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GRADUATE COLLEGE

EXPLORING CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN INDIGENOUS EARLY CHILDHOOD  
LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAMS: AN INDIGENOUS STORYWORK JOURNEY  
THROUGH THE KIOWA ENCAMPMENT STORY CIRCLE METHODOLOGY

A DISSERTATION  
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A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE  
DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

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## **Dedication**

To all those who have come before and all those who will come after we are gone.

In loving memory of my mother, Mary Vickland Redbird and my grandmother, Ruth Whitefox  
Redbird.

## Acknowledgements

Ah-hoh day baht haw (Accept my gratitude): My husband, my greatest support and my motivator, Stephen Robert Post, II. My children: Hozshona Morningstar, Vizshon Manyhawks, Nevaeh Windsong, Echo Silvermoon, and Merlina Eveningstar. My sister Angelaura Sarah-Wichakpi. My siblings. My father, Tim Redbird Whitefox. My family: the Redbird's, the Whitefox's, descendants of Ahdl-Paw-Gooy, Sayt-Ah-Pay-Taw, and Iy-See-Oh. My Kiowa Tribe. My Grandma, Ms. Dorothy Whitehorse DeLaune. My Grandma, Ms. Delores "Dee" Harragarra. Mrs. Martha Addison. Mr. Dane R. Poolaw. My fellow Anadarko Kiowa Language Teacher Candidates with the Kiowa Language and Culture Revitalization Program. Anadarko Public Schools Indian Education Program. Mr. David Sullivan. Mrs. Brenda Sullivan. Mrs. Cricket Rhoads-Connywerdy. Mr. Dawes Twohatchett. Mr. Don Tofpi. The Tribal Early Childhood Research Center and the Native Children's Research Exchange. Dr. Sara Beach, for challenging me to be my best self. Dr. Xu Ge. Ms. Angie Calton. Dr. Michelle Sarche. Nancy Whitesell. Brad Morse. Dr. Aleta Meyer. Jessica Barnes. Ann Bullock. Dr. Joshua Sparrow. Dr. Amanda Tachine. Mr. Terry Cross. My Team at the National Center on Tribal Early Childhood Development. Most importantly, I extend gratitude to the four collaborating research partner programs, the teams at: New Kituwah Academy, Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program, Lakota Immersion Childcare Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa Thanka, and Wicoie Nandagikendan Dakota Ojibwe Early Childhood Urban Immersion Program. To all those who have provided me much needed inspiration, support, and motivation, ultimately, empowering me to continue to pursue my dreams. Ah-hoh day baht haw (Accept my appreciation). Daw-K'ee bah tiy-doh-day (May Creator watch over you always).

## **Abstract**

Our children represent the future of our people. Each generation has a responsibility to ensure the younger generations have what they need to carry our people forward. With this in mind, I am sharing with you, the reader, a story. This story is the journey that I took to conduct my doctoral dissertation research and the lessons learned as I implemented an Indigenous research methodology in order to explore the process of curriculum development in Indigenous early childhood language immersion programs across the United States. This research story is my way to share a little bit about who I am, where I come from, and how it is that I am doing my part to ensure the success of future generations. I come to you in a good way, with an open heart and with the utmost respect.

I want to pause here and offer a note to you, as a reader, regarding the structure of this dissertation. I invite you to step through the boundary between the linear worldview and the relational worldview, and meet me on the other side, where the worldviews intersect. Join me in exploring a research journey grounded firmly in Indigenous ways of knowing, and specifically approached from my own Kiowa perspective. In an effort to remain true to who I am as an Indigenous scholar, I am using the methodology of Indigenous Storywork (ISW) (Archibald, 2008), specifically, I am writing from my own Indigenous worldview of the Kiowa people. Through this approach I will explore the various facets of my dissertation journey. Like all Kiowa stories of lived experiences, there is a beginning event, the journey to the destination, and a lesson to be learned. You have entered a space for decolonized research methodologies. I invite you to join me in this journey, a journey towards exploring curriculum development in Indigenous early childhood language immersion programs. Ah-koh (let us begin).

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## Forward

Our stories define us, remind us of who we are. Our stories invite us in and offer pieces of wisdom that we must glean for ourselves. Our stories wrap around us like the turquoise shawl my grandmother made and gave to my mother. Our stories are the collective memory that reaches back into the past, helps us understand the present, and gives us hope for the future. Our stories are the oral tradition, the way that our knowledge is passed from one generation to the next. Our stories are fluid, ever-evolving, changing, shifting to help us make sense of the world around us and what is happening in this world. Our stories remind me to stay humble, to be respectful, to pay attention. Our stories wrap around us like the black yarn that my dad would use every morning to wrap his two braids in the way that his grandfather did. Our stories tell us that everyone's voice matters, that everyone has something to offer, and each new piece of the story added by the storyteller becomes a part of the collective memory of who we are as Kiowa people. Our oral tradition has persisted over eons of time and will continue to persist long after we have walked on into the spirit world. Our stories are the legacy that we leave behind. Our stories are the way that my siblings and I would be so excited to hear our mom's memory of tending to her first garden. Our stories are the way that my siblings and I would ask our dad again and again to tell us about that one time when his brothers taught him to swim by throwing him into the Zohl-Tohn Creek. Our stories remind us of who we are, of the way our people came to be and the role that we play in this creation. Our stories are sacred and evolving, respected and retold, from grandparent to grandchild, from mother to daughter, from auntie to niece. Our stories are so much more than a figment of someone's imagination. Instead, our stories provide that continuous thread, like the sinew that stitched up my moccasins, from the day we emerged into this world, through the epochs of time as our society has shifted and changed, through the

journeys that our people took from the Rocky Mountains, to the northern plains where caribou graze, from the deserts in the south, to the canyons of our neighbors, from the hills of the Badlands to the rolling waves of prairie grass of the southern plains. For me, as I add my voice to the collective story of my people, my story will become our story, and my children's children can hear this story and remember. This story will exist long after I am gone from this world. And yet, my memory will remain, just as my big brother (great-grandfather) whom I never actually met in this life, has taught me so much through the stories I have been told my entire life about who he was and what he stood for. In my own small way, this is how I am fulfilling the dreams of my ancestors. I once heard another storyteller say that we are the answers to our ancestors' and our relatives' prayers. It is my hope that this part of the story of my people can continue on for the next seven generations and beyond. I am just one voice, and yet, I add my voice to the voices of all those who have come before me, so that one day, my children's children can hear this story and know who I am and how I perceive the world, long after I am gone. This is how we continue onward. This is how we know how to enter our sacred circle, the traditional camp circle, dance circle, of our Kiowa people, and this is how we know to acknowledge our four sacred directions and above all else, our Creator, Dohm-Owy-Ohm-Daw-K'ee, in everything that we do. Our stories define us, ever evolving as we journey through time, and encounter the challenges that arise with each new generation. Our stories remind us of who we are so we can continue on, continue that thread of memory far into the generations after us.

Our stories represent every aspect of Kiowa life and Kiowa knowledge, our kyah-kohm-bah, our people. As foundational Tribal Critical Race Theory scholar, Bryan M.J. Brayboy, wrote, "theory is not simply an abstract thought or idea that explains overarching structures of societies and communities; theories, through stories and other media, are roadmaps for our

communities and reminders of our individual responsibilities to the survival of our communities” (2006, p. 427). Brayboy asserted that “stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being” (2006, p. 430). Current Indigenous scholars, Shirley and Angulo (2019) affirmed that “stories serve as the basis for how our communities work and should therefore be thought of as theory” (p. 65). For Kiowa people, our stories are so important to us that in our Kiowa language we have an entire verb tense dedicated to use whenever we are sharing a story, a memory, a reflection, our knowledge. From the moment a Kiowa child is born, we are immersed in this knowledge. Infants, toddlers, and young children are introduced to Kiowa stories through the nightly ritual of someone, usually a grandparent or aunt or uncle, telling a story as soon as the sun sets and the stars appear in the sky. Nighttime represents storytelling time. As we first enter the world, the genre of Kiowa stories we are told begins with children’s songs, also known as Kiowa lullabies, then we start hearing the story that accompanies each song. The genre of Kiowa children’s stories includes specific stories that each focus on a specific Kiowa value: respect, consideration for others, responsibility, relationships, connection to the rest of creation, and so on. As infants and toddlers grow into preschoolers and older children, then we are told an important story sequence in our Kiowa epistemology, what we call Saynday Stories, but what might be similar to what other tribes call trickster tales. Our Kiowa Saynday Stories tell of the Kiowa culture hero, Saynday and sometimes, his accomplice, Saynpeet, as Saynday shows us what to do by learning through mistakes, misfortune, and misadventures. Saynday teaches us through humor and showing us what not to do; Saynday also explains how the different elements in our world and creation came to be. As Kiowa children grow, Saynday stories grow with them, getting more complicated as time passes. With Saynday stories, each story has a specific lesson, and teaches a specific part of

Kiowa philosophy and Kiowa ethics. However, the lessons are never told directly by Saynday. Instead, we learn each part of our Kiowa knowledge through the telling of Saynday's actions and the consequences he faces because of his choices and his actions, despite the better wisdom of other beings telling him not to do it. Saynday exists in our Kiowa consciousness and he reminds us of a time in our beginnings as a people when humans could talk with the animals and when humans were more aware of our connection to the spirit world and the world of the unseen. As a rule, Kiowa Saynday Stories should only be told when there are stars overhead, at least that is what my grandmother always told me. Another genre of Kiowa stories are the origin stories of our Kiowa warrior societies. Each of our warrior societies has its own origin story and its own repertoire of songs that each society member learns and maintains. The remaining Kiowa warrior societies today each have their own story: Poh-Ly-Hyohp (Rabbit Society), Tdiy-Pbay-Gah (Kiowa Gourd Clan), Tohn-Kohn-Gaht (Kiowa Black Leggings), and O-Ho-Mah (the Kiowa War Dance Society). Then, there is the genre of our sacred Kiowa stories that keep our sacred knowledge for each new generation. These stories include our Kiowa Creation Story as well as our sacred Zy-Day-Tah-Lee Stories. Once we hear the first thunder after the winter has passed, that is when our Zy-Day-Tah-Lee Stories can be told, again, under the cover of the stars at night. Sacred Kiowa stories also include the origin stories of our Kiowa spiritual practices. The next genre of Kiowa stories are the stories of Kiowa historical events – these were often maintained by Kiowa calendar keepers (also called “winter counts”), who would remember the major events during the Kiowa year and retell those events as long as they could. There is also a genre of Kiowa stories that are intrinsically tied to place – these stories recount memories from so far back in our collective Kiowa memory that these stories explain why various geological features in North America are so important to our people. One example is the Kiowa origin story of what

is now known as Devils Tower in Wyoming. Another Kiowa story genre includes the stories associated with our Kiowa historical leaders, whether they were leaders of the various bands, or who, in more recent times, served as a principal chief and represented the Kiowa people collectively during treaty negotiations, for instance. For these types of stories, Kiowa people today still remember the deeds and legacy of the most important and most influential Kiowa leaders from throughout our past. Next, there is the genre of Kiowa family history stories. These stories are maintained by the elders and told to each new generation of the family as the family tree expands. These are specific to each Kiowa lineage and include stories from childhood, teenage years, and adulthood, usually spanning multiple generations. It is through these types of Kiowa stories that I was able to feel a close connection to my great-grandfather, who left this world decades before I was born. These stories also serve to remind us of the way our Kiowa people see our family relationships. For instance, two sisters may have children, and then those children have children, but all the children's children (grandchildren) maintain close ties with each other because of our shared experiences and family history that is told and retold as family events are recounted and retold, year after year. Through family history stories we are reminded that we treat all of our so-called "cousins" as our actual brothers and sisters, which then solidifies cousin relationships into sibling relationships, and these relationships are honored over multiple generations. Then there is the genre of Kiowa stories that are simply humorous and represent the unique aspects of our Kiowa language and our Kiowa humor. These stories are typically based on real events that have become larger than life over time. Sometimes, these stories are in the form of long jokes, or self-degradation, usually recounted as a reminder to the rest of us of what not to do, or of the consequences of our actions. Another genre of Kiowa stories specifically focuses on individual and collective experiences. For instance, the story of our first official

automobile owner in the early 1920s or the story of the three boys who ran away from boarding school because they had nothing to eat. Finally, there is an entire genre of Kiowa stories that explains the unique Kiowa naming conventions. Our Kiowa naming stories explain who the person was who carried a particular name, and what happened to them, and who their descendants are over time. These genres of Kiowa stories are only scratching the surface. We have stories about how the different constellations came to be; about what plants, herbs, and trees are used for; about how to make the different items of Kiowa clothing; about how each Kiowa dance and each Kiowa song came to be; about how to hunt; about how to care for children; about Kiowa warfare; about being safe during severe weather; about how to handle dangerous animals; and the stories about our Kiowa law and order, and so on. My point here is to affirm that when I say the word story, in our Kiowa context, a story means a specific piece of knowledge. With these examples of genres of Kiowa stories in mind, I offer the following account as a story that fits under the Kiowa genre of individual and collective experiences.

It was not until I gave myself permission to be who I am as kgawy-mah, a Kiowa woman, as an Indigenous scholar, striving to be successful in this modern world of academia, that I found my voice. I am not a storyteller, not the way that my grandmother was, or my father is. However, I have a responsibility, an obligation to become a storyteller, so that my children's children can know who I am and be inspired to continue on. This is my story of how I have taken this decade-long journey to becoming a storyteller so that I can uphold the wishes of my great-grandfather when he prayed for the generations to come after him. This is the journey of my doctoral dissertation work at the University of Oklahoma, and how, along the way, I have had the honor to be able to collaborate with other storytellers from other tribes who have a message to share with the world. We are all storytellers in our own way. No matter how we say things, once we



say it, our knowledge becomes the knowledge of our people, of the generations after us. This is the story of the journey towards understanding curriculum development in Indigenous early childhood language immersion programs.

As I have undertaken this journey, I have been privileged to get a glimpse, to take a piece of the thread of story of another tribe, and braid together this one story that represents the culmination of years of learning and working to become the person that my grandmother knew I could be before I even knew what was possible. This is just one story, but this is my contribution to our collective memory, so that another Indigenous scholar, seven generations from now, can add their story to our ever-growing braid of knowledge as a people. Indigenous storywork (ISW), as shared by Joann Archibald (2008) and added to by other Indigenous scholars, is an emerging decolonized methodology, an approach to research that acknowledges who we are as Indigenous people, and respects the voices of those who have contributed to our journey through life. Indigenous storywork is just one way that, as a Kiowa woman, I can build understanding of my own knowledge, the knowledge of my people, and the knowledge of the tribal nations that have agreed to collaborate and participate in this journey with me.

In the following pages, I invite you to join us in this journey, to become part of our story. I will tell this story in the way that I have envisioned a Kiowa research methodology, using Indigenous storywork as the framework of analysis, with which to engage with the stories that were shared with me as part of this dissertation. This is my answer to the call for Indigenous scholars to engage in decolonizing research practice, and the challenge for us to truly embrace who we are as Indigenous people in order to carry out research that is representative of who we are and that respects the collective memory of our people, in order to give back, to do the one thing that I grew up hearing. That I, as a Kiowa woman, as an Indigenous scholar, have a

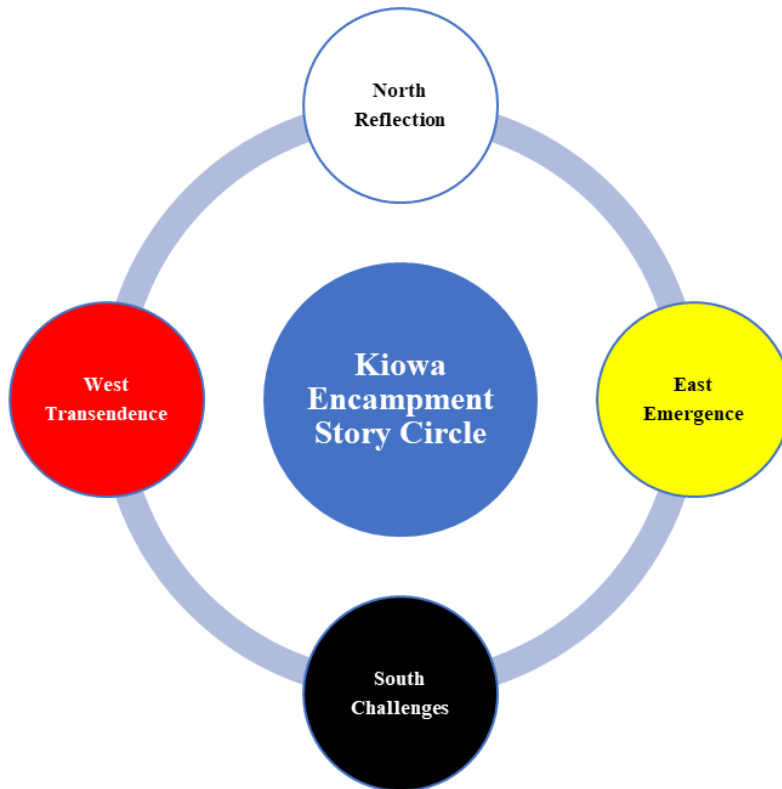
responsibility, to go out, to succeed in the world, and then to come back, return to our people, and add my hands to the collective hands that will carry us forward into the future. It is through this dissertation work that I am fulfilling that dream, that prayer, that I have been told over and over by aunts and uncles, by grandmas and grandpas, by my mother and father. I only ask that you engage with this story with an open mind, that you enter this story, walk around in this story, and pull your own meaning from these memories. As I write, I invite you, the reader, the listener, to reflect upon your own experiences, and hopefully this story is one that you can find useful in the work you do. This is the way that I am giving back to our people.

We are going to journey around the Kiowa camp circle, acknowledge each of our four sacred directions as we journey, and along the way, hear the voices of the collaborative research partners that have graciously agreed to be a part of this story. I offer my sincerest appreciation to the teams at the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians' New Kituwah Academy, the Jemez Pueblo's Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program, Thunder Valley's Lakota Language Immersion Child Care program Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa Thanka, and the Wicíoie Nandagikendan Dakota Ojibwe Language Immersion Program. Together, our voices rise to explore how we came to this place and understand why this story is so meaningful.

Before I can continue, I need to respect the way that we do things as Kiowa people and take the time to properly introduce who we are, where we came from, and where we want to go. Following our Kiowa protocol, I ask that you, as the story listener, come along with us on this journey. We start the way we always start – by first acknowledging our place in the universe and giving appreciation for the life we have. Then, we enter the circle. Our sacred Kiowa camp circle tells the story of our history as Kiowa people, and it also defines our specific roles and responsibilities that we have as a part of our Kiowa society. The way that I am approaching this

dissertation research is through Kiowa eyes. In order to do this, I invite you to join me, entering our camp circle, and journey around this sacred circle, and along the way, we will acknowledge each of the four directions we encounter. As we meet each sacred direction, we will also listen for the particular roles and responsibilities that comprise that particular direction.

The model for this dissertation work is represented in the symbolism of our sacred Kiowa Sundance encampment circle. I have used this as the foundation from which I designed my research methodology, according to the approach of Indigenous Story Work (ISW). The following graphic represents the research journey that became my doctoral dissertation research. I am calling this Indigenous research framework the Kiowa Encampment Story Circle. Each phase of my dissertation research is represented in the following graphic as well as in the subsequent outline below.



**Figure 1.** Kiowa Encampment Story Circle Methodology Conceptual Model

For more information on how this approach was developed, please read Location 3 – Story 5 on my dissertation research methodology situated within my Kiowa ways of knowing.

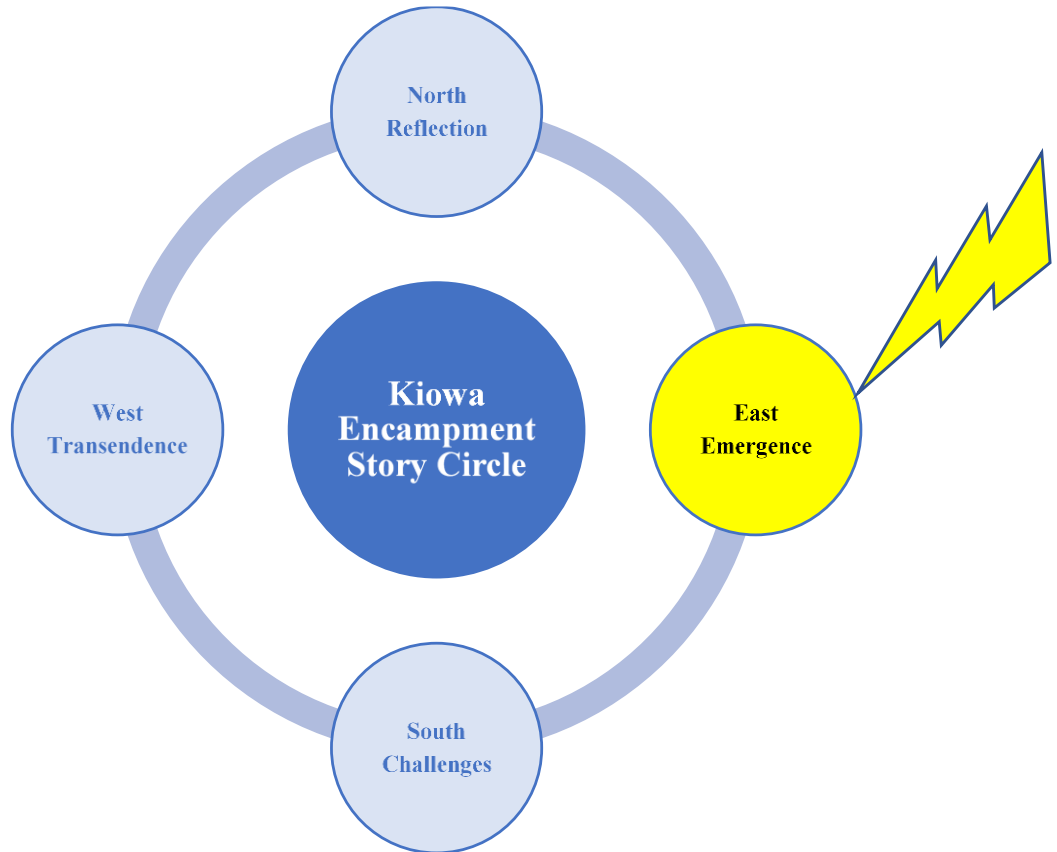
We start by entering from the east. The east is our first sacred direction, and the east symbolizes our emergence, our awakening, and our beginning. The following pages share the story of what we encounter when we first enter our Kiowa camp circle, from the east. By acknowledging this direction, we are also acknowledging who we are. We are taking our place in the circle. As we journey forward, the next sacred direction we encounter is the south. In the south things are challenging. As life gives us challenges, we must face those obstacles in our path and figure out how we can surmount them. Our next stop around the Kiowa camp circle is the west. In the west, we hear stories of transcendence, stories of long journeys being completed. Encountering the west means we have survived the challenges in the south and we are overcoming those challenges we faced. Then, we journey onwards, to the next sacred direction, the north. In the north, the land is sleeping under a cold blanket, awaiting the moment of re-emergence. The north represents the winter season. For Kiowa people living in our camp circle, the wintertime means the time for storytelling, the time for hearing our sacred origin stories, sharing family history, memories, and a time of learning and preparation. In the wintertime, Kiowa people historically practiced cleansing and purification of mind, body, and soul through using our sweatlodge ceremonies. For us, the north, the winter, represents a time for sharing. In my dissertation journey, once I reach the direction of north, then I will need to share the stories that will be told to the world. Each of the collaborating programs has a message that they want to share with other tribal programs.

Then, after we leave the north, we continue on our way along the Kiowa camp circle, and we encounter the east once again. At that point, the journey can begin anew, with future scholars,

future generations, and with other stories. So, here at our starting point, as we enter the Kiowa camp circle, I first need to acknowledge who I am, who we are, and give thanks for this journey. Then, I can take the first steps. With this in mind, I will share a brief introduction about each of the programs that have graciously agreed to partner with me in this dissertation journey. I am so appreciative of these four program partners for inviting me in to become a part of their stories.

Ah-koh (let us begin).

**Location 1: Piy-Baw-Daw (The East) – Emergence**



**Figure 2.** Kiowa Encampment Story Circle - East: Emergence

**Story 1: Introduction and the Beginning of the Journey**

## **Part 1: “Ah-Tsahn” (I Have Arrived): Becoming an Indigenous Scholar**

We are of one heart, the legends teach,  
The line of life is clear, time is limitless,  
The young seek roots, the reminders of the mind,  
For they lead to the heart, to home.

~ T’ow-hadle “Limping Woman” (c. 1925), *Kiowa Voices, Volume I* (Boyd, 1981)

Gohm-daw-gyah-maw ah kahn. Gkawy-maw ah daw. Kahn-ahn ah daw. My grandmother named me “Windsong Woman” and I am enrolled in the Kiowa Tribe. I come to you as a humble mother, wife, daughter, sister, niece, and granddaughter. I am a married mother to five children ages eight years-old to sixteen years-old and we live in southwest Oklahoma. My four daughters and I all dance Kiowa-style southern cloth. My son is a southern-style men’s fancy war dancer and a recent inductee of the O-Ho-Ma Warrior Society. We were all dancing as soon as we could stand up. I am the daughter of Timothy Redbird, Sr., and the late Mary Vickland Redbird. I am descended from Whitefox and I-See-O, and a long line of singers, dancers, and keepers of our spiritual practices and our Kiowa ceremonies. Spending summer nights outside under the stars, my father, a Kiowa singer and artist, would tell my younger brothers and I stories about our people, our origins, our emergence, our heroes, our sacred stories about how our ceremonies came to be as well as stories about his childhood and his family. My father was raised primarily by his grandfather, Whitefox, who was a respected spiritual leader and a keeper of our ceremonies. My father’s mother, my grandmother, the late Ruth Whitefox Redbird, was a renowned Kiowa singer who started the modern-day trend of Kiowa women standing behind the drum singing, supporting the men. She started this trend at the urging of her father during the 1940s when the Kiowas, along with the Comanches and Apaches, revived

Native American plains culture in the form of powwows and social gatherings, and redesigned some of our traditional dances to fit into the modern world. I grew up hearing stories about our people and immersed in our ways.

Growing up in southern California, I always felt like I was returning home whenever we would travel out to southwest Oklahoma for our summer ceremonies and family gatherings. To this day, every time I step into the sacred dance circle, I feel as if I am returning home, as we reaffirm our connection to who we are and to all those who have come before us. I grew up hearing my mother's stories of a childhood spent in foster care and dealing with being a child with a chronic illness. She would always say that she did her best as a mother to keep all of her children together so that we would not undergo the childhood she endured. She once told me that she made sure that she learned as much as she could about her husband's ways and about being Kiowa before she had me (her first child and the oldest of six children) primarily because she did not want us growing up as she did, feeling disconnected and having a deep sense of longing to know who we were. She made sure that we would be connected to our Kiowa identity and grow up Kiowa.

While my undergraduate education began in Ethics, Politics, and Economics and ended with Liberal Studies, Administrative Leadership, my graduate education has encompassed completing a M.Ed. degree in Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum in Early Childhood Education with certification and pursuing a Ph.D. degree in ILAC-Early Childhood Education. Professionally, my career has consisted of over 15 years of working to support tribal families, children, teachers, and program administrators in tribal home visiting, tribal Head Start, and tribal child care settings. Through various roles, I honed my passion for empowering children and families to reach their full potential. Working in early childhood programs taught



me the value of coalition-building and community partnerships as I collaborated and leveraged community and tribal resources to support the programs where I worked. Currently, I operate a national center on behalf of the Office of Child Care to provide culturally responsive training and technical assistance to tribal child care programs. This trajectory has given me insight into high-quality early childhood programming, intentional curriculum development, and culturally relevant teaching practices, both from the Western worldview and through our Indigenous ways of knowing.

Since moving to Oklahoma permanently to raise my children, I have participated in Kiowa language revitalization in one way or another for the past 12 years. My grandmother once told me that the day we stop speaking our language is the day our Kiowa people cease to exist. Our Kiowa language is in a severely endangered status since Kiowa is only spoken within the great-grandparent generation and is no longer transmitted to children in the home. In the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale, we are listed at an 8b, or nearly extinct. It has been my personal motivation to take up the charge left by my grandparents and all those before them to ensure that our ways and our language remains.

When I was 19 years-old, I had the opportunity to work with the now-defunct Kiowa Language Preservation Program where I learned various linguistic techniques, completed Kiowa language classes, and learned to read and write in two orthographic systems of the Kiowa language. That was where I first became interested in revitalizing our language. I have also had the opportunity over the years to work with Kiowa elders, some of the last remaining fluent Kiowa language speakers, across several dialects of the Kiowa language, and to document their stories, and histories behind Kiowa phrases and words. Since 2017, I have been a volunteer Kiowa language instructor candidate with the Kiowa Language and Culture Revitalization

Program. As a second-language learner of Kiowa, I do my best to ensure my children are immersed in our language and our ways as much as possible. We have our immersion sessions at home and have begun the work of giving the different domains of our family life back to our language.

I eventually fulfilled my dream to serve our people by working for our tribal government. When I was hired as the director of the child care program, I searched for a framework to support our work towards Kiowa language immersion. Finding none, we began our journey to do our part in language revitalization, given minimal federal resources. Our goal, which took three years to achieve, along with countless hours of service from our dedicated elders and children's families, was to implement Kiowa language immersion sessions in all of our child care classrooms from infants through 12 years-old. We began exploring the disconnect we felt between required child development standards, such as developmentally-appropriate practice, and the historical Kiowa ways of parenting and learning. In Kiowa, the word for teaching is maw-hay-maw, which is also the word for learning. There is no difference between a teacher and a learner in Kiowa like there is in the Western approach to education. This was when my interest in curriculum development emerged.

As I pursue my doctoral degree, my research explores language immersion curriculum development theory in the context of Indigenous knowledge. With each graduate course I took, I found ways to make the final projects applicable to the work I was doing for my Tribe and our language. When one professor told me to make school work for me, I took that seriously and began engaging my staff, the children's families, our elders, and community partners in these projects. We supported community efforts by collaborating and documenting our journey; we even co-presented at various conferences. These projects included validating Indigenous

knowledge as a theory of education, developing an instructional design model to support our language work, developing a curriculum framework with rationale, designing a teacher's guide, completing pilot research studies using a tribally-based participatory research approach, and even conducting a comprehensive Kiowa language assessment. Each semester represented a new step in our journey. Outside of work and school, I attended weekly Kiowa language classes, held family nights to teach Kiowa to the children's families, conducted community, tribal partnership and coalition meetings, and studied Kiowa language so that I could model for my staff and the families. Over time, I connected with other community-based Kiowa language advocates and engaged with college instructors at the University of Oklahoma and the University of Sciences and Arts of Oklahoma, where several Kiowa courses are taught. I pursued additional funding to support the language revitalization efforts on behalf of our tribe. Finally, after leading the language assessment project, I partnered with university, community-based language efforts, and Kiowa tribal programs and applied for an ANA Native Language Community Coordination grant, which the Tribe was awarded to pilot our approach. Through these efforts I have learned about the importance of collaboration in language revitalization work. It was never just me, it was always us, a core group, to plan and complete these projects. These lessons drive me forward. This research journey I have been on over the course of the past decade is rooted in who I am as a Kiowa woman, a Kiowa scholar, and an Indigenous researcher.

## **Part 2: “Gkawy-mah ah daw” (I am a Kiowa woman): Life as a Kiowa Woman**

Thinking back to how my team and I started to implement Kiowa language immersion in our child care classrooms, I remember a conversation with one of my colleagues. We had been discussing how frustrated we were that there are so many protocols in the early care and education field. From training plans, job descriptions, Robert’s rules of order for meetings, standard operating procedures, action plans, developmental domains, early learning guidelines, child care licensing standards, federal funding requirements, all of these elements felt so restrictive as we first started our team discussions about moving towards our language immersion as a goal for our child care center. Then that day, my colleague and I looked at each other and I asked, “what will things look like if we see it through our Kiowa eyes?” How can we take our sacred traditions, our history, our stories, our values, our way of being and assert who we are in this world of early care and education and still meet all those requirements and protocols? Then came the day when we made a bold move.

Up until that time, I liked to be very organized, the way that all of the professional development and trainings that we had attended told us to be in order to be successful. I drafted careful meeting agendas, I made sure we followed Robert’s rules of order with motions and seconds to approve actions taken in meetings as a group. I took very detailed notes and then shared those notes back with my team. I liked to think I was being responsible and accountable. However, I began to question the way I approached my professional life.

Here was our situation: We were a small, federally and tribally funded child care center in one of the main towns where a majority of our tribal members lived. We had a staff of all Kiowa tribal members, from our teachers, to our cook, to our center director. We cared for 35 Kiowa children every day for 12 hours a day, five days a week. Yet, since we were a state-

licensed facility, we maintained a high-quality star rating within the state's quality rating and improvement system, we maintained compliance with the state's child care licensing requirements, we had all the necessary learning centers in each of our classrooms including our infants, our toddlers, our preschoolers and our school-age children. We participated in the state's child care facilities assessment process by using tools like the Program Administration Scale, the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, and even met higher quality requirements including the Caring for Our Children National Health and Safety Standards, the Head Start Program Performance Standards (even though we were not a Head Start program), and the developmentally appropriate practice standards set forth by the National Association on the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). We were proud of our accomplishments and the work that we had all put in to meeting those standards.

Then, we got the results of our annual parent survey back and several of our parents had indicated that they were interested in their children learning the Kiowa language. Once we had examined the responses we received, as a team, we decided we would rise to the challenge. We would start learning more about what it would take to implement our Kiowa language in a more intentional way in our classrooms and program.

Despite all of the high-quality standards we met, we still felt like we were just pretending to be someone we were not. So, each of my teachers and I went out to our family members, to our aunts, our grandmothers, our uncles, our grandfathers, to our mothers and fathers, and we started asking, we started learning about who we are as Kiowa people. It started with small things – How do you say thank you? How do you say hello? Who can start one of our Kiowa hymns? What are some traditional Kiowa children's songs? Are there traditional Kiowa children's stories that we can start sharing with the children in our center? Every day, we would

informally share with each other what we had learned. And then, when we were sharing these observations with each other, it would spark one of our memories and we would start sharing our own experiences with each other from our childhoods. We would share memories of how an auntie showed us the proper way to carry a shawl, or how our grandmother took us outside with her to go pick the sand plums that grow in the summer. We would share one part of our Kiowa origin story as told by our grandparents. We would remember the tune to a Kiowa lullaby that our mothers and grandmothers sang to us. These memories sparked even more interest for us.

Some of us went to research the books currently published on our Kiowa people. Some of us scoured the internet for existing resources that might be of use. Some of us sat down with our grandmothers and started hearing more about how there is actually no word in Kiowa for hello, instead we greet each other by asking “are you doing well?”

One day, we were all sitting in our formal weekly staff meeting. We all had our agenda and we all knew the roles we had to play as we went down each item. A couple of us got sidetracked and started sharing some funny stories that we had heard from our aunties when we had asked them one of our questions about who we are as Kiowa people. I looked at my team and I realized that what we were doing was not who we are. I asked them, “How did you learn when you were growing up? What are some of your earliest memories of hearing our Kiowa language?” One by one, each one of us took a turn responding, and one by one we all realized the same thing: we each shared our own experiences about how we learned about who we are by sitting around the kitchen table, the dinner table, the lunch table, after breakfast, at the family reunion meal, and we, as small children, had the opportunity to hear our elders, our mothers, grandmothers, aunties, all sharing their stories, their life histories, their experiences, and their memorable moments in life. We learned through listening, through observation, and through

being a part of that unbroken circle of story-sharing. We did not learn about being Kiowa from a book, from an agenda, or from a website. We learned about who we are by sitting with our elders and being a part of their stories.

That is when I decided that we would start “seeing the world through Kiowa eyes.” We would be who we are as Kiowa people in our professional lives at our child care center, despite all of the regulations, standards, and trainings that seemed to have no room for who we are. Then, we started a different approach to our staff meetings. Instead of staff meetings, they became team meetings. Instead of rigid rules of order, we had open-ended discussion questions where each one of us had a chance to share thoughts, reflections, ideas, and challenges. We started to pray before our staff meetings. In our Kiowa way, we start every important activity off with a prayer. This is our way of acknowledging who we are and our place in the universe. Even though we could not yet pray in our language, we took turns offering a humble prayer to our Creator. Then, we started including a meal with our team meetings. We would meet during lunch time or have a quick breakfast meeting before the children arrived. If we met in the evenings after hours, we would share dinner together, and we could bring our families and children if we wanted to. Then, we got down to business. Together, we mapped out the steps we wanted to take. Using an approach that I had learned about in a training program, I tried appreciative inquiry with our team in order to create a vision statement for what we wanted to do with our program. Our vision, we decided, was “to do things the Kiowa way.” We asked ourselves, what does that mean? How can we live in this modern world and still be true to who we are as Kiowa people? Then, one of our respected elders shared her wisdom when we asked her “is there a way to say we do things the Kiowa way?” She smiled and responded, “Gkawy-hoh-ahn!” “What does that mean?” “It means that’s the Kiowa way, that’s the Kiowa road, that’s the way we are, that is how

we live.” From that point on, we would say to each other, “Gkawy-hoh-ahn” to remind ourselves that our vision was to be true to ourselves and work towards our goals together. We drafted a follow-up parent survey to send to all the child care families to ask more direct questions about our approaches. We researched the best ways that other tribal early care and education programs had implemented their tribal language and culture in their classrooms. We went to visit nearby tribes that were starting similar efforts. Then we discovered a grassroots organization dedicated to preserving the Kiowa language for children. We started talking with their representatives and even had them come do a training with us on language revitalization and what it might mean in early childhood. That is when we learned that language immersion had the highest success rate and the highest chance of successfully giving the language back to the younger generations and repairing the generational gaps to truly let the language live in the community again. It opened our eyes to a whole new world of possibility. The more we learned, the more we became inspired to do what we could, in our small ways, to help revitalize our Kiowa language. That took us down the path of learning about the status of our language, a harsh reality that was hard to hear. Then, we started to ask ourselves, now that we know this, where can we start? We had decided to implement Kiowa language revitalization in our child care classrooms with all age groups and the children’s families. Our goal was to demonstrate to ourselves, our tribal leadership, and our community that we could implement a high-quality Kiowa language revitalization initiative using only our existing funding. And so, our journey truly began.

That was how I became interested in Indigenous early childhood language immersion, specifically the curriculum development process in successful immersion programs.

Due to the wide diversity of early childhood immersion programs in tribal settings, I focused on the most effective, successful programs in the United States. After careful



consideration, there were 16 model programs in the field that often serve as mentors for tribes who are interested in implementing immersion. I engaged four of these successful programs:

- 1) New Kituwah Academy, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, Cherokee, North Carolina;
- 2) Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program, Jemez Pueblo, New Mexico;
- 3) Lakota Immersion Childcare Elementary Track Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa Thanka, Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation, Porcupine, South Dakota; and,
- 4) Wicoie Nandagikendan Dakota Ojibwe Early Childhood Urban Immersion Program, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

In order to remain true to each program and to myself as a Kiowa scholar, first, I need to share how the journey began with each of these four programs. This is how we built relationships with each other to the point where now we are research collaborators.

### **Part 3: Introducing the New Kituwah Academy**

I remember back in my Head Start days, hearing about this innovative immersion program that was started to revitalize the Cherokee language. At conferences and trainings, the representatives from Cherokee language immersion programs were always fascinating to hear. I would take detailed notes as I heard them share their stories about how they implemented their immersion programs. The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, located on the Qualla Boundary in Cherokee, North Carolina, has successfully developed a Cherokee language immersion school that is both licensed by the state for early childhood and accredited as an elementary school for pre-kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade students. I remember seeing examples of the teaching tools used by the Cherokee immersion teachers, how they used approaches similar to the Native

Hawaiian immersion schools, to teach the next generation of Cherokee people completely in their language as well as ensuring they could read and write with the Cherokee syllabary. It has been such an honor to be invited in to hear more about their immersion school, their classrooms, and their approaches to curriculum development.

#### **Part 4: Introducing the Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program**

The first time I heard about the Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program was when I met the representatives from Jemez Pueblo's Education Department at the Native Children's Research Exchange in 2013. I had just presented a poster on a pilot research project I was working on. The Education Director approached me and offered his reflections about my work. We started talking and he offered a question for us to consider: How can we ensure that we are teaching our children all the elements of early literacy in the English language, when the Towa language is not allowed to be written? Hearing this perspective made me stop in my tracks. I thought back to how I had worked with my team, using an orthography of our Kiowa language to create labels for our learning centers, and create poster boards of our Kiowa children's songs for the children to follow along in the classrooms. I wondered – what is early literacy? What does early literacy look like in an Indigenous language immersion program? That question has stayed with me through the remainder of this journey as an Indigenous scholar. I have had the honor of being invited into the Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program to see with my own eyes how that dedicated team has found a way to be true to who they are as Towa people, the people of Jemez Pueblo, and still ensure that their children will be prepared to carry on the responsibilities of their people into the future generations. Located in Jemez Pueblo, New Mexico, about an hour north of Albuquerque, the Towa people have a specific etiquette, rules that guests are asked to respect during their time there in Jemez.

## **Part 5: Introducing the Lakota Immersion Childcare Elementary Track Iyápi Glukínipi**

### **Owáyawa Thanka**

In 2014, during an Indigenous language revitalization conference, I heard about this immersion program started by two Lakota language advocates who had been successful in developing a way to implement language immersion in their child care classrooms and at the same time prepare second language learners of Lakota to enter the classrooms to teach entirely in their language. I had to know more. Getting to know more about the story of the Lakota Immersion Child Care program, and now the Lakota Immersion School, I was inspired to develop a similar system that we could use in our Kiowa child care program to train our own second language speakers to be able to teach young children completely in our language. Located in Porcupine, South Dakota, on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, current home of the Oglala Lakota Sioux nation, the team at the Thunder Valley Lakota Immersion Child Care and Education Program have succeeded in developing a vast array of resources and pedagogical tools that could be used by their Lakota language immersion teachers in the classrooms. It has been such an honor to get to hear them tell their story as part of this dissertation work.

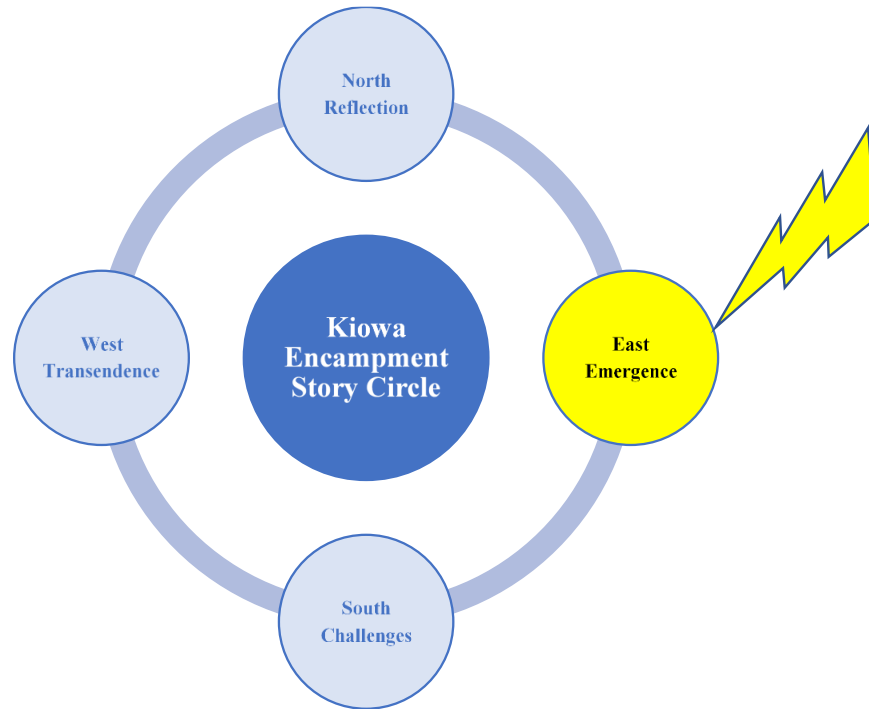
## **Part 6: Introducing the Wicioie Nandagikendan Early Childhood Urban Immersion**

### **Program**

It was in 2015 that I first encountered the Wicioie Nandagikendan Dakota Ojibwe Language Immersion Program. I had been researching successful Indigenous language immersion programs, specifically geared towards early childhood, in order to gain inspiration for approaches that could be useful in my own work implementing Kiowa language immersion in my tribe's child care program. The Wicioie Nandagikendan Dakota Ojibwe Language Immersion Program is located just off of Franklin Ave, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The team at Wicioie

Nandagikendan has successfully implemented language immersion classrooms that teach two different languages, the two main Indigenous languages spoken by the tribal nations in Minnesota. I remember reading a research report about how the Wicioie Nandagikendan program has found a way to track progress of children's learning in both Dakota and Ojibwe languages. In one study, the team there demonstrated that children entering Kindergarten, transitioning out of the Dakota and Ojibwe immersion program, scored higher on English standardized tests than the children in English-only child care classrooms. I was so motivated by the potential for Indigenous language immersion programs to ensure children are successful in school and beyond. It has been an honor to get to know the team at Wicioie Nandagikendan and I have been so appreciative of their hospitality so that I might get a glimpse into their curriculum development process and share their story as part of my dissertation story.

## Location 1: Piy-Baw-Daw (The East) – Emergence (continued)



## Story 2: Indigenous Knowledge and Tribal-Specific Knowledges

### Part 1: Daw-Tawn-Maw (In the process of discovering) ~ My Journey of Indigenous Knowledge Exploration

In *Power and Place*, Deloria and Wildcat (2001) affirmed “that the tribe exists over many generations and possesses a cumulative knowledge that transcends any particular generation” (p. 86). In the enacting of this dissertation journey, I am now a part of the collective understanding of not only Indigenous knowledge but also Kiowa knowledge. As I have endeavored to learn more about how Indigenous knowledge theory came to be, I also learned more about my tribal-specific knowledge, how we see the world as Kiowa people. As I have worked with each language immersion program, I have also learned about their ways of knowing. Since our

knowledge frames our perspective and how we see the world, it is important to have a deeper understanding of how Indigenous knowledge has evolved. Our language carries with it the way we view the world. Since I am talking about completely different worldviews than that embodied in the English language, I need to share what I have come to understand about Indigenous knowledge theory, tribally-specific knowledges, and why they matter to the process of curriculum development in Indigenous early childhood language immersion programs. Before I can share the stories that have been shared by each program about their curriculum development process, I first must share a brief history of Indigenous knowledge and how I have come to understand my own Kiowa ways of knowing. Then, I can share what I have learned from each program about their own tribal ways of knowing.

In the larger picture of the story of my dissertation research journey, the process of exploring more about Indigenous knowledge and the tribally-specific knowledges of the programs with whom I have come to collaborate has shaped the way I view curriculum development. In order for me to understand the curriculum development approaches, I first had to understand the tribal specific knowledges that are carried within the language. Since our languages carry our memory, our history, and our worldview, our languages also carry our ways of knowing. In immersion classrooms, Indigenous knowledge has emerged as the foundation for developing curriculum. In order to honor those Indigenous voices that have come before me, I share what I have come to understand about Indigenous knowledge theory and how it relates to curriculum development. And, in order for me to respect the tribally-specific knowledge that was shared through collaborating with each program, I first had to explore more about my own understanding of my tribally-specific knowledge, Kiowa ways of knowing. For in order to hear and understand the different knowledges that were shared by each program, I had to ground my

own perspective in my own people's way of seeing the world. Even though our knowledges are different between our tribal nations, this is the way that I respect the nuances and differences between our knowledges, by having a point of reference in my own Kiowa knowledge. Once I was properly grounded in who I am, it was only then that I could truly hear what knowledges were shared with me through the stories told by each early childhood language immersion program. We are all connected, and even though we have different histories and different perspectives, it is when I approach their knowledge through Kiowa eyes can I truly see what they want me to understand about the way they view the world. From *Spirit and Reason*, Deloria (1999) discussed the phrase that is a cornerstone within our Indigenous languages: "we are all relatives" (p. 34). This concept in Kiowa is "tday-tdayt-tday-tdaw" and Deloria describes this saying by offering the following: "when taken as a methodological tool for obtaining knowledge means that we observe the natural world by looking for relationships between various things in it. That is to say, everything in the natural world has relationships with every other thing and the total set of relationship makes up the natural world as we experience it" (Deloria, 1999, p. 34). Deloria, in a later work, went on to say that the "Indian idea of relationship, in a universe that is very personal and particular, suggests that all relationships have a moral content. For that reason, Indian knowledge of the universe was never separated from other sacred knowledge about ultimate spiritual realities" (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001, pg. 23). Within his analysis of this particular saying—we are all related—Deloria highlighted the cornerstone of Indigenous knowledge, that is, the relational aspect. This idea of being in a relationship with all other elements of creation lays a foundation for the development of Indigenous knowledge theory by future Indigenous scholars.

In one of my graduate courses in 2013, I was challenged by my instructor to select a theory of curriculum development to explore further. After sifting through the various theories we had been reading about in the course, none felt like they represented who I am. I then asked my instructor if I could use Indigenous knowledge theory to frame my curriculum approach. Given the go ahead, I began reading everything I could find on Indigenous knowledge. By the end of the semester, I had a newfound respect for the Indigenous scholars who have asserted Indigenous knowledge into the Western academic world as a valid approach to theory. Over the years since that course, I have continuously read more articles and chapters published by Indigenous scholars as Indigenous knowledge as a theory has evolved over the past two decades. When it came time to determine my dissertation topic, I knew that I would frame my entire topic within the context of Indigenous knowledge. Not only do I have a responsibility to those Indigenous knowledge scholars who blazed the trail for us, but I am also responsible to my Kiowa people to remain true to who I am and who we are as I approach my topic of interest.

In the fall semester of 2019, the University of Oklahoma offered a graduate Presidential Dream Course, called “Rematriation of Indigenous Epistemologies in Education” which was offered through the College of Education in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies department. Led by Dr. Heather Shotton and Dr. Sabina Vaught, this course helped me to make sense of the internal turmoil I felt every time I thought of applying my proposed grounded theory analysis to the data I had gathered from the collaborating research partner programs. Through this course, we explored the concept of rematriation and what that term means for Indigenous knowledge and ultimately how we as Indigenous scholars pursue rematriation in our daily lives. When considering the term and a possible definition of rematriation, as we were challenged to do in this course, considering rematriation and the connections to Indigenous knowledge forced me



to step outside my own comfort zone and confront my own understandings through the lens of rematriation and the idea of returning, reclaiming, and remembering who we are in the context of our lives today. This course was the first time that I was able to come to terms with the two worlds that I had always sensed within me.

My entire life, I have viewed Western education as a necessity to make it in the world today. My parents, my grandparents, my Kiowa elders all told me as I grew up: “go, do good in school, get a good education, and then come back so you can help our people.” So, this was the rallying cry for my life. However, in my experience, there was no place for my Kiowa worldview in the Western public educational system nor in the Western higher education system. So, I have always felt torn between acting like the proper academic scholar that I have been trained to be through the Western institutions in which I have participated since my mother stopped homeschooling me in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and my own Kiowa perspective through which I see the world. Despite the tension I felt, despite the daily struggle to jump back and forth between my natural Kiowa worldview and the learned Western worldview, I always assumed that this was normal. This tension that I always faced is a fact of life as a Kiowa woman and I would just have to deal with it. Then I took the Presidential Dream Course. For the first time, I was challenged by Western academic scholars, our instructors, who had achieved success in the Western academy, to shatter the dichotomy in my psyche and fully embrace who I am as a Kiowa woman and as a Kiowa scholar. All along, I thought that I had it all figured out, this need to walk in both worlds at the same time, the need to speak with both perspectives in mind, the need to be successful in both worlds.

After several months of engaging in thoughtful, challenging discourse with our instructors and the other graduate students in the course, I realized that I can truly live up to what

my parents, grandparents, and elders have charged me to do – I can assert myself as an Indigenous scholar, as a Kiowa woman, and I can claim my place in the academy and carve out a space for Indigenous knowledge and decolonized, Indigenous research methodologies. I can be a part of the growing chorus of Indigenous academic voices who, one by one, step by step, have walked through the boundaries of the Western academy and asserted a space for Indigenous ways of knowing, a space to grow the emerging field of Indigenous knowledge theory. I can be successful in attaining an education that will truly be useful to my people, to my community, and to the generations of Kiowa people that will come after me. The difference is that instead of achieving my education and affirming the Western view of knowledge, I can reclaim, assert, and remember our own Kiowa ways of knowing and in the context of decolonizing thought, explore Indigenous knowledge, continue to push the boundaries, and strike up meaningful discussions to expand the ever growing knowledge encompassed throughout human existence. My small voice is but one voice, and yet, by asserting who I am as an Indigenous scholar, I can truly contribute to the continued success of our Indigenous people.

Who are the voices that I want to journey with me? In her guest lecture during the Presidential Dream Course in Fall 2019 semester, Dr. Amanda Tachine challenged us, and I took this question as a personal charge. Listening to her speak about her own framing of her doctoral work within an Indigenous methodology was invigorating and inspiring. It made me realize that the journey I am on is but the first step in my academic career, and as an emerging Indigenous scholar it is acceptable to break through the boundaries of the three methods of conducting research that I have been trained in during my time at the University of Oklahoma. I have taken several courses each in quantitative methods, qualitative methods, and mixed methods research approaches. In my extra-curricular work I have also taken several courses through Johns Hopkins

University and the Tribal Early Childhood Research Center on tribally-based participatory research methods and conducting early childhood education research with Tribal Nations and their communities. Despite all of these methodology courses, once I actually started working with my collaborating research partners, the immersion programs who opened their doors and arms to my project and trusted me to tell their story respectfully, I found an incredible incongruence between all of those methodologies and the actual doing of the research work. This tension was created by having to transverse two worldviews within early childhood education research: the Western worldview and the Indigenous worldview. I use worldview in the same way that Deloria (1999), Wildcat (2005), and Cross (2009) have used this word – to mean epistemology and ontology, our perspective of the world, the way we perceive all of creation and the knowledge that exists all around us.

One of the most influential Indigenous scholars for me are the writings and life's work of Vine Deloria, Jr. (1993-2005). He was a respected Indigenous theorist, author, and philosopher, who was on the forefront of the development of Indigenous knowledge theory, writing academic pieces, such as *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969) and *God Is Red* (1972), that were seen as controversial in his time but laid the foundation for Indigenous scholars today. It was in Deloria's work that I found mention of the comparisons between the worldview of the Western academy and Indigenous philosophies. Deloria's work has inspired a generation of Indigenous scholars and inspired many others, like me, to take additional steps along the journey of making scholarly contributions to Indigenous knowledge theory and Indigenous methodology as an additional paradigm from which to see the world, as opposed to the Western worldview.

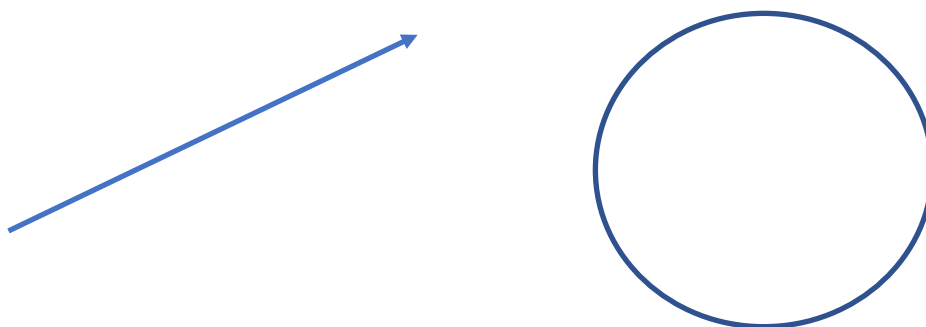
Deloria's most profound contribution to Indigenous knowledge theory is his distinction between Western epistemology and Indigenous epistemology. As one of the first steps in the

journey to legitimize Indigenous knowledge as separate and distinct from Western and American knowledge, Deloria surfaced this idea in his 1970 book, *We Talk, You Listen*:

“The best method of communicating Indian values is to find points at which issues appear to be related. Because tribal society is integrated toward a center and non-Indian society is oriented toward linear development, the process might be compared to describing a circle surrounded with tangent lines. The points at which the lines touch the circumference of the circle are the issues and ideas that can be shared by Indians and other groups. There are a great many points at which tangents occur, and they may be considered as windows through which Indians and non-Indians can glimpse each other. Once this structural device is used and understood, non-Indians, using a tribal point of view, can better understand themselves and their relationship to Indian people.” (Deloria, 1970, p. 12)

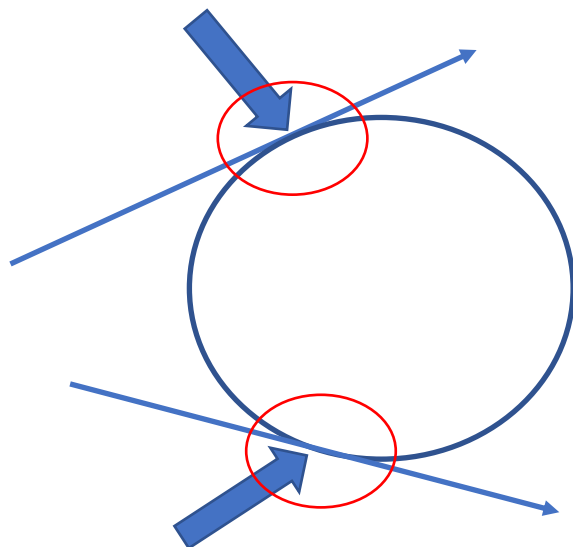
Nearly a decade later, in his little known work, *The Metaphysics of Modern Man*, Deloria asserted “precise boundary lines can also be established to channel the discussion according to the most constructive lines of thought” (Deloria, 1979, p. 247). The ideas proposed in Deloria’s writings can be described visually as follows:

**Figure 3.** The linear worldview vs. the relational world view conceptual models



The line with an arrow represents the Western/American epistemology, which Deloria termed the linear worldview. The linear worldview symbol is representative of Western European and American thought, knowledge, and perspectives towards life. Next, the epistemology of Indigenous people in the United States, specifically from his own tribal knowledge, is called the spatial or relational worldview by Deloria. The circle represents the relational or spatial worldview, which symbolizes Indigenous thought, knowledge, and understanding of the universe. These two worldviews exist separately and are distinct from one another. With these as our mental models, we can then explore further what happens when we discuss the implications. When thinking about these mental models, a linear line and a relational circle are very distinct from each other. Deloria, Cross, Lowery, and many authors since, have dedicated their time and efforts to exploring the distinct worldviews. Before continuing, my use of the terms Indigenous epistemology is used throughout this dissertation to refer to the Indigenous knowledges of the Tribal Nations that are located in what is now known as the United States. I use the terms Western epistemology to refer to those knowledges that come from the linear worldview, which encompasses European thought, settler and colonial knowledges, essentially, those knowledges that tended to clash with the Indigenous epistemologies they encountered.

Deloria and subsequent generations of authors have asserted that it is where the boundary lines cross that we can engage in meaningful dialogue from within our respective worldviews. The two red circles in Figure 4 indicate where our conversations can happen.



**Figure 4.** The intersections between the linear and the relational worldviews.

When it comes to curriculum development in early childhood, it is at these intersection points that my entire dissertation is based.

Deloria served as the Executive Director of the National Congress of American Indians and was a very prolific writer. In his writings, Deloria put down on paper the things that we as Indigenous people have been thinking. Through his personal connection with his own tribal-specific knowledge as a Standing Rock Lakota Sioux tribal member, Deloria affirmed tribal knowledges from an Indigenous epistemological perspective in a way that used Western academic terminology to make his case. Over time, Deloria inspired nearly three generations of Indigenous scholars to refine his thoughts on this idea of boundary lines as modes of communication.

Terry L. Cross is the founder and current Senior Advisor to the National Indian Child Welfare Association and has dedicated his lifetime to empowering Indigenous children and families. During the keynote address at the 2019 Native Children's Research Exchange meeting through the Tribal Early Childhood Research Center (TRC), Mr. Cross offered a comparison of

the linear worldview and what he termed the relational worldview as framed by Vine Deloria, Jr. Mr. Cross said the linear worldview has a theory of change that says “given this, if we do this, this will happen” (Terry Cross, Seneca Nation, personal communication, September 2019). In contrast, Mr. Cross offered a relational worldview indicative of Indigenous thought as including a “fluid, cyclical view of time; each aspect of life is related; services aim to restore balance; interventions may not be directed at the symptoms” (Terry Cross, Seneca Nation, personal communication, September 2019). Then, Mr. Cross explained that taking the relational worldview to the individual child and family level, the relational worldview is represented by a circle split into four quadrants that correspond to the four sacred directions. These quadrants are Mind (knowledge/judgement, thinking processes, self-esteem, memories, emotions); Body (bio-chemistry, genetics, health status, sleep/rest state, substance use/abuse); Spirit (innate positive, learned positive, innate negative, learned negative); and Context (social history, economics, work/school, family/peers, community, culture). He then goes on to share the relational worldview theory of change as “change is a constant, inevitable, cyclical, and dynamic part of the human experience that occurs in natural, predictable patterns and can be facilitated to promote desired and measurable outcomes” (Terry Cross, Seneca Nation, personal communication, September 2019).

Terry Cross shared Indigenous scholar Vine Deloria Jr.’s words that “it is where the linear line intersects with the outer boundary of the relational circle that we can discuss why and how we see things as Indigenous scholars and Indigenous researchers” (Terry Cross, Seneca Nation, personal communication, September 2019). This sentiment has been echoed by previous scholars and practitioners such as Lowery (1998) who wrote that

Deloria (1970, p 13) compared the tribal-nontribal orientation this way: Where the tribal society is ‘integrated toward a center,’ the nontribal society is linear; a circle surrounded by tangent lines represents the two orientations. Where the circle and the lines touch, opportunities for the joining of tribal and nontribal perspectives exist ‘between spirit and science.’ (p. 127)

In thinking about the disconnect that I felt between my original analytic approach and my final approach of Indigenous Storywork (ISW), one of Deloria’s writings particularly struck me, where he defined the boundaries of Indigenous knowledge as “those of respect, not of orthodoxy... Indians as a rule do not try to bring existing bits of knowledge into categories and rubrics that can be used to do further investigation and experimentation with nature” (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001, pg. 21). It is in Deloria’s writings that I found an explanation of what I was feeling.

Daniel Wildcat (2005) asserted that for Deloria, Indigenous knowledges embodied “wisdom, as living entities...he influenced two generations of Indigenous scholars who would not be trapped in the dominant Western dichotomy of either/or in any of its pernicious forms: primitive versus modern, spiritual versus physical, nature versus culture, and so on” (p. 425). When discussing the role of Indigenous scholars in academia, Deloria wrote that

In truth Indians were completely outside the system and within their own worldview...In fact, this system has pulled Indians into the Western worldview, and some of the brighter ones are now emerging on the other side, having transversed the Western body of knowledge completely. Once this path has been established, it is almost a certainty that the rest of the Indian community will walk right on through the Western worldview and emerge on the other side also. (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001, pg. 133)



Based on the charge that Deloria set forth for generations of Indigenous scholars to come, Wildcat wrote that “Indigenization is a set of practices that results in processes in which people seriously reexamine and adopt those particular and unique cultures that emerged from the places they choose to live today” (Wildcat, 2005, p. 419) where to indigenize our practices and thoughts is to acknowledge “that the old ways of living contain useful knowledge for our lives here and now” (Wildcat, 2005, p. 419).

Over the past two decades, Indigenous knowledge has emerged as a theory of knowing that is different from theories of knowing in academia such as constructivism, rationalism, or positivism. Yes, there are over 570 different tribal nations in the United States today. And, yes, that means there are over 570 different ways to see the world. However, even though we each have our own understanding, there are some commonalities that provide a common language and contribute to our shared perspectives of our world.

Many of the recent contributions to Indigenous knowledge theory have been through doctoral dissertations such as the one I am writing. Over the past two decades, Indigenous scholars have contributed their different scholarly perspectives. With each contribution, Indigenous knowledge has become increasingly legitimized as an accepted theory of knowing as an alternative to the Western worldview. In recent years, an increasing number of Indigenous scholars have endeavored to explore and understand the tribally-specific understandings that comprise Indigenous perspectives in the context of particular tribal ways of knowing (Debassige, 2012; Gokee-Rindal, 2009; Guerra, 2006; Harrison & Papa, 2005; Hernandez, 1999; Jircitano, 2001; Kovach, 2006; Parry, 2008; Queton, 2014; Reyhner, 2010; Tachine, 2015; Warner, 2006; Yazzie-Mintz, 2011). As these researchers have presented their interpretations of the Indigenous knowledge maintained in their tribal communities, a body of work has evolved into a theory.

Within the theory of Indigenous knowledge, tribally-specific knowledge has been transmitted from generation to generation via oral traditions. Community knowledge experts have passed their knowledge of tribal perspectives orally from one generation to the next. Indigenous scholars have taken it upon themselves to legitimize those oral traditions for side-by-side comparisons with the Western scholarly traditions by documenting Indigenous oral traditions and representing them using Western terminology. Indigenous knowledge is essentially an epistemology that encompasses various common themes across our Indigenous cultures. Through doctoral dissertations and subsequent peer-reviewed articles and books, Indigenous scholars have taken what they have identified as common themes in their traditional tribal knowledges and examined them from their tribally-specific contexts. After the reflection from a tribal-specific perspective, the common themes were then generalized into an overall Indigenous knowledge theory as presented by foundational Indigenous knowledge scholars, including Deloria (1999), Battiste (2005), Cajete (2005), Kovach (2006), and Johnson (2012). According to these foundational Indigenous knowledge theorists and Indigenous researchers, tribal knowledges are subjective, ecological, and intertwined (Battiste, 2005; Cajete, 2010; Yazzie-Mintz, 2011). Learning and teaching are interdependent processes that cannot be separated from each other in an Indigenous view of knowledge. Indigenous knowledge is intrinsically tied to social, environmental, and spiritual perspectives of life. Indigenous knowledge as an accepted theory then provides tribal communities and Indigenous scholars a framework with which to examine and explore educational practice in Indigenous communities. Regarding implications for the educational field, Indigenous knowledge can be applied to early childhood education and the growing field of Indigenous language revitalization. Indigenous ways of knowing can be readily applied to educational practice in any setting that serves Indigenous children. Early childhood education

programs in tribal communities can utilize the implications of Indigenous knowledge in curriculum development, pedagogy, and instructional strategies (Reyhner, 2010; Yazzie-Mintz, 2011).

Now that I have shared my foundational understanding of the evolution of Indigenous knowledge, I need to point out that the Indigenous scholars who have woven Indigenous knowledge into the academic consciousness have been most successful when they have turned to their own tribal knowledge in order to frame their inquiry and their own research journeys. In order for me to make this same connection, I first need to share something about my own Kiowa ways of knowing.

Given these findings from the formal literature review I conducted in preparation for my doctoral general examination in 2017, my original research question was: What is the theory that guides the way Indigenous early childhood immersion programs develop and implement culturally sustaining curricula? The research strategy that I originally selected to explore this question was that of constructivist grounded theory as defined by Charmaz (2006), which would potentially allow me to generate a theory that could explain the process of Indigenous early childhood education program curriculum development. However, as I started my data collection process, following the principles of tribally-based participatory research as well as adhering to my own Indigenous epistemology that dictates the research approach to use, I found an increasing disconnect between the approach I felt I had to choose that was deemed appropriate by the Western academic expectation of conducting rigorous research and the approach towards working with Indigenous communities that I know to be true.

After conducting initial data collection, I began my data analysis. Partway through an interview transcript, I stopped. I felt something like alarm bells in my mind. Something

whispering that this was off, that something was not right. That was when I began to wonder - since my entire research approach was grounded in Indigenous knowledge as my theoretical framework, my methods, especially the data analysis was supposed to be qualitative in nature, specifically, constructivist grounded theory. This proposed approach for analysis would not work for me, especially if I intended to remain true to my theoretical framework and my research reflexivity of Indigenous knowledge.

After turning back to the literature on Indigenous epistemologies and Indigenous research methodology, I realized that I needed to rethink my data analysis approach. In order to complete this necessary reframing, I first needed to become introspective and dive deeper into the literature around Indigenous methodologies (Gaudry, 2015; Kovach, 2010; Kovach, 2015). Belonging and accountability are both critical facets of Indigenous life and understanding (Kovach, 2015). As Kiowa people, we must first know who we are, and in knowing who we are, we see our value in the context of the larger community, we see our role, not just in the present day but as a manifestation of the deeds and actions of our ancestors and as an investment into the future generations of Kiowa people. Reciprocity, accountability, and relationality are key constructs that frame the Kiowa worldview.

However, as I engaged in the initial stages of data analysis for my dissertation research, I found continued juxtaposition between approaches and methods that are actually appropriate for the tribal communities that have opened their doors and invited me in, and the analytic approaches that I had been taught in my graduate education at the University of Oklahoma in my doctoral coursework. As I worked as a thought partner and a collaborator with the leadership of the programs that are participating in my dissertation study, I began to lean more heavily on the decolonizing methodological approaches discussed in the literature. This shift has caused me to

reframe my analytical approach in my dissertation and instead fully embrace the underlying framework of Indigenous knowledge while applying decolonized data analysis strategies.

This work of “crisscrossing cultural epistemologies” (Kovach, 2015, p. 53) has sown discord within my psyche. I have always felt that in order to be accepted in Western academia as a scholar, I must also change my way of thinking and practice the Western ideology towards research. I have struggled with this ever since starting graduate school for my master’s program. It began in my first graduate courses on curriculum theory and instructional methods. As I learned more about the Western theories of child development and curriculum, the more I felt a disconnect from who I am. I have found that I am drawn to the constructivist and constructionist methods because of my background and the way I see the world. However, constructivist theory does not entirely describe who I am and how I think. In order to understand that, I must turn to my Kiowa ways of knowing.

In order to develop a research framework, I first need to outline some basic understandings that I have on Kiowa ways of knowing. A research framework based on an Indigenous epistemology means that I approach the research from the perspective in which I am grounded. I was raised Kiowa, so I see the world through Kiowa eyes. As I learned about curriculum theory, child development theory, and even different research methodologies, I learned more about my own approach, and as I reflected, I found that I needed to further explore Kiowa ways of knowing. As an Indigenous scholar, I approached my dissertation research through a Kiowa perspective. Instead of trying to fit myself into a box that does not describe me, nor does it fit within my worldview, I instead turned towards Indigenous research methodology to frame my research and to guide my analysis.

## **Part 2: Gkawy-Hohn-Ahn (The Kiowa Way) ~ Kiowa Tribal Knowledge**

The Black Legs spoke of courage and honor and death.

And what of Death and Time?

There is no death, only a change of worlds; and our world goes on!

~ T'ow-hadle, *Kiowa Voices, Volume I* (Boyd, 1981)

Before moving on, I first want to take a step back and reflect on who I am as a Kiowa woman, and who we are as Kiowa people. Our name for ourselves used to be Gaigwu which means “pulling-out-people” and reflects our sacred origin story. Today, we call ourselves Gáuígù, which means the principal people. The word Kiowa is the anglicized version of the name we call ourselves. Our Kiowa language is known as Gáuidò:gà which translates to “Kiowa-talking-us.” Our name for ourselves has evolved alongside us as we have encountered the various experiences of life over the millennia.

Our elders tell us that we originated at the headwaters of the Missouri River and within our oral tradition, we have historical accounts of our deep connection to the Northern Plains, including the mountain regions of southern Canada and the north-central United States, in what is now Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Before contact with Western ways, Kiowa people had a nomadic lifestyle and migrated with the buffalo herds in cycles that took us from the Northern Plains, down into the Southern Plains, into Northern Mexico, through the Pueblos, and back up to the Northern Plains. Our first language Kiowa speakers, our elders, have place names and calendar counts indicating annual Kiowa Sundance locations, illustrating the wide range of Kiowa travels. We were historically divided into seven bands.

In 1780, there was a conflict among the bands. One band leader chose to take his people, known as the K'uato or Pulling Up band to the north, where they were never seen again. Kiowa

oral tradition tells us that this band was since decimated by the Dakota people when the Dakota were pushed into the Black Hills region. Since that time, the Kiowa have had six bands. Each band consisted of several family groups. Each family group elected a leader, known as a “Tdopadoki” and each Band selected a leader to represent them. The six Kiowa bands spent most of the year ranging among the Kiowa territory and all six bands came together in the summertime for the annual Sundance ceremony. Each band had a particular role and responsibility in preparing for and conducting the annual Sundance ceremony. Traditionally, the bands would camp in a specific location around the Sundance encampment circle, according to the role that they played in the Sundance. The first band is located at the east, the entrance into the Sundance ceremonial circle, and they were located on the south side of the entrance. They are called the K’at’a or Ree and they were responsible for furnishing the buffalo for the annual Sundance ceremony. The next band, on the south side of the encampment circle was the Ko’gui or Elk, whose role it was to lead the war ceremonials during the annual gathering. To the west, directly across from the entrance to the circle were the Kaigwu or Kiowa Proper. Their role was to be the Keepers of the Taimé, which is what we called the sacred Sundance Medicine and the Kaigwu also maintained the ceremonial lodge and the entire western part of the circle was maintained by them. On the north side of the circle were the Kinep or Big Shields. The role of this band was to be the Keepers of the sacred image that accompanied the Taimé sundance medicine. Also, on the north side were the Semat or Apache. The Apache, who are also known as the Kiowa-Apache, are a small, but very distinct tribe of people who became allies with the Kiowa during one of the Kiowa migrations. Since that time, the Kiowa have given the Semat both the designation of one of the Kiowa bands as well as a location within the Sundance circle. Finally, in the east, on the north side of the entrance to the circle were located the Kontaliyoup or

Black Boy or Sende's Children. They are a small band and supported the preparations of the K'ata band.

The Kiowa Sundance was a time of renewal, spiritual commitment, and ultimately, celebration. Families could reunite and stories of travels throughout the year were shared. Even into modern times, even though the Kiowa Sundance ceremony is no longer conducted, we still gather as a Kiowa people annually during the summer through one of our warrior societies, the T'iah P'iah Gah, the Kiowa Gourd Clan, where the annual gourd dance camps are still organized according to the historical location of each family's ancestral band association.

The annual calendar was marked by specific events, once per summer and once per winter, with the summer event indicating a special moment during the Sundance ceremony. The calendar keeper was the person who kept the stories of each event on the calendar and passed them down to the next calendar keeper. Our thinking was nonlinear: Our calendars were kept in a spiral fashion, with each event added in the same direction we travel in our dances during our ceremonies, from east, to south, to west, to the north and back again.

We believe in a universe that was created by Daw-K'ee, the Creator. Daw-K'ee permeates all of creation and all that the Kiowa have is attributed to Daw-K'ee. Our belief system sees life and death as moments in the cycle of humanity and the separation between the physical world and the spiritual world is the difference between the seen and the unseen. In Kiowa epistemology, spirit and physical, unseen and seen, are intrinsically connected and each impacts the other. The spirit force can be affected by one's actions in the physical world in both positive and negative ways. When negative energies were accumulated around a person, enough so that the individual was visibly suffering, Kiowa Medicine Men, the Keepers of the Spiritual World, conducted healing ceremonies to bring the spirit and physical back into balance for that



individual or family. According to Kiowa beliefs, humanity was one facet of creation, with the other facets including the Ant People, the Deer People, the Wolf People, and all the other living things including plant life and even rocks and land formations. Since all life and all of creation is connected, the Kiowa people have a strong belief in the power of prayer and the importance of acknowledging the sacrifice of the plant or animal life for the sustenance of the human life.

Our Kiowa people once followed the buffalo herds for food and only hunted for what they needed. Kiowa men were the keepers of the spiritual world while Kiowa women were keepers of the physical world. These roles were clearly defined and both men and women were essential to maintaining the balance of creation. Kiowas historically lived in tipis made from tanned buffalo hides and lodge poles from trees. After the introduction of the horse to North America, Kiowa people became expert horsemen and by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, horses became a form of currency. A Kiowa family's wealth and ultimately, status, was measured in the number of horses. In addition to our band system, we have a very intricate caste system, consisting of four levels of status: Ondei (Spiritual Leaders, Keepers of the Songs and Dances), Ondeigupa (Warriors, Political Leaders), Kah-ahn (The Pitiful Ones), and Dahpohm (The Untouchables). Upward mobility was possible among the lower three castes while the highest caste was either inherited or, in some circumstances, married into. However, a member of the Ondei could commit horrendous deeds or crimes and thus be cast out into a lower caste by decree of the leaders of the people. Since murder was forbidden, the worst punishment an individual could receive was to be outcast. One night, the offender would go to bed in their tipi, and quietly in the night, the rest of the camp would pack up and leave the area. The offending Kiowa would emerge from the tipi in the morning and realize the entire camp had moved on – the punishment had been rendered. Without a people around, certain death was imminent. Kiowa social structure

included distinct societies that played critical roles in the education and training of young men and women into successful Kiowa adults. These societies started out with the Rabbit Society, comprised of all young boys and girls. At puberty, boys and girls became separated into their respective societies, with the girls becoming apprentices of the women, and the boys becoming apprentices of the men, learning how to behave as a Kiowa warrior and as a Kiowa man. Kiowa men had the responsibility to ensure the Kiowa spirituality lived on while Kiowa women ensured the Kiowa way of life was maintained.

Some Kiowa ways of knowing, Gkawy Hohn Ahn (Kiowa Ways of Knowing), as compiled through my conversations with Kiowa elders, Kiowa language advocates, and Kiowa children's family members from 2012-2015 are described here:

- Daw-Kee (Our Creator-The Power within all of creation) comes first (Pray at sunrise, noon, sunset, bedtime; Express Gratitude; Be Thankful)
- Children are the future of the people and must be prepared accordingly (Rabbit Society feeds into other societies)
- Everything is connected (Creation Story)
- The world and universe are sacred (Creation Story)
- There is an invisible power that permeates all creation (Creation Story, Prayer)
- Children have a family/community who value them (Parents are not isolated, Extended family over generations assist)
- There is a time and place for everything (Roles and responsibilities of each person; certain things occur at certain times)
- All members of the community have a role (Kiowa Caste System, Kiowa Societies, Kiowa Bands)

- All voices are heard before action is taken (When elders speak, everyone else listens)
- There are no tyrants. The people make decisions on who will lead (Group consensus, majority acceptance)
- Use of public shame as a social control (Wrong to kill a Kiowa, being outcast was worst punishment, teasing)
- Children learn by observing and listening (Children mimic what adults do; smaller versions/child sized, Rabbit Society, which reminds me of the theory I just learned about from the researcher, Dr. Barbara Rogoff, who has spent 40 years studying Mayan communities, and her theory of “Learning by Observing and Pitching In (LOPI)” and her studies on how collaborative learning is transmitted)
- Values are taught through stories (Sayn-Day Stories, Zai-Day Tah-Lee Stories)
- Social norms are taught via modeling (Adults go about their business, children follow along and mimic actions)
- Learning and teaching are the same (Mah-Hay-Maw)
- Teaching happens within a context and as the child is ready for it, according to child’s need and readiness
- Learning occurs through experience (Being in the present moment, Connected to the world around us)
- Knowledge is grounded in our place (Know our surroundings, Kiowa Place Names, Kiowa Ethnobotany)
- We use only what we need, no waste (Hunting for food, Use of natural resources, Innovations)

- Our actions impact the lives of those around us (Individual actions speak for the entire Family and thus Reputation)
- We have four directions which each represent our four seasons and are also symbolized by specific colors. East is represented by the color yellow and the spring season. South is represented by the color black and the summer season. West is represented by the color red and the autumn season. North is represented by the color white and the winter season.

After reflecting on and remembering the collaborative exploration into Kiowa ways of knowing, I realized that my research questions would need to be reframed in order to truly capture the essence of my inquiry, in the context of the Kiowa camp circle methodology that has emerged. My research questions were reworked as follows:

- How do Indigenous early childhood immersion programs develop and implement culturally sustaining curriculum?
- What is the story that emerges as Indigenous early childhood immersion programs develop and implement culturally sustaining curriculum?
- Sub-questions included: What is the planning process that guides the implementation of Indigenous early childhood immersion culturally sustaining learning experiences? What is the process that underlies the development of culturally sustaining pedagogy in Indigenous early childhood immersion programs?

These questions served to ground me as an Indigenous scholar and are constant reminders that I must remain true to who I am and assert that a decolonized research methodology offers an alternative to the narratives of Western institutions and Western methodologies.

When I think about curriculum development in the context of the four different programs that have agreed to collaborate with me on this dissertation research project, I find that I feel both accountable to and responsible for getting this right. In other words, I feel a strong sense of accountability to the programs that I have been working with. Because they agreed to be collaborators in this project, I feel immense pressure to ensure that their stories are told in such a way that is both respectful of the individuals who have trusted me with their knowledge as well as responsive to the individual programmatic goals of these immersion programs.

As I entered the writing phase of my dissertation research work, I struggled intensely. This internal struggle was between the rational qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research that I was taught and the relational, holistic perspective towards the world that I have as an emerging Kiowa scholar. It has been the most difficult part of this graduate school journey to find a way for me to include my relational knowledge in my own research process. After numerous discussions with my advisor and other mentors, I feel increasingly confident that I can assert myself as a Kiowa researcher and describe my research process through the lens of my own Kiowa ways of knowing. By being true to who I am as a human being, I can then be fully accountable to the collaborating programs who have agreed to embark on this research journey with me. As a researcher and as a Kiowa scholar, I have a responsibility to ensure that I am engaging in respectful research methods and honest analysis that allows me to truly see the stories shared by each program as they are situated within each tribal nation's own ways of knowing. This relational and holistic worldview also implies a research analysis process that is reflective of the Indigenous ways of knowing that are present in each individual program's understandings. I have thus chosen to utilize Indigenous Storywork (ISW) as my analytical method – see Location 3, Story 5 for more details on my use of Indigenous Storywork in this

dissertation research. My framework for my entire dissertation topic is that of Indigenous knowledge theory, as specifically viewed through my own Kiowa ways of knowing. It is through Kiowa eyes that I see the world and it is with Kiowa eyes that I listened to each story as it was told to me through this process of exploring curriculum development in Indigenous early childhood language immersion programs.

The Indigenous scholars that I have selected are those whose voices have inspired me along this research journey, beginning in 2013 when I first embarked on this process by pursuing a non-Western theory of education to explore. By first selecting Indigenous knowledge as my theoretical framework, I took my first tentative step outside the boundaries of Western academic thought and began to dig deeper into connecting to who I am as a Kiowa scholar who will be responsible for future contributions to both our Kiowa knowledge and also the ways in which Western academics view Kiowa contributions to scholarship and the ever expanding knowledge base of human understanding. Now, in 2020, I take the final step in my journey to becoming a scholar, preparing to take my place within the academic memories of the University of Oklahoma.

### **Part 3: New Kituwah Academy's Tribal Knowledge**

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians' New Kituwah Academy stands as a testament to the determination of a nation of people to not forget who they are and to ensure that their language and specific knowledge continues forward into future generations. This is the story of Cherokee tribal knowledge that emerged through the conversations with the immersion staff at New Kituwah Academy.

The varying shades of deep green all around speak to life. Trees, vines, plants, rocks, all the elements that make up the Cherokee world are layered throughout mountain ridges. Rolling

valleys where mist gathers throughout the day stretch to the horizon in each direction. Swiftly flowing rivers and shallow streams with rocky beds crisscross through the land, stretching from the mountains, through the valleys, and beyond. These are the Great Smoky Mountains in western North Carolina, and this is the ancestral home of the Cherokee people. Surrounded by the beauty of the greens, blues, and earth tones, it is no surprise that the students in the New Kituwah Academy's Cherokee immersion program spend just as much time outdoors as they do indoors. Cherokee people see themselves as the stewards of their homelands and this teaching is woven throughout their stories and songs.

The stories that have been passed down through the generations each have specific values embedded in them so that the listener can know and remember the core Cherokee values. Cherokee values include harmony, spirituality, community, relationships, respect, and humility. As the world has changed around them, their core values still remind the people of who they are and how they are expected to interact with the world as Cherokee. In the immersion classroom, Cherokee stories are used to ground the children in Cherokee ways of knowing. Starting with the beginning of the year, immersion teachers share the Cherokee story sequence with stories ranging from their sacred creation story to the stories about how things came to be, from stories about what plants to use, to stories about the resilience of the Cherokee people. These stories serve as the foundation of the curriculum and are a reference point for the children. Not only do they hear these stories entirely in Cherokee, but the children also get the opportunity to explore each story more in depth through asking questions, reflections, and making connections between the story and their daily lives. The stories come to life when the immersion teachers take the students outside on nature walks through the lush woods that surround the valley, or as they

travel to ancient sacred sites such as the Kituwah Mound, which is known as the location of the very first Cherokee village, long, long ago, eons in the past.

In the Great Smoky Mountains, the Cherokee people refer to themselves as “Ani-Kituwahagi” which translates to “the people of Kituhwa” referring to their first Cherokee village. They also refer to themselves as “Ani-Yunwiya” which translates to “real people” or “principal people.” The word “Cherokee” is an anglicized version of another Cherokee word that is said to refer to “atsilagi” or the “people of the fire.” The Cherokee people are organized into seven different clans. Historically, the clans enforced Cherokee laws, and also provided the political structure for governing. Children have a particular role to play in life and through their introduction into the clan system, they develop a sense of belonging and confidence in who they are and what role they play in the community. Cherokee people each had a role to play in Cherokee society and were raised to understand their role and be prepared to take on that role once they reached puberty. Cherokee women once were the keepers of the plants – they kept the family gardens, planted the corn, beans, and squash and other crops, while Cherokee men handled the hunting and business of fighting wars. However, women shared an equal voice as the men in the historical Cherokee government. The clan system was historically a reflection of the matrilineal and matriarchal organization of Cherokee society. Clan relationships were passed through the mother to the child, and the mother’s brothers played an important role in raising their sister’s children. Through the Cherokee language, children grew up understanding their world in terms of relationships – to each other, through their clans, and through their interaction with the rest of creation.

The Cherokee worldview is grounded in the Cherokee cosmology. Cherokee stories tell of the connection between the lower world, the middle world, and the upper world. Traditional



ceremonies reminded the people of the way that they needed to interact with these various worlds in their existence. The origins of the Cherokee people and the expectations for interacting with the rest of creation are still embedded in Cherokee oral tradition. Each Cherokee story carries particular values and teachings, and the retelling of the story helps to add to the collective knowledge that the Cherokee people still have to this day. In this way the children have the opportunity to carry on Cherokee knowledge.

#### **Part 4: Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program's Tribal Knowledge**

“Every morning, we pray.” ~ Curriculum theme

My feet crunch on the gravelly sand. The dry breeze greets me as I stretch from the drive over. As I look around, I breathe in the stillness of the land and I feel an immediate reverence and a sense of peace. I have arrived in Jemez Pueblo, New Mexico, a rural village about an hour north of Albuquerque. In the high desert air, we are surrounded by red-layered mesas and canyons at the edge of the Jemez Mountains. Around me I see the pinion and juniper trees in their hues of deep green in contrast with the light amber earth and aqua colored sagebrush and chaparral plants that speckle the landscape.

I am stepping into the Walatowa people's land and I want to be as respectful as possible. In putting together this story of Towa knowledge as told to me by the staff of the Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program, I want to first acknowledge that the program staff who agreed to collaborate with me have provided me with a responsibility to be true to their story and the messages that they want shared with the world about their program. It is with utmost respect that I share the following story that is a brief glimpse into the Towa ways of knowing, as told to me by the program staff. I also want to emphasize that this story is not meant to be exhaustive and I am very cognizant of the fact that there are some traditional things that cannot be talked

about with the public or with outsiders. However, in order to understand the process of curriculum development shared in other parts of this story, I must first present the story that emerged from the program staff about the Walatowa people's traditional knowledges and the worldview through which they engage with all of creation.

The sun beams are just beginning to peek over the hills. A line of children and their two teachers stand, facing the rising sun, to the east. They are quietly engaged in prayer as they "embrace the sun," as one teacher shared. I stand quietly, sending up a silent prayer of my own. These children are continuing the traditional practice of greeting the sun and praying with cornmeal every day. In this way, the children are affirming their connection with the rest of creation and asking for blessings throughout their day of learning at the Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program. The importance of prayer in the lives of the Walatowa people is apparent. Through prayer, the children and teachers are carrying forward the values of respect and connectedness. There are four sacred directions, beginning with the east. Through the use of prayer, the children are also learning about the four directions and the significance of each direction.

Through our conversations and story-sharing, the immersion teachers and program leadership told me that Jemez Pueblo life revolves around a traditional calendar guided by the seasons and the ways in which the seasons change the land, the plants, and the activities that occur as they have occurred for millennia. This traditional cycle of the seasons and activities informs the children's learning experiences and curriculum within the context of the ceremonies that the Jemez people conduct at certain times of the year. During the time of year that I am visiting, it is October. The word in the Towa language for October means "husking the corn" month. For the Jemez Pueblo people, corn is sacred. Grandparents, parents, and now, teachers,

all work to demonstrate to the children the importance of corn to the life of the people through growing the corn and other important plants in the fields and harvesting them. As the children participate in planting, tending, and harvesting activities, they are also living the Towa value of respecting Mother Earth and carrying that particular value forward. By involving the children in every step of the corn plant's life cycle, children learn the importance of cornmeal as well as the protocol for using cornmeal in the proper way, a way that has been passed down through the generations and millennia of the Walatowa people.

During specific times of the year as determined through the traditional calendar and changing of the seasons, the people conduct various Feast Days. Through the celebration of Feast Days, including traditional songs, dances, and ceremonies, the children who attend the Head Start program learn about ceremonial protocol, including the roles that various individuals and clans carry out during these ceremonial times. Certain cultural figures, such as the Pecos Bull, make their appearances during the different Feast Days. During these times of ceremony and celebration when the entire community comes together, the children learn about the role of and protocol regarding the kivas. They also observe the various traditional and ceremonial dances and songs. Through observation, the children learn to sing the different types of songs and learn to dance the appropriate dance that goes with each type of song. Since children represent the future of the people, their involvement in traditional songs and dances is seen as very important.

One teacher shared that "it's about their identity, who they are, where they come from" when discussing the importance of carrying on the Walatowa people's protocol on how to introduce themselves. Their identity is connected to the clan their family belongs to, their Indian name, their moiety, and where they live. In this way, the clan system and the importance of knowing their particular moiety is perpetuated by the younger generation.

The value of respect is demonstrated through the relationships that the children have with each other, with their families, their teachers, their community, their elders, and even the plants, animals, and insects they encounter. One teacher shared about the children encountering a spider crawling along their classroom floor. The children thanked the spider for visiting and carefully took it outside, and gave it back to Mother Earth so it could continue along its way. Another teacher shared that the children go on walks through the community on their way to harvest in the fields. As they walk, they see various community members and tribal elders going about their activities. The children greet those who they meet with the traditional Towa greetings and the children often bring smiles to the elders' faces as they greet the children back in Towa. Through these types of exchanges, the children learn about the different relationships around them and how to both maintain and be respectful with each type of relationship. In these ways and many other ways, the children learn to live the Towa value of being in relation with all other human beings and elements of creation.

## **Part 5: Lakota Immersion Childcare Elementary Track Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa**

### **Thanka's Tribal Knowledge**

“They're the center of the universe” ~ Immersion Teacher

The wind gusts over the rolling hills, covered in flowing, yellowed prairie grasses, dotted with dark green juniper trees. Hills stretch to the horizon and meet the expansive blue sky.

Located in the southwestern portion of the state of South Dakota, the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation is home to the Oglala Lakota people.

As shared with me by the immersion program staff, Lakota teachings revolve around the four directions and the acknowledgement of each aspect of creation as represented in the medicine wheel. In the Lakota language immersion classrooms of the Thunder Valley

Community Development Corporation's Lakota Immersion Childcare Elementary Track, the beginning of each day includes using sage to smudge, cleanse, and pray. The children start the day by getting into a circle, blessing themselves as the sage is passed around the circle, and together, they sing the four directions song. In this way, this future generation of Lakota people will know the importance of each direction as well as the importance of prayer. The Lakota people base their epistemology on the concept of "as above, so below." With the belief that what is on the Earth is reflected in the stars, Lakota people see the balance that is inherent in creation. Lakota elders believe that the balance needs to be maintained. Lakota star knowledge is embedded throughout each of their stories about how things came to be as well as included in their songs. Seeing their lives on Earth represented in the stars and having that understanding has reminded the Lakota people of the importance of maintaining balance as part of the connectedness that is woven throughout all aspects of Lakota life. Through their stories, Lakota elders remind the younger generations that what is in the stars is on the Mother Earth and that connection must be maintained. Lakota stories also tell us what happens when the balance is not maintained. As time has gone on, human society has gone through changes in waves and cycles of knowledge. When the balance between the elements of creation and the connection between the seen and the unseen is not respected and maintained, then Mother Earth has to cleanse. This most important of values is a constant reminder to younger generations to maintain the balance in creation and to acknowledge and respect the connection between all elements of the world and universe.

Lakota elders believe that it will be the responsibility of the future generation to carry on the stories of their tribal memories, including how the Lakota people came to be on Mother Earth. These stories share the history of the Lakota people and their interactions with the other

life on earth, such as the differences between the four-legged animals, the winged animals, and two-legged humans. Their stories help to explain the values of respect, honor, belonging, and community. These stories also remind the people to maintain peace and to remain humble in their daily lives. Their stories share the knowledge that has been collected within Lakota memory over the generations and eons of time. Stories tell of the importance of the different elements of the world, including the plants that are sacred and which plants to use to eat, to heal, and to pray with. Wild plums could be picked, chokecherries could be gathered, sweetgrass could be picked and sage could be braided. These lessons along with details about which plants are used for medicine by the Lakota people, to heal and to pray, these lessons are embedded in the stories that comprise Lakota collective knowledge. Ceremonies that speak to the balance that needs to be maintained throughout creation still survive to this day, such as the Sundance ceremony. Lakota oral tradition maintains the collective lessons learned and the knowledge that the people have gained about the life around them and their role and responsibility to creation. In addition to the stories that are told and retold by Lakota elders, there are also the songs and dances of the Lakota people. Through their songs, the Lakota people also maintain knowledge of their history as a people, the meaning behind their culture, and also acknowledge Lakota spirituality. Within Lakota songs, relationships between humans and all elements of creation are recorded and maintained so that the knowledge can be passed on into the future.

Through beginning each day with a smudging ceremony and a prayer song that acknowledges each of the four sacred directions, the Lakota teachings are still alive and the immersion classroom teachers ensure that the next generation of Lakota people maintain the knowledge that is necessary to understanding the Lakota worldview and offers guidance on how to live their lives. These immersion teachers are also doing their part to ensure the children understand that

they have a purpose and a place in life as Lakota. Each of the four directions represents specific aspects of Lakota beliefs, values, and lifeways. The four directions also serve as a reminder about the connection between human life and all the rest of creation. Within each sacred direction, there is a corresponding sacred plant, specific animals as well as a specific stage of life. Through the Lakota teachings intertwined in the stories, songs, dances, and ceremonies, Lakota people can assure their continued existence, especially as the children are reminded of their roles and responsibilities to the rest of creation as a Lakota person.

### **Part 6: Wicoie Nandagikendan's Dakota and Ojibwe Tribal Knowledges**

In the heart of Minneapolis, in the center of the busy city, there is a quiet street and a stone building that sits within a wrought iron fence. This is the Wicoie Nandagikendan Dakota Ojibwe Language Immersion Child Care program.

Both Dakota and Ojibwe people are the Indigenous people of the state of Minnesota. Ojibwe people call themselves "Anishinaabeg," which means the "True People," "Original People," or "Spontaneous Beings," which is also pronounced as "Anishinaabe." The anglicized version is "Ojibwe" or "Chippewa," which means "puckered up," which is most likely due to the fact that traditional Ojibwe moccasins were designed with a puckered seam across the top. Ojibwe people are organized into Anishinaabeg dodems, also known as clans, which vary according to the region of the Ojibwe homeland in which they reside. The seven original clans were Crane, Loon, Bear, Fish, Marten, Deer, and Bird, with Wolf and Eagle now added. Each clan represented people with specific roles and responsibilities. Traditional Ojibwe life follows the circle of life which encompasses the four directions, the four seasons, the four phases of life, and the four sacred medicines. East is associated with the spring season, the life stage of childhood, new life, a time of change, and the color yellow. South is associated with the summer

season, the teenage life stage, growing things, full understanding, and the color red. West is associated with the autumn season, the middle adulthood life stage, full maturity, gradual change, insight, and the color black. North is associated with the winter season, the elderly life stage, dreams, wisdom, purity, and the color white. According to Ojibwe oral tradition, the four seasons predicted what types of resources were available as well as what the people needed to prepare for, and even where and how the people would need to live during that time of the year. Regarding the four stages of life, Ojibwe people have specific roles and activities associated with each life stage. As Ojibwe people live their lives, any decisions they make are made with the seventh generation in mind. In other words, the actions of the people today will have an impact on the seventh generation in the future, and care should be taken to remember that fact. Ojibwe people are guided by what they call the seven grandfather's teachings, which dictate a code of conduct for Ojibwe people. These seven teaching include wisdom, love, respect, bravery, truth, humility, and honesty. There are Ojibwe stories that share the meaning of each of the seven teachings and explain the consequences when the teachings are not followed. Ojibwe oral tradition also carries within it the history of the Anishinaabe people, the movements of the people as they have evolved as a society as well as life lessons necessary for a successful life as an Anishinaabe person. Their stories also carry within them the expectations for Ojibwe spirituality, instructions for conducting ceremonies, prophecies, and the code of conduct for living and interacting with others. In the Ojibwe immersion classroom, these teachings are carried out through each theme and lesson plan as well as in the daily routine. Each day starts off with a morning circle where the children pray together and conduct a smudging ceremony to ask for a good day of learning.



The word “Dakota,” sometimes spelled as “Dakhota,” means “friend” or “ally” and has been interpreted to mean “alliance of friends.” Dakota people are a part of Oceti Sakowin, also called the Seven Council Fires, which are also inaccurately called the “Sioux.” The three major groups of people within Oceti Sakowin are the Dakota, the Lakota, and the Nakota. They each speak a dialect of the same language. Specifically, the Dakota are made up of the eastern bands, whose homelands are in Minnesota. Dakota are sometimes called the Santee, from Isanti Mde (Knife Lake), southeast of Mille Lacs in Minnesota. They make up the Sisonwan (Dwellers of the Fish Ground), Wahpetonwan (Dwellers Among the Leaves), Wahpekute (Shooters Among the Leaves), and the Bdewakantonwan (Dwellers of the Spirit Lake) bands of the Dakota people. The band names themselves also tell of where the people were specifically located.

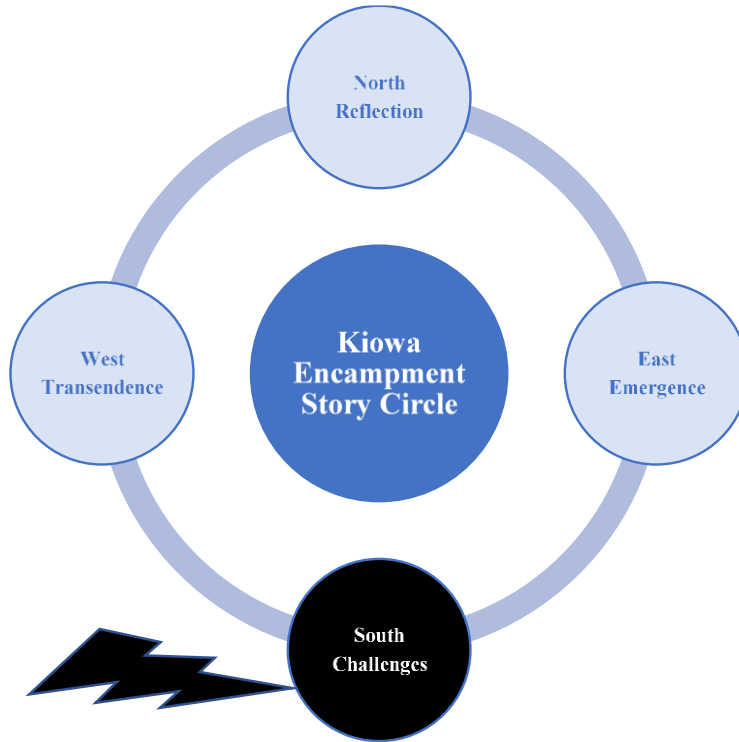
There are 12 values of the Dakota people: wholeness, changes, cycles, Earth life, sacred life, true learning, four wisdoms, spiritual dimension of human development, active participation in development, decide to develop potential, aid along the journey, and only source of failure. Dakota oral tradition includes stories about how to apply the 12 values to daily living, including the code of conduct for Dakota people as well as the history of the Dakota, such as the Creation Stories which tell the origin of the Dakota people where the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers meet. In the Dakota immersion classroom, each day starts off with gathering in a morning circle, and conducting a smudging ceremony with sage, then the children sing a Dakota prayer song. Through these activities, the Dakota immersion teachers ensure that their students start each day with a sense of spiritual belonging with each other and within themselves. The Dakota view of kinship includes both the understanding of how to be a good relative to each other as well as knowing the rules defined within an extensive social structure and kinship expectations for

Dakota communities. Dakota life is all about understanding relationships with each other and with all other elements of creation.

The season of the year dictated both where the people would live as well as the activities they would engage in, such as in the springtime the people moved into sugaring camps where they focused on making maple sugar and maple syrup. During the summertime, the people would gather in hunting and fishing villages where they processed both the game they caught as well as harvested traditional medicines and cultivated plants such as corn, beans, and squash. The summer months also included the tradition of gathering wild rice along the lakes in Minnesota, traditionally called Mni Sota, “the land of cloudy waters,” in Dakota. In the autumn, Dakota families moved into hunting grounds where they would prepare and carry out the annual hunt in order to prepare for the cold season. The wintertime season was when the people would live off of the stores of food gathered during the warmer months.

In both Dakota and Ojibwe oral tradition, there is the understanding that over time the Anishinaabe people migrated through the Great Lakes region, the Dakota people were pushed further and further south. During these times, there were times of conflict and war between the Dakota and Ojibwe people. Finally, both people tell of the story of the Big Drum giving, where the Dakota people gifted the Big Drum to the Ojibwe people as a symbol of peace and friendship between both peoples. This tradition is recognized still today through ceremonies in both Dakota and Ojibwe. In the classrooms at Wicoie Nandagikendan, the tradition of the Big Drum giving is carried on as children in the immersion classrooms learn the specific expectations of both Ojibwe and Dakota people regarding the use of the drum and song.

## Location 2: Piy-K'ee (The South) – Challenges



**Figure 5.** Kiowa Encampment Story Circle - South: Challenges.

### Story 3: Historical Context

#### Part 1: Defining the Indigenous Educational Context and Historical Implications

##### Introduction

As we make our way around the camp circle, I acknowledge that this journey began long before I was born. The history of my people and the other Indigenous peoples on this continent is recounted in the following pages as it was told to me by my parents, my grandmothers, my grandfathers, and by their grandmothers and grandfathers. There are parts of the histories of the

Tribal Nations represented through the collaborating partner programs that I worked with that were told to me through the story sharing process. Some of the history that is shared here will not be found in a history book or a journal article because that knowledge lives in the collective knowledge of our people.

The Kiowa people are but one nation among the many hundreds, even thousands, of nations of Indigenous peoples who were thriving on this North American continent long before the Europeans became settlers here. In the United States today, there are still 574 federally-recognized sovereign Indigenous, also known as American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN), nations, tribes, rancherias, villages, and pueblos, and dozens of state-recognized tribes (National Congress of American Indians, 2019). Our nations have been dwindled down over the centuries of contact with the settlers. We used to be able to travel freely between our ancestral homelands and our sacred sites all over the continent. Now, we have been restricted to a specific land base forced on us by the settlers. Through forced removal, relocation, and eradication over the centuries, today, federally recognized tribes with reservation lands are located on one of 326 federally recognized reservations, except for tribes in the states of Alaska, California, and Oklahoma (National Congress of American Indians, 2019). While we used to be the total population of North America, today, demographically, Indigenous people make up two percent of the total U.S. population with about 71 percent of Indigenous people living off the reservations (National Congress of American Indians, 2019).

### ***Our Challenge: How We Came To Be In This Place***

The history of contact between Indigenous peoples and Western settlers in the United States is defined by several different timeframes.

In the Colonial Period (1492-1828), European colonies increased their presence on what is now the East Coast of the United States. During this time, the various colonial governments and the newly-formed United States government negotiated and established treaties with many different Tribal Nations (National Congress of American Indians, 2019). Hardin (2012) explained that one aspect of the Colonial Period included the United States policy of taking responsibility for the education of the Indigenous peoples. After the Civil War, the U.S. government worked to solve the “Indian Problem” (p. 11) through providing federal funding to major churches to work on Christianizing the *savages* and *heathens*, as Indigenous people were known at the time.

The next timeframe is called the Removal, Reservation, and Treaty Period (1828-1887) and involved the growth of the U.S. population as well as the increasing U.S. military force in order to push Indigenous peoples further and further west. In order to secure more land for the U.S., the federal government used military force to remove Indigenous people from their homelands in the east and then relocate them on lands far to the west (National Congress of American Indians, 2019). Removal and relocation were the strategies first employed by the federal government to address the issue of Indigenous peoples on lands that the U.S. wanted to use instead. A good summary of the federal government’s official attitude towards Indigenous people during this time period is “the only good Indian is a dead Indian” (Hardin, 2012, p. 11).

During the Allotment and Assimilation Period (1887-1934), there was increasing pressure on the U.S. government to assimilate Indigenous people into American life. The General Allotment Act of 1887, also known as the Dawes Act, forced Indigenous people to become individual land owners of lands that had been communally used for centuries and even millennia. Of the original lands that were promised to tribal nations through the treaty process,

the Dawes Act resulted in over 90 million acres of reservation land, roughly two-thirds of all lands occupied by Indigenous people at the time, being taken from the tribal nations and given to the settlers (National Congress of American Indians, 2019). Much of the land that would become the present-day reservations of many tribal nations was actually land that was typically hard to use for agriculture or livestock production. General Richard H. Pratt coined a popular phrase at the time, “Kill the Indian, but save the man” (Hardin, 2012, p. 12). This statement clearly expressed the motivation behind the establishment of federally controlled boarding schools, which consisted of 25 boarding schools, modeled after Pratt’s Carlisle Indian School (Hardin, 2012). Indigenous children were removed from their families and forced to attend boarding schools far from their homelands. In these boarding schools, children performed manual labor and were educated according to Christian doctrine. While these schools were marketed to the public as educational institutions, in reality, boarding schools had the express purpose of removing all tribal and Indigenous affiliation from the children, including their language, culture, and family knowledge, and were geared to produce graduates who would be upstanding, Christian citizens of American society. Instead of learning school subjects, the children learned about how to speak English through punishment for speaking their Indigenous language. It was a time where assimilation was the primary goal.

The Indian Reorganization Period (1934-1945) was started by the U.S. government’s Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934, which ended the allotment policy. Through the IRA, the federal government started the process of restoring some of the land that had been lost through the allotment period. The IRA also created various programs and projects that attempted to address the severe economic disparities that existed in tribal communities and on reservations. Part of this restorative process also involved a misguided attempt by the federal government to

support the formal organization and development of tribal governments (National Congress of American Indians, 2019).

In the Termination Period (1945-1968), vast federal changes focused once more on assimilating Indigenous people into the mainstream American population. The U.S. Congress terminated the federally-recognized status and the associated federal funding streams to over one hundred tribal nations. Then, through Public Law 280 in 1953, states were granted jurisdiction over the tribes in those states that voted to participate in the law. This alarming piece of federal and state legislation essentially placed both state civil and criminal jurisdiction over tribes in California, Minnesota, Nebraska, Oregon, and Wisconsin, which removed those tribes from the auspices of the federal government oversight (National Congress of American Indians, 2019). These termination policies resulted in an economic disaster for many tribal nations including the “loss of millions of acres of valuable natural resource land through tax forfeiture sales” (National Congress of American Indians, 2019, p. 12). Then, during this termination era, due to the severe economic situation in many tribal communities, the federal government forced young people from tribal nations across the U.S. to physically relocate from their homelands and reservations to urban areas. There were various urban centers around the country that were designated as sites for relocation. As soon as Indigenous youth graduated from high school they were placed in a job training program that mandated they leave their home and their families, and travel to cities including Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, New York City, and Seattle, where they were placed in group homes and assigned minimum wage, blue-collar skill level jobs with the goal of the youth learning a trade and establishing themselves as contributing citizens of the urban area where they were placed. In the generation since that time, the majority of those

Indigenous youth who were relocated never found their way back home and, in the process, became isolated and cut off from their cultural values, language, and families.

During the Self-Determination Period (1968-2000), tribal governments reacted to the termination era policies, which resulted in a federal policy that emphasized self-determination and self-governance. The idea behind self-determination was that tribal nations of federally-recognized tribes should be in control of their own tribal governments and be able to make decisions for the improvement of their people. Due to this shift in federal policy towards tribal nations, various federal programs were reformed to include funding streams for federally-recognized tribal governments. With the influx of federal funds, tribal governments could then develop, administer, and implement programs to serve their tribal communities. Programs that were established in this period included the Administration on Aging meal service program, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's food distribution, or commodities, program, various education programs including the development of higher education grant programs to support individual educational achievement as well as social service programs such as emergency assistance, the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Act program, child abuse and neglect prevention, injury prevention, Head Start, child care subsidies, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (National Congress of American Indians, 2019).

Finally, the current era is known as the Nation-to-Nation Period (2000-present), which is characterized by an increase in both support for and acknowledgement of tribal governments as tribal nations with the capacity to act on behalf of their tribal citizens. According to the National Congress of American Indians (2019), approximately half of the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs' total funding obligations to tribal nations have involved self-determination and self-governance contracts and compacts, which means that federal funds are allocated to tribal



nations and the tribal governments determine the best use of those funds and the subsequent programs supported through those funds in order to meet the needs of their tribal citizens. Along those same lines, the federal Indian Health Services has entered into health services compacts with over 75 tribal nations which means that each individual tribe administers and implements a wide range of tribal health services to its tribal citizens. This tribal government oversight includes all aspects of administering health services from human resources, contracting with health providers, maintaining patient records, and managing contract referrals to other health facilities for specialized services, to name a few (National Congress of American Indians, 2019).

In the U.S. today, Indigenous children continue to face numerous barriers to school success and these barriers have held steady over the past two decades (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). The challenges that Indigenous communities in the U.S. face include high rates of unemployment, poverty, mortality due to chronic illness and addiction, suicide, and violent victimization, among others. Out of the 12.9 million children in the U.S. who are living in poverty, 32% of the children living in poverty are Indigenous. Barriers to adequate health and wellness include chronic unemployment, lack of adequate infrastructure in tribal homes, and high rates of alcohol and substance abuse. Indigenous people currently experience violent victimization at higher rates than all other ethnicities and Indigenous women are at a higher risk for experiencing intimate partner violence (SAMHSA, 2016). Indigenous children are disproportionately represented in the foster care system and are often placed with non-Indigenous families. Indigenous children and youth, ages 3-21 years-old, continue to have the highest rate of disabilities diagnosis under the U.S. Department of Education's Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

An achievement gap between Indigenous children and children of other ethnicities in reading, math, and sciences continues to persist over the past two decades. Fourth grade Indigenous students continue to score the lowest on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scale scores, a disparity that continues to surface in both eighth grade and twelfth grade testing data (NCES, 2019). Fourth grade Indigenous students continue to score the second lowest NAEP mathematics scale scores, which continues through the eighth grade and twelfth grade data points (NCES, 2019). Indigenous students face challenges to high school graduation and continuing to a college or university, with the lowest graduation rates when compared to other ethnicities (NCES, 2019). Additionally, Indigenous students continue to have the lowest rate of graduation from a 2-year or 4-year college or university when compared with other ethnicities in the U.S. (NCES, 2019).

Compounding these indicators, researchers have identified historical trauma as a contributing factor to the many challenges Indigenous people face. Historical trauma is defined as “the collective complex trauma inflicted on a group of people who share a specific group identity or affiliation” (SAMHSA, 2016, p. 23). There are long-lasting and intergenerational effects of historical trauma which show up as symptoms in the Indigenous population, including psychological stressors and numerous physical and mental health challenges such as high rates of continued exposure to trauma, depression, substance misuse, suicidal thoughts, and exposure to violence. When trauma is not addressed, the risks of mental disorders, substance misuse, and chronic medical illnesses increases. In their report, Brockie, Heinzelmann, and Gil (2013) asserted that “Native Americans disproportionately experience Adverse Childhood Experiences and health disparities, including posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and substance abuse, significantly impacting long-term physical and psychological health” (p. 3). These barriers

combine to form the achievement gap between Indigenous children and children from other racial groups in the United States.

Despite these challenges, Indigenous communities are resilient and in the twentieth century, Indigenous people in the U.S. “rebuilt their nations, adapted to cultural and economic pressures, overcame adverse and destructive policies, and retained their place in the U.S. landscape” (SAMHSA, 2016, p. 50). Currently, Indigenous communities are engaged in language and cultural revitalization efforts in order to reaffirm their connection to each of their individual tribal identities for the younger generations. Recent research has shown that language and culture are protective factors that act to counter the negative impacts of historical trauma including lower levels of depression, substance misuse, and other disorders (Pewewardy & Hammer, 2003; Whitesell et al., 2012).

This quick tour through the history of Indigenous peoples in the U.S. is meant to provide an overview of the context for this dissertation journey. At this point, I will dive deeper into our history by focusing on my own tribe’s history as well as provide brief histories of each of the Indigenous communities associated with the four collaborating programs.

## **Part 2: Kiowa History**

Ours is a story of survival. Throughout our Kiowa memory, our oral tradition tells us that the struggles of today mark the challenges that we as a people have historically faced. With each challenge that defines our Kiowa epochs of time, our people have adapted and overcome each challenge to thrive. Resilience is built into our genetic memory, both literally and figuratively. After our emergence from the hollow cottonwood log, the Kiowa people have faced starvation, wars, and navigated socio-political conflicts. Then, we faced our greatest challenge of all – the eradication of our way of life at the hands of a Western colonial power. Today, we face barriers

of a different kind. With each challenge we have faced, our people have made tremendous sacrifices to overcome those challenges and continue onwards.

Our way of life was completely disrupted once the Western settlers arrived. At first, we were curiosities viewed as uncivilized and inhuman since we wore animal skins, spoke a different language, and practiced ceremonies they did not understand. Since the days of George Catlin and Lewis and Clark's explorations, we have been a fascination for anthropologists and ethnographers. With the advent of westward expansion and the "American dream" perpetuated by U.S. President Andrew Jackson during the Removal, Reservation, and Treaty Period (1828-1887), more and more settlers pushed their way into the Great Plains (National Congress of American Indians, 2019). At the time of the Civil War, the Kiowa people were located in the Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico region and had built alliances with neighboring nations, namely, the Apache, the Comanche, and many of the Pueblo nations. Once located in the northern plains, our Kiowa people have a historically large territorial range that reached from the mountains of Canada to the deserts of New Mexico to the plains of Oklahoma. Our way of life depended on the buffalo herds, and as we followed them, we began to cross paths more and more often with the settlers.

Pretty soon, the U.S. government had handled their Civil War and then turned its attention to solving the "Indian problem" in the western part of the United States, as the Kiowa people and many other Tribal Nations across the Midwest, Northern and Southern Plains, deserts, mountains, and along the western coast were seen as barriers to United States progress. With the signing of the Medicine Lodge Treaty of 1867, the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache nations were relegated to very specific portions of our original territory so that we would be out of the way of U.S. progress. The clash of cultures would only escalate from there.

Even after we signed the Medicine Lodge Treaty and we agreed to limit our range, it was not enough. Because of the U.S. government policy that eastern tribes would be relocated to the west, the land in what is now the state of Oklahoma was designated as Indian Territory. This meant that we, as Kiowas, could remain here, along with numerous other tribes, many of whom were forcibly removed from their homelands and placed in Indian Territory to make room for the settlers and the expanding United States. Even that was not enough. Then, the U.S. government created the Kiowa-Comanche-Apache Indian Reservation, which designated a small portion of Indian Territory specifically for use by the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache nations. Each of our Kiowa family bands had to be brought into the reservation. We could not leave the boundary of the reservation. Since the buffalo herds were gone by that time, we had to hunt for other sources of food. Due to the many other Tribal Nations that had been placed in Indian Territory, and into these small, designated reservation areas, it wasn't long before all of the game and wild food that we were used to hunting were all gone. Then, our people began to starve. Those who tried to escape the boundary of the reservation to hunt were swiftly punished, made examples of.

Because we were no longer a free people, we became entirely dependent on the federal government for food. This was when the government began to pass out rations. Every Friday, during our reservation days, our people made their way to the Agency building to pick up our weekly food rations. White flour, shortening, rice, beans, and meager meat supplies were given for each family. This was when we learned to make frybread and tortilla bread. It was never enough food. More and more Kiowa tried to leave the reservation. Rations also included woolen blankets, and sometimes fabric. Kiowa women made dresses and shirts for the children since we no longer had our buffalo—we adapted.

Missionaries from the east traveled out to join us on the reservation as part of the government-sanctioned efforts to “civilize” us. The many different denominations of missionaries taught us of the Christian god and told us that our Kiowa god was wrong. It was during this time that many Christian hymns were translated into our Kiowa language. Today, we still sing these hymns, they are known as prayer songs to us, and are evidence of yet another way that our people have adapted to the changing times. After the missionaries came, then the government demanded our children attend boarding schools.

I am two generations removed from the federally-mandated boarding schools. These schools required the forced removal of the youngest children and their placement against their will in boarding schools far from their homeland where the U.S. government put their plans to “civilize” us into full force. In boarding schools, we were not allowed to speak our language, we had to use English. Children who tried to run away were shot by the guards. Other children who ran away were so far from home, they could not remember how to get back home, and so they starved, alone, lost forever. We were given Christian names, assigned to us by the whims of the schoolteachers. They cut our hair, took away our Kiowa clothes, our beadwork, and dressed us in American clothes that they taught us how to sew ourselves. We had our mouths washed out with lye when we spoke our language. We had to learn to speak in code just to survive the boarding schools (personal communication, Ruth Redbird, Carnegie, Oklahoma, 2000). My grandmother, who was born in 1920, went to boarding school at Riverside Indian School in the 1930s. When her father was a little boy, he was forced to go to boarding school. He had to learn English. When he left boarding school, he never spoke English. He refused. He only spoke Kiowa, to his kids, to his grandkids – including my father and my aunties and uncles (personal communication, Ruth Redbird, Carnegie, Oklahoma, 2000).

In order for me to tell this story of how we got here means that I have had to face the very difficult path that our journey as a people has taken over the past two centuries. I have had to revisit the memories that have been passed down through the generations in my family. These dark times were times of swift change for our Kiowa people. We had to become Christian or die. We had to become just like the Western settlers or die. We had to survive or die.

We were warriors once. The swiftly changing world during the reservation and allotment periods threw us into chaos. These dark times were times of starvation. Our buffalo herds were gone – hunted to extinction, their carcasses left to rot on the plains, with no care, no prayers, no thanks given, just wasted. The U.S. government paid a bounty for every buffalo slaughtered until non-Indian hunters could stand atop the piles of buffalo skulls taller than a train engine. One time, U.S. soldiers mocked us for depending on the buffalo the way we did, so they locked us up, men, women, elders, children, in a corral meant for cattle. Then, they threw us hay, grass, and laughed “you love your buffalo so much, eat grass, just like they do!” These voices of these soldiers remain locked in our collective memory, taunting, reminding us of our differences, and reminding us of our losses (personal communication, Ruth Redbird, Carnegie, Oklahoma, 2000). Kiowa people are just one nation among the thousands of nations in our world. How one nation could torture another nation so much is something that me, my parents, my grandparents, my great-grandparents never could understand. These memories both hurt us and guide us. These memories remind us that we have been dealt unprecedented loss, sorrow, grief. But, as Kiowa people, we have done what we have always done throughout our long history as a people – we have overcome, adapted, survived, and we will thrive.

We tried to maintain our traditional ceremonial schedule during the reservation days and even into the allotment days. We tried to have a Sun Dance, as we had for so many eons. But

without any buffalo, the elders decree was that the Sun Dance was no longer relevant – we were no longer free, the buffalo herds were dead, and our people were confined to a small tract of land and dependent on foreign food. Every time we tried to have our traditional ceremonial dances, the U.S. soldiers at the agency and at the army forts grew anxious. Any time we were gathered together, the soldiers and agents were quick to break us apart. In 1898, the Anadarko Agency received a directive from the U.S. Department of the Interior, which was formerly called the U.S. War Department, that the mescal dance, which is now known as the Kiowa Gourd Dance, was outlawed. From the day that this letter was received, any Kiowa who was found to be participating in our traditional gourd dance ceremonial was placed on the no-rations list. They were denied their food rations for however many weeks the government deemed was appropriate punishment (personal communication, Dorothy Whitehorse, Anadarko, Oklahoma, 2019).

We had faced dark times before – we had overthrown tyrants among our own people, we had found our voice as people, we had overcome famine and wars with other nations. Our oral tradition reminds us of these facts – in each epoch of Kiowa history, we emerged a stronger people. When the flood waters covered the planet, we went underground, we adapted to survive, and when we resurfaced, we emerged into a new world where we had to learn all over again about the plants and animals around us. When the human world was under attack by numerous monsters, Kiowa heroes emerged and fought on our behalf to free us from their reign. When Kiowa people became the unwilling subjects of tyrannical leaders among us who took power and demanded servitude, we rose up, as a people, and overthrew those tyrants, declaring with our voices that never again would tyrants rule the Kiowa. Never again would there be one person given all the power to make decisions on our behalf. We became stronger. We adapted. We thrived. And through it all, our Kiowa language maintained the memories and the lessons



learned. Our Kiowa language carries within it our entire history, our collective memory, our way of life as human beings, our belief system.

Currently, historical Kiowa society is maintained via contemporary manifestations of Kiowa warrior societies that also exist as vehicles for cultural, spiritual, and values transmission to future generations of Kiowa. As Queton explains, “the sociocultural structure of Kiowa society has been remarkably adapted from a traditional military hierarchy... Today, these sociocultural functions still take place in the form of community and cultural organizations which perform ceremonial dances, giveaways, and communal feasts as organizational events” (Queton, 2014, p. 10). Today, we are moving beyond merely surviving to thriving. Our story is just one of the many thousands of stories of cultural change across the United States.

### **Part 3: Cherokee History**

The people of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) have a long history in the Southern Appalachian Mountains and in what is now the southeastern part of the United States (U.S.). It is through awareness of the Cherokee people’s connection to their land that Cherokee resilience can be better understood. In 1540, the Cherokee people had their first contact with Spanish explorer, DeSoto. Since that first contact, the Cherokee people’s historical land base was slowly eroded through forced land cessions throughout the southeastern U.S. This erosion of the Cherokee people’s land base is a reflection of the struggle to maintain the Cherokee identity. With each treaty that was signed between the governments of the Cherokee people and the U.S., Cherokee lands grew smaller and smaller. In the process of land loss and forced removal, there have been many assaults against Cherokee identity, language, and culture.

Children in the immersion classrooms hear Cherokee origin stories in the context of Cherokee history and the Cherokee understanding of place, as shared by one New Kituwah Academy immersion teacher:

The story that was created with that is that some...ancient Cherokee spiritual leaders went to Clingmans Dome...which was the highest point in the Great Smokey Mountains National Park...and they went up there and they were praying about it, and they [said] Creator show us a place where we are meant to take our fire and put it. And...there was a rainbow that appeared and at the end of the rainbow is where the Kituwah Mound is. (program interview, 10/29/2019)

The Kituwah Mound is known as the mother town for the Cherokee people and is traditionally the location that the Cherokee people were guided towards to make their home. From that point on, Cherokee people made their home in the Great Smokey Mountains in North Carolina and extended their reach into the surrounding states. To this day, Cherokee people share that story as part of their Cherokee cosmology story sequence and, in doing so, assert their ancient historical connection to their land.

As shared by an immersion classroom teacher,

So we started out by taking the kids to the Kituwah Mound and telling them that story and then we went to Clingmans Dome and had them look around and see everything up there...when we got up there, I was like, ok, look around you, you can see three states or four states from Clingmans Dome, so everything you can see from this observation tower was Cherokee territory at one point in time. Like this was all your lands, historically. (program interview, 10/29/2019)

In this recounting of a lesson delivered and experienced by the children, the profound connection to their land is reiterated. Through this outdoor experience, immersion students walk the same steps their ancestors took to the sacred sites that represent pivotal points in Cherokee history. And through sharing the story and then identifying the states that now exist as well as the borders of the Qualla Boundary within the state of North Carolina, Cherokee history is experienced by these students in the context of the layers of changes that have been imposed upon the Cherokee people over the centuries of contact with the Western settlers.

It was in the early 1800s that Cherokee tribal members banded together to purchase 57,000 acres of property in their ancestral homelands in order to assert their continual connection to their land base. This land is held in trust by the U.S. federal government, but owned by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, and thus, is not a reservation, but instead called the Qualla Boundary. Even after purchasing a portion of their historical land base, and despite the long history of treaties defining the boundaries of Cherokee lands, the Cherokee people and their lands were still pursued. In 1838, the United States government forcibly removed the Cherokee people from their ancestral homelands in and around the Qualla Boundary. This devastating attempted erasure of Cherokee identity is called the Trail of Tears. Cherokee people were forced to march from the Southeast U.S. to what is now the state of Oklahoma, which was called Indian Territory at the time. During the Trail of Tears, between 25% to 50% of the Cherokee people died while walking. Once arriving in Oklahoma, the Cherokee people were placed in a location in the northeastern part of the state. Over time, the group that ended up in Oklahoma became federally-recognized as the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. Despite the best efforts to remove the Cherokee people from their homelands in the southeast, there were still some Cherokee people who went into hiding throughout the Smokey Mountains and resisted all attempts from the U.S.

military to find and capture them. That group of people who remained hidden in the Smokey Mountains were eventually joined by some Cherokees who returned to their homeland from Oklahoma. In 1868, the U.S. government declared that the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians would be federally-recognized due to the history of treaties between the governments and the fact that Cherokee people still remained on their ancestral lands within the Qualla Boundary.

From 1893-1948, federally established boarding schools forcibly educated Cherokee children and “attempted to eliminate Cherokee language and culture by forcing students to live away from home and speak only English” (Museum of the Cherokee Indian, 2019, p. 25).

Despite the repeated attempts to sever the Cherokee people’s connection to their land, Cherokee resilience remained. In 1997, EBCI made a major land purchase by buying the Kituwah Mound, one of the Cherokee people’s sacred places that had been located outside the Qualla Boundary. That same year EBCI opened the Harrah’s Cherokee Smoky Mountains Casino, which represents economic development and was an act that asserted Cherokee sovereignty and resilience.

Currently, the EBCI has 15,000 enrolled tribal members. As a sovereign nation, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians tribal government has an Executive Branch and is led by a Principal Chief and a Vice-Chief; a Legislative Branch consisting of a 12-member tribal council; and a Judicial Branch. Today, the Cherokee people face ongoing challenges due to historical trauma over the centuries of struggle with the Western settlers. In the 2018 tribal health assessment conducted by the EBCI Public Health and Human Services Division, top health priorities included substance abuse and issues related to dealing with the opioid crisis, which has become a nationwide priority of the U.S. government as well (Bradley, 2019). Other health priorities identified included violence and abuse, diabetes, heart disease, stress, tobacco misuse, depression, food insecurity, and teen pregnancy (Bradley, 2019).

Based on the tribal health assessment, the EBCI government and programs have been focused on implementing initiatives that will continue to support a thriving community while addressing the priority health issues identified (Bradley, 2019). One important piece of resilience is the Cherokee culture, language, traditions, and values. This is where the New Kituwah Academy and its immersion classrooms fit into the overall plan forward. Within the immersion classrooms, the next generation of Cherokee people are able to continue to maintain their connection with their homeland and, in the process, continue to assert the resilience of their people.

#### **Part 4: Jemez Pueblo's History**

The traditional name for the Jemez Pueblo is Walatowa or Giusewa, which translates to the "Place at the Boiling Waters." The Jemez people made their way to the Canon de San Diego region of northern New Mexico around 1275 A.D. Historically, the Jemez people were a warrior society and the people lived in several different villages around the current location at Walatowa. Their warriors were respected in the region and many of the other Pueblo nations would reach out to the Jemez warriors for assistance. During that time, the Jemez people had built villages made out of stone which were located on top of the mesas and even in canyons around northern New Mexico. These stone villages resembled fortresses and could get as high as four stories high and had up to 3,000 rooms within them. During the spring and summer months, the people of Jemez would build smaller houses that were used as base camps for those who hunted on behalf of the people. These smaller houses were spaced out in between the main villages on the top of the mesas.

In 1541, the Jemez people had first contact with Europeans through the Spanish conquistador, Coronado. Forty years later, the Rodriguez-Chamuscado Expedition arrived, then

the next in 1583, and the next Spanish conquistador expeditions followed in 1598. With the 1598 Expedition, the Spanish settlers sent the first Franciscan priest to Jemez to oversee the building of the first church in the Pueblo (Whatley, 1993). More and more Franciscan priests were sent to forcibly convert the people of Jemez. Over most of the next century, the Jemez people clashed numerous times with the Spanish settlers and the Spanish missionaries sent to Christianize them. These conflicts ultimately resulted in what became known as the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, when the Jemez Pueblo allied with other Pueblo nations to overthrow the Spanish settlers and expel them from Pueblo lands. Twelve years later, the Spanish had reconquered New Mexico and forced the Jemez people into just a single village at Walatowa (Whatley, 1993). By 1696, the “Jemez Nation was completely subdued and placed under clergy and military rule” (Whatley, 1993, para. 3), according to Jemez historians. Due to this forced relocation, many of the traditional Jemez Pueblo religious sites are now found outside the present-day village of Walatowa. The people of Jemez Pueblo survived the Spanish Colonial Period from 1540-1821, and then the Mexican Period from 1821-1848, when they continued to encounter the newly-formed Mexican government. Next, the Jemez Pueblo people went through the U.S. Territorial Period from 1848-1889, when the United States government sent American settlers to the New Mexico area.

Then, in 1938, tribal members of a pueblo east of Santa Fe, the Pueblo of Pecos, “resettled at the Pueblo of Jemez in order to escape the increasing depredations of the Spanish and Comanche cultures” (Whatley, 1993, para. 5). While both the Pecos people and the Jemez people speak Towa, they still remain as distinct cultures. The Jemez Pueblo’s Second Lieutenant Governor also serves as the Governor of the Pueblo of Pecos. In 1936 the two Pueblos, Jemez and Pecos, were legally merged by an Act of Congress.

Today, the Jemez Pueblo is one of the 19 federally-recognized Tribal Nations, the other Pueblos in New Mexico. The Jemez people have a secular tribal government system that includes a Tribal Council, Jemez Governor, two Lieutenant Governors, two fiscals, and a sheriff. On the other hand, “traditional matters are still handled through a separate governing body that is rooted in prehistory. This traditional government includes the spiritual and society leaders, a War Captain, and Lt. War Captain” (Whatley, 1993, para. 5).

Over the centuries of contact with the different groups of settlers, the Jemez people have had to adapt to the changing times. It is in their ability to adapt to these changes that the resilience of the Jemez people is demonstrated. Despite centuries of forced Catholicism and Christianity, traditional dances, ceremonies, and celebrations are still held at Jemez Pueblo. These traditional practices are closely protected within the insulated cultural boundaries maintained and asserted by the Jemez people. While most of traditional celebrations and ceremonies are closed to the public, there are several times a year that the Jemez Pueblo is open to the public, during the various Feast Day celebrations that occur, usually with the changing of the seasons or to celebrate an important day for the patron saint of the Pueblo. The Jemez people still maintain their connection to the Creator and to creation, despite all that they have undergone. It is within this context that the Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program is situated.

### **Part 5: Lakota History**

The Lakota Immersion Child Care program is operated by Thunder Valley Community Development Inc., which is located on the Pine Ridge Reservation, home to the Oglala Lakota people. In South Dakota, there are four Lakota reservations: Pine Ridge, Rosebud, Standing Rock, and Cheyenne River. Each of these reservations are home to a different group of the

Lakota people. The signing of the first treaty between the Lakota people and the U.S. government was the catalyst that created these Lakota reservations.

Historically, the Lakota people lived in the upper Mississippi region and were forced west of the Mississippi towards South Dakota due to encroaching settlers and fur trade wars. Their first contact with the Western settlers was recorded as part of the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1804 (Fills The Pipe, 2019). When the Oglala Lakota signed their first treaty with the U.S. government, the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851, it established the Great Sioux Nation territory which extended “from Canada to the North, through to Kansas to the South, into Wyoming to the west, and Wisconsin to the east,” (Fills The Pipe, 2019, para. 4), which set the precedent for the reservations to be established. After the signing of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851, and the subsequent breaking of the treaty through the Black Hills gold rush, the next three decades were filled with battles and wars in between the Oglala Lakota warriors and the U.S. Army as the Oglala Lakota fought to protect their homelands (Fills The Pipe, 2019). The signing of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 established the present-day states of South Dakota and surrounding states as Lakota territory; however, war continued when the U.S. government broke this treaty as well. By 1878, all bands of Oglala Lakota had settled on what is now the Pine Ridge Reservation. In 1890, the Wounded Knee massacre occurred on Pine Ridge when Oglala Lakota elders, women, and children, along with warriors, were brutally massacred by the U.S. Army.

After the Lakota were all relegated to the Pine Ridge Reservation, the U.S. government authorized Catholic, Christian, and Protestant missionaries to establish churches and church-operated, government-mandated boarding schools. While at first the missionaries operated religious boarding schools, eventually the U.S. government sanctioned boarding schools as well.



According to one Lakota scholar working on developing a Lakota educational model, the Lakota elders of today experienced the onslaught against Lakota language and culture in both the religious and the BIA-administered boarding schools on the Pine Ridge Reservation, as shared by Red Feather (2005): “many Lakotas were punished for speaking their language in these schools. They were punished for practicing their Lakota spirituality. For this reason, many Lakotas today do not speak the Lakota language nor practice their Lakota spiritual ways” (p. 99). According to Lakota elders, “when we come to the school, they took the language-the Lakota language-to teach us English. Now, the government wants to teach the Lakota language. They should have left us alone in the first place” (Red Feather, 2005, p. 97). From 1870-1900, the U.S. Congress funded missionary-run boarding schools on the Pine Ridge Reservation, then, the U.S. government started funding government-run boarding schools on the Pine Ridge reservation through the Bureau of Indian Affairs until 1953, when the Johnson O’Malley Act (JOM) was amended to support tribal-contracted federally-funded schools on Pine Ridge.

The history of boarding schools on the Pine Ridge Reservation is complicated and as with any issue, opinions differed greatly among the leaders of the Lakota people. Oglala Lakota leader, Chief Red Cloud, petitioned the U.S. government to allow the Jesuits into the Pine Ridge Reservation to provide education to Oglala Lakota children because Chief Red Cloud saw the children’s education as being necessary to be successful in the changing world. Chief Red Cloud was instrumental in the founding of the Red Cloud Indian School, which was operated by the Jesuits and the Franciscan Sisters into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Despite differing opinions, history tells us that boarding schools are the source of much of the Lakota people’s trauma and also an indication of their resilience.

Today, the Pine Ridge Reservation, home of the now-federally recognized Oglala Sioux Tribe, faces the ramifications of the consequences of swiftly changing times, loss of language, culture, and lands, broken treaties, and decades of wars. The Pine Ridge Reservation has an unemployment rate of 80 percent and has been designated as the second poorest area of the U.S. with a per capita income of \$6,286. They continues to face numerous health and wellness disparities when compared to other communities in the U.S. (Fills The Pipe, 2019). In order to help to combat these disparities and to combat the continuing impact of historical trauma, the Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation was formed with the goal to: “We envision a liberated Lakota nation through our language, culture, and spirituality” (Thunder Valley CDC, 2018, para. 5). Their mission statement says they are “empowering Lakota youth and families to improve the health, culture, and environment of our communities through the healing and strengthening of cultural identity” (Thunder Valley CDC, 2019, para. 5). As one immersion teacher shared: “With the second language learning program, we have a couple different programs too. I think our main thing is just to make Lakota normal, to normalize it. Just doing it in the interest of the community” (program interview, 10/29/2019). This message of empowerment is prevalent in the immersion classrooms. As shared by an immersion teacher:

For me, I just want them to be happy and proud to be Lakota, and not be afraid to speak Lakota like anywhere, in the store. I just want them to really feel comfortable and be proud and confident in who they are and with their speaking. Because, a lot of them, they know we’re their teachers and we all speak Lakota in the classroom but if they see us at a basketball game or something they don’t want to talk Lakota to us, so it’s trying to figure out how do we instill that in them.  
(program interview, 10/29/2019)

Building empowerment and turning resilience into success are two of the underlying philosophies of the Thunder Valley CDC and all of its programs. Through intentional work, the Lakota language immersion programs seek to reinvigorate Lakota language and culture as a way to overcome the decades of historical trauma experienced by the Lakota people on Pine Ridge. More recently, in a profound act of empowerment and reclamation, the Thunder Valley CDC partnered with the Red Cloud Indian School to house several classrooms of the Lakota Immersion Child Care as well as the Lakota Immersion Child Care Elementary Track classrooms on the campus of the school (Thunder Valley CDC, 2018).

### **Part 6: Dakota and Ojibwe History**

Both the Dakota and the Ojibwe people have a long history in the Great Lakes area of the U.S. I am going to share an overview of the Dakota people's history first and then I will share an overview of the Ojibwe people's history.

The homeland of the Dakota people in the Great Lakes region is known as Mni Sota, which translates to "slightly cloudy river," which is the Dakota name for the Minnesota River. Historically, waterways were essential to Dakota life. In the 1720s, the Dakota people had their first contact with Western settlers in the form of French fur traders from the east. By the 1780s, the Dakota had had several conflicts with the Ojibwe people as they were pushed into Dakota lands from the east due to westward movement of U.S. settlers. In 1805, the Dakota people signed their first treaty with the U.S. government in which the Dakota were promised money, food, and supplies, among other things, in exchange for their land (Peterson & LaBatte, 2014).

The Dakota people experienced a turning point in their history with the events surrounding the U.S.-Dakota War in 1862. In the treaties of 1851 and 1858, the U.S. government received the lands of Minnesota from the Dakota people, leaving the Dakota with a narrow ten-

mile strip of land which extended on each side of the Minnesota River. As part of the treaties, the Dakota people were relocated to this area and the different Dakota bands were separated to either side of the river (Peterson & LaBatte, 2014). After Minnesota officially became a U.S. state in 1858, the U.S. government offered incentives to Western settlers to move into the new state through the Homestead Act of 1862. For the Dakota people, crops had not produced much food in 1861 and the winter of 1861-1862 became known as the “starving winter.” There was no wild game on the Dakota reservation in Minnesota at that time and the Indian Agency refused to distribute food rations to the Dakota through the spring and summer of 1862. The tension reached a boiling point when violent conflict between Dakota warriors and Western settlers occurred in August 1862. Four Dakota hunters killed five white settlers on August 17, 1862, and then on August 18, 1862, the Dakota went to war (Peterson & LaBatte, 2014). In response, the Governor of Minnesota commissioned Henry Sibley to lead a state voluntary militia force against the Dakota people.

A letter from U.S. Army General John Pope to Henry Sibley on September 28, 1862, illustrates the extent of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862:

The horrible massacres of women and children and the outrageous abuse of female prisoners, still alive, call for punishment beyond human power to inflict. There will be no peace in this region by virtue of treaties and Indian faith. It is my purpose utterly to exterminate the Sioux if I have the power to do so and even if it requires a campaign lasting the whole of next year. Destroy everything belonging to them and force them out to the plains, unless, as I suggest, you can capture them. They are to be treated as maniacs or wild beasts, and by no means as people with whom treaties or compromises can be made. (Peterson & LaBatte, 2014, para. 7)

As a result of the U.S.-Dakota War, the Dakota who were directly involved in the conflict were arrested, resulting in 303 Dakota warriors being arrested and imprisoned to await trial and sentencing. Then, the U.S. Army forcibly removed nearly 1,700 Dakota people, mostly women and children, to Crow Creek in what is now South Dakota. In December 1862, 38 Dakota warriors were executed in the largest mass-hanging in U.S. history. The rest of the Dakota warriors who were sentenced to prison were taken to Davenport, Iowa, where 120 Dakota men died in prison (Peterson & LaBatte, 2014). In the 1880s, some Dakota people who had been exiled from their homelands in Minnesota made their way back and settled in various places in Minnesota, which formed the basis for today's four Dakota reservations: Lower Sioux Indian Community, Prairie Island Indian Community, Shakopee Mdewakanton, and Upper Sioux Community (Peterson & LaBatte, 2014). Through the Indian Relocation Act in 1956, Dakota youth were relocated to urban centers, including Minneapolis and St. Paul, in order to be fully assimilated into American culture (Peterson & LaBatte, 2014). These Dakota youth were forced to leave their home communities and attend job training, obtain their education, and ultimately, expected to become a part of the urban workforce. The Indian Relocation Act further disintegrated the remnants of Dakota community, language, and culture in Minnesota by removing Dakota youth from their homelands, thus severing ties to their language and culture.

Turning to the Ojibwe people, the Indigenous people who also call Minnesota home, I briefly detail the journey the Ojibwe people have taken. The Ojibwe people call themselves Anishinaabe and are located in five different U.S. states and three Canadian Provinces. There are 19 Ojibwe bands in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Ojibwe oral tradition says that the Ojibwe made their way into the Great Lakes Region around the year 1395, where they encountered the Dakota people. Throughout the history of the Ojibwe people, they have had both

peaceful and violent relations with the Dakota people. By the mid-1800s, the conflict between the two Tribal Nations was brought to an end by the need to deal with the challenges and changing times presented by the Western settlers. According to oral traditions of both people, the story of the Big Drum giving continues today, recognized through ceremonies. The Dakota gifted the drum to the Anishinaabe people and it has been an ongoing symbol of friendship and peace...the government commemorated and sealed the peace between the historically warring tribes through the 1825 Treaty of Prairie du Chien. (Peacock, 2013, para. 3)

During this changing time, Ojibwe children were forcefully removed from their families and placed into mission schools and, later, U.S. government-mandated boarding schools (Peacock, 2013). In the mission schools Ojibwe children were forced into Christianity and taught that their traditional Indigenous ways were wrong. In these schools Ojibwe children were treated violently if they were caught speaking their Indigenous language. Despite the challenges faced, there were some Ojibwe individuals who took their traditional teachings, including ceremonies, spiritual beliefs, traditional knowledge, traditional foods, and most importantly, the language, underground until they could be retaught to the new generations (Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, 2019). This is how the teachings have survived through the changes and into the present day.

Into the twentieth century, the Ojibwe people faced poverty, food insecurity, and unemployment. Through the Indian Relocation Act in 1956, many Ojibwe people were relocated from their reservation communities into urban areas of Minneapolis and St. Paul. When the various Ojibwe tribal governments in Minnesota were formed in the 1960s, there were some reservation jobs available to tribal members (Peacock, 2013); however, the Ojibwe that had

relocated to the cities continued to struggle with poverty and all of its ramifications. It was with the Indian Regulatory Gaming Act of 1988 that the gaming industry really started to have an impact on improving the economic prospects for Ojibwe people (Peacock, 2013). Tribal government services expanded to provide public health, transportation, workforce development, social services, and educational services to tribal members throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s. Due to the history of the Ojibwe people, tribal governments have had to navigate the needs of both populations of tribal members: those who were able to stay on the reservation and those who had been forced to relocate to the large urban areas.

It was due to the intertwined history of the Dakota and Ojibwe people that the need for the Wicoie Nandagikendan Dakota and Ojibwe Early Childhood Urban Immersion Program was born. Through the immersion classrooms at Wicoie Nandagikendan, children and families are reconnected to their Dakota and Ojibwe language and culture as well as have the opportunity to reestablish connections to their homelands in Minnesota.

### **Story 3: Reflection**

Indigenous children are more likely to have positive outcomes when it comes to resilience and academic achievement if they attend high-quality, culturally relevant early childhood programs (Hardin, 2012). Curriculum development in Indigenous early childhood education programs represents the intersection of research on language immersion education and culturally responsive practice in the United States. As a means for building resilience and reducing risk factors, early childhood education programs located within Indigenous communities can provide a positive foundation for Indigenous children, which can set them up for success when they enter public school and later in life (Yazzie-Mintz, 2011). Early childhood immersion programs in Canada have been described as integral to Indigenous language and

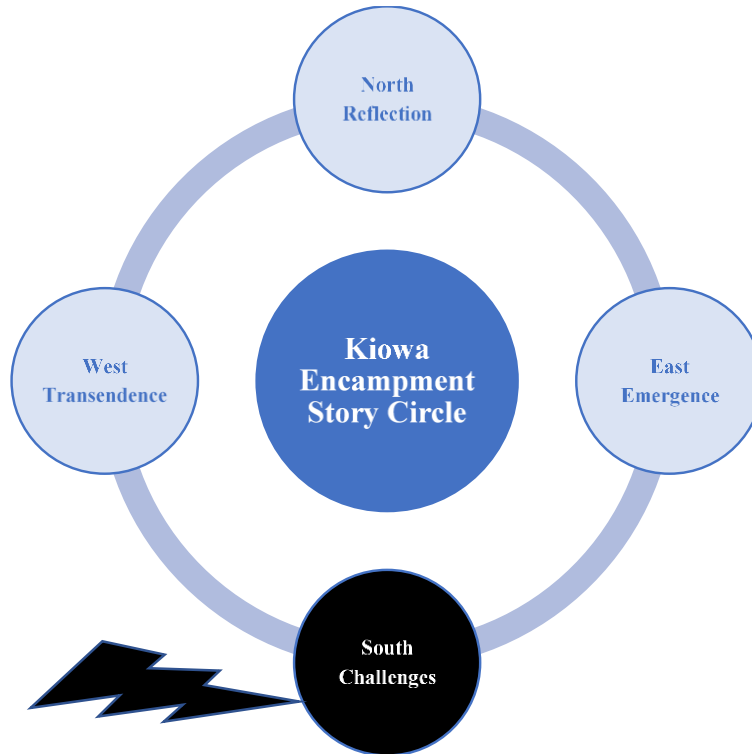
culture revitalization as well as promoting the well-being of the students (Preston et al., 2012). Immersion schools have also been found to produce positive academic outcomes as well as enhance the cultural identity of participating students (Gokee-Rindal, 2009). Many tribes in the U.S. have sought to find approaches that fit not only their basic needs but also reflect their particular cultural and community context. An increasing number of research studies have been completed in the past decade by Indigenous scholars on their own Indigenous communities, which has built the knowledge base on Indigenous knowledge, tribally-specific curriculum development, and early childhood education practices (Bell, 2013).

With these promising outcomes in mind, and now that I have established the storied past of the Indigenous peoples involved in establishing the four collaborating immersion programs that have agreed to work with me on this dissertation research journey, I turn to the topic that inspired this study – Indigenous language revitalization, and the potential for reversing the tremendous difficulties faced by Indigenous peoples across the U.S.



## Location 2:

### Piy-K'ee (The South) – Challenges (continued)



## Story 4: Language Revitalization and Language Immersion

### Part 1: Exploring Language Revitalization Best Practices and Immersion Research

Before continuing into the curriculum development processes of the four collaborating programs in this research journey, I need to set additional context and share my understanding that has emerged from working with these programs. As stated previously, each Indigenous language, including our own Kiowa language, carries within it the way we see the world, our specific perspective. One of my grandmothers once told me that if we are not able to think in

Kiowa, then we are not able to be Kiowa. Another of my grandmothers shared with me that the day we stop speaking our language, that will be the day we cease to exist as Kiowa people. The way that I can be sure to think in Kiowa, and thus, continue to exist as a Kiowa person, is to continue to learn our Kiowa language. This is how the Kiowa worldview will continue forward. This is also how the unique worldview of each Indigenous people on this land will be perpetuated. In working with the four collaborating programs on this research journey, I have been privileged to get a glimpse into each program's own language revitalization journey. Through their efforts as part of their own community's language revitalization journey, each of the collaborating programs can ensure that their specific Indigenous worldview will remain far into the future.

Due to the history of Indigenous people in the United States, it has become imperative for tribal nations to take control of their own futures to ensure the survival of their people. Many tribal nations have chosen to do this through Indigenous language revitalization efforts. While there are federal funding sources to support language revitalization, each tribal nation's revitalization efforts will look different based on their tribally-defined priorities and needs for language revitalization. Over the past three decades, scholars have become increasingly interested in the prospect of revitalizing endangered languages. Various linguists, sociolinguists, and ethnographers have all been interested in the idea of language diversity and the propensity of the world's languages to capture vastly different perspectives, worldviews, cultures, technology, and all other aspects of human thought and human society. When it comes to the languages of the Indigenous people in the United States, there has been a profound struggle for survival over the past five hundred years. Since human languages capture the thoughts, dreams, stories, and essence of what makes us human, it is even more imperative that we, as Indigenous peoples,

fight to maintain our languages, and through our languages, our identities. According to Hermes, Bang, and Marin (2012), Indigenous language revitalization has become a movement that is “passionate, political, and deeply personal, particularly for many Native people who are acutely aware that the federal government’s attempted genocide was the direct cause of Indigenous language loss” (p. 383). Indigenous language revitalization is defined as a concerted effort undertaken by a tribal nation or tribal community with the goal of reestablishing the transmission of the targeted Indigenous language or languages between generations, such as from parents to children or grandparents to grandchildren, and so forth (Hermes et al., 2012).

One of the foundational contributors to the Indigenous language revitalization movement was Dr. Leanne Hinton. She has worked extensively with Indigenous peoples throughout North America over the years to support the development of effective language revitalization programs. Hinton (2001) wrote, “the world stands to lose an important part of the sum of human knowledge whenever a language stops being used” (p. 5). For Hinton, language revitalization is much more than just knowing a heritage language: “Those who dream of language revitalization ultimately desire the natural transmission of the language from parent to child and its use in daily life” (Hinton, 2013, p. xiv). See my chapter in Brunn and Kehrein’s *Handbook of the Changing World Language Map* (Redbird-Post, 2019) titled “Indigenous Language Revitalization in Early Care and Education: An Overview of the Available Literature” for an introductory overview of the literature in Indigenous language revitalization in early care and education.

Primary strategies used by Indigenous peoples around the world to revitalize their endangered languages include school and community-based programs such as language nests, master-apprentice programs, and language immersion (Thomason, 2015). Each of these types of language revitalization programs has different goals and thus a different focus. Language nests

provide full-immersion experiences through the target language to be learned and are geared towards preschool children ages infant through five years old (Thomason, 2015). Successful language nests have been implemented by the Maori in New Zealand, Native Hawaiians, and the Mohawk in Canada, and among the Lakota, Blackfeet, and others in the United States (Redbird-Post, 2019). On the other hand, master-apprentice programs were started as an initiative in California by Leanne Hinton and collaborators in the early 1990s as a way to combat severe language loss among the Indigenous peoples in California through pairing a fluent language speaker, usually an elder, with a younger adult who is willing to be dedicated to learning their target language (usually their heritage language) as a second language learner as a method of gaining fluency in the language (Thomason, 2015).

The method of Indigenous language revitalization that is the focus of this dissertation study is language immersion. Language immersion, both school and community based, emphasizes teaching academic content through the target language as well as using the target language in a variety of different domains, or aspects, of daily life as part of the daily routines typically found in a classroom setting. There are various models of language immersion programs that have been identified by researchers. These include (a) one-way immersion, also known as foreign language instruction; (b) two-way immersion, where the target language and the children's dominant or first language are used during equal and different parts of the day; and (c) Indigenous language immersion, where the target language is also an endangered language and often the heritage language of the children in the immersion setting (Palmer et al., 2014). Indigenous language immersion programs are implemented as a strategy by tribal nations and Indigenous communities in the United States with the goal of reestablishing the Indigenous language as the dominant language and as a means of creating fluent speakers through working

directly with the community's children. Immersion instruction can also be defined as "language immersion in early childhood education is an instructional method in which the students' second language is the language of instruction" (Redbird-Post, 2019).

I use the term immersion setting here because Indigenous language immersion can be successfully implemented in a school classroom, child care classroom, Head Start classroom, family home setting, or even a community setting. Immersion settings have been successfully implemented over the past 40 years in the United States with all age groups from infants through high school age children. Often times, in order to meet the tribal nation or Indigenous community's goal of creating fluent speakers in their endangered language, immersion programs are implemented because immersion settings recreate opportunities for children to interact across various domains of daily life and learn the target language as a second language.

In the past three decades, more research studies have emerged that have described the potential of high-quality Indigenous language immersion programs for not only creating fluent speakers of their targeted languages, but also creating opportunities for children to connect with their identities, succeed in school, and even build resilience against adverse childhood experiences and other situations that communities may struggle with in today's society. There have been a growing number of researchers who have been exploring the implications of language immersion education on children's language acquisition over the past two decades. These researchers have contributed to the body of research that indicates the power of language immersion to both revitalize endangered languages as well as to improve efficiencies in young children's language processing (Anderson, 2004; Baig, 2011; Ballester, 2012; Barnett et al., 2007; Broner & Tedick, 2011; Gebauer et al., 2013; Howard et al., 2003; Koop, 2012; Nicolay & Poncelet, 2013; Palmer et al., 2014; Soderman, 2010; Whiting et al., 2012). Adding to this

research base over the past several years, Indigenous scholars have been conducting studies that look at Indigenous children's language acquisition and the educational impact of children's participation in Indigenous language immersion programs (Baloy, 2011; Bell, 2013; Gokee-Rindal, 2009; Gresczyk, 2011; Hare & Anderson, 2010; Hinton, 2011; Iokepa-Guerrero & France, 2007; Kaomea, 2012; Kukahiko, 2014; Leske et al., 2015; Lipka et al., 2005; Lockard & DeGroat, 2010; Luning & Yamauchi, 2010; Muehlbauer, 2011; Pence et al., 2007; Peter, 2007; Preston et al., 2012; Reyhner, 2010; Romero-Little, 2010; Sheffield, 2013; Soria, 2012; Uran, 2012; Vagner, 2014; Volfova, 2013; White, 2006; Wood, 2014; Yazzie-Mintz, 2011).

How are endangered languages classified? How does an Indigenous community know the severity of language loss? The team of researchers at Ethnologue, operated by SIL International, tracks the vitality of all languages in the world according to a measure known as the Expanded Graded International Disruption Scale (EGIDS) which defines language status in terms of a series of stages or levels of vitality. According to Ethnologue, there are 10 possible levels of language vitality. Essentially, the lower the number, the higher the vitality of the language while the higher the number, the lower the vitality and the more threatened the language becomes. EGIDS levels 6b-7 are called "in trouble" and are defined as "intergenerational transmission is in the process of being broken" (Eberhard et al., 2019, para. 4). Specifically, level 6b is "threatened," where the "language is used for face-to-face communication within all generations, but it is losing users" (Eberhard et al., 2019, para. 4). Level 7 is called "shifting," where the language is "not being transmitted to children" (Eberhard et al., 2019, para. 4).

In EGIDS levels 8a-9, this is known as "dying," where Ethnologue defines these levels as "the only fluent users (if any) are older than child-bearing age, so it is too late to restore natural intergenerational transmission through the home; a mechanism outside the home would need to

be developed” (Eberhard et al., 2019, para. 4). Level 8a is “moribund,” which is defined as “the only remaining active users of the language are members of the grandparent generation and older” (Eberhard et al., 2019, para. 4). EGIDS level 8b is known as “nearly extinct,” where “the only remaining users of the language are members of the grandparent generation or older who have little opportunity to use the language” (Eberhard et al., 2019, para. 4). Finally, the last EGIDS level is level 10, or “extinct,” which is defined as “the language has fallen completely out of use and no one retains a sense of ethnic identify associated with the language” (Eberhard et al., 2019, para. 4). The term extinct in the context of an Indigenous community’s language is a very scary term, and many Indigenous language advocates have come to prefer the term *asleep*, as in their language is *sleeping* and waiting to be reawakened by a future generation. To say a language is extinct is to imply that the people are also extinct, which is a prospect that the many Indigenous communities who have undergone this extreme language loss have fought deeply against.

I used the Ethnologue classification scale to identify the language status, language vitality, and EGIDS level for each of the Indigenous languages of the partnering immersion programs that I worked with on this research journey. Out of the 422 languages spoken in the United States today, 216 are Indigenous languages (Eberhard et al., 2019) that represent the diversity of the tribal nations that still exist in the U.S. Many of these languages are now considered endangered with their EGIDS level at 8 to 9 where the only fluent speakers of the language are the elderly population, and the younger populations are no longer able to communicate in their heritage language (Eberhard et al., 2019). Since Indigenous cultures are intrinsically tied to their respective languages, language loss also means loss of traditional practices, Indigenous perspectives, cultural activities, and entire worldviews.

Romero-Little and McCarty (2006) tackled the challenge of language immersion in public education when they asserted that the case studies demonstrated “heritage-language immersion to be superior to English-only instruction even for students who enter school with limited proficiency in the heritage language” (p. i). Over time, as children become increasingly proficient in using the Indigenous language, their individual positive outcomes will then translate into family-level and, eventually, community-level outcomes. With a goal of reviving endangered languages, Indigenous language immersion programs have the community-level outcome of increased cultural awareness and participation in cultural activities (Johnston & Johnson, 2002).

Now that I have covered the basics of Indigenous language revitalization and where immersion instruction is situated, I turn to the journey that I have undertaken. First, I will share my own perspective on the progress of my tribe’s language revitalization and how I am involved in those efforts. Next, I will launch into a description of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians’ Cherokee language revitalization efforts as they relate to the New Kituwah Academy. Then, I will share about the Towa language revitalization efforts as related to the Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program. Fourth, I will describe the Lakota language revitalization efforts and how the Lakota Immersion Child Care program plays a role in those efforts. Finally, I will discuss the Dakota and Ojibwe language revitalization efforts in the state of Minnesota and how those efforts are reflected in the implementation of the Wicioie Nandagikendan immersion program. I begin by asking “where have they been?” and “where are they now?” from each program’s perspective on their involvement in language revitalization.

## **Part 2: Gkawy-tdohn-gyah baht k’iyi tdaw (We Respect our Kiowa Language):**

### **My Experiences with Kiowa Language Revitalization Efforts**



How did Kiowa language revitalization get started? As I have become more involved in Kiowa language revitalization efforts, I have attempted to piece together the history of Kiowa language revitalization. First, some history: Our Kiowa language is known by various names: Cáuigù, Cáuijò:gyà, Gaigwu, and most recently, Kiowa; however, fluent speakers use the term “Gáuidò:gà” or “Gáuidò:zà:ni” while non-speakers say “Kiowa.” Our Kiowa language is classified by most linguists as a member of the Kiowa-Tanoan language family, within the Tanoan language group. The languages in this family are Towa, Kiowa, Tewa and Tiwa. These four languages are spoken in the southcentral portion of the United States in modern-day Oklahoma and New Mexico, although linguists say these languages are also spoken in Kansas and Texas (Hill, 2008). The Kiowa language is unique among the Kiowa-Tanoan language family and has been the academic fascination of various non-Indian linguists since the 1890s. Researchers of the Kiowa language find that the only languages Kiowa is linguistically related to are Taos and the Tanoan pueblo languages (Tiwa, Tewa, and Towa) (Watkins, 1980). The classification of Kiowa in the Kiowa-Tanoan language family is still controversial since the Kiowa people are a distinctly different culture, being of the Plains nomadic lifestyle, while the other three languages in the language family are spoken by peoples of the Pueblos, and thus are strong Pueblo sedentary lifestyles. There is still a group of linguists, including many Kiowa speakers themselves, who view the Kiowa language as an isolate language and do not agree with the formal linguistic classification of Kiowa.

From 1900 to about 1930, our people and our language were a fascination among non-Native linguists, ethnographers, and anthropologists, with many different researchers visiting the Kiowas to study us during that time. Due to the influx of missionaries to Kiowa territory around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Kiowa language was maintained through Christian translations of

hymns and prayers, as Kiowa traditional ceremonies were outlawed during those years. This was the time when it was seen as a survival mechanism to learn and speak English rather than our own Kiowa language.

Kiowa language revitalization began as Kiowa language preservation with ethnographer John P. Harrington (1894-1961), who worked closely with fluent Kiowa speaker and tribal member, Parker McKenzie (1897-1999) to understand the Kiowa language. Harrington's efforts to document Kiowa resulted in an array of Kiowa language preservation materials, including field notes and, ultimately, the text *Vocabulary of the Kiowa Language*. McKenzie worked with Harrington throughout his time on the Kiowa-Comanche-Apache Reservation, and after Harrington left, McKenzie was inspired to pursue Kiowa language as his passion. Parker McKenzie spent the rest of his life dedicated to preserving our Kiowa language and he eventually created the first orthography, or writing system, of Kiowa, using the English alphabet along with diacritic marks to capture Kiowa sounds, and specifically, to capture Kiowa tones. One of my grandmothers calls Parker McKenzie her "Sequoyah" and speaks reverently of his lifelong dedication to ensuring our language could both be preserved and written.

Around the 1970s, we refused to continue to be a subject of outsider study, and we were empowered to focus on preserving the Kiowa language for future generations. The Kiowa Tribe invested in the Kiowa Culture Program, a language preservation effort through the Kiowa Research and Historical Society in partnership with Texas Technology University. Through these tribal and privately funded programs, which included the Kiowa Historical and Research Society, we sought to document the Kiowa language and culture via audio and video recordings. These programs stopped in the early 1980s due to lack of funds.

Then, in the early 2000s, the short-lived Kiowa Language Preservation Program gathered 20 of the remaining first language Kiowa speakers and documented the language, songs, and stories over a period of three years. This particular program was my first experience with Kiowa language revitalization efforts, as stated in Location 1, Story 1. Several contemporary linguists have studied the Kiowa language, including Laurel Watkins, who, in the 1980s, worked closely with McKenzie to learn and examine the Kiowa language using McKenzie's orthography. Daniel Harbour, a linguist from England, worked closely with Kiowa tribal elders in the 1990s and early 2000s to further explore the language in context.

One recent, highly-respected champion of Kiowa language revitalization was Alecia Gonzales, who worked from the 1980s to the early 2000s to develop educational materials for all ages to learn Kiowa in school-based settings. Due to the lack of instructional materials for younger learners, Gonzales created a Kiowa language textbook using her own phonetic-based orthography. This textbook is still used by the Kiowa I and Kiowa II language classes at the Anadarko High School and by the Kiowa Clemente language class at USAO. Ms. Gonzales (1926 – 2011) held a Master of Arts in speech pathology and devoted many years of her professional life to developing the textbook *Thaum Khoiye Tdoen Gyah: Beginning Kiowa Language* (2001), published by the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma (USAO) and used in the Anadarko High School and USAO Kiowa language classes, both of which Ms. Gonzales taught until her passing. As an educator, Gonzales had unique insight into language learning and in her materials captured specific aspects of Kiowa culture and Kiowa beliefs about language acquisition, teaching, and learning. Gonzales' materials used Kiowa storytelling methods to share Kiowa children's stories and lullabies so that young parents could find it easy to read Kiowa to their children. In the early 1990s, Ms. Gonzales worked with the Kiowa Tribe

Head Start to develop a preschool Kiowa language curriculum that was later adapted by my team and I for use in our Kiowa Child Care Center immersion classrooms. Gonzales believed so much in Kiowa language revitalization, as she stated, "the language of one's birth is a priceless gift, to lose it would be to lose one's self and one's uniqueness. To withhold it from others would be to waste and lose, in selfishness, this priceless heritage; a gift from our Creator specifically for us" (Gonzales, 2001, p. 2).

There are two contemporaries of Gonzales, Mrs. Delores Harragerra, and Mrs. Dorothy Whitehorse Delaune, both of whom have been actively involved in Kiowa language instruction at both the community level and the university level throughout the 1990s through the 2010s. One of our first language Kiowa speakers and a respected elder mentor is Mrs. Dorothy Whitehorse Delaune, who is known to many, including myself, as "Grandma." She has been known to say: "We've got to hurry up, before it's too late. There's a lot of work to be done and not many of us left to do it. We're really the last ones raised by fluent speakers who still had a strong connection to traditional culture. We learned directly from them" (Dorothy Whitehorse Delaune, KiowaTalk website, 2019). Another respected Kiowa elder and first language speaker, Mrs. Delores Harragarra stated, "The most important part of who you are is your language. You have to think as a Kiowa to speak in Kiowa" (personal communication, Delores Harragarra, 2020). Known to me and my generation of family members as "Grandma Dee," she is the last living granddaughter of the family line of Sayt-ah-pay-tah and Ah-taw-nah, who were the parents of my great-grandfather, Whitefox. She and my father's mother, Ruth, were first cousins, known as siblings, in the Kiowa kinship system. It is truly a privilege to call these two respected first-language speakers "Grandma," and they are my daily reminders of the importance of continuing with our Kiowa language revitalization efforts. One important lesson that all of these elders

agree on is “Gkawy-tdohn-gyah baht k’yiy tdaw,” which means “we must respect our Kiowa language” (personal communication, Dorothy Whitehorse Delaune, 2019). Gonzales, Harragerra, and Delaune represent the handful of first-language Kiowa speakers, who are also elders, who have dedicated their later years to revitalizing the Kiowa language and bringing it back into daily use among the younger generations.

Kiowa language revitalization has been part of my life off and on since I was 18 years old. When I finally moved to Oklahoma in my mid-twenties, I had the opportunity to get more involved in community-based language revitalization efforts. Over the years that I have been working on learning and revitalizing our language, I have become increasingly motivated by my children. Several years ago, one of my four daughters came up to me and said, “if we don’t speak Kiowa, who will?” As other Kiowa language advocates will attest to, my children accompany me everywhere – to the community-based Kiowa Clemente classes sponsored through the University of Sciences and Arts of Oklahoma, to the weekly evening Kiowa language mentor sessions where we instructor candidates learn the language needed to develop our lesson plans, and even to the quarterly Kiowa language outreach events sponsored by the Kiowa Language and Culture Revitalization Program through the Kiowa Tribe that are planned and conducted by the Kiowa instructor candidates and our elder mentors. I also feel so honored to be a part of a community where our public-school district’s Indian Education is so committed to ensuring the children know their identity and learn to appreciate their culture. All five of my children participate in the Anadarko Public Schools Indian Education Dance Troupe, led by respected Kiowa elders. The Dance Troupe regularly travels around the state of Oklahoma to present song and dance performances in order to raise awareness of our Indigenous culture and share their knowledge with children in other school districts. Through their participation in the Dance Troupe, my

children have learned Kiowa songs, Kiowa hymns, and even Kiowa sign language. At home, my oldest daughter and I formally study Kiowa through one of the University of Oklahoma's Kiowa language textbooks. Just as researchers and linguists have said, language revitalization is very personal. For me, Kiowa language revitalization has become a way of life for my family.

According to the EGIDS system, our Kiowa language is defined as: “Red = Dying (EGIDS 8a-9) — 8a: Moribund. The only remaining users of the language are members of the grandparent generation or older who have little opportunity to use the language” (Eberhard et al., 2019, para. 4). I remember first seeing this classification on the Ethnologue website when I worked with the Kiowa Tribe Child Care Program. It was like finally hearing the truth, and that provided me with the motivation to do something to stop the loss of our language. Once I shared that statistic with the rest of my team, we all focused on a common goal – to help revitalize our Kiowa language and ensure that we can do our part to ensure that our language can be transmitted from parents to their children once again.

In 2016, I worked with Kiowa language advocates in our communities, Kiowa elders, and tribal members to complete the 2016 Kiowa Language Assessment process in order to capture both the necessity and urgency of engaging in comprehensive Kiowa language revitalization efforts. Some of the words from that project echo for me still. One Kiowa elder shared, “it is hard because I don't think in Kiowa anymore. There is no one to talk to” (Redbird-Post, 2016, p. 16). One tribal member stated, “I'm glad that our tribe is finally understanding the need to help preserve the language! But you better hurry up and get something going because we are losing our fluent speakers, our elders” (Redbird-Post, 2016, p. 16). One of the current Kiowa language instructors at the University of Oklahoma shared a vision for Kiowa language revitalization: “We

need to first create a community of speakers so we can be able to teach Kiowa to the children in order to bring Kiowa back as a living language” (Redbird-Post, 2016, p. 16).

Over the past several decades, our Kiowa language revitalization efforts have started and stalled due to territorialism and dialect disputes. It has been promising in recent years, as the Kiowa Tribe, with tremendous support from the grassroots Kiowa language revitalization community, has taken steps to implement the necessary infrastructure to undertake a comprehensive, collective language preservation and revitalization program. In 2011-2012, the grassroots organization, Kiowa Kids, implemented a six-month pilot Kiowa language immersion classroom for children ages preschool to school-age. Building on the success of that short-lived pilot classroom, the Kiowa Tribe Child Care Program worked toward and successfully implemented Kiowa language immersion sessions in each classroom for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children from 2012-2016. Most recently, the Kiowa Language and Culture Revitalization Program (KLCRP) was launched by the Kiowa Tribe government via a federal Administration for Native Americans Native Language Community Coordination grant in September 2016.

As part of the KLCRP initiative, which will last until 2021, there are several promising community-level efforts to revitalize the Kiowa language. In Tulsa, Oklahoma, a Kiowa language community class is run by two Kiowa speakers and offered free of charge on a weekly basis through the University of Tulsa. In Norman, Oklahoma, a Kiowa language community class is run by Kiowa language activists and a Kiowa speaker and is also offered free of charge to the community on a weekly basis. Also, in Norman, the University of Oklahoma Native American Studies Department offers Kiowa language classes as Kiowa I, Kiowa II, and Kiowa III to undergraduate students. In Anadarko, Oklahoma, two Kiowa speakers and several Kiowa

language activists host weekly Kiowa language community classes in partnership with the University of Sciences and Arts of Oklahoma (USAO). In Carnegie, Oklahoma, a Kiowa speaker and several Kiowa language instructor candidates host weekly Kiowa language classes. For the Lawton and Cache area, a Kiowa speaker and two Kiowa language instructor candidates conduct a weekly Kiowa language community class. Each of these community classes also involves from one to five Kiowa language instructor candidates (called teacher candidates), who, as part of the KLCRP, work on a weekly basis with the Kiowa language elder speaker in their area to focus their language learning on topics related to developing lesson plans for use with various age groups of student learners.

I have been involved as a teacher candidate with the Anadarko area KCLRP Kiowa language class since December 2016. As a teacher candidate, I have chosen to focus on developing language immersion lesson plans for the early childhood age range, and I have worked with the current staff at the Kiowa Tribe Child Care Program to develop deeper understanding on how to implement language immersion activities in the different classrooms for various age groups. My commitment has been to attend the weekly Anadarko-area Kiowa language mentor sessions with our elder fluent speaker and then to partner with the other Anadarko teacher candidates to develop lesson plans based on the domains of language we have learned, and then to conduct Kiowa language outreach activities to deliver the Kiowa language lesson plans with different age groups of learners. Our involvement is heavily supported by the Anadarko Public Schools Indian Education Program and we have had the opportunity to conduct Kiowa language classes for Anadarko students through the after-school tutoring program, various summer programs for all age groups as well as through the Anadarko High School Kiowa Language I and II classes. Through my personal involvement in Kiowa language



revitalization initiatives over the years, I have developed deeper understanding of the nuances of both language revitalization and implementing language immersion activities, especially for the early childhood age range.

Switching gears, I turn now to sharing my understanding of the language revitalization efforts undertaken by each of the Tribes represented through the early childhood immersion programs that have agreed to collaborate with me as part of this research journey.

### **Part 3: Cherokee Language Revitalization Efforts:**

#### **The Story of Language Revitalization at the New Kituwah Academy**

The first thing I noticed as I entered the building of the New Kituwah Academy was a large stop sign on the door that said: “English stops here” (program visit, 6/6/2019). After being welcomed into the building, I could hear the staff as they spoke Cherokee to each other. The Program Manager switched to English and proceeded with a tour of the building, even though the children were out of school at that time. I was amazed at the use of the Cherokee Syllabary in each classroom and the complete lack of written English on the walls. It was truly inspiring to see the lengths that the Academy’s staff had gone to ensure their classroom environments truly reflected the Cherokee language and culture. I learned that the New Kituwah Academy represents years of commitment to Cherokee language revitalization by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians is one of the three federally-recognized Cherokee Tribes, with the other two being the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma and the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokees in Oklahoma. The Cherokee language is spoken by all three of the Cherokee tribes in the United States, and all three tribes have undertaken a slightly different path towards revitalizing their Cherokee language. Within the Ethnologue categorization system, I found that

the Cherokee language is identified as EGIDS level 8a, Moribund, where the only remaining speakers of the language are in the grandparent generation (Eberhard et al., 2019). In order to get a sense of how many people still speak Cherokee, I found that the Cherokee language is spoken by 217 of the 8,600 tribal members of the Eastern Band of Cherokees (Eberhard et al., 2019). Out of a total population of 376,000 Cherokee members across all three tribes, approximately 1,520 are language speakers. Cherokee speakers refer to their language as Aniyunwiya and Tsalagi. In addition to being a spoken language, Cherokee is also written using a writing system known as the Cherokee Syllabary. In 1828, the Cherokee language officially became a written language when tribal leadership adopted the Cherokee Syllabary, which was created by Cherokee tribal member, Sequoyah. The Syllabary consists of 84 symbols that represent individual syllables of spoken Cherokee, rather than single sounds.

Since the 1990s, the Cherokee language has been undergoing intensive revitalization, first through creation of the Cultural Resources Division within the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians tribal government, then creation of the Cherokee Preservation Foundation, through the implementation of the Kituwah Preservation and Education Program, and finally with opening of the New Kituwah Academy in 2009, as the EBCI's effort towards Cherokee language revitalization with an emphasis on language immersion instruction for children ages infant through sixth grade.

The Cherokee Preservation Foundation is a non-profit, independently-operated foundation funded by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians with a mission to “preserve our native culture, protect and enhance our natural environment, and create appropriate and diverse economic opportunities in order to improve the quality of life for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) and our neighbors in western North Carolina” (Walker et al., 2019). The work of

the Cherokee Preservation Foundation is guided by the Cherokee values that have ensured the resiliency of the Cherokee people through the centuries.

In order to tackle the challenge of Cherokee language revitalization, the Cherokee Preservation Foundation funded the Kituwah Preservation and Education Program (KPEP) along with two other partners, the Western Carolina University and the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, to implement a 10-year language revitalization plan created through engagement with the EBCI community. Launched in 2005, the plan involved language needs assessments both to provide a baseline as well as assess ongoing progress over the decade of implementation. The needs assessments initially found there were limited instructional materials for teaching the Cherokee language to children, and there were also no resources for teacher professional development to teach Cherokee. With the majority of Cherokee language speakers in 2005 over the age of 50, part of the language revitalization plan included partnering with a neighboring university in order to develop a Cherokee language teacher credentialing process and an intensive focus on teacher language learning as well as community-based adult language classes as mechanisms to create second-language speakers who could then teach the language to the children. Based on the outcomes of the initial language assessment, the community goals for the Cherokee language included creating second-language speakers and then teaching the children so that young children could once again have Cherokee as their first language.

The Kituwah Preservation and Education Program administers the New Kituwah Academy, which is the realization of the community's desire to give the language back to the children. The mission of the Kituwah Preservation and Education Program is "to increase Cherokee language fluency, cultural awareness, and appreciation through engaging programs and services" (KPEP, 2019). Current services offered through KPEP include language and culture

education programs for children and adults, language translation services for tribal programs, tribal members, and the public, events to support Cherokee language speakers, the development and maintenance of online Cherokee language resources as well as participation in various annual celebrations and ceremonies.

The New Kituwah Academy, known as *DV YSG dθSGIαDJ*, in the Cherokee Syllabary, operates from a program philosophy that places “Kituwah First.” The curriculum, school activities, and teacher-student interactions are grounded in the Cherokee language, culture, traditions, and history. A portion of the Academy’s mission statement is as follows:

As the cultural and Cherokee language campus for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, New Kituwah Academy Immersion Program will teach and guide our youth to completely embrace our near extinct Cherokee language and the traditional ways of our ancestors, which will instill a deeper sense of pride and renewed sense of determination to be successful. Our students will have the knowledge to translate traditional skills and Cherokee lifeways that have helped the tribe persevere through many periods of hardships over the centuries. (KPEP, program website, 2019)

The Academy focuses on preparing Cherokee children to be the Cherokee leaders of the future, through the mechanism of language immersion instruction (KPEP, 2019). This particular vision is evident in my conversations with one of the immersion teachers, who shared that learning about Cherokee history and culture through the Cherokee language “will lead [the children] to think about these things later on and will empower them if not now, later on, to be passionate about their identity and culture as Cherokee people” (program interview, 10/29/2019).

In addition to operating the New Kituwah Academy, which provides Cherokee language immersion education to children ages infant through sixth grade, the KPEP has also been engaged in curriculum development, creation of Cherokee teaching materials, teacher professional development, a post-secondary degree program for elementary education teachers to also become certified to teach the Cherokee language, scholarships to fund Cherokee language teacher education as well as language classes for the family members of children who attend the immersion school. Additional language revitalization efforts through the Cherokee Preservation Foundation and the Kituwah Preservation and Education Program include hosting speaker gatherings for fluent speakers to come together to speak Cherokee and also provide the language for further development of both curriculum and teaching materials. Additionally, there have been a variety of Cherokee language symposiums conducted through which all three federally-recognized Cherokee tribes, the EBCI, the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, and the United Keetoowah Band come together to discuss the status of the Cherokee language. The efforts of the KPEP and the New Kituwah Academy have included utilizing approaches deemed best practices in the endangered language revitalization field, including language immersion with young children, teacher professional development, language learning materials development, and adult language learning opportunities. The New Kituwah Academy and the efforts of the EBCI to revitalize their language were featured in the 2014 documentary film from the Language and Life Project, titled *First Language: The Race to Save Cherokee* (Wolfram, 2014). In June 2019, the Tri-Council of Cherokee tribes declared that the Cherokee language was in a state of emergency and they needed to further enhance current efforts at language revitalization.

The New Kituwah Academy is administered through the Kituwah Preservation and Education Program (KPEP) and supported with funding from the Cherokee Preservation

Foundation. Growing out of the efforts of the three Cherokee Tribes to revitalize the Cherokee language, the New Kituwah Academy is one way that the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians has asserted their language and is seeking to revitalize the language through immersion education beginning with infants and toddlers and up through the sixth grade. In the Cherokee language immersion classrooms at the New Kituwah Academy, the written language is taught to the children through the use of the Cherokee Syllabary.

In the process of implementing Cherokee language immersion instruction, the teachers at the New Kituwah Academy have faced the challenges that come along with working to revitalize a language and make it relevant for the children and the lives that the Cherokee people live today. One of their challenges is one that other immersion programs have faced, which is how do the teachers know that the immersion setting is working? In other words, how do they know that the students are building their language skills as a result of attending an immersion classroom? As one immersion teacher shared, the team at the New Kituwah Academy has faced multiple challenges with language assessment development. First, there are differing opinions on what specifically should be assessed: “we have parents and fluent speakers, we have groups of people who argue that Cherokee language needs to be conversational, like it doesn’t matter if they can read and write if they can’t have a conversation, which I agree with to an extent” (program interview, 10/29/2019). Then, there is the difficulty with comparing an Indigenous language assessment to the multiple assessments that English language speakers must take: “whenever we look at how English speaking students learn English you have phonics assessments, you have reading assessments, you have writing assessments, there are all these different elements to teaching English that we don’t see whenever we teach native languages.” For the teachers at the New Kituwah Academy, they often struggle with what types of assessments to develop:

Do we develop an assessment purely performance based, purely a linguistic assessment that is performance-based specially intended to measure a student's conversational and functional skills in the language, or do we create an assessment that is at the complexity level of an English language assessment where they are assessed for phonics and their writing and their self-expression and their speaking skills? (program interview, 10/29/2019)

This question, unfortunately, does not have an easy answer. The choice that will ultimately be made will be based on input from the teachers, administration, fluent speakers, tribal members, and even the children's families. Summing up the immense uphill climb that an endangered language immersion school faces, one of the immersion teachers shared:

The thing is most kids come to school and they can already speak English, they already understand it, whereas with us, our kids are not fluent in Cherokee when they come here, so we're having to do both: we're having to teach them their conversational and their speaking skills but also trying to implement literacy learning. (program interview, 10/29/2019)

In addition to developing Cherokee language assessments for students, the team at New Kituwah Academy must also consider the language fluency levels of the immersion teachers themselves. In the New Kituwah Academy model of instruction, in each immersion classroom, a state-certified teacher is paired with a fluent Cherokee speaker, where both the teacher and the speaker are expected to use Cherokee as the language of instruction. Since the majority of immersion teachers at the Academy are second-language learners of Cherokee, the planning team must consider their expectations for Cherokee language fluency as they select and assign

immersion classroom teachers. The issue of language assessment again presents a challenge, specifically for the adult second-language learners of Cherokee who are also immersion teachers:

We're not only trying to develop an assessment for our students, but also our second-language learners. How is it fair that our students are expected to know more in the language than our second-language learners do? So, we're trying to develop assessments to say: ok, are you qualified to teach in an immersion classroom based on your language knowledge? (program interview, 10/29/2019)

In an effort to ensure that the Cherokee language is accessible to students in a time when technology-use is critical, the immersion teachers have found creative uses for technology as part of their language revitalization efforts in their classrooms. Teachers use their classroom's dedicated SmartBoard and the Academy ensures one-to-one access to iPads for the students (program interview, 10/29/2019). One area that is still under development when it comes to technology is the creation of more apps that use the Cherokee Syllabary for specific use in immersion settings, as opposed to apps that use a phonetic writing system or include English translations (program interview, 10/29/2019).

The team at New Kituwah Academy take the approach of continuous improvement and are always looking for ways to improve. One teacher's perspective on Cherokee language revitalization through an immersion classroom setting is that "teaching immersion involves a lot of trial and error. There is no one perfect model for language immersion so over time we have worked to refine our methods," (program interview, 10/29/2019) which leads to the constant push for improvement and for reflecting on each school year and making changes accordingly to improve for the next school year. Part of this drive for continuous improvement is in the efforts made for teacher development as a key piece of their language revitalization efforts. In addition



to teacher in-service days, such as the one described in Location 1, Story 2, the team has also received professional development in immersion strategies through the highly regarded Indigenous Language Institute based in New Mexico, which “gave us some ideas: what are some ways for teaching your language, what are some games, what are some hands-on strategies for teaching language that you can use in the classroom” (program interview, 10/29/2019). Also included in this approach of continuous improvement is the teachers’ intentional effort to apply immersion education research to their classroom practice. One immersion teacher shared her perspective on language revitalization, language immersion, and language acquisition:

This is something I experienced and has been proven in research that if students have a clearly defined space, where they know they’re expected to speak the language, they are more likely to stay in the language. They are more likely to try to stay immersed. Where, if they know they can speak English, they’re going to be more likely to speak English. That’s the same for second-language learners, for anyone. Anytime anyone can revert to their first language, they will. (program interview, 10/29/2019)

Successful language revitalization comes down to ensuring that there are readily available avenues to obtain the language that the teachers need to implement their lesson plans.

As explained by one immersion teacher:

I write it down in the most simple language possible because a lot of stuff is really difficult to translate into Cherokee. I try to get the essence of what the students need to know, I write that down and then I hand it to him and he gets it translated, and if he can’t translate it he’ll go and talk to some of the fluent speakers that

work here and ask them how they would say it and come back to me with the result. (program interview, 10/29/2019)

Now that I have shared my understanding of the language revitalization efforts of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, I explore the language revitalization efforts of the next collaborating research partner, the team at the Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program as part of the overall language revitalization initiative at Jemez Pueblo.

#### **Part 4: Towa Language Revitalization Efforts:**

##### **The Story of Language Revitalization at the Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program**

From the moment I set foot on the grounds of the Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program, I knew that this was not just any Head Start program. Sitting in her office as we had our first conversation, the Early Childhood Program Manager shared with me her view of the Towa language, her first language. She said, “our language is sacred” (program interview, 10/22/2019). This perspective is evident in the hallways leading to the immersion classrooms via a large mural of the Jemez Pueblo tribal symbol with the words “We speak Hemish” across the top. In each of the classrooms and staff offices, there is a sense of the language being very special and revered (program visit, 10/22/2019).

As I have learned, the people of Jemez Pueblo have endured repeated attempts to disrupt their way of life and their language. Those who speak the Towa language have managed to maintain their core values as a people and have continued to speak their language and use their language in daily life in their community and in their ceremonies. Despite the long history of settler-colonialism in north central New Mexico, the Towa language was not actually considered endangered until a language assessment conducted in 2006. At that time, the tribal leadership

found that the use of the Towa language was declining in the younger generations. This was the first time that the leadership had seen such a decline (Kelly, 2019). The Towa language had successfully been transmitted from parent to child, up until the language assessment in 2006. By the early 2000s, parents' work schedules had grown increasingly busy, especially as more and more parents had to travel further away from their homes in Jemez out to nearby towns and even Albuquerque in order to support their families. Additionally, there was a noticeable trend of the younger generations using more technology, such as smartphones, tablets, and computers which all rely on English-only, both written and spoken. These factors created an alarming situation. Motivated to do something to reverse the language shift that was happening in the community, the Education Department got involved in Towa language revitalization efforts with an emphasis on the role that early childhood programs might play in supporting the use of Towa language in the home environment. The Walatowa Head Start staff, supported by the Jemez Education Department, decided to do their part to reverse the language shift.

Before going further, I first want to share some specific information about the Towa language. According to Ethnologue, the Towa language, also known as Jemez, or Hemish, is spoken by approximately 1,790 people out of a total population of about 1,940. In 2018, a language assessment conducted through the Jemez Pueblo education department found that 80% of Jemez Pueblo tribal members are also fluent speakers of the Towa language (Kelly, 2019). The Ethnologue categorizes Towa as a level 6b on the EGIDS which is classified as threatened where "the language is used for face-to-face communication within all generations, but it is losing users" (Eberhard et al., 2019). Among the 19 Pueblo nations in New Mexico, there are three language families: Keresan, Tanoan, and Zunian. There are five recognized language

dialects: Zuni, Keres, Tiwa, Towa and Tewa. The Towa language dialect has been classified by linguists as part of the Kiowa-Tanoan language family (Eberhard et al., 2019).

One of the unique aspects of the Towa language is that the language is completely spoken. The Jemez Pueblo Tribal Council does not allow the language to be written because the language itself is considered sacred. This tenet has been fully embraced by the staff at the Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program as they have worked to implement full language immersion in each of their four classrooms and in all of their daily activities with the children.

In 2009, the program participated in a PhotoVoice research project with a professor at the Arizona State University, and this was the catalyst for the Walatowa Head Start program to develop their own Towa-specific curriculum and implement full language immersion in all 4 of their Head Start classrooms. The PhotoVoice project is identified by the program director and the Education department director as the turning point for their Head Start program (program interview, 10/22/2019). The researcher, Dr. Eunice Romero-Little, worked with the Head Start director and tribal leadership to provide parents with digital cameras in order to answer three questions: “What should Jemez children learn in order to be Jemez? How do they learn these things? How does Head Start support or not support this learning?” (Romero-Little, 2011). The researcher then worked with the parents to select 25 photos that captured what they viewed as the major themes across the hundreds of pictures. Then, the parents were asked to share their interpretation of each of the 25 photos in a written narrative. The collection of posters and accompanying narratives were summarized and shared back with the program and tribal leadership. Romero-Little (2011) summarized the PhotoVoice project findings as

Each poster represents the dynamic sociocultural context in which Jemez's youngest members...begin their linguistic, social, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual development. Guided by multifaceted oral traditions, children learn through peripheral and active participation, engaged observation and listening, guided and independent practice, trial and error, and direct and indirect instruction. (p. 23)

As a result of the PhotoVoice study, the Walatowa Head Start program leadership decided to work towards developing a comprehensive curriculum for their Head Start program that was grounded in their community-identified goals and developmental needs of their children. One of the ways to do this would be to work towards a full immersion program.

In 2011, the Walatowa Head Start program served as a pilot program to implement a new culturally and linguistically responsive curriculum development tool, called *Making It Work*, as developed by one of the Office of Head Start's training and technical assistance national centers. Through a series of worksheets, the staff at the Walatowa Head Start produced documents that showcased how their cultural and linguistic practices as a people aligned with the Head Start's mandatory Early Learning Outcomes Framework, which set the expectations for developmental milestones for Head Start programs. The work of the Walatowa Head Start team can be seen in the 2011 version of the *Making It Work* toolkit in the *Pilot Program Examples* section. Their lesson plans and related documentation focused on the project of making traditional blue corn tortillas in their classrooms with the children along with tribal elders and Head Start teachers (National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness, 2011). Working on this pilot project helped the Walatowa Head Start program staff to further develop their goals for their program's involvement in their language revitalization as a people.

Then, in 2012, the Jemez Pueblo Tribal Council passed a resolution that would support the Head Start program in implementing full Towa language immersion in all of their classrooms. Along with the support of their tribal leadership, the Head Start program changed its name to more accurately describe their goals. That was when the program became known as the Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program (program interview, 10/22/2019). Since that time, the language revitalization efforts undertaken by the Jemez Pueblo education programs and the Head Start program in particular has led to the development of a culturally specific curriculum based entirely in the oral-only Towa language (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2019). It is this curriculum that the program staff use to develop their lesson plans, their program school readiness goals, and all other aspects of immersion instruction in their classrooms.

In addition to the four immersion classrooms that serve 68 three and four year-old children at the Head Start program, Towa language revitalization is occurring in the charter school on the reservation that serves kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade children, the San Diego Riverside Charter School as well as in the public school that receives the Head Start children upon entering kindergarten, the Jemez Valley Elementary School, within the Jemez Valley Public School District. Jemez Pueblo's language revitalization efforts have led to the development of the Towa Language Team, which serves as both a community partner and a resource available to the Head Start program and other education programs that are working on Towa language revitalization (program interview, 10/22/2019).

Towa is the language of the community, meaning it is used in all aspects of daily life. The tribal leadership uses Towa to administer their tribal council meetings. Ceremonies are conducted entirely in the language. Providing these culturally and linguistically rich opportunities for young children to be a part of their culture through their language is seen as

incredibly valuable by the program and community, as stated by Romero-Little, Shendo, and Toya (2011),

Whether they participate in the dances or not, Jemez children observe them, and long after the dancing days have passed, they remember them and continue to imitate them...Through imitation and play, children develop a sense of pride about being Jemez. This is an important beginning or construction of their identity as a Jemez person. (p. 10)

Walatowa Head Start staff are very interested in language outcomes – they want to be able to collect information about the children’s Towa language comprehension, including Towa productive and receptive language skills. In our conversations, the Early Childhood Program Manager and her management team expressed their journey to finding culturally sustaining ways to conduct language assessments. Part of their curriculum includes an assessment piece, intended to gauge how much of the language within a particular unit the children understood. For each themed unit, there is an accompanying assessment that the management team created with the teaching team’s input. This assessment is administered orally to each child individually by their teacher. The teacher asks all the questions and expects responses in Towa. The assessment document is written in English and the teachers document notes based on the child’s responses to their questions. When the team first developed the assessment in 2018, they wanted to assess the children across four categories of language use: pronunciation, vocabulary, receptive and productive language, and word/sentence structure. In the assessment rubric, the team incorporated a graded scale of 12 numbered levels with descriptors to help teachers make their decisions on where the child being assessed stood in each category. However, after implementing the language assessment last year, the management team noticed the hesitation of

the teachers to choose a number for the child's language knowledge. Instead, the teachers used extensive notes and documentation to demonstrate what the child knew in each category. After meeting with the management team and the teaching team over the summer, the program staff agreed that the rubrics as originally developed did not accurately reflect Jemez values. Since that time, the management team has begun the process of revising the rubrics for each unit theme throughout the school year. In this way, the ECP Manager intends the revised rubrics to assess the same constructs as the original version but will instead reflect the children's own understandings and culture more appropriately. During the piloting of the revised rubric with individual children earlier that month, the ECP Manager explained how one child described the context of one of the Jemez Pueblo cultural activities, including the values behind it, the protocol, and how they should conduct themselves, all in Towa (program interview, 10/22/2019).

For the immersion teachers at the Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program, the goal for the children in their classrooms is for those children to continue "taking in the language" (program interview, 10/22/2019). The immersion teachers want to see the children be able to speak Towa in complete sentences as well as to understand the language when spoken (program interview, 10/22/2019). As the children hear and use the language in their classrooms, they then start to "bring the language home to their parents and their families. This motivates the families to want to learn how to say different words" (program interview, 10/22/2019). The program works hard to inspire families to continue the language learning at home with their children, when their children are not at Head Start. As families are motivated to use Towa with their children, intergenerational transmission of the language can be reestablished. This is how the Head Start program has contributed to the overall Towa language revitalization goals of the Jemez Pueblo people.



An immersion teacher from one of the four-year-old kindergarten transition classrooms shared the way that she described the children's involvement in Towa language revitalization to the children themselves during large group time one day:

I was telling them over here, so our teaching was supposed to be in strictly Towa, so we're doing that, but when you move on to the other school, like I was saying maybe kindergarten, whatever, your teaching is gonna be different, it's gonna be all English, based on English, so right now, we tell them, you're so lucky, you know, to be in a school where language is taught and the culture. They are the key. (program interview, 10/23/2019)

Another teacher simply stated that there is "a lot of pressure on those little ones" (program interview, 10/23/2019), meaning that the future of their Towa language depends on the children in their immersion classrooms knowing and using their language as they grow older.

There is a strong sense among all levels of program staff that their goal is to continuously improve, and to continue to seek additional resources, including learning from other immersion programs in other Tribal Nations. The attitude of the immersion teachers is one of continuously learning. As one immersion teacher shared, "we are still learning everyday" (program interview, 10/22/2019). Even though all of the immersion classroom teachers and teacher assistants are first-language Towa speakers, they each acknowledge that they are "always learning, learning and using some English words, making up our own" (program interview, 10/22/2019). There are instances when the teachers are trying to find the vocabulary to describe various developmental concepts to the children, including the vocabulary necessary to discuss scientific exploration and pre-math concepts, for instance, where the teachers need to regroup with each other to figure out how to explain these things in Towa. One teacher goes to her mother as her language resource,

especially since her mother is a fluent speaker and always open to her questions. Other teachers go out into the community and ask questions of Jemez Pueblo elders and other relatives in order to find the necessary vocabulary to cover the concepts in their curriculum, or to respond to the children's interests as they arise (program interview, 10/22/2019).

There is a general consensus among the teaching team that they are always "open to learning new ideas" (program interview, 10/22/2019). They are aware that sometimes there are strategies that other immersion programs have implemented that could also work in the Walatowa Head Start classrooms. In some cases, due to the differences in the cultures between different tribal nations, the teachers are cognizant of the need to only "take parts of ideas" (program interview, 2019), and make adjustments to ensure that approach would be aligned with Jemez values and ways of knowing. As one teacher put it, they are "open to trying different things" and, as teaching staff, they "want to make the program better" (program interview, 10/22/2019). One member of the management team takes this growth mindset to a program level by always asking: "How can the program be successful in the immersion field?" (program interview, 10/22/2019). The staff at Walatowa Head Start have also visited other successful Indigenous language immersion early childhood programs, including two very memorable visits to the model Native Hawaiian immersion programs. These visits helped the teachers to see other immersion programs in action and gave them lots of food for thought once they returned to Jemez. The visits even helped to motivate both the management team and the teaching team to work even harder to ensure they were successfully implementing their immersion instruction (program interview, 10/22/2019). Concluding the brief glimpse at the Jemez Pueblo's language revitalization efforts, I now share my understanding of the language revitalization efforts

undertaken at the next collaborating research partner represented through the Lakota Immersion Childcare Program.

### **Part 5: Lakota Language Revitalization Efforts:**

#### **The Story of Language Revitalization at the Lakota Immersion Childcare Program**

The Lakota Immersion Childcare Elementary Track is one powerful aspect of the collective efforts of the Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation to revitalize the Lakota language on the Pine Ridge Reservation of the Oglala Sioux Tribe. They have led the charge with exploring the uncharted territory of Lakota language revitalization for young children and elementary-aged children. Their focus has been towards training immersion teachers by building the capacity of individuals who have demonstrated commitment to learning the language to be immersion teachers to then teach the language to the children. It works both ways – through intentional teacher training efforts, language immersion teachers are educated, and when those teachers go into work in their own immersion classroom, those same teachers are able to build their own language skills as well as build the language skills of the students in their immersion classrooms.

Before continuing, I need to share a little background on the Lakota language: Lakota, which is also known as Lakhota, Lakotiyapi, Teton, and Teton Sioux, is classified by Ethnologue as a member of the Siouan-Catawban language family of the Mississippi Valley-Ohio Valley, Siouan specifically. Lakota is spoken in Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota, with urban population centers across the U.S. The federally-recognized tribal nations that speak Lakota include the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation, the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe, the Oglala Sioux Tribe, the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, and the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in North Dakota and South Dakota. The number

of first language Lakota speakers has been declining over the years. When I looked up the language status, I found that, currently, the Lakota language is categorized as a level 8a on the EGIDS, which is known as moribund, where the “only remaining active users of the language are members of the grandparent generation and older” (Eberhard et al., 2019, para. 3). Many of the first language speakers today are aged 65 years old and above. The most challenging aspect of Lakota language use currently is that the language is no longer being used as the primary language of the home where it can be transmitted to Lakota children. The Lakota language is spoken by about 2,100 people in the United States, with a population of first language speakers of approximately 2,000 people (as of 2016). The total population of Lakota people is roughly 175,000 people in the United States (Eberhard et al., 2019).

As seen through the determination of Lakota language advocates over the past decade, the Lakota people maintained their language despite the repeated attempts by the federal government to force them to only speak English, including missionaries and boarding schools. Since 1879, the Lakota language has been under attack. In the 1940s, Lakota elders started to see alarming trends in the younger generations where they were not learning Lakota in the home as much anymore. The language has fallen out of use as a first language by the younger generations, mostly due to the prevalence of English and the requirements to speak English to get a job on the reservations (Powers, 2009). By the 1970s, there had been language revitalization efforts implemented in various levels throughout the Lakota communities and reservations. These efforts included community language classes, classes held at local tribal colleges, and efforts to work on Lakota grammar and dictionary resources. There was even a comic book series developed in Lakota through a collaboration between the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations in the 1980s (Powers, 2009). Over the years, there have been numerous difficulties

with using one of the many orthographies in Lakota and finding one that accurately captures the accent in the language (Powers, 2009). A diverse group of Lakota language advocates came together to form the Lakota Language Consortium (LLC) in 2004 as a way to alleviate disagreements in orthographies and coordinate language revitalization efforts across the various federally-recognized tribes with Lakota language speakers.

Since 2004, the Lakota people collectively have taken great strides to stem the tide of language loss. In order to bring the Lakota language back into daily use and to restore the intergenerational transmission of the language, a common goal has emerged since 2004 to implement language immersion programs to work with Lakota children as a way to revitalize Lakota (Powers, 2009). Currently, there are language immersion efforts underway through various college, university, school-based, and even child care-based initiatives, including Sitting Bull College, St. Joseph's Indian School, Oglala Lakota College, and Sinte Gleska University. A recently released documentary film project, *Rising Voices-Hothaninpi*, focuses on the Lakota language revitalization movement as it has evolved throughout the various communities of Lakota language speakers (Lakota Language Project, 2019).

The Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation (CDC), a Native-owned and operated non-profit organization located on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, has implemented Lakota language revitalization efforts for children ages toddler through elementary. Committed to Lakota language revitalization, the team at Thunder Valley CDC operates under a collective goal:

We want Lakota to be a language used beyond its basic functions so that students are able to comprehensively engage with their heritage language, no matter the subject. Our program sees Lakota as a living, thriving language; one in which speakers can talk about

fiber optic cables, plate tectonics, and astrophysics in addition to everyday conversations about work, self, and community (Thunder Valley CDC, 2019, para. 2)

In order to achieve the goal of ensuring that Lakota is a living language, the Thunder Valley CDC pursues immersion instruction through the model of a Lakota language nest for children in the community. Thunder Valley CDC operates the Lakota Immersion Childcare program for younger children, and also the Lakota Immersion Childcare-Elementary Track, known as Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa Thanka, to support those graduates of the Childcare program with a continuous immersion education as they grow. According to the Thunder Valley CDC team, through “encouraging entry into the program at around 18 months of age, we can begin establishing language acquisition from a pre-verbal age. This allows Lakota to become a primary language and creates a foundation for continued fluency throughout their lives” (Thunder Valley CDC, 2019, para. 4). By the time those children enter the Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa Thanka, they are first language Lakota speakers, supported through the multipronged efforts of the team at Thunder Valley CDC.

Their main mission is “reviving our Lakota language and culture” (Thunder Valley CDC, 2019, para. 2) with the following goals for Lakota language learning: “achieving normalization of our language and culture; increasing access to language resources, materials and learning; creating safe and empowering learning spaces as well as fluent speakers and teachers; healing through our language and culture” (Thunder Valley CDC, 2019, para. 3). The focus of the program is to encourage “youth to be functionally able to speak their language, but to also have their language as a framework for their world, their identity, and their future” (Thunder Valley CDC, 2019, para. 4). In other words, the team at Thunder Valley CDC works towards the dual goals of increasing Lakota language fluency among Lakota youth and “equipping them with an

education that allows them to successfully pursue their dreams – without sacrificing their connection to culture. We seek to create well-rounded individuals, rooted in their heritage language, with no future closed off to them” (Thunder Valley CDC, 2019, para. 4).

Operated within the Thunder Valley CDC’s Lakota Language Initiative department, the Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa Thanka is supported by the other programs within the department. These programs include Lakota Immersion Childcare (also known as Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa Cik’ala), Lakotiyapi Press, Curriculum Development, Second Language Learners (2LL) Program, and Lakotiya Skiiyapi (Lakota athletic program for youth). The Lakotiyapi Press is the multimedia arm of the program and works to develop original Lakota language learning materials based on the curriculum to support the children’s learning and family involvement in both the Immersion Childcare and the Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa Thanka programs. Materials developed by the Lakotiyapi Press include hosting and creating hundreds of live action and animated videos for the program’s YouTube channel, Wayawa Cik’ala, since 2015; creating and publishing original Lakota children’s books that are used in the classrooms and also available for purchase online; creating Lakota translations of existing stories and books (completing over 800 translations so far); creating and providing numerous online teaching tools for use by immersion teachers and by second language learners; developing various education apps to be used by teachers and children in the classroom and by family members with the children at home; operating and updating an all-Lakota news website at *woihanble.com* as a resource for first language Lakota speakers, including the students and graduates of the immersion programs. The Lakotiyapi Press has served to fill the gap of Lakota-language, Lakota-focused learning materials in order to provide relevant resources for use by teachers in the immersion classrooms as well as by family members with their children at home.

For immersion teachers and all program staff employed through Thunder Valley CDC, the Lakota Language Initiative team administers the Second Language Learners Program, known as 2LL, with the stated goal that “all program staff who are not first-language speakers of Lakota are automatically part of the 2LL program, with the obligation to increase their fluency on a daily basis, to the greatest extent of their learning abilities (and with a great deal of support in doing so)” (Thunder Valley CDC, 2019, para. 3). The Lakota Language Initiative also has a series of videos called Wayawa Thankinkinyan that are specifically designed for second language learners and ultimately, to support teachers, as part of the 2LL initiative. Each video is focused on a specific theme that has been implemented in the immersion classrooms. These themes include “Serving Meals,” “Clothes,” “Sweetgrass and Prayer,” and involve demonstrations by current immersion teachers and fluent speakers complete with the introduction of new vocabulary, common phrases, repetition, and step-by-step instructions, all in the Lakota language. Each video is also part of a complete online learning module that includes corresponding Lakota grammar lessons, worksheets, online flashcard games, and quizzes on the topic of focus. All program staff who are participating in either the 2LL initiative or who are immersion teachers must complete these each week and pass each quiz to get credit for completing the module. Parents of immersion students can also watch the videos and complete the corresponding online learning modules.

One program launched in 2018 is called Four Years to Fluency (4YF) and consists of intensive evening Lakota language classes that occur five days a week throughout the school year. These 4YF classes are open to parents and family members of immersion students, the staff who are not already fluent speakers, as well as to community members who might be interested in becoming a Lakota language speaker. The 4YF classes are held in person as well as



livestreamed to additional sites to provide necessary access to all Thunder Valley CDC program staff, immersion teachers, and parents who may be interested. People who are not able to attend in person can also watch the livestream as well. In the second year of the 4YF program curriculum, all classes are taught entirely in Lakota (Thunder Valley CDC, 2019). Program leadership shared that the original conceptualization for the 2LL and 4YF initiatives was through the use of a second language learner framework developed by the Indigenous Language Institute and piloted by the directors of the Lakota Language Initiative called “How Do I Say?” This framework was developed to support Indigenous language revitalization programs through providing a flexible set of commonly-used topics to guide second language learners through having language learning conversations and lessons with their first language speakers (Thunder Valley CDC, 2019).

In addition to onsite mentoring for new immersion teachers and in-house 2LL and 4YF Lakota language learning initiatives, there are also a variety of other professional development opportunities through Thunder Valley CDC and its partners. One of these is through the Lakota Summer Institutes. The Lakota Language Consortium hosts the three-week long Institute each summer and in the summer of 2020 there will be two sites offered. Participants can take courses such as Communicative Lakota I, II, and III – Lakota language for beginners, introductory grammar and vocabulary. For second language learners at a pre-intermediate level, there are three courses offered: Communicative Lakota for Pre-Intermediate Level I, II, III. There are also courses on Lakota Grammar and Lakota Language Teaching Methods (Lakota Summer Institute, 2020). Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa Thanka staff attested that the Lakota Language Consortium’s implementation of the LLC Lakota Summer Institute, which has been held each summer for the past 11 years, has been a powerful motivator for second-language Lakota learners (program

interview, 11/29/2019). Through the LLC Lakota Summer Institute, there have been a total of 480 Lakota language teachers who received training to effectively teach the Lakota language in their schools and communities. The investment of the LLC into Lakota language revitalization efforts has increased the number of active Lakota language learners over the years to a total of approximately 6,000 individuals (Lakota Summer Institute, 2020). These comprehensive Lakota language learning efforts geared towards adults are all focused on the goal of training immersion teachers and supporting their language growth and language use as second language learners.

Red Cloud Indian School started the Lakota Language Project (LLP) with a mission of “promoting and revitalizing the Lakota language and culture through curriculum development, community engagement, and culturally relevant education” (Red Cloud Indian School, 2019, para. 4). In 2015, the LLP began to focus on expanding language revitalization efforts beyond the classroom to include family and community involvement and continue to build a repository of Lakota language learning materials to complement the curriculum already in use (Red Cloud Indian School, 2019, para. 7). For the first few years of the LLP at Red Cloud, the staff focused on creating a comprehensive curriculum to be used to teach Lakota to students in grades K-12 (Red Cloud Indian School, 2019, para. 7). Most recently, the Red Cloud Indian School decided to have their kindergarten classroom go full immersion and needed teacher training for the kindergarten teacher.

It is important to know that due to her experience in teaching immersion, as a second language learner of Lakota, and her experience in curriculum development, the Lakota Language Instructor/Curriculum Developer also serves as an immersion teacher trainer. When asked to train, she will step into the immersion classroom and lead the activities, modeling for the new immersion teacher and providing scaffolding for implementing Lakota language immersion

techniques that have already been found by program staff to be effective with their students. The Lakota Language Instructor/Curriculum Developer at the Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa Thanka worked in the elementary immersion track classroom for six months with the soon-to-be kindergarten teacher until the teacher felt ready to conduct immersion instruction on her own, as she described: “That’s what my role, my position now is to be a teacher trainer, so really explaining to these teachers that are in the classroom now, and speak as much Lakota as I know” (program interview, 11/27/2019).

In addition to the program goals of providing a comprehensive education through the Lakota language and building a positive Lakota identity for all participating students, there are also several program goals related to the adult family members and teachers in the immersion classrooms. One important goal is to support the parents of immersion students to “embrace Lakota language at home” (Thunder Valley CDC, 2019, para. 2). Regarding the parents of participating immersion students, the program requires children’s family members to also take Lakota language classes in order to continue to support their child’s Lakota language learning and Lakota language use at home and in daily life. The numerous adult learning resources are available to children’s parents and family members through the Second Language Learner (2LL) program. Another resource is the comprehensive parent and family website called Lakota Language Learning. The Lakota Language Initiative program has also developed a website specifically for Lakota language learners called “Learn Lakota Language,” found at *iyapiglukinipi.org*. This website has content specifically geared towards three different audiences: Learners, Educators, and Parents. The Learn Lakota Language website has resources links to books – such as “Anpetu Tokheca Kin” on the weather.

As program leadership stated, “adult learning resources are not only limited to LLI staff, but also available to program parents, community members, and the wider general public. These include a large body of Lakota teaching resources available online as well as live classes” (Thunder Valley CDC, 2019, para. 6). As children gain fluency levels, parents are encouraged to follow along through the 2LL courses and resources. Through these courses, children’s family members learn how to read and use the numerous Lakota language resources available as a way to continue to support their child’s Lakota language use at home. Those parents who complete the modules each week and pass the quizzes get a percentage of their program participation fee for their children waived. Other topics of these online modules and videos include washing hands, greeting a visitor, offering food and drinks, seating visitor, and so on. As shared by the Lakota Language Instructor/Curriculum Developer,

With the second language learning program, we have a couple different programs too. I think our main thing is just to make Lakota normal, to normalize it. Just doing it in the interest of the community. We are doing a lot with basketball. A lot of coaches are teaching in Lakota now. And I know, it’s growing but it could be a lot faster. (program interview, 11/27/2019)

I was inspired by the perspective shared by the Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa Thanka program staff that they see their efforts with their immersion program as part of a larger Lakota language revitalization movement, and that their movement is sparking change in their community and beyond. I was also excited to hear how transparent the team is about their efforts. Having gone through the arduous and winding, sometimes “trial and error” process of implementing language immersion instruction and developing language immersion curriculum in Lakota, the program leadership and the staff I communicated with were each very willing to

share their work with other Indigenous immersion programs and other Indigenous communities who were exploring immersion as an option for language revitalization. The general attitude seemed to be one of “why reinvent the wheel?” as a general approach to supporting others who may be encountering the same challenges that the Lakota Language Initiative has faced over the years.

After exploring the Lakota language revitalization efforts, I turn towards sharing the language revitalization efforts of the next collaborating research partner, the Wicoie Nandagikendan Urban Early Childhood Immersion Program with a specific focus on the Dakota and Ojibwe languages.

### **Part 6: Dakota and Ojibwe Language Revitalization Efforts:**

#### **The Story of Language Revitalization at Wicoie Nandagikendan Early Childhood Urban Immersion Program**

As I entered the brick building where the Wicoie Nandagikendan Early Childhood Urban Immersion Program is located in Minneapolis, Minnesota, I looked forward to learning more about this unique early childhood program that has been a cornerstone of Indigenous language revitalization efforts in the state of Minnesota. In our initial conversation, the program administrator and a representative of the board of directors shared that their program’s primary goal is to build and maintain connections to the children’s and families’ cultural identity, a concept that is embodied in children’s cultural self-efficacy as a founding principle. This aim is echoed in the program’s mission and vision statements that were shared with me. The mission statement of Wicoie Nandagikendan Dakota Ojibwe Early Childhood Urban Immersion Program is “To advance Minnesota’s Indigenous languages through intergenerational mentoring and immersion strategies in order to nurture a quality and culturally sensitive early childhood

education (Wicoie Nandagikendan, 2019). The vision of the program is “to build a thriving environment for Indigenous language learning in Minnesota’s communities where it becomes a part of life” (Wicoie Nandagikendan, 2019). Beyond these two statements, the team at Wicoie Nandagikendan has identified five core values: (1) Developing leaders through language and culture; (2) Sparking a lifelong appreciation for learning, retaining, and sharing language and culture; (3) Engaging community through opportunities around language and culture, (4) Providing culturally relevant curriculum and materials; and (5) Enhancing self-efficacy and self-esteem (Wicoie Nandagikendan, 2019). The vision, mission, and core values are evident in every aspect of program implementation.

In order to truly understand the uniqueness of this immersion program, I need to provide information on the Dakota and Ojibwe languages, which are the Indigenous languages of Minnesota. Both the Dakota and Ojibwe-speaking peoples had a wide historical territorial range that extended around the Great Lakes and up into Central Canada. The Dakota language is classified as part of the Mississippi Valley Siouan and Mississippi Valley-Ohio Valley Siouan language families, which ultimately are derived from Siouan and Siouan-Catawban language groups. The Ojibwe language, also known as Chippewa, is classified by linguists as part of the Ojibwa-Potawatomi language family which is derived from the Algonquian and Almic language groups. After dealing with language loss and assimilation since 1879, the Indigenous people of Minnesota have maintained their identity; however, they are in danger of losing both of these languages. According to Ethnologue, the EGIDS level of the Dakota language is at 8a, which is labeled as “Moribund—The only remaining active users of the language are members of the grandparent generation and older” (Eberhard et al., 2019). Ethnologue lists the EGIDS level for the Ojibwe language at 7, which is designated as shifting which means that “the child-bearing

generation can use the language among themselves, but it is not being transmitted to children” (Eberhard et al., 2019).

According to a census of first language (L1) speakers conducted by the University of Minnesota in 2016, there are a total of 170,000 Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota peoples residing in the United States. However, there are less than one hundred L1 Dakota speakers living in the U.S. with just eight L1 Dakota speakers residing in Minnesota (Turck, 2016). The 2010 U.S. Census found there are over 170,000 Ojibwe peoples in the U.S. with less than 1,000 L1 Ojibwe speakers. According to Turck (2016), as of 2015, there were only 678 Ojibwe L1 speakers remaining in Minnesota after a study was conducted by the University of Minnesota’s Department of American Indian Studies.

In addition to the population numbers presented above, there are 11 tribes on 11 reservations in Minnesota representing two main Indigenous languages, Dakota and Ojibwe. The tribes are Lower Sioux Indian Community, Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, Upper Sioux Community, Prairie Island Indian Community, Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, White Earth Band of Ojibwe, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Grand Portage, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, Red Lake Nation, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa (Indian Affairs Council, 2011). As a result of the federal government’s relocation programs, all of these tribal nations had individual tribal citizens who were relocated to the nearest urban area, in this case, Minneapolis. As a result, there is a thriving urban population of Minnesota’s Indigenous people who have established themselves as part of a close-knit urban community known as the Little Earth neighborhood and the community in and around Franklin Avenue.

As I started having conversations with the leadership team at Wicoie Nandagikendan, I learned even more about the history of their program. One important event was that the State of

Minnesota legislature established the Indian Affairs Council in 1963 with the goal of providing opportunity and collaboration among the 11 different Minnesota tribes and the state. Then, in 2002, a group was formed by concerned individuals representing various tribes in Minnesota to address the issue of their vanishing languages. The Dakota Ojibwe Language Revitalization Alliance (DOLRA) essentially established a network of like-minded individuals all interested in language revitalization, specifically focusing on the Dakota and Ojibwe languages. After approaching the 11 tribes and reservations in Minnesota, the group, DOLRA, went to the State of Minnesota legislature and requested that a resolution be passed addressing the importance of ongoing language revitalization of the Indigenous languages of Minnesota. Affiliates of DOLRA came together with the Native American Leaders' Circle where they planned language revitalization program implementation and secured partner sites for both language efforts (program visit, 10/3/2019).

By 2006, the Dakota and Ojibwe Early Childhood Urban Immersion Program, called *Wicoie Nandagikendan*, was established in order to provide immersion instruction in both Dakota and Ojibwe to preschool-aged students whose families resided in and around the Minneapolis area. There is one classroom for Ojibwe language immersion and one classroom for Dakota language immersion. Both classrooms serve children ages toddlers through kindergarten-entry. Both classrooms are located within a currently-existing child care center that also serves the Indigenous people who live in nearby Little Earth neighborhood. Funding for *Wicoie Nandagikendan* was initially secured in 2007 from the University of Minnesota for classroom teachers to receive training in language immersion skills. Furthermore, the group, DOLRA, was successful in securing additional funding in 2009 and 2010 from the State of Minnesota Legislature to further *Wicoie Nandagikendan*'s language revitalization work. One thing I learned



is that the emphasis on teacher training and immersion instruction professional development is such a crucial part of Wicoie Nandagikendan's history and is embedded into the culture of the program today. Outreach to Dakota and Ojibwe elders who are the remaining first language speakers has resulted in the innovative use of a version of the master-apprentice model of language learning where a first language speaker is paired with an apprentice speaker who both work with the children in the immersion classrooms (program interview, 10/3/2019). One of the unique aspects of both immersion classrooms and both immersion teachers who lead those classrooms is that both teachers serve as mentors to apprentices who wish to learn how to teach in either Dakota or Ojibwe language immersion settings. The Dakota Immersion Teacher explained this approach:

She is the aide right now. We're looking for an apprentice. We haven't had one for a while because they're bringing in a new group. So it's going to be exciting to start.

Because I created...4 teachers. And they all took off and they're doing really amazing work. (program interview, 10/9/2019)

Continuing with the timeline of language revitalization in Minnesota, in 2009, the State of Minnesota legislature commissioned the Volunteer Working Group on Dakota and Ojibwe Language Revitalization and Preservation to prepare a report to the state legislature describing the status of the Indigenous languages of Minnesota with recommendations and conclusions across 10 directives. This report was released in 2011 and was presented to the legislature as the *Dakota and Ojibwe Language Revitalization in Minnesota* report. The Volunteer Working Group was tasked with 10 different directives that addressed the status and needs of Minnesota's Indigenous languages. Even though there were over one hundred language programs identified in Minnesota, only three of these programs have an emphasis on creating first language speakers.

Furthermore, of those programs that do focus on creating speakers, which are language immersion programs, all programs struggle with the challenges of pedagogic tool development, curriculum development, teacher training, teacher credentialing as well as funding constraints. These immersion programs were found to only reach a select few Indigenous students with just 1% of all Indigenous students in Minnesota being served by these programs. The Report identified the need for additional language immersion programming to be implemented in order to address the identified gaps in language learning.

Regarding Dakota language revitalization efforts since 2011, there have been various types of curriculum developed for Dakota focusing on teen and adult learners, such as dictionaries, vocabulary guides, and Dakota verb trees. Also, there is a Dakota language app that has been developed for use by those interested in learning Dakota. The Dakota reservations in Minnesota as well as urban programs have also established community-based Dakota language classes.

Ojibwe language revitalization efforts have been well-rounded and coordinated since the 2011 report. Several tribes of Ojibwe recently collaborated with the Minnesota Department of Education to create a state-approved Ojibwe language curriculum for use in early childhood classrooms both within tribal programs and in public schools. Ojibwe language advocates have been instrumental in the development of video series in Ojibwe addressing the need for intergenerational transmission of the language. Furthermore, an Ojibwe-owned media group has become a premier developer of Indigenous language apps, namely the recently launched app for both Android and Apple devices to be used by all ages of Ojibwe language learners. Another success that should be mentioned is the movement by the Ojibwe tribes in Minnesota to

approach the state to request that bilingual signs be placed along the roads in order to depict both the English and Ojibwe names for the lakes of Minnesota.

Since the dire need for additional Ojibwe and Dakota language programs was indicated in 2011, the focus shifted to establishing additional early childhood immersion programs where young children from infancy through five years-old attend classrooms where either Dakota or Ojibwe is the language of instruction and English is not spoken in the classroom. Since research has shown that immersion programs have been very successful at creating first language speakers, language advocates in Minnesota focused their efforts on securing funding, establishing teacher professional development programs, engaging community and university partners as well as creating much needed pedagogical materials in both Ojibwe and Dakota for use in their respective language immersion classrooms.

All of these efforts combined to contribute to the growth of Wicoie Nandagikendan as a program model and program staff became cornerstones of the language revitalization community in Minneapolis. The teachers and leadership at Wicoie Nandagikendan are very interested in ensuring the children who participate in their immersion classrooms are prepared for school when they leave the program (program interview, 10/3/2019). In order to provide insight into the young children's development as they participate in the immersion classroom setting, they partnered with The Family Partnership program and the Alliance of Early Childhood Professionals to ensure all children attending Wicoie Nandagikendan are screened with age-appropriate developmental screenings. The screening instrument used by the staff is the *Ages and Stages Questionnaire-3<sup>rd</sup> Edition* (Brookes Publishing, 2009). Screening occurs within 30 days of child's first day of attendance and at several intervals throughout the school year as prescribed by the screening instrument. Program staff then developed comparisons among children who

received instruction in the immersion classrooms and those who received instruction in English-only classrooms in the same center. Out of the four years of screening data available, the children in the immersion classrooms scored higher on developmental screenings for three of those years (Bendickson, 2016).

As with any initiative identified as a community need, there are consistently more funding requests than there are funds to support them. Thus, there is a need for additional funding, especially funding that is consistent and stable to fund the ongoing language revitalization efforts. While there are several state grants, federal grants, and even private language grants, the high cost of operating early childhood language immersion classrooms often becomes the downfall of such program as program administrators must constantly seek additional funding in order to operate their program from year to year (Indian Affairs Council, 2011). Other setbacks include the ongoing communication and collaboration between the Indigenous peoples of Minnesota and the Minnesota State Department of Education. Work is still being pursued surrounding complex teacher licensure and credentialing structures that pose roadblocks. Although steady progress has been made to break down these barriers for Dakota and Ojibwe language instruction, the progress is slow and may continue to be a lengthy process.

One devastating blow to the Wicoie Nandagikendan program recently was that despite the long history of the program as part of the state of Minnesota's Indigenous advocacy efforts and the support for language revitalization in the state, when the Minnesota legislation was most recently reauthorized, Wicoie Nandagikendan was excluded from the funding. This exclusion created an immense amount of pressure on the program staff and the board of directors to locate and secure funding for program operations including staff salaries, classroom supplies, and building space usage (program interview, 10/3/2019).

In addition to the program at Wicoie Nandagikendan, there are also Ojibwe language immersion programs at the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe's Head Start immersion classroom, and in the immersion school, Bdote Learning Center, in Minneapolis. Dakota language immersion programs also exist in the Bdote Learning Center's elementary immersion classrooms. The Bdote Learning Center has been a huge resource and a collaborating partner for the teachers at Wicoie Nandagikendan, especially since the children from Wicoie Nandagikendan often transition to attending kindergarten and the elementary grades at the Bdote Learning Center.

Over the years, there has also been cross-training with the immersion teachers at both programs (program interview, 10/9/2019). Both the teaching team and the program leadership shared that ongoing professional development is critical to ensuring the success of their immersion classrooms in producing language speakers. As both teachers' skill sets have grown, so has the demand in the larger language revitalization community for trainers and facilitators regarding immersion instruction implementation. Both immersion teachers are regularly asked to conduct training sessions to area immersion programs on immersion techniques, and both teachers are also asked to facilitate language immersion courses for teachers-in-training, as one immersion teacher shared,

Here's different immersion techniques...here's how you can lesson plan in an immersion setting, here's how you can do games, this is how you re-engage students if they're starting to get lost, you know, all kinds of different aspects to do immersion. (program interview, 10/9/2019)

There is a growth mindset present in both the immersion teachers at Wicoie Nandagikendan. It is apparent that both teachers also maintain their own skills and are constantly looking for areas to improve. The Ojibwe Immersion Teacher explained about the importance of reaching out and

maintaining communication with other immersion teachers who work with Indigenous languages:

We're always dialoguing, like oh, how do you do this? What do you do when this comes up? Or how do you guys talk about this kind of whatever subject? Those networks are incredibly important right now. (program interview, 10/7/2019)

The communication with informal networks of immersion teachers throughout Minnesota has become a valuable part of the immersion teachers' own professional development, especially since conferences and trainings geared specifically towards Indigenous early childhood language immersion instruction are difficult to find (program interview, 10/9/2019).

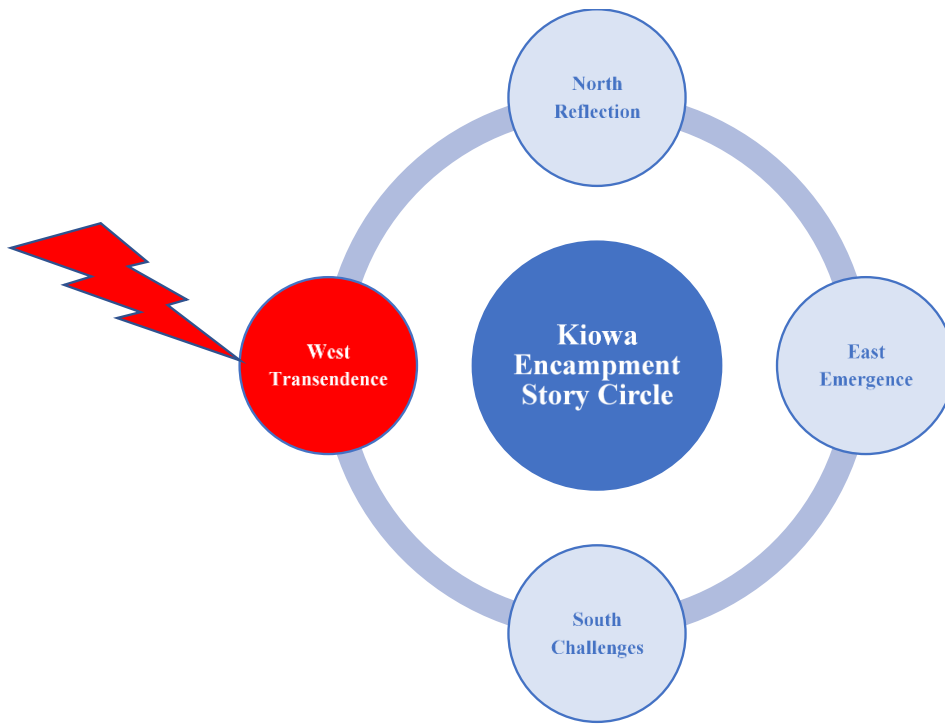
Ultimately, Wicoie Nandagikendan has become a foundational part of the language revitalization efforts in Minnesota. One important expected outcome of the immersion instruction approaches used is summarized by the Dakota Immersion Teacher:

Fingers crossed that out of I don't know how many kids that at least one or two can be almost a first language speaker, maybe a first language speaker... We're just trying to keep the language alive and develop as much as we can with the kids (program interview, 10/9/2019).

Every day, the children who attend the Dakota and Ojibwe immersion classrooms there are a part of a legacy of hope for the future of Minnesota's Indigenous languages.

After exploring the language revitalization efforts undertaken by the four different programs involved in this project, I continue this research journey to the next location which will be Location 3, where I will share each collaborating program's story of curriculum development and how I have come to understand their processes.

### Location 3: Piy-Yee-Yah (The West) – Transcendence



**Figure 6.** Kiowa Encampment Story Circle - West: Transcendence.

#### **Story 5: My Journey towards Indigenous Storywork as Methodology**

A good story can reach into your heart, mind and soul, and really make you think hard about yourself in relationship to the world...Coming to know and use Indigenous stories through storywork requires an intimate knowing that brings together heart, mind, body, and spirit.

~ Jo-Ann Archibald (2008). *Indigenous storywork*. (p. 140)

In order to understand the rationale for my choice to use Indigenous Storywork (ISW) as my research methodology for my dissertation research journey, I offer a reminder of the conceptual model of the intersection of the linear worldview and the relational worldview, as

discussed in Story 2 (pages 17-33) through the work of Deloria (1999). It is at the boundary of the linear conceptualization of Western research methods and the relational model that embodies Indigenous research methodology that I assert that the most appropriate way for me to answer my research questions was to remain true to my own epistemological stance by exploring research questions that are grounded in Indigenous knowledge through a research methodology that is situated within the relational worldview. Due to the congruence between my own epistemological stance, the nature of my research questions, and the context of my collaborating research partner programs, I conducted this exploration through the methodology of ISW, as conceptualized by Archibald (2008), guided by a research framework defined by my own Kiowa ways of knowing.

Before exploring ISW more in depth, it is important to share some of the insights I have had as part of this process of defining my research methodology within my Indigenous knowledge framework. In order to truly understand how I approached the development of this research framework, I turned to other Indigenous scholars for guidance and inspiration. Ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology form a circle where “the entire circle is an Indigenous research paradigm. Its entities are inseparable and blend from one into the next. The whole of the paradigm is greater than the sum of its parts” (Wilson, 2008, p. 70). Ontology and epistemology are defined by the importance of relationships or relationality (Wilson, 2008), while axiology and methodology are defined by the concept of relational accountability (Wilson 2008). As Wilson (2008) defined them, “the ontology and epistemology are based on a process of relationships that form a mutual reality. The axiology and methodology are based upon maintaining accountability to these relationships...An Indigenous research paradigm is relational and maintains relational accountability” (p. 70). In trying to figure out how to explain my



research framework from my Kiowa knowledge perspective, it was the words of Shawn Wilson, shared above, that captured the essence of what I was trying to explain. Because our Indigenous knowledges were historically based on and continue to be based on relationships and connectedness, for me to separate out the different components would be a form of dissection and extraction, detracting from the overall paradigm in which Indigenous knowledge, and thus, Indigenous research methodologies are situated.

Historically, Indigenous communities within the United States and beyond have not had positive experience with researchers. In the past, researchers have tended to study Indigenous populations and then leave, without adequately disseminating the findings of the studies to the people who participated. Called extraction research by some scholars (Gaudry, 2015), this has been the primary research experience of tribal communities in the United States thus far. When I really reflected on the data analysis strategies originally proposed, I realized that by proceeding with grounded theory, I would be imposing a Western ideology on the Indigenous knowledge that my research partners have entrusted with me. I would thus end up becoming the same extraction researcher that my own tribe and myself have experienced in the past. I could not be true to who I am and be true to my research collaborators if I continued with that original approach.

In order to uncover the dynamics of oppression of Indigenous peoples with respect to research, Indigenous scholars have turned to the terms *decolonizing methodology* to indicate that research should be conducted with an awareness of the history of oppression that researchers have historically imparted on Indigenous communities under study (Beeman-Cadwallader et al., 2011). Decolonization refers to acknowledgement of the history of research as well as calls for empowering tribes to reclaim the research methods used to study Indigenous peoples and

reframe research so that it is empowering rather than dehumanizing (Beeman-Cadwallader et al., 2011). With an emphasis on the importance of developing relationships with participants, decolonized methodologies include sharing knowledge, exchanging stories, and responding to participants' questions in respectful ways (Kovach, 2010; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). In an Indigenous research model, a relational worldview means accountability and responsibility on the part of the researcher to the community participating in the research (Gaudry, 2015). During the data collection process, it is important to also demonstrate respect for the participant's context, including awareness of the role of the elders, such as a tribal elder who is one of the language teachers, whom the other immersion teachers look to for guidance and support. Studies that are relevant to the communities of interest can serve to empower the community.

I utilized the tribally based participatory research (TBPR) approach, a recently decolonized methodology that has gained traction among Indigenous scholars and tribal leaders (Czaykowska Higgings, 2009). Due to the sovereign nature and protected status of federally-recognized AI/AN tribes in the United States, I selected TBPR as the research approach due to the need for significant involvement of the tribal leadership, tribal programs, tribal government staff as well as the tribal members at large. Through the use of the TBPR approach, I ensured that each key player and stakeholder had meaningful input during the entire process of conducting the study and that the findings were shared with the participants and the communities involved in this study. For the purposes of this dissertation study, and through adhering to the TBPR approach, I prepared annual reports, as required by the Tribal Council, Board of Directors, and program administrators of each participating program for review and progress updates. In order to ensure I was accurately capturing the stories that were shared with me, I provided each individual participant a copy of the transcript of our conversation for them to review and let me

know of any changes. This way I could ensure I was accurately capturing the voice of each participant as they shared their story. I also prepared program-specific reports on the curriculum development process as I have interpreted it in each collaborating program. These program-specific reports were shared with each program's administration, leadership teams, and the immersion teachers who worked with me on this process. I prepared four presentations, tailored to each collaborating program, that describes the approach, methods, findings, and analysis regarding each program's own curriculum development process in the form of a teacher in-service training that could be shared with each program. Finally, I also prepared four presentations, as requested by each program, that could be used with all program staff, teaching staff, and even with the parents of participating children, that detailed my study design, approach, and analysis regarding the curriculum development process used in their program. These reports and presentations have been distributed to each program's administrative staff for use when they are ready to proceed with the final dissemination of the results of this project.

In order to proceed with establishing an Indigenous research methodology grounded in Kiowa knowledge, I first need to define Indigenous epistemology in the context of Indigenous research (as opposed to the philosophical definition of epistemology that I explained in Location 1, Story 2 as part of the discussion on Indigenous knowledge). Wilson (2008) defined Indigenous epistemology in the context of research as “systems of knowledge built upon relationships between things, rather than on the things themselves... These relationships are with the cosmos around us as well as with concepts. They thus include interpersonal, intrapersonal, environmental, and spiritual relationships, and relationships with ideas” (p. 74). Indigenous epistemology is found in every aspect of our lives as Indigenous people – our language, song, dance, cultural traditions, stories, worldview, history, spirituality – and in every aspect, we see

the world through our Indigenous eyes. With these concepts in mind, I worked to design a research framework that made sense from my Kiowa ways of knowing and the way that I needed to approach this dissertation research journey in a way that was relevant and respectful.

The way that I view this research journey is summed up with the statement made by Smith (1999) that there have been many Indigenous researchers who “have struggled individually to engage with the disconnections that are apparent between the demands of research, on one side, and the realities of the world they encounter amongst their own and other Indigenous communities, with whom they share lifelong relationships, on the other side” (p. 5). I am one of those Indigenous researchers that has experienced the struggle between the specific research protocols I have been trained in and the reality of getting to know and visiting each of the Indigenous communities of the collaborating partner programs as part of this research journey. It is hard for me to say data collection – the term itself carries with it the entirety of the history of research with the Tribal Nations in the United States and is framed through the extractive research lens within the Western academic research tradition. I had to reframe the way that I had been trained to view data collection for the purposes of this research study. Ultimately, my approach was all about building a relationship, acknowledging a relationship, and extending an invitation for story sharing. Smith (1999) explained,

Indigenous methodologies tend to approach cultural protocols, values, and behaviors 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. (p. 16)

It was with respect for these cultural protocols that I could take neither a qualitative nor a quantitative, nor even a mixed methods approach to this dissertation work. I felt that since I am working with four different programs, located in four different parts of the United States, and representing five different Indigenous communities each with a different history, that in order to appropriately answer my research questions, I needed to approach the entire journey in a way that allowed for me to respect each of the different protocols I would encounter across the different contexts of each collaborating program.

Turning towards the actual development of my Kiowa research framework through Indigenous research methodology, I expand on what the literature says about Indigenous methods. According to Kovach (2010), Indigenous research methodologies acknowledge that traditional Indigenous knowledge is embedded in the oral tradition of each individual Tribal Nation and community. For Kovach, as an Indigenous researcher, the Indigenous oral tradition goes beyond simply fictional stories – instead, the stories that comprise our oral traditions share history, philosophy, spirituality, values, morals, ethical standards, developmental milestones, lessons learned as well as intellectual understandings of the natural sciences, physics, astronomy, cosmology, and even mathematical theory. Our Indigenous oral traditions carry our way of life, and the entire history of our people since our emergence as a people on this land. Kovach (2010) offers one interpretation of the use of storywork from an Indigenous perspective:

Within the structure of story, there is a place for the fluidity of metaphor, symbolism, and interpretive communications (both verbal and non-verbal) for a philosophy and language that is less definitive and categorical. My sense is that skilled orators, then and now, were able to imbue energy through word choice, and allow listeners to walk inside the story to find their own teachings. The interpretation and the teachings taken become the listener's

task. With the listener's involvement, the insight gained from the story is a highly particular and relevant form of knowledge exchange. (p. 60)

As defined by Archibald (2008), I assert that Indigenous storywork seeks to honor and respect the storyteller through the ways in which the listener hears the story and interprets the story specifically from the listener's own lens or worldview. Indigenous storywork as a methodology braids data collection and data analysis into one collective experience that involves both hearing a story and honoring the storyteller by interpreting the story from the specific lens of the listener. Authentic storywork can be carried out through adhering to seven specific principles: respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, wholism, inter-relatedness, and synergy. Archibald (2008) asserted that "these principles facilitate meaning making through and with Indigenous stories, which may be of a traditional nature or about lived experiences" (Ch. 1, p. 3). These seven principles have been defined by Archibald (2008) as a way to approach data collection and data analysis through the relational worldview of ISW. One question I often asked myself through this journey was what does analysis look like? To answer this, I had to reflect deeply on who I am as a Kiowa scholar and how we as Kiowa people view stories. In order to ensure that I approached the analysis piece of this dissertation journey from a Kiowa perspective, I examined each of Archibald's seven ISW principles from the Kiowa lens.

With the first principle of ISW, respect, Archibald (2008) asserted that "listening involves using all of our wholistic realms of heart/emotional, mind/intellectual, body/physical, and spirit in relationship to oneself, family, community, or Nation" (p. 5). The Kiowa value of respect says that we approach each story, each situation with mindfulness, intentionality, and care. Our way of saying respect in Kiowa is *nay-k'yiy-baht-t'ah-ye* (respect each other), which is seen by our elders as the most important value to know as a Kiowa person. Respect is

something that does not happen in isolation; instead, in order to be respectful, we need to demonstrate respect through our actions and through our interacting in relationship with others and the rest of creation. In order to enact this principle of respect, I followed my own cultural expectations of demonstrating respect as I interacted with each program and the individuals within each program.

The next ISW principle is responsibility, which Archibald (2008) defined as “the core meant learning about the values, beliefs, and the essence of a story, which could transcend time and place” (pg. 6). Our Kiowa elders taught us that listening is essential and that we have a responsibility to the speaker, to the storyteller, to perpetuate their memory and the collective memory within the stories they share with us by being accountable to ourselves, to them, and thus, to all those who come before us. Part of our responsibility is also being able to do our part to carry out our roles in society. For this research journey, I felt driven to listen with my whole heart, but also to pay careful attention to get the stories right. Even though the stories being shared were from the perspective of the individuals who had chosen to participate, their stories represent their own lived experiences and I felt and still feel responsible for getting the stories right and also being able to give back by sharing their stories as they wished.

Reverence is the third ISW principle, defined by Archibald (2008) as the act of making “time for people to connect to their inner being, to each other, and to the Indigenous topic being discussed” (p. 6). We start each activity with a moment of reflection, of gratitude, of respect, and of reverence. We take a moment to thank our Creator for the day that we are given, for the chance to share, and for all of the people in our life. Reverence also involves humility. We are taught that we are no better than any other living creature, not any of the animal people, nor the plants or rocks found in the world. In the traditional Kiowa way, we pray “dawm-bay-yeeday”

which loosely translates to “touch the earth” and serves as a constant reminder to connect and reconnect our inner being and outer selves with the rest of creation around us, both seen and unseen. In each conversation I had with the collaborating program staff, I heard their interpretations of this principle of reverence arise through their voices. Reverence was a key piece of this entire process, and is reflected on every level of interaction, including my own self-reflection about this research journey.

The fourth principle of ISW is reciprocity which is defined by Archibald (2008) as “sharing this learning with others” (p. 48). Kiowa people have always valued giving back above all else. We always think about those around us and work to ensure that they are taken care of at all times. We had the mechanism and cultural practice of giveaways to demonstrate this principle in action. To be greedy and selfish are two values that were highly discouraged. In the research context, reciprocity is about giving back and sharing the journey and lessons learned with those who may be interested. Reciprocity is also about paying attention to what would and would not be appropriate to share as well as following the lead of the program participants in what they want to give and receive as part of the process of sharing their stories and co-constructing knowledge.

With the fifth ISW principle, wholism, Archibald (2008) asserted that this means acting “in a heart-centered way by being in sync with my body, mind, heart, and spirit when working with stories...I also create a space in my heart, mind, body, and spirit to be open to the questions and answers that come to me” (p. 11). The principle of wholism is seen in the way that there is never just an individual operating by themselves, instead, there is the family, the society, the band, the Nation. Just as there is never just one aspect of existence, all aspects of existence, the seen and the unseen, work together to strive towards balance. Through enacting wholism, I was

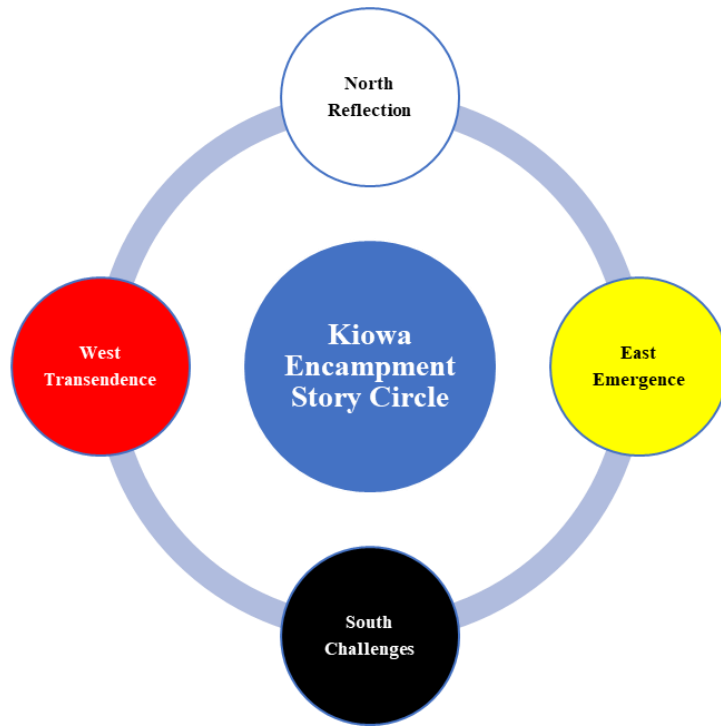


well aware that I approached each program as a Kiowa woman, as a representative of my people, as a representative of my university, and also had to approach each individual with an open mind and an open heart in order to be ready to listen and make meaning from the stories shared.

As the sixth ISW principle, inter-relatedness, Archibald (2008) explained that “community describes a collectivity with shared identity or interests, that has the capacity to act or express itself as a collective” (p. 11). Everything is connected. We are connected to our ancestors through our stories. Our actions reflect on them and their legacy. The roles that we play impact others in our society. Our mindset and the way we are thinking impacts our health and our moods. Everything is connected to everything else. What happens to one, has rippling impacts on everything else. During this research journey, through the process of establishing relationships, I was able to find multiple points of connection with both the individuals who participated as well as the program leadership of the partnering programs. For example, when I shared about my own passion for participating in my own tribe’s language revitalization efforts, those with whom I was conversing were able to share their own passions and involvement about their respective language revitalization efforts.

Finally, the seventh principle of ISW is defined by Archibald (2008) as “an exchange of life force energies that infuse the exchange between the story, the storyteller and the listener in that ‘space between words...’ which encodes the understanding of spirit” (p. 15). Synergy speaks to energies. Synergy speaks to the unseen ways that we come to gain knowledge, wisdom, and understandings. Synergy is not just intellectual, but also emotional, spiritual, and physical. It is all of the aspects of our human experience bound together in a collective way. As the story sharing progressed, I was able to experience synergy in the form of mutual shared interests and mutual respect for cultural protocols.

Ultimately, the Kiowa research framework that I developed to guide this journey is designed to capture the essence of Kiowa ways of knowing in order to strategically guide research data collection and analysis in a way that folds in ISW as my methodology, and tribally-based participatory research as my approach. This research framework, called the Kiowa Encampment Story Circle is structured as a circle around the four sacred Kiowa directions, east, south, west, and north.



**Figure 7.** Kiowa Encampment Story Circle Research Framework.

Each direction represents an aspect of the data collection and the data analysis as well as serves as a reminder of the particular concepts embedded within each of the four directions and what that means for the overall methodology. According to my interpretation of how my research journey is situated within this framework and grounded in Kiowa knowledge, east represents emergence and embodies sacredness and connectedness; south represents challenges

and embodies responsibility; west represents transcendence and embodies reciprocity; north represents reflection and embodies respect and communication.

In order to design this research framework, I followed our Kiowa ways of knowing which called for me to begin the journey in the east in order to set the stage and to acknowledge my place in the universe and acknowledge the connection that I have with each of my collaborating research partners. Beginning a journey, a meeting, a new aspect of our lives, a new day, requires acknowledgement of the sacredness in creation and around us as a part of creation. Through this acknowledgement of the sacred, I, as a Kiowa woman, am also affirming the belief in connectedness. Humanity exists in connection to, in relationship with all other elements of creation including other human beings, all other living and non-living things, and in connection to both the unseen and the visible worlds. Through our connection with the unseen, we also must acknowledge our inherent values and beliefs, such as everything happens for a reason and asking for guidance when we feel lost.

The next location in my research framework is the south, which represents challenges that were encountered. As I both faced challenges as well as conceptualized challenges, I also needed to be mindful of the role that we, as Indigenous people, play in our work, in our family, in our community, and in society and that we have a responsibility to ourselves, our Creator, and those around us to persevere, to continue on, and to face challenges because challenges are a part of life. In other words, our actions have an impact, and the things we do have consequences for those around us. The difficulties faced range from historical events to specific challenges faced by the collaborating partner programs.

Our next stage in our research journey involves the west where we face transcendence. In this framework, transcendence means overcoming and thriving as a people and as a program.

Embodied in this stage is reciprocity, which speaks to the value of maintaining balance in creation, and giving back, sharing, and helping others. Things – both visible and unseen – are never taken, and must be acknowledged with a return action, gift, some form of acknowledgement. We always start our interactions with those around us with a mindset of what can I offer, how can I support, and what can I give back to help make a difference for others.

Then, we travel to the north where we encounter opportunities for reflection. This location in the research journey is about both communication and respect. Communication includes sharing our experiences, sharing our story, and adding to the collective stories and collective knowledge. Respect underlies all that we do, especially as we look back on where we have been and consider the implications for where we are going. Respect is about acknowledgement, honoring others, and maintaining awareness of the sacredness in creation, the connectedness, and relationships we have with the world around us. After encountering the location to the north, the journey is completed by continuing back to the east, to the initial location, where the journey began. After completing this cycle, the Kiowa Encampment Story Circle research journey will have encompassed each of the elements included within this methodology, and the research journey can begin anew, in a new iteration. The Kiowa research methodology that I have conceptualized above serves as a guide for information gathering (data collection) and meaning making or interpretation (data analysis) as well as for sharing (dissemination of the findings of) this dissertation research journey. Through engaging with each element of the Kiowa Encampment Story Circle, I affirmed and acknowledged the importance of stories as a part of my own Kiowa culture but also as a part of Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous research methodologies. As I encountered each element in the Kiowa Encampment Story Circle, I approached that story segment, whether emergence, challenges, transcendence, or

reflection, through the lens of Kiowa storytelling, with specific attention to each of the seven principles of ISW. In this Kiowa view of the research process, the Story Circle model is my framework, ISW is my approach, and my methodology represents the intersection of my Kiowa ways of knowing and ISW as I have interpreted it for use on this journey.

In Kiowa culture, telling stories is a way of life. Our stories make us who we are. Our stories are much more than just narrative. Stories preserve our memories as a people, our history as well as our values, philosophy, scientific knowledge, and cultural protocols. We have stories and we have songs that accompany those stories, each with a very specific reason behind it. Young Kiowa children begin life with very specific stories that teach Kiowa values such as respect, consideration, and responsibility. As Kiowa people, our own stories define us. Our oral tradition is the foundation for who we are. Our stories include children's stories that teach the values of our people. We have stories that share the origin of our sacred songs, dances, and ceremonies. There are stories that teach us what not to do through our trickster character, the Kiowa culture hero known as Saynday. Our stories recall the lives of our heroes, our leaders, those among us who have earned a place in our collective memory. Our stories ensure that our families know the history of those who have come before. There are also stories that teach of our laws, our leadership, the way we conduct ourselves, and our spiritual beliefs. Every song we have has a story that goes along with it. Every individual Kiowa has a story that has been told and retold over the generations. There are stories of heroism, bravery, stories of survival, overcoming the odds. From individual histories, to stories about one's childhood, to stories of how we got our Kiowa names, each of these stories is woven together into the braid of our collective memory. Not only do our people as a whole have collective stories, but each of our societies also has its own origin story. Each of the seven Kiowa bands has their origin stories and

embedded within those stories are the stories of the families that make up those bands. And in each family's story are the individual stories of the people whose lives we have impacted and whose lives have impacted us. We can each trace our own story through the tree trunk of our mothers', fathers', siblings', aunts', and uncles' stories, then through the branches of our grandparents, their siblings, and through the leaves of all of our big brothers (great-grandfathers) and big sisters (great-grandmothers) who have come before us. Their memory lives with us and the more that we retell their stories, the more that their stories become our story, and our story as a people is perpetuated to our children and our children's children, all of the stories that make up a Kiowa life, become woven into the collective memory and become a part of our Kiowa oral tradition. I knew that I wanted to conduct my doctoral dissertation research in a way that affirms who I am and in a way that will give back to my people, the Kiowa people, and all the other Indigenous people of this land. I was raised to take on the challenges presented by the educational system we now find ourselves surrounded with, and rise to that challenge, and thrive so that ultimately, I can come back home, to my people, and give back, to serve them.

Data collection in an Indigenous context must be approached with the utmost respect, as summed up by Smith (1999), "Critical questions that communities and Indigenous activists often ask, in a variety of ways: Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated?" (p. 10) It was these questions that I prepared to address as I began the data collection process. As I approached each collaborating program, I invited them to share their story and offered to serve as the messenger for whichever story they wanted to share with others about their own curriculum development processes. According to Smith (1999), "intrinsic in story telling is a focus on dialogue and

conversations amongst ourselves as Indigenous peoples, to ourselves and for ourselves” (p. 146). As part of my invitation to participate in this study through story sharing, I knew that my originally proposed semi-structured interview protocol had to be adjusted to reflect the conversational approach that is more congruent with ISW and my own Kiowa research methodology. When it comes to data collection methods, Kovach (2010) shared that Indigenous research methodologies include

approaches such as a conversational method that involves an open-ended structure that is flexible enough to accommodate principles of native oral traditions, and is thus differentiated from a more traditional interview process. Conversation as a method is unlike standard structured or semi-structured interviews that place parameters on the research participant’s narrative. An open-structured conversational method shows respect for the participant’s story and allows research participants greater control over what they wish to share with respect to the research question. (p. 124)

The leadership of each of the four collaborating programs identified individuals whom they felt would best represent their program and would be best suited to share their story about their curriculum development processes. These individuals included immersion teachers, program managers, site supervisors, and even curriculum developers. For the New Kituwah Academy I spoke with both the program administrative staff and selected immersion teachers. At the Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program, I spoke with the Jemez Pueblo’s Education Director, the Head Start Director, the management team, and the entire immersion teaching team. For the Lakota Language Immersion Program Elementary Track, I spoke with the program leadership, the curriculum development team, and selected immersion teachers. At the

Wicoie Nandagikendan, I spoke with the board of directors, the program administrative staff, and the entire immersion teaching team.

For two of the collaborating programs, Walatowa Head Start and Wicoie Nandagikendan, I conducted onsite visits. One program, the New Kituwah Academy, gave me a virtual tour of an immersion classroom via video conferencing technology, and I got a tour of their entire school building when I was in town for another purpose. The other program, Lakota Language Immersion Elementary Track, sent pictures of their immersion classroom and included a presentation with their classroom setup and learning materials. I was also able to include classroom observations and teacher planning time observations as I worked with each program. Originally, I had included teacher planning time observations as part of my research protocol that I had submitted to the IRB. In the two programs that I visited in person, I was able to observe the planning time of the teachers as they developed their lesson plans and prepared learning materials. One program, New Kituwah Academy, gave me a virtual view of their planning materials along with an oral description, and the program leadership graciously gave me a full tour of each classroom and their school building, even though students were already out of school at that time. The other program, Lakota Language Immersion, gave me an oral description of their planning process.

When I was onsite with two of the programs, the program leadership invited me to observe each of their classrooms to see the immersion teachers in action as they implemented curriculum, both the visible curriculum documented on their lesson plans and the hidden curriculum that emerged through conversations with the children and the children's interests as they went about their day. I was told by program leadership in both programs that I could not truly understand their curriculum development process unless I saw how they implemented their



curriculum in their immersion classrooms. It was such an honor to be invited into these sacred spaces where their languages are alive and thriving. As I listened to teacher-child interactions completely in each Indigenous language, I got the strong sense that in these classrooms, the language was wrapped around each child, like a hug. It was amazing to see language transmission in action from one generation to the next.

In order to get a complete picture of the curriculum stories shared, I also asked each participating individual if they could share any documentation they used as part of their curriculum development process. These documents included program brochures, articles about the program, family handbooks, curriculum maps, curriculum themes, worksheets, PowerPoint files, handouts for families, videos, classroom pictures, curriculum work plans, daily classroom schedules, and lesson plans. For each program, these documents looked different, however, program leadership and the participating individuals determined the documents to be reviewed. For instance, with the New Kituwah Academy, the program shared with me several lesson plans, examples of learning activities, teacher's reflective journal entries, and the program's website. Regarding the Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program, the program staff shared with me their parent handbook, school readiness goals framework, lesson plans, curriculum maps, daily schedules, and samples of learning activities. With the Lakota Language Immersion Program Elementary Track, the program shared their comprehensive website which includes a multitude of multimedia learning activities and lesson plans as well as program reports and sample learning materials. Then, the Wicoie Nandagikendan program shared with me their curriculum map, lesson plans, daily schedules, program newsletters to families, sample learning activities, and videos developed for children. For a complete list of each program's shared documents related to curriculum development, see the Appendix (pages 315-324).

Beyond just documentation, data collection from within my Kiowa research methodology included cultural elements, such as making an introduction, sharing about my family and where I come from, sharing a meal, entering a space respectfully, acknowledging the land that we are on, and offering something in return for the time taken to share with me. As I traveled, I started each individual journey with my own smoking ceremony, the term that I use for what many people call “smudging,” which involves burning dry cedar or sage and blessing oneself with the smoke. My own internal acknowledgement of both the place and people that I would interact with included burning our sacred Kiowa Longhorn Mountain cedar and asking for Daw-K’ee to guide the journey, the conversations, and ultimately, the stories that would be shared.

My data collection process included having conversations with each participating individual in order to hear their stories of curriculum development, being invited onsite and into the immersion classrooms of the participating programs to make my own observations, gathering documentation determined by the program as integral to understanding their curriculum process, and I even had the opportunity to conduct a sharing circle. Tachine, Yellow Bird, and Cabrera (2016) presented an approach for data collection they called sharing circles, as an approach inspired by Archibald’s (2008) ISW, which could be compared to a focus group, though much more conversational, grounded in the Indigenous knowledge of the individuals who participated.

With regards to the data analysis piece, I still could not authentically use any of the methods presented in the Western academy as sound data analysis approaches. Instead, I had to retrain my brain to think of research in my particular context and reframe the way that I saw analysis. Wilson (2008) shared that the researcher’s interpretation of knowledge “must be respectful of and help to build the relationships that have been established through the process of finding out information...Respect, reciprocity and responsibility are key features of any healthy

relationship and must be included in an Indigenous methodology” (p. 77). According to Kovach (2010), “the more conventional analysis of research is a reductive way of knowing, and contrasts with Indigenous epistemologies that are non-fragmentary and holistic. This is where there is a fundamental divergence between Indigenous and analytically based Western research” (p. 131). Instead of taking apart the stories that were shared with me, I had to look to my Kiowa knowledge and my Kiowa methodology to inform my analysis or meaning making.

In Indigenous research, historically, “analysis means observing patterns and behaviors and making sense of those observations” (Kovach, 2010, p. 131). When interpreting the meaning of Indigenous stories, Kovach (2010) asserted that “the patterns and observations were highly contextualized and particular, and did not assume that this knowledge could be or should be generalized to other instances” (p. 131). Kovach (2010) continued to elaborate on Indigenous analysis approaches by stating that “interpreting meaning from stories that do not fragment or decontextualize the knowledge they hold is more challenging” (p. 131). In order to address this challenge, according to Kovach (2010), “some Indigenous researchers have incorporated a mixed-method approach that offers both interpretive meaning-making and some form of thematic analysis” (p. 131). Dr. Amanda Tachine (2015) used a mixed methods analysis approach combining Archibald’s Indigenous Storywork and qualitative narrative analysis to conduct her analysis of students’ stories and to create the metastory within her dissertation. Despite the challenges outlined by Kovach (2010) and Tachine (2015), I have decided to approach this research journey through the lens of my Kiowa research methodology and focus solely on the ways that my Kiowa knowledge informs the analysis, meaning making, and interpretation of the stories shared by each partnering program.

To complete my analysis, or interpretation, of the stories and documents shared by each program, I had to read through each written document thoroughly, take each picture and video provided and determine where it fit within the larger story, and ultimately listen to and learn from the stories shared with me. As conversations unfolded with each collaborating program's participating individuals, I had to constantly hear the patterns within the stories. When it came to interpreting the stories shared, I had to approach each program individually, from their own context. This is why I had to be prepared going into each session with as much background knowledge as possible about each program. And this is why I have spent so much time sharing both my data collection and analysis as part of each location in my Kiowa research methodology. In order to properly be able to hear the stories that each individual wanted to share, I had to have a foundational knowledge of each program's own tribal knowledge as well as where the program fit within the larger context of their Tribal Nation's language revitalization efforts. One phrase stood out to me along the way which dealt with the way to make meaning from stories that are shared: "the old way, you had to really think...you had to figure it out, they wouldn't give you the answer, you had to figure it out" (Archibald, 2008, p. 10). Through this piece of wisdom, Archibald (2008) imparted her knowledge and interpretation that speaks to the long tradition among Indigenous peoples of story sharing as well as an approach to analysis. As a Kiowa woman, I have experienced this type of meaning making through hearing stories growing up and even when asking questions of my elder mentors where instead of a direct response, the elder mentor addresses my question through telling a story. Over time, I have learned to be patient and that when I am listening to Indigenous stories, I must take off my Western academic lens and instead listen to each story with my Kiowa heart, mind, and soul. I am expected to walk around within the story and find my own interpretation of the wisdom shared by the storyteller. In this

way, when it comes to Indigenous stories, whether one is the listener or the storyteller, there are elements of both data collection and analysis embedded within each story.

In order to find the meaning within each story that was shared with me, I used an element of Kiowa oral tradition. After repeatedly listening to each individual story I had recorded, I then went to one of my elder mentors and one of my fellow graduate students, and I shared the story as I have heard it. I recorded my telling of the story orally. When I was back at my desk, I listened to myself telling the story, and I listened for the major story elements that stood out to me, primarily those elements that are a part of the Kiowa genre of individual and collective experiences. Within this genre, the structure of the story as it is told orally includes a beginning event such as “my brother was driving to Lawton,” then includes a description of the events that happened along the way, and the story ends with the main event that occurred. Kiowa stories always end with the saying “oh-bah-hah yahn hiy-gyah-daw” (that is all I know about that). While there are many other genres of Kiowa stories, I focused on being true to this particular genre where I needed to retell the individual and collective experiences of each of the collaborating programs as I have interpreted them. With this story structure as my guide, I used my oral recordings—those of my conversations with each individual who worked with me, and those recordings of myself telling each program’s story to someone else—and I wrote out the story as I have interpreted it, as I have heard it told to me. See Location 3, Stories 7, 8, 9, and 10 to read the four program stories of curriculum development that resulted from this approach.

Smith (1999), in her seminal work on decolonizing research methodologies with a focus on Indigenous knowledge, shared that “Indigenous researchers speak of the long-term relationships which are established and extend beyond a research relationship to one involving families, communities, organizations, and networks” (p. 15). I knew that I had to be respectful

and be appropriate in conducting this research since the relationships that I established will extend far beyond this particular research project. Part of the relational accountability aspect of Indigenous research axiology and methodology is that I will need to ensure that the analysis and interpretation of this research

reaches the people who have helped make it. Two important ways not always addressed by scientific research are to do with reporting back to the people and sharing knowledge. Both ways assume a principle of reciprocity and feedback...sharing knowledge is also a long-term commitment. (Smith, 1999, p. 16)

With respect for these research relationships, and to remain true to my own epistemology as well as the approach provided by ISW, I proceeded with the dissemination of this study's results in a way that represents an Indigenous way of doing things. Each of the items I prepared for each program represents the way that I am remaining true to both the TBPR approach as well as the seven principles of ISW. Through first giving the individuals who shared their stories with me the opportunity to review their own words and offer any corrections or revisions, I am demonstrating reverence, inter-relatedness, synergy, and wholism. Additionally, I provided the executive summaries of each collaborating program, included in the Appendix, and I will provide a copy of the final dissertation as requested by each program's leadership. Through ensuring that each program has tailored reports and presentations available to use as they see fit, I am doing my part to show respect, reciprocity, and responsibility to each collaborating program.

Through this process, I have had to co-construct knowledge, both through my own lived experiences as I worked to gather the stories of each collaborating program, and through

listening to and interpreting the lived experiences of the individuals representing their particular program. Kovach (2010) asserted that

in co-creating knowledge, story is not only a means for hearing another's narrative, it also invites reflexivity into research. Through reflexive story there is opportunity to express the researcher's inward knowing. Sharing one's own story is an aspect of co-constructing knowledge from an Indigenous perspective. (p. 100)

Not only did I share my story with each of the individuals who shared their story of curriculum development with me, but I also have taken time to share my story as I wrote this dissertation. In this way I have approached the analysis and interpretation piece of this dissertation research journey through my Kiowa eyes and through the Kiowa research methodology I have defined to guide the process. By sharing my story along the way, I am able to remain true to my own ways of knowing as well as maintain integrity within ISW. As I completed each piece of this process of information gathering, meaning making, and sharing, I used the principles of ISW as reminders of the analytic approach that I took in each step of this research journey. Using these principles reminded me of the multiple dimensions of making meaning from our stories of lived individual and collective experiences, even as I interpreted the collaborating programs' stories from a Kiowa lens.

Now that I have explained my Kiowa research methodology, which includes adhering to the principles of ISW along the way, and my approaches towards data collection and data analysis in this dissertation, I continue with sharing my understanding of the curriculum development process in Indigenous early childhood language immersion programs.

## **Story 6: Understanding Early Childhood Curriculum Development in the Context of Language Revitalization and Immersion Education**

### **Introduction**

Beginning facing the sacred direction of the east, I made my introductions of self and each of the collaborating programs. I started this journey, through emergence, by first affirming my connection to this topic, explaining the Indigenous knowledge that provides the foundation for this storywork. Next, I journeyed to the second sacred direction, the south, the challenges that are faced, where I explained the painful history of the clash of Indigenous cultures with Western conquerors and the ramifications of those events, including the loss of Indigenous languages, which necessitated Indigenous language revitalization efforts. Now, I turn towards the third sacred direction, the west, where this journey takes us towards transcendence. At this location in my dissertation story, I share my interpretation of Indigenous research methodology, culturally sustaining curriculum development, and ultimately, the four stories of curriculum development that emerged through my interactions with the four collaborating programs.

Initially proposed in Location 1, Story 2, I reaffirm my two overarching research questions that guided this dissertation journey: (1) How do Indigenous early childhood immersion programs develop and implement culturally sustaining curriculum? and (2) What is the story that emerges as Indigenous early childhood immersion programs develop and implement culturally sustaining curriculum? As a reminder, my sub-questions are: (a) What is the planning process that guides the implementation of Indigenous early childhood immersion culturally sustaining learning experiences? and (b) What is the process that underlies the development of culturally sustaining pedagogy in Indigenous early childhood immersion programs?



In order to inform this journey as Location 3—Transcendence as encountered within the Kiowa Encampment Story Circle research methodology, I need to lay a foundation for understanding the overarching context within which the curriculum development process within Indigenous early childhood language immersion programs is situated. This is the story of the evolution of my understanding of curriculum development through the lens of my experiences in developing a Kiowa-specific, values-based, thematic curriculum.

### **From Culturally Relevant to Culturally Responsive Curriculum**

First, referring back to the story I presented in Location 1, Story 1, I knew that my team and I needed a Kiowa-specific, culturally connected curriculum that reflected our own Kiowa values as well as the goals that Kiowa elders and the children's families had for children's learning in our child care center. What I knew that we needed, I could not articulate at the time. Also, there was just not the time in the day to do the in-depth research needed to explore all the concepts. I started out by exploring curriculum for early childhood, specifically looking at ways that curriculum development had been approached by schools and early childhood programs that serve diverse communities, such as tribally operated schools or other Indigenous early childhood programs. As I explored the literature, I found two terms used often: culturally relevant and culturally responsive. These seemed to be hot topics in early childhood at the time, so I explored all available literature around these two terms. I found that it all started with a trend towards culturally-relevant, then culturally-responsive curriculum in the early 2000s. Then, over time, educators in the United States started to explore the ways that their classrooms, primarily in public school settings, could be increasingly accommodating to students from diverse backgrounds.

Culturally-responsive practice is an educational strategy intended to address diversity in schools in the U.S. As the student population becomes increasingly racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse, and as the diversity of the teacher workforce decreases, researchers have found that there is an ever-increasing need for teacher professional development, especially around curriculum and assessment practices, that build skills in early childhood multicultural and multilingual educational settings (Calderon, 2008; Cohen, 2013; Duran, 2015; Espinosa, 2005; Gorham, 2013; Simangan, 2012). Over time, more scholars added to the literature specific to curriculum development and curriculum implementation. Souto-Manning and Mitchell (2010) found that the development and implementation of culturally responsive practices by preschool teachers positively impacted children's identity development, including the acknowledgement and appreciation of cultural differences as well as the integration of the home culture in the classroom. Nolan (2013) stated that implementing culturally responsive curriculum continues to be a challenge for early childhood teachers because "what teachers learn in preservice training focuses on how to teach and what to teach. New teachers are equipped with this pedagogical knowledge when they enter the profession and often have trouble seeing beyond these more technical aspects of teaching" (p. 57). Several scholars addressed curriculum implementation for racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students through the lens of culturally responsive practice and pedagogy (Durden et al., 2015; Griner & Stewart, 2012) and asserted that these approaches could help to address the achievement gap as well as support children's social development. Despite these findings, I still wanted to know specifically about curriculum development in early childhood, focused on Indigenous immersion settings. As more studies were conducted, the definition of culturally responsive practices expanded and became more focused on the implications for Indigenous students.

The work of Dr. Tarajeau Yazzie-Mintz has been especially inspiring along my journey of exploring curriculum development for Indigenous early childhood language immersion programs. Her foundational work with Navajo language immersion teachers has contributed immensely to the literature specifically focused on Indigenous curriculum development in early childhood settings. Yazzie (2002) indicated the teacher's identity, motivation, and beliefs about teaching inform the development and implementation of culturally appropriate curriculum. Yazzie (2002) also asserted that pedagogy, curriculum content, and the learning environment are also key factors in implementing culturally appropriate curriculum. In a follow-up study several years later, Yazzie-Mintz (2007) found that the manner of instruction is equally important as the curriculum content in classrooms serving Indigenous students and determined it is the teacher's background and "acquired cultural knowledge" (p. 80) that are essential to developing a culturally appropriate curriculum. Teachers in Indigenous immersion schools should be mindful of their own Indigenous identity, have awareness of their own philosophy of teaching and learning, be intentional in selecting content and instructional methods, provide opportunities for learners to engage in culturally appropriate curriculum activities, and also ensure that learners meet the established criteria for school success as defined by their school district (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). Yazzie-Mintz (2007) went on to say that it was "rare to find a teacher who fulfills all of these characteristics simultaneously. Also elusive is the process by which teachers become conscious of their social, cultural, and political location within the field of education and the lives of their students" (p. 91). Yazzie-Mintz (2007) argued that culturally appropriate curriculum is "appropriate because the content, pedagogy, and participants are deeply shaped by a shared knowledge" (p. 87). Through her qualitative study, Yazzie-Mintz (2007) explored the implementation of Indigenous pedagogy and curriculum development using Indigenous

epistemologies in elementary school settings. Her findings from this study reiterated the importance of reflective practice, the need for teachers to be aware of the specific cultural and social contexts in which their students live as well as the need for intentional curriculum development that incorporates culturally appropriate practice (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). I remember reading this study and highlighting areas that were applications of theory to practice that I could then use to work with my own teachers in our child care classrooms.

Another one of Dr. Yazzie-Mintz's qualitative studies provided an exploration of teacher perspectives on early childhood classroom instruction using Indigenous language and culture (Yazzie-Mintz, 2011). Dr. Yazzie-Mintz proposed the development and implementation of Indigenous culture-based curriculum as an alternative to the standards-based curriculum and calls for school reform that were the hot topics at that time. The implications of this study included some possible avenues for the development of culture-based curriculum specific to the Indigenous students represented. Additionally, she outlined promising practices for early childhood teachers in the development and implementation of culturally relevant curriculum (Yazzie-Mintz, 2011). In this study Indigenous knowledge was embedded into an early childhood education curriculum to be used at an Indigenous immersion school (Yazzie-Mintz, 2011). These findings represent foundational studies in applying culturally appropriate curriculum to Indigenous early childhood immersion settings. I was so excited to read Dr. Yazzie-Mintz's 2011 paper as I was inspired to think of the ways that our own Kiowa knowledge could be embedded in the curriculum we were developing. Even though we were not at the level of a full-day, full-immersion program, I felt this study and its implications, including the promising practices identified, could contribute greatly to the way we thought about structuring

our Kiowa language immersion sessions in the context of a larger, Kiowa knowledge-based curriculum.

There were other scholars who had also explored culturally-responsive curriculum development for implementation in Indigenous settings. Gilliard and Moore (2007) found that teachers who effectively implemented Indigenous culture within their classroom curricula then “described their part in honoring and perpetuating the day-to-day rituals, routines, and beliefs of the place in which they lived” (p. 254) where three categories emerged: respect, belongingness and community, and family values and beliefs. Matyska (2011) summarized culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy succinctly where key characteristics were respect, communication, cultural understanding, development of classroom materials and activities that acknowledge the cultural background of students, modeling empathy, relationship-based, clear expectations, and taking into account “culturally responsive considerations” (p. 175). In this conceptualization of curriculum, the focus was on high-school teachers and students in the Menominee Nation. Jacob and colleagues (2018) advocated for the use of culturally responsive curriculum to support the cultural identity development of Indigenous students in public education settings.

The various constructs within culturally-responsive teaching in early childhood education included the use of Indigenous or local child-rearing practices, respect for the diversity of languages and ethnicities represented in the classroom, and utilizing a variety of community resources (Modica et al., 2010). Curriculum development in Indigenous early childhood programs includes learning activities grounded in the context of children’s family environment, their cultural values as well as inclusive of family member and elder perspectives (Gilliard & Moore, 2007). An effective curriculum should include cultural nuances, such as historical

traditions of storytelling from Indigenous cultures (Inglebret et al., 2008). In another study, MacFarlane et al. (2008) worked towards developing a national curriculum framework that was culturally responsive to the Maori people in New Zealand and found that the cultural constructs that emerged to be included in the curriculum were “cultural identity (collective and individual), establishing and maintaining relationships, holistic understandings of human development and learning, and the need for active engagement and participation in learning through having a sense of belonging and a place to stand” (p. 123). In an insightful literature review on socially, culturally, and linguistically responsive education, Lee (2015) asserted there is an increasing movement among Tribal Nations in the U.S. to reclaim their educational self-determination through the passage of tribal laws to support the socially, culturally, and linguistically responsive education of Indigenous students as well as increasing the availability of tribally-operated charter schools to serve Indigenous students. Whitinui (2010) described the need for a culturally responsive learning environment be designed for “culturally connected learners” (p. 20) with a focus on implementing “cultural standards for learning” (p. 20). Whitinui (2010) explained schools should focus on establishing “culturally preferred learning contexts” (p. 21) that are grounded in relationality. Whitinui used the term “Indigenous-based inclusive pedagogy” (p. 3) to describe the intersection of culturally preferred curriculum and culturally connected learners.

In summary, culturally relevant means that the curriculum is relevant to the learner’s context. Culturally responsive means that the curriculum allows for intentional interaction between the teacher and learner in a way that is supportive of the learner’s own cultural identity. Culturally appropriate curriculum has come to mean that the curriculum is appropriate for the learner, the teacher, and the setting in which the learning occurs. All three of these terms have been applied to Indigenous language immersion curriculum approaches.

Given these studies and findings, I was very interested in the development of curriculum for Indigenous early childhood settings. There were several studies that explored the specific elements that made a curriculum culturally responsive. Despite these findings, many were specific to one Indigenous community or were attempts to generalize across several communities. I realized that I needed to find out which Kiowa-specific elements should be included in our curriculum being developed. In developing a curriculum for our early childhood classrooms, I knew that we could not just complete a direct translation of all of the *Creative Curriculum* (Teaching Strategies, 2011) or *Teaching Strategies GOLD* (Teaching Strategies, 2010) learning activities, for instance. Given the research I had reviewed, I knew that in order to be truly culturally responsive, we needed to drill down to the specific values that made us Kiowa. This idea launched a process that would take the next year and a half.

### **Indigenous Pedagogy**

As I learned through exploring the literature, pedagogy must be considered in curriculum development and in curriculum implementation. In the Kiowa perspective, teaching and learning are like the back of the hand and the palm of the hand: they go together, there are just different aspects and attributes to each. *Maw-hay-maw* is defined as studying to learn something, or having someone instruct you on something, and it also means teaching others a skill – this would be the root word for a Kiowa understanding of pedagogy. *Maw-hay-maw* is also the root word for the implementation of curriculum and speaks to an understanding that the experience of the learner is just as important as the intentionality of the teacher. Despite the assertion of a definition of pedagogy in the Matyska (2011) study, I counter with my own understanding of pedagogy as I have applied the term in my work and career: Pedagogy is the intersection of curriculum and instruction. It is where the teacher enacts the curriculum. And it is where the

teacher and the student engage across multiple levels and in many ways. If pedagogy is critical to the authentic implementation of Indigenous language immersion curriculum in early childhood settings, I needed to know more about exactly how to work with my teachers to understand what pedagogy truly means and how they can use that knowledge in their classrooms.

Indigenous pedagogy emerged as an important component of both implementing and developing culturally-relevant, culturally-responsive, and even culturally-appropriate curriculum. Hall (2003) conducted a qualitative dissertation study on teacher's perspectives on teaching Indigenous language immersion classes for children in various Montana tribes. One category that emerged from the data collection was the importance of teaching methodology and pedagogy in Indigenous immersion settings (Hall, 2003). The insights of the language teachers were valuable to understanding how their language teaching philosophy influenced their daily teaching practices. While this study provides additional support for Indigenous language immersion programs, the study did not focus on curriculum development, instead, pedagogical beliefs and teaching methods were volunteered by the teachers being interviewed and additional data was not collected specifically around how the curriculum was developed in their immersion classrooms. In another study, Kukahiko (2014) explored the implementation of Indigenous pedagogy in the context of a culturally-responsive math curriculum. In their exploratory study, Marin and Bang (2015) engaged teachers in discussions that sought to build awareness of how teachers develop their own pedagogical understandings in the context of culturally relevant pedagogy through the use of Indigenous storywork as their methodology.

Another construct that has been applied to Indigenous education settings is critical pedagogy. For me, critical pedagogy is all about not just passively accepting the status quo, it is about considering the multiple contexts and multiple realities in which students and teachers find



themselves. There has been some work over the past decade in exploring the application of critical pedagogy as a construct to Indigenous people, or rather, to be inclusive of Indigenous knowledge. Johnson (2012) argued for the need for a place-based pedagogy that is both representative and respectful of Indigenous people and the inherent struggles they face. The idea of an Indigenous Emancipatory Pedagogy was defined by Green (2009) as crucial to understanding the shift from their Indigenous language to English and to build a pedagogy specific for language learning to be used as part of the language revitalization process. This Indigenous scholar used Indigenous Emancipatory Pedagogy as a research process to establish community grounded language revitalization goals as a way to understand and work through their language shift process and understand the various domains of language use as part of that process. Despite the focus on Indigenous pedagogy, the process of curriculum development was not specifically addressed in these studies. The literature showed that this concept of Indigenous pedagogy has been explored, but very superficially. In early childhood classrooms, young children are in the beginning developmental stages of their lives, and any curriculum and instruction, in essence, the pedagogy, needs to be reflective of the children's own developmental needs as well as respectful of the children's family, community, and Indigenous contexts. I needed to know more about what curriculum development looks like in Indigenous early childhood immersion settings.

**Curriculum Development for Indigenous Programs**

I began asking: how do Indigenous programs – Head Start, child care, pre-k, immersion schools, tribally operated schools, charter schools, Bureau of Indian Education schools – develop their curriculum? What makes the curriculum in Indigenous programs different? What does curriculum development look like in Indigenous early childhood settings? Approaching curriculum theory and curriculum development from a Western academic lens, the work of

Walker and Soltis (2009) informed me that curriculum goes beyond what is written down to include the way that teachers implement the curriculum, make curriculum decisions within interactions with the students, and the actual activities that are conducted in classrooms. Curriculum also includes the intent of the curriculum, the organizational structure, the content as well as the learning activities implemented. With this as a foundation, I began to explore how curriculum has been conceptualized and developed for use with Indigenous students, by Indigenous teachers.

As I explored the literature on curriculum development, I found that curriculum development as part of language revitalization programs was explored from the lens of other Indigenous researchers writing their dissertations (Begay, 2016; Gauci, 2016; Nagle, 2004; Shenandoah, 2006) and was driven by Indigenous people themselves wanting to know more about the curriculum development process (Romero-Little, 2010). Some studies focused on how families were engaged in contributing feedback to the curriculum development process (Gilliard & Moore, 2007). Other scholars have looked at curriculum development grounded in Indigenous knowledge through the lens of critical pedagogy (Wood & Hedges, 2016) and place-based pedagogy (Gauci, 2016; Johnson, 2012), and even through “second language pedagogy for endangered languages” (Hinton, 2011, p. 317). Some scholars have even looked at curriculum development through models they developed, like a culturally responsive framework (Inglebret et al., 2008). There are scholars who looked at curriculum development through the lens of working with Indigenous middle and high school age students (Torres, 2014), and through the contributions of elders’ Indigenous knowledge to a culturally responsive K-12 curriculum (Holt, 2016). Through this exploratory work, my understanding of curriculum expanded to include the terms culturally relevant, culturally responsive, and even culturally based curriculum. Embedded

within the literature on curriculum development in Indigenous early childhood settings, I also found reference to Indigenous language immersion instructional approaches and implications for implementing curriculum in immersion settings (Hinton, 2011; Lipka et al., 2005). Reinhardt (2017) asserted that a curriculum for Indigenous students should not just include the Indigenous language; instead, the curriculum needs to also incorporate “traditional cultural characteristics” (p. 9), including looking at teacher-child interaction, acknowledgement of Indigenous spirituality, community participation, and the social values of the community. One interesting aspect of this heavily practitioner-focused article, Reinhardt (2017) presented a series of tools that Indigenous immersion teachers might find useful as they develop curriculum and implement curriculum in their immersion classrooms. The tools mentioned are primarily adaptations of mainstream or general education tools used for bilingual education and dual-language learning that have been adapted in various settings for use in Indigenous immersion classrooms. Gerde and colleagues (2012) found that in Indigenous Head Start classrooms, “perhaps one of the most important findings of this study was that in all classrooms cultural content was considered additive to the classroom curriculum rather than embedded into children's classroom investigations” (p. 55). This particular study demonstrates the need for further documentation of how successful programs develop and implement their Indigenous knowledge into their early childhood classrooms.

I remember finding one study that really made me rethink my conceptualization of curriculum development, specifically in Indigenous immersion settings. Through developing a curriculum for use in Yup'ik immersion settings, Webster and Yanez (2007) found that by working with elders and cultural knowledge keepers within the Yup'ik community, teachers were able to incorporate the genre of traditional Yup'ik oral storytelling to teach math concepts

to elementary students. This study used the terms *culturally based curriculum* to illustrate the math curriculum that was developed was inclusive of the cultural values of the Yup'ik culture as well as being grounded in the Yup'ik tradition of oral storytelling as a way to engage children in cultural exploration within the context of discovering math concepts. For Webster and Yanez (2007), the curriculum included inquiry-based activities, cultural activities, and called for the use of *culturally based pedagogy* so that the teachers could intentionally use the traditional Yup'ik way of instruction—modeling—in implementing the math lessons. This study inspired me to think beyond the Western conceptualization of developmentally appropriate early childhood curriculum development and think critically about what a Kiowa-specific curriculum would look like for use in Kiowa language immersion settings.

As shared in Location 1, Story 1, my team and I had begun the work of gathering information about our own Kiowa understanding of child development and child-rearing practices. We formalized this process through conducting surveys to the children's family members at our center, and then through surveys shared throughout the various Kiowa communities. We wanted to essentially give as many Kiowa people as we could the opportunity to weigh in on this process. The particular information we were interested in was the understandings and the goals that Kiowa people today see as important to Kiowa children's development and learning. So, not only did we have information that we had gathered from our tribal elders and fluent speakers on traditional children's songs, stories, games, activities, but also we had information from Kiowa parents today, including the parents of the children in our care at our center. All of these elements combined to become a list of goals, priorities, purposes for children – essentially, the information taken together represented the vision that Kiowa people today have for Kiowa children. My teaching team and I worked closely with our partners

at the University of Oklahoma, including linguistics, Kiowa language instructors, and instructional designers to synthesize the information we had gathered over the course of a year and a half. Please refer to my co-authored chapter in Hokanson, Clinton, and Tracey's *The Design of Learning Experience: Creating the Future of Educational Technology* (Calton, Ge, Redbird-Post and Wang, 2015) titled "The Kiowa language and culture revitalization program: Designing a community-based learning model for an endangered language" for additional information on the process we took to get started. In all the literature I had read on gathering community input when developing a curriculum for Indigenous settings, the element of gathering community input was always mentioned almost as a sidebar. In reality, it took us nearly two years to gather enough input that we felt we had cast a wide net.

Over the course of reviewing the literature, I became increasingly interested in the terminology used by the various scholars. Those scholars who were focused on diverse learners in general used more generic terms such as culturally relevant and culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy. Once I dug into the literature specific to Indigenous education, scholars used the terms Indigenous pedagogy, culture-based curriculum, culturally preferred curriculum, and even culturally connected curriculum. However, none of these scholars and studies tackled curriculum development in Indigenous early childhood language immersion programs through the lens of culturally sustaining curriculum, pedagogy, and practice.

### **Culturally Sustaining Curriculum Development and Pedagogy**

Through their work, Indigenous scholars have conceptualized culturally sustaining pedagogy to apply specifically to Indigenous early childhood language immersion programs due to the focus on revitalizing historical ways of knowing and ensuring their continued relevance (McCarty & Lee, 2014; Yazzie-Mintz, 2011). I really appreciated one study in particular that

clearly defined what I was trying to conceptualize as I worked with my team to develop our Kiowa-specific curriculum. McCarty and Lee (2014) proposed the use of the terms *culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy* as a way to think critically about the way teachers engage with students in Indigenous language immersion programs. McCarty and Lee (2014) also broached the topic of community-based accountability in the work of curriculum development and pedagogy exploration in Indigenous immersion education settings. The McCarty and Lee (2014) study takes the research on culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching and applies it to an Indigenous context, grounded within the history of colonization with a lens of revitalizing the heritage languages and traditional cultures which were disrupted with the clash of imperialism and the westward expansion of the United States government. Situating an Indigenous conceptualization of culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy within education sovereignty, McCarty and Lee (2014) claimed that culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy includes three distinct threads: (1) To provide a mechanism for Indigenous educators to revitalize the traditions that were disrupted; (2) To assert accountability at a community level; and (3) To incorporate the “four Rs of respect, reciprocity, responsibility and relationships” (McCarty and Lee, 2014, p. 112) within the educational approaches utilized. Drawing inspiration from this study, I used the definition provided by the study authors to guide my exploration into the topic of curriculum development. I will be using the terms *culturally sustaining pedagogy* and *culturally-sustaining curriculum* when referring to the focus of my dissertation research journey.

Based on all of this knowledge gained, I defined culturally sustaining curriculum development as the set of procedures that comprises the planning and implementation of learning activities that are culturally appropriate and reflective of the Indigenous worldview of the children being served. Culturally sustaining curriculum is an essential element of effective

Indigenous language immersion programs, especially when the interplay between language and culture is grounded in the traditional ways of knowing of the Tribal Nation engaged in revitalizing their language and culture (McCarty & Lee, 2014; Redbird-Post, 2019; Yazzie-Mintz, 2011).

After gathering initial input from the children's families, our Kiowa elders, fluent Kiowa speakers, our cultural knowledge keepers, and tribal members in general, we then started pulling all the information together to look for themes and priorities. Then, we started holding what we called family nights, where we would invite our children's family members as well as Kiowa elders, speakers, and even our tribal leadership to attend. During these family nights, we provided a meal, and then we would go over the information we had gathered and ask questions of those present, almost like a focus group, or what I would call a story sharing circle from an Indigenous perspective. Over the course of nearly a year, we refined the key areas that would eventually become themes of our curriculum. In the end, with the help of all of our partners, both individuals and community partners, we defined six key themes that would shape our curriculum. Once those themes were finalized, our teaching team began to work with our elders and fluent speakers with input from the children's family members to develop specific learning activities that would correspond to each theme. Just as with the themes themselves, the learning activities were aligned with our Kiowa values and followed the progress of Kiowa children's development. Example activities included singing a Kiowa lullaby and hearing the story that was related or learning how to play the Kiowa handgame. Each activity was embedded in the understanding that they would be delivered completely in the Kiowa language. The curriculum itself could be considered emergent, since it was always evolving, and never completely finished. We had activities that we did that were differentiated across the different age groups we served;

and how those activities actually ended up being experienced by the children depended on how the teacher delivered the activity and how the child engaged with the activity. So, once we had a framework to build from, we were able to actually go about the work of implementing our curriculum. I remember how excited my teachers were to finally, officially, write their first lesson plans with our final curriculum themes. I remember the teaching team's commitment and drive to research the cultural and historical information needed for their activities, and their perseverance to continue to work to elicit the language they needed from our fluent speakers and elder mentors. In the end, that curriculum development experience was not just for a small group of teachers and the 30-plus children in care, but that curriculum had become the Kiowa community's curriculum. And, in essence, it represented the work and voices of all those elders who had contributed. Unfortunately, there were some elders who had contributed early in the process who did not make it to see the finished product. We know that they are watching over us as we continue to honor their legacy and the voices of all those who have come before them.

We utilized reflective practice and continuous quality improvement as methods to improve the curriculum – the themes remained the same, but the activities were refined to be more intentional, and as Kiowa language scripts were developed for use in each activity the Kiowa immersion sessions grew to be more complex and allowed for more authentic exploration by the children. The entire process motivated my whole team to become more self-reflective, and as we began to think in increasingly metacognitive and metalinguistic ways, we were more inspired to conduct different activities with the children that were grounded in Kiowa ways of knowing and delivered in traditional Kiowa ways, through the use of modeling, observation, and hands-on inquiry.



Even though I initially conceptualized this curriculum as being learner-centered and socially constructed, when the initial process was complete where we had the themes and were implementing the curriculum for the first year, I stepped back and reflected that our curriculum was actually Indigenous-focused. Our curriculum was culturally sustaining. Most importantly, our curriculum went beyond learner-centered approaches and social construction theory. Our curriculum flew right through the boundary of the linear and relational worldviews and emerged on the other side in a fully Indigenous knowledge-based conceptualization.

I am not saying that I know what it is like to teach in a full-day immersion classroom for 10 years. I have the utmost respect for those teachers who do that every day. I am just saying that this is where the inspiration for this entire dissertation came from – undergoing the process of developing a Kiowa-specific curriculum caused me to explore the literature and become more informed about what other Indigenous scholars have said about developing early childhood curriculum for Indigenous language immersion settings. And, through this process of exploration, I came across many other Tribal Nations who have similar goals for implementing their own Indigenous language immersion programs in early childhood settings, and all of them ask the same questions that my teaching team and I asked – How do you develop curriculum for language immersion classrooms? The short answer through the lens of my personal experience was – it takes time, patience, and commitment to see it through. However, I know that those questions are still being asked, in different ways. It was through this entire process of discovery that I began to ask – what does culturally sustaining curriculum development look like in Indigenous immersion programs? Specifically, what does culturally sustaining curriculum development look like in those Indigenous early childhood immersion programs who have successfully implemented full-day, full immersion programs?

As seen from the trends identified in recent research, Indigenous curriculum development is grounded heavily in Indigenous epistemology and has implications for culturally responsive practice as applied to Indigenous children. Yazzie-Mintz (2011) issued a challenge for immersion programs and future Indigenous scholars:

There is a need for tribally controlled schools and tribal nations to document internal processes and efforts that are based mostly on internal, local Indigenous knowledge and priorities...How do tribal nation communities stand strong in their focus to prioritize Indigenous knowledge, language, and culture, in spite of outside political, social, and economic influences? (p. 324)

I took on this challenge in the enacting of my dissertation journey – I sent a call out and four Indigenous early childhood immersion programs took up the charge and agreed to journey with me through the opportunity to share their stories of curriculum development with other tribal nations who might also be implementing or exploring language immersion as a language revitalization strategy in their communities.

### **Reflection on the Significance of this Study**

Conflicts inherent in the research include the delicate balance needed between making generalizations of Indigenous knowledge while also honoring the specific community's Indigenous ways of knowing. In order to steer away from making generalizations that would unintentionally oversimplify local epistemology, my intent was to pay careful attention to the specific ways of knowing identified by the Indigenous community or Tribal Nation who participated in this study. Additional conflicts exist in the dichotomy between developmentally-appropriate practice as identified in empirical studies on young children in early learning environments and culturally-sustaining practices implemented in Indigenous early childhood

education programs. In some cases, what is generally thought of as developmentally appropriate practice may need to be adjusted or modified in order to ensure cultural synchronicity with the Indigenous children being served in Indigenous early childhood education programs. To address this conflict, as a researcher, I designed this study to provide additional insight into the process by which teachers in Indigenous immersion programs adapt promising practices as part of their curriculum development approaches in order to be culturally-sustaining in the settings in which they teach.

Based on all of the articles and studies I read through this exploration process, there is a gap in the research on Indigenous curriculum development which highlights the need for additional studies on Indigenous curriculum development, especially in Indigenous early childhood language immersion education programs. As I explored the literature around my dissertation topic, it was my intent to provide additional insight into the process by which Indigenous knowledge is incorporated into early childhood education curriculum. Further, I hope to shed light on methods of pedagogical implementation that are relevant to the Indigenous ways of knowing and the specific cultural knowledge base of the Indigenous community or Tribal Nation of interest. It is imperative that additional information be gathered in the field of Indigenous early childhood education in order to continue to build a compendium of promising approaches or pedagogical practices that lead to effective program operation and contribute to positive academic outcomes for children served.

Now that I have shared the way I have come to understand the progression of culturally relevant, culturally responsive, and culturally sustaining curriculum development in early childhood education programs, I can turn my attention to hearing the stories that emerged from the conversations and interactions I have had with the four different Indigenous early childhood

immersion programs that have agreed to collaborate on this dissertation research journey with me. As I continue forward, I keep one more question in mind: what is the story that programs want to share about their curriculum development process?

### **Story 7: “It’s About Planting That Seed...To Empower Them:” The Story of Curriculum Development at New Kituwah Academy**

The story that emerged from my conversations with the second grade Kituwah Academy Teacher and the program staff at New Kituwah Academy (NKA) made me reflect on my Kiowa Encampment Story Circle methodology and how I could make meaning from their story through the story circle.

#### **Piy-Baw-Daw (The East) – Emergence**

Following the Kiowa Story Circle methodology, I started by facing the east, and thought about emergence. I thought about the way that I built my relationship with the program staff as well as the curriculum development approach that they shared. My initial conversations with the team at NKA began with me reaching out to their program leadership, through the Kituwah Preservation and Education Program, the program that administers the New Kituwah Academy. I initially made contact through sending a formal letter of invitation to the KPEP Program Manager. After a series of conference calls and email exchanges, I was able to share additional information about my proposed research and relayed the information requested so the KPEP Program Manager could secure the necessary approvals from the administrative leadership for the Academy. Through this process, I shared several of the outreach materials that I had prepared for this particular step in this research journey. These materials included a PowerPoint presentation that I put together to explain the different pieces of my dissertation research project and the process of receiving IRB approval. I also shared my University of Oklahoma IRB

approval letter and approval application packet with all of the documents that I had attached for the data collection portion of the approach. I was able to explain the informed consent form as approved by the OU IRB as well as the informed consent process I would go through with any staff member that both agreed to and was approved to participate with me.

Before going further, the program leadership had several questions for me, including: (1) How come our school is not listed as a study site in the IRB document? (2) How many and who at our school do you want to interview? (3) What would a theory of culturally sustaining curriculum materials development look like? (4) What other theories of curriculum materials development are you looking at in the literature? (5) What is “grounded theory”? (6) What is “intentional methodology?” (7) Looks like a four-to-six hour commitment for each person that you want to interview? In the process of addressing these questions, I was also in the process of making changes to my methodology to fit into my theoretical framework for my dissertation research journey. I was able to provide responses to each question. Once I explained that the grounded theory methodology had shifted towards Indigenous Storywork as my framework grounded in my own Kiowa research methodology, the program leadership was much more inclined to allow me to work with their program.

Once I had addressed all of the questions, I was granted approval by the program leadership to include New Kituwah Academy as a collaborating program. In order to support the recruitment efforts through the program leadership, including the NKA Principal, I shared with them the documents I had prepared for recruiting immersion teachers to participate in the process. These documents included a two-page handout explaining the process of participation and what it would mean as well as a letter of invitation with further details about the dissertation study and the informed consent process. Several weeks later, program leadership made the

introductions for the staff that had agreed to work with me on this project. I was so honored to be able to collaborate with the second grade Kituwah Academy Teacher to hear her story of curriculum development for her immersion classroom.

The New Kituwah Academy is a Cherokee language immersion school that serves children ages infant through sixth grade with two units, the NKA Early Childhood unit, which serves the 0-5 year-old children and the NKA Elementary unit, which serves the kindergarten through sixth grade children. There are 65 students currently served in grades K-6 with 10 immersion teachers, called Kituwah Academy Teachers. In each immersion classroom, the certified classroom teacher is paired with a co-teacher who is a fluent Cherokee language speaker who provides support with the Cherokee language and has input in lesson planning and curriculum development. The co-teachers are called Language Specialists. The school year spans 180 days and the students attend classes for seven hours each school day.

As I got to know the staff at the New Kituwah Academy, I began to see the strong sense of pride the staff feel about their work with the students in their immersion classrooms. The Academy is a critical piece of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians' overall language revitalization approach to bringing the Cherokee language back into first language use, through starting with the youngest Cherokee tribal members. The mission statement shared to the public is as follows: "New Kituwah Academy provides a nurturing learning environment where students, staff, and families, and the community work in partnership to rekindle our language and to instill pride in being "Kituwah First" (New Kituwah Academy, 2019, para. 1). On January 22, 2015, the Academy was awarded with AdvancEd Accreditation and is listed as a private school on the National Center for Education Statistics website (New Kituwah Academy, 2019, para. 1).

The second-grade curriculum, known as ႠႫႫႫ (dideyododi) in Cherokee, included various components that were all initially designed around the specific state standards that second grade students needed to know in the state of North Carolina. Additionally, the curriculum is infused with traditional Cherokee knowledge, known as the Cherokee way of life, ႠႫႫႫ ႠႫႫႫႫႫ ႠႫႫႫႫႫ (anitsalagi unalenidasdi analenidoo) in Cherokee, and incorporates traditional and modern Cherokee values, all through an intentional immersion instruction approach. Each component of the curriculum represented a subject area of the second-grade state standards. The subject areas in the second-grade immersion classroom included the curriculum components of language arts, math, science, and social studies. This initial understanding set the stage for how I heard their story emerge.

### **Piy-K'ee (The South) – Challenges**

Thinking about the next direction in my story circle methodology, I faced the south, towards the challenges encountered by the program. Specific challenges mentioned include an ongoing struggle with the unknowns involved in teaching within an Indigenous early childhood language immersion program. There was a constant questioning of whether or not the approach was appropriate, due to the lack of resources and pedagogical supports for the Indigenous language immersion field in general. When describing the overall approach to curriculum development in her second-grade classroom, the Kituwah Academy Teacher shared the challenges she and her colleagues faced,

To give you some insight into what the process has been like at our school is like it's very experimental, a lot of these immersion programs, nothing like them has ever been done before, so we are often incorporating new techniques, and strategies, and that has

definitely been the most challenging thing, I think, for our program. (program interview, 10/29/2019)

The challenges with developing curriculum in an Indigenous early childhood immersion program were summarized with the statement “It’s an ongoing process” (program interview, 10/29/2019). For instance, regarding the math curriculum component, the Kituwah Academy Teacher expressed the difficulties faced when both developing and implementing math concepts, called ᏊᏗᏅᏍᏗ ᏊᏍᏁᏅᏍᏗ (disesdi dideloquasdi) in Cherokee,

Math is more structured, because we follow Common Core and North Carolina State Standards at our school...It’s more of like a colonial framework for learning...It looks like a more traditional colonial classroom where they have worksheets that they have to do at their desks. (program interview, 10/29/2019)

In addition, there were questions around how to approach the assessment process in an immersion setting. As students advance, there are specific developmental expectations and milestones, but at the same time, there are specific language acquisition indicators. The teacher involved expressed an ongoing struggle with how to specifically design her assessments and how to balance out all the competing priorities in the assessment process. She explained that there is a continuing struggle to identify the appropriate type of assessments to use for an immersion setting that are also age-appropriate,

My long answer is on one hand I really like portfolios since you can see the progress the students have made over the year and it’s very individualized. At the same time I have the conflict of: do I base the rubric for this student on what I know they personally are capable of or do I base it on the strongest student in class and what they’re capable of? (program interview, 10/29/2019)



There are times when expectations of student performance need to be adjusted according to the differences in the students that enter the classroom each year, as described below,

I started out this school year with very high expectations for what their social studies journals should look like because my students last year were very good artists, they were very creative...And that is just not a class that I have this year. So, I've really had to reel in my expectations for what their journals should look like and adjust it to the class.

There was a particular emphasis on being intentional with using Cherokee language immersion instruction as well as abiding by the Academy's "no English" policy, as the Kituwah Academy teacher explained why she decided not to teach English language arts with her second grade students this school year: "My whole attitude towards it was that I could survive the first 5 hours of the day in Cherokee and then I would have, I'll have that hour and a half where I could speak English. It was a crutch" (program interview, 10/29/2019). She continued to explain how the instructional environment had to reflect true immersion where children had to remain in the target language the entire school day. This struggle illuminates a challenge that Indigenous immersion schools face: whether or not to include English language instruction as children advance into higher grade levels.

Additionally, there were challenges faced regarding student's fluency progress and pressure from the students' families about assigning grades to students' work. The Kituwah Academy Teacher shared,

That's one thing we run into with the language, with the parents, if we say to the parents 'oh, your kid is struggling with the language,' they want to know 'ok, well what are their grades?' So we have to, I hate to a certain extent that we have to, do worksheets in

Cherokee Language Arts at all, but then I'm like, so, they have to have literacy skills and writing skills, anyway. (program interview, 10/29/2019)

This pressure from the children's families to give grades created an atmosphere where the immersion teachers felt obligated to create worksheets that would be seen in an English-only classroom, just translated into Cherokee. The questions that kept arising placed pressure on the second-grade teacher to balance the reality of immersion instruction with expectations from children's parents regarding assignments and grading. In the process of developing the curriculum, there were challenges identified such as the need for certain words to describe second-grade scientific concepts, called ᎠᎩ ᎠᎩᎠᎩᎠᎩ (nigav agasestanv) in Cherokee,

So of course, the challenge with that is we translate all that in my classroom, so it's like how do you translate certain words in science into Cherokee words because those are concepts that our ancestors may not have had or had words for. So, I still try to do a lot of hands on stuff (program interview, 10/29/2019).

The teacher explained there were times she had to consult with the fluent speakers and other elder speakers in order to identify the appropriate words to use in order to explain the concepts to the children in Cherokee. There were no easy answers to the questions posed and the challenges faced continued to come up.

### **Piy-Yee-Yah (The West) – Transcendence**

This leads me to the next direction where I faced the west, the direction of transcendence in my Kiowa Encampment Story Circle research methodology. Despite the challenges faced, and despite incredible pressure to produce fluent speakers, the teachers at the New Kituwah Academy continually rose to the challenge, they transcended, they overcame. The elementary teachers are supported by a principal who is passionate about students needing to know their

Cherokee identity, so much so that the principal designed professional development experiences that placed the teachers in the position of learners in order to inspire them to create and adapt curriculum content that continued to be innovative and aligned with Cherokee knowledge. The NKA Principal was very supportive of the intentional integration of the Cherokee traditional knowledge and culture into each grade level's curriculum package. The Kituwah Academy Teacher described a recent professional development experience specific to social studies curriculum development which inspired the embedded cultural curriculum component called the cosmology lesson sequence,

Our principal had us go on a weeklong staff development... We got in the bus and we drove around from place to place, to every place that had historical significance to Cherokee people. So, we went to a lot of mounds, we went to places where we knew that villages existed at one point in time. And, after we did that, our principal said to us, which I was already on board with that and working on this prior to when we did this. She said after that to take these places where we've been and create place-based learning units or lesson sequences based on where we've been. So that was the first product or lesson sequence that I created as a result of that training and development. (program interview, 10/29/2019)

The curriculum used by the New Kituwah Academy was based on the grade level of the students, state learning standards, and was grounded in Cherokee traditional knowledge. The Kituwah Academy Teacher shared her experiences in developing curriculum for her second grade students in the area of social studies, called *JANβJ BΘ DΛΩ* (digoliyedi yvwi anhv) in Cherokee, by first stating her approach, "I came in with the vision for our social studies and history curriculum being exclusively from a Cherokee history perspective. So, if we talk about

George Washington or Abraham Lincoln, we talk about them only as it relates to Cherokee history” (program interview, 10/29/2019). Next the teacher described a process that she indicated was standards design,

I look at my standards and objectives for North Carolina social studies for second grade. So I look at where I can pull stuff from Cherokee history and culture that will meet the standards for what the students should know or how they should learn. There’s one standard that says students will understand history in chronological order and a substandard is they’ll understand and identify historical figures. So, usually, we start our year by going through Cherokee history. I start with precontact. These are the people who were our ancestors. This is what their art looked like, this is what we know about them. We look at artifacts, and I try to find projects that match up with that, like my boyfriend knows how to make (all-ahdles), which are precontact Indigenous weaponry. (program interview, 10/29/2019)

As the school year progressed, the second-grade teacher described her curriculum development and implementation approach with the social studies component,

I try to find a historical figure, or a few traditional Cherokee historical figures, relevant to that time period. So, the kids have journals, they have a social studies journal, we talk about each period, about what our lifeways looked like during that period, and any significant events during that period. And the kids learn about each historical figure in that period. (program interview, 10/29/2019)

One important historical figure is Junaluska, who was a warrior and a leader for the Eastern Band and is known as ᏅᏍᏏᏁᏍᏏ (tsunulvhvsga), in Cherokee. In order to provide additional details around the experience of developing and implementing Cherokee cosmology-focused

social studies curriculum, the Kituwah Academy Teacher explained that she worked closely with her Language Specialist co-teacher in her classroom to ensure that she was capturing the concepts accurately in Cherokee,

For social studies I pretty much decide what they're going to learn and then I confer with him, because he's not only a very fluent second language learner, he's also very traditional. I'll ask: what do you think about this? How would you say...? What would you add to it? What are some things that you think the kids should know? And another thing, I do have the social studies journals from my kids last year so I already have several entries that are already translated that I can use. (program interview, 10/29/2019)

In addition to the direct input from the Language Specialist, the second-grade teacher used other resources in order to make translations in interpreting the social studies standards. She described how she was able to use the social studies journal projects her students created last year to add additional context in her work of translating and interpreting the social studies standards into Cherokee.

Due to the expectations for second grade students in the North Carolina state standards, the teacher felt less ability to be creative and innovative with the math curriculum development and implementation. The pressure to prepare these children for the next grade level was evident in the way the teacher described the flexibility she had to choose her own math curriculum, but at the same time, she faced a challenge with needing to ensure the children were progressing as expected along the state standards. In order to ensure that the math curriculum met the needs of her students, she explained how she adapted the math curriculum component specifically,

I use a math curriculum that someone else made and just translated it, and add in stuff and adjust as needed based on the needs of my students. So if they are struggling with

addition with regrouping and the curriculum allows for a 10-day segment on it, I would add stuff to it. I pretty much look at the standards that I need to meet, and I align those with the specific events that are going on in the school year and then align it that way.

(program interview, 10/29/2019)

She continued to explain the way she implemented the curriculum in her classroom by describing small group, whole group, and individual lessons and activities that were included. When it came to actually drafting the curriculum and translating it into the Cherokee language, the Kituwah Academy Teacher explained how she also ensured that her language translation was accurate by working closely with her co-teacher, the Language Specialist assigned to her classroom (program interview, 10/29/2019).

Turning towards the science component of the second-grade curriculum package, the Kituwah Academy Teacher shared that the teachers worked together to develop the science curriculum and the science component is intentionally infused with Cherokee cultural concepts,

I try to find a lot of the natural sciences and life sciences, because of the connections to Cherokee traditional stories, I try to find a Cherokee story that correlates with what we're learning in science. So for example, if the kids are learning about animal adaptation, we have a traditional story about how bats got their wings, so I might use that traditional story to talk about different animal adaptations...we do that in Cherokee, so I'm saying all these things in Cherokee as I'm explaining it to the students. (program interview, 10/29/2019)

In addition to ensuring that Cherokee knowledge is embedded in the science curriculum, there were also considerations for ensuring the students have access to content that aligns with state standards. The Kituwah Academy Teacher engaged in direct translation from English to

Cherokee, standards interpretation, and cultural knowledge integration with support from the second-grade Language Specialist in her classroom, as she explained,

For science, I look at the standards, I write it down in the most simple language possible because a lot of stuff is really difficult to translate into Cherokee. I try to get the essence of what the students need to know. I write that down and then I hand it to him and he gets it translated, and if he can't translate it he'll go and talk to some of the fluent speakers that work here and ask them how they would say it and come back to me with the result.

(program interview, 10/29/2019)

The Kituwah Academy Teacher who collaborated with me on this dissertation journey was very explicit about how Cherokee knowledge was integrated throughout not only the science topics but also woven throughout the entire curriculum package so that there were very specific themes based on the time of year and based on the specific topics of focus according to Cherokee cosmology. The methods used to develop this particular aspect of the second-grade science curriculum was explained as follows,

I'm super into traditional Cherokee cosmology, specifically as it relates to reality, so I try to teach the kids about that...It's more about, well, this is what our ancestors believed, and that was another element of that...the Cherokees traditionally believe, and many other southeastern Indigenous tribes believe, there was a lower world, a middle world and an upper world. So places on mountains would be considered to be very close to the upper world so were sacred because the upper world was associated with the creator, and so that's why animals, birds like eagles were so important because they can get so close to the creator, so I also talk about that element of it. (program interview, 10/29/2019)

The second-grade teacher continued to explain the specific approach she used to engage the students in making the connections between standards-based scientific content and the Cherokee-specific knowledge-based content,

So this is an illustration, somebody drew it, I had my curriculum assistant print it off, and I had the students color it, and I explained the image to them so I was like: up here you can see the upper world and then down here you can see the lower world. These are the creatures that live in the lower world and these are the creatures that live in the upper world, and then, here we are. (program interview, 10/29/2019)

The approach explained above is also tied into the Cherokee language arts curriculum component for the second grade. The word for language in Cherokee is ᏍᏊᏰᏃᏍᏏ (gawonihisdi). Her process for developing the Cherokee Language Arts (CLA) curriculum was described as collaborative, intentional, and emergent, alongside her co-teacher, the Language Specialist,

We'll sit down together, I have him for the whole day, he mostly teaches Cherokee Language Arts, I have some stuff that I've created, and implemented but I kind of give him the freedom to figure out what he thinks the kids need to know, because he's more fluent with the language than me so I feel like he has a better understanding as to what is actually applicable in conversation or what they need to survive. So, on Monday, I'll just be like: what is going on this week? And, this is the first year I've worked with the teacher too, so we don't have a map for that, we don't have a sequence. We're developing it as the year progresses. (program interview, 10/29/2019)

Some questions that she asked herself and her Language Specialist as they planned the specific activities that were aligned with the curriculum included



What words are we going to work on this week? What are our phrases for this week?

What do we want to teach the kids in the language this week? What's going on this week? What is happening this week that we want the kids to know words for so they can be able to talk about it and have conversations? So that's what the planning looks like.

And we both kind of tag team on making the materials for that. (program interview, 10/29/2019)

Implementing each component of the second-grade curriculum package included the creative use of technology, including software, online games, iPad tablets, and a SmartBoard.

Transcendence was also evident in the teacher herself: through every word she spoke and through the stories she shared, her passion and commitment to her students' is evident. Not only is she dedicated as a Cherokee second language learner herself, but she has taken on the task of being an immersion teacher in her heritage language in an environment that is often challenging, but equally rewarding. Another important component of transcendence is the support of the community. The New Kituwah Academy has tremendous visibility and is a source of pride in the Cherokee, North Carolina community and throughout the Qualla Boundary. As the certified teacher in the classroom, the Kituwah Academy Teacher is also a second language learner herself, and this is emphasized when it comes to immersion pedagogy and engaging students in the instruction,

Because one, where it's in Cherokee, it gives me the opportunity to practice the language, the kids get to use the language more in small groups because a lot of my students are kind of shy, and they don't want to answer questions if I'm giving a lesson to the entire class, but if they are in a small group then they'll be more interactive. (program interview, 10/29/2019)

Specifically regarding immersion instruction for teaching math concepts through the Cherokee language, the Kituwah Academy Teacher emphasized that “I always incorporate the concrete representational abstract sequence of instruction with my students, so I always start with a concrete lesson with manipulatives, because that’s important for building conceptual understanding” (program interview, 10/29/2019).

When specifically focusing on the development of the students’ learning experiences, the Kituwah Academy Teacher described how her classroom has implemented daily routines and classroom schedules as part of the learning process,

Every day, we have routines we go through. Like, they’ll get here in the morning, they’ll sing the Morning Song which is a Cherokee prayer of thanksgiving, for like the new day, for the morning that the Creator has given us. Then we do our calendar...I’ll get the kids to come up and share what day is it, what was yesterday, what is tomorrow, what month is it, all that good stuff. They talk about the weather. Then we do introductions. (program interview, 10/29/2019)

As explained by the second-grade teacher, student introductions were a critical component of spoken Cherokee language and a strong indicator of the student’s cultural identity. Each day, each student was expected to practice by introducing themselves to their classmates using constructs that included: “my name is, this is my community, these are my parents, this is my school, my birthday is” (program interview, 10/29/2019).

There was also a focus on ensuring that learning experiences are directly tied to the curriculum approach overall, as indicated by the teacher, “we progress through that, and as we move through each period of Cherokee history, I tried to find an project aligned with it that the kids can do that is hands on” (program interview, 10/29/2019). She continued to explain how she

used cultural activities as the learning experiences tied directly to the specific curriculum component of focus. Examples of these activities included making traditional corn bead necklaces and designing templates of shell gorgets, both historical Cherokee activities. Overall, there was an intentional connection with the outdoors that was embedded into the children's learning experiences on a regular basis:

We do a nature walk time, we go outside, we talk about what we see, it doesn't necessarily have to be directly related to what we're learning that week or that day, we go out, if we see a learning opportunity with the students then we'll explain what we see to them. (program interview, 10/29/2019)

One important outcome of the intentional, culturally-sustaining learning experiences was the implementation of specific projects that the students created throughout the year,

The kids have a journal at the end of the year, an artifact, basically, that they get to take home, a portfolio, that they get to take home, and be like this is what I learned about the whole entire year and it's all written in Cherokee. Which, I just think is supercool, because, when else will the kids get to go home with this finished product about Cherokee history, that's all in the language? (program interview, 10/29/2019)

Regarding the way that children are assessed and tracked according to the specific learning experiences, the Kituwah Academy Teacher explains: "I used a rubric... It's more of a performance-based assessment, more than a traditional pen and paper assessment" (program interview, 10/29/2019). When it comes to the assessment approach, curriculum integration, and the use of the student journals, the following explanation emerged,

This year is the first year that I've done the whole sequence with them, like we talk about the cosmology, we talk about the different kinds of trees that live at different elevations,

the different kinds of animals that live at different elevations, there's the science integration, we made little books where we wrote about, we drew pictures of the different trees...I'll come up with a plan, give them something to draw, I'll get the words translated, we'll go through the process and we'll write in our journals, or we'll make these little books. (program interview, 10/29/2019)

Regarding activities that required student interpretation, the Kituwah Academy Teacher described an integrated approach that encouraged student creativity,

This week, we've been talking about Cherokee monsters and mythical figures like Spear-finger and the giant, or the Raven monster, and my goal with that, I just told the kids the stories and what we know about them, and didn't give them a whole lot of input on what the creatures or characters looked like because I wanted to see what would they think these creatures looked like. (program interview, 10/29/2019)

The second-grade classroom learning environment included Cherokee artwork, visual depictions of the traditional Cherokee Clans as well as environmental print completely in the Cherokee Syllabary. The children had many reference materials on the classroom walls such as anchor charts called ᐃᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦ ᐃᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦ (datlidesdv kanohesgi) in Cherokee, the calendar called ᐃᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦ ᐃᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦ (nvda disesdi) in Cherokee, a word wall, and Cherokee Syllabary charts called ᐃᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦ ᐃᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦ (tsudatlugi dunoyvgvi) in Cherokee.

The Kituwah Academy Teacher summarized the way she designed students' learning experiences in her classroom, "I really believe it's about planting that seed, planting that seed that will lead them to think about these things later on and will empower them if not now, later on, to be passionate about their identity and culture as Cherokee people" (program interview, 10/29/2019).

## **Siy-K'ee (The North) – Reflection**

Finally, I turn to face the fourth direction, the north, the direction of reflection. One impression I received through my interactions with the New Kituwah Academy team was that all staff share the same vision, the program's overall vision, which in turn, is the community's vision – to create first language Cherokee speakers, in essence, giving the language back to a new generation of Cherokee people. It was also apparent that this immersion program does not operate in isolation – there are a total of three federally-recognized Cherokee Tribal Nations. All three of the Cherokee Tribes continue to meet on a regular basis to share promising practices and offer revisions to their language revitalization plans for the Cherokee people as a whole.

The New Kituwah Academy shared the goals for students through the belief statement listed on the program website:

- “Kituwah First is the primary focus of the Kituwah Academy. Cherokee language, culture, traditions, and history are the foundations of the school and its instructional programs.
- The development of a second language enhances all areas of our students' academic development. Challenging educational experiences are provided, in order to maximize brain development.
- Instruction is student-centered, provided in a loving, nurturing environment. Learning occurs best when it is hands-on, experiential, and richly contextual.
- The tradition of helping those who need help, Gadugi, will inspire a sense of community and instill cultural pride in our students.
- Parents and families have the first responsibility in education. Strong parental commitment is essential in reaching our vision of producing fluent speakers.

- The fluent speaking community is the heart and soul of AniKituwagi. Without the language, we cease to exist as Kituwah people.” (para. 2).

These goals are evident in the conversations that I had with the Academy staff as well as through the story that emerged around the program’s curriculum development process.

### **Reflection on Story 7**

Overall, my impression remains that the New Kituwah Academy has found a way to live their community’s vision and make that vision into their reality. The teachers, both the Kituwah Academy Teachers and the Language Specialist in each classroom have taken tremendous strides in creating both a second language learner community of adults as well as a potential first language learner community of Cherokee youth. The way they accomplished their goals was through the intentional development and implementation of the various components of their culturally based and culturally sustaining curriculum.

### **Story 8: “Put It in Your Heart So You Can Remember:” The Story of Curriculum Development at Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program**

In thinking about how this story fits within my Kiowa Encampment Story Circle methodology, I found it helpful to organize this overall curriculum story in the context of the four locations within my story circle.

#### **Piy-Baw-Daw (The East) – Emergence**

Always starting by facing the east, I first focused on emergence. The Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program is known as the Early Childhood Program (ECP) within the Jemez Pueblo tribal government organizational structure. My conversations with the ECP began first by reaching out via email with a formal letter of invitation to participate that was sent to the program director and her supervisor. They invited me to a conference call with the ECP

Manager, who is the Head Start program's director, and her supervisor, the Education Director for Jemez Pueblo. After I first presented my study over the phone, I was invited to present the research study idea to the other program staff. The ECP Manager arranged for a face-to-face meeting with her program supervisors, essentially, her management team and those who directly supervised the immersion teachers. Over lunch, I presented my dissertation study idea and explained the benefits of participating and the goals of the study. After I answered their initial questions, the entire management team seemed excited to pursue next steps. After debriefing with the ECP Manager, we had a series of conference calls and emails with the Education Director to discuss the plan for getting official approval from the tribal council.

The Jemez Pueblo Tribal Council of Governors is comprised of 12 men who have each been designated by their respective communities to represent them on the council. Since Jemez Pueblo does not have its own IRB, the Tribal Council themselves hear, review, and act on all research proposals to determine whether the research will serve their people and programs. Over the course of several months, the ECP Manager and I coordinated schedules and finally were able to officially submit an agenda item for a Jemez Pueblo Tribal Council meeting. I was informed by the ECP Manager and the Education Director that the expectation was for me to travel out in person to present to the Tribal Council and that they would then decide if my study would be approved to pursue with the ECP. The ECP Manager and I drafted the Tribal Council resolution that the council would officially use to provide their approval or denial. I then prepared a PowerPoint presentation with some highlights of the study to present as well as a two-page handout that served as a quick reference for the Tribal Council members as they deliberated. Once all materials were submitted, including the University of Oklahoma's official IRB approval letter, the proposal for the study, and all supporting documents, such as my

protocols, the ECP Manager informed me of the date of the Tribal Council meeting and I made travel arrangements to be there to present.

When the hour came and the doors opened to the council chamber, I stood before the council alongside the ECP Manager and the Education Director. First, they each spoke in their Towa/Hemish language. There was some conversation in Towa/Hemish among the councilmembers present. Finally, they stopped speaking and all eyes turned to me. The ECP Manager motioned with her arm, indicating it was my turn to speak. Taking a deep breath, I knew that we had to first establish our relationship. To do that, I introduced myself in my Kiowa language the way my grandmother taught me, in a respectful way. The Jemez Pueblo Tribal Council Chairperson acknowledged my introduction in the Towa/Hemish language, and then began asking questions in English. The first few questions were centered around why I am requesting to work with the Jemez Pueblo's Early Childhood Program (ECP). The next few questions were around what I would do with the information I gathered. This exchange went back and forth for a couple of hours. During this time, I had the opportunity to explain the handouts I had submitted and walk them through the proposed research process. Each councilmember had a turn to speak. Through their questions, I heard their goals and their vision for their Jemez children. Finally, one councilmember spoke, "So you're Kiowa, huh? I went out that way a couple of summers ago with my brother to sing at Tiah-Piah-Gah (Kiowa Gourd Clan Ceremonial). I appreciate that your people value your language and want the young ones to maintain it." Another council member told me "Keep doing this, this is good work for our future generations. I'm proud of what you are doing, keep doing it." I felt both small and honored, insignificant, and incredibly privileged. The council signed the resolution granting approval for me to work with the ECP and we were dismissed so their other business could continue.



I was invited by the ECP Manager to return to their Early Childhood Center to debrief. Over lunch, we exchanged stories, laughs, and she shared her goals and dreams for Jemez children and for her program. As we spoke, I explained that I see her as a collaborator and that it would be an honor to have her collaborate with me on any published articles, presentations, or books that emerge from this dissertation journey. She agreed and thanked me for the opportunity. Little does she know how honored I am to be someone who can listen to their story and share it back with them. I conducted two data collection visits to Jemez Pueblo after presenting to the Tribal Council.

The program's mission statement is "Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program is a community-based program preparing for school and life, rooted in culture and traditions, to become lifelong learners" (p. 2), while their vision statement is "every Jemez child will be fluent in the Jemez language and grounded in our traditions and culture" (p. 2). Their 2019-2020 Family Handbook states that

language and culture are incorporated in everything we do, utilizing a full Jemez language immersion approach. From going on cultural field trips, serving traditional foods, and using traditional music and storytelling in the classroom, we take a community-based approach, making the Jemez community an extension of the classroom. We invite elders and other community members who are knowledgeable about Jemez culture to become involved with our children's unique Jemez early childhood education. We encourage all tribal members to speak our Jemez language when visiting the center to model and promote the use of our language community-wide. More importantly, if you are a speaker of the Jemez language, providing opportunities for children to speak our language is valuable. (Early Childhood Program, 2019, p. 3)

The program consists of four Head Start immersion classrooms which are staffed with two teachers each: the Adobe and Corn Maiden classrooms both serve four year-old children, and the Hemish and Kiva classrooms both serve three year-old children.

The ECP developed their curriculum by first identifying the most important values that a Jemez child should know through the 2009-2011 PhotoVoice project (Romero-Little, 2011). Next, as explained by the program director, managers, and teaching staff, the team collectively refined those values into themes. These themes were separated into scholastic themes and cultural themes, which were organized according to the traditional activities that take place during that time of the year in the Jemez Pueblo community. There were nine scholastic themes and 22 cultural themes. Each of these themes was detailed on a curriculum map that outlined each month of the Head Start school year and listed the corresponding themes for that month. The nine scholastic themes were broken down as follows: *Friends and School* (August and September); *Home and Family* (October); *Inside and Outside of Me* (November); *Staying Well, Staying Safe* (December); *Our Community* (January); *Working and Playing Together* (February); *Make It, Build It* (March); *Let's Explore* (April); and *Animals and Where They Live* (May). The Animals theme incorporated into the children's learning included: *Pets* (August through October); *Wildlife* (November through January); *Birds and Insects* (February and March); and *Zoo* (April). For the Colors theme, the school year started with Yellow and White in August and continued with two colors per month until April and May when all colors were reviewed and studied. The specific animals and colors that the children would focus on learning about that month were also listed on both the lesson plans and the curriculum map. The cultural themes were divided across four categories: Celebrations/Ceremonies, Values/Principles/Spiritual Beliefs, Family, and Planting. The eight Celebrations/Ceremonies cultural themes included

*Pecos Bull/Corn Dance* (August); *Drummer Boy* (September and October); *Corn Dance* (November); *Buffalo/Deer Dance* (December); *Buffalo Dance* (January); *Learning Other Dances* (February); *Butterfly Dance* (March); and *Corn Dance* (April). The cultural themes of Values/Principles/Spiritual Beliefs were *Every morning we pray* (August and September); *Cultural advice* (October); *Elders ensuring we know who we are* (November); *Learning through oral tradition* (December and January); *Learning the Jemez Way of Life* (February and March); *Jemez Way of Life* (April and May). The next set of cultural themes, those around Family, were *Helping Families* (August and September); *Caring for Siblings* (October and November); *Grandmother's Words of Wisdom* (December and January); *Respect and Honor* (February through May). The Planting theme included *The Importance of Corn* (August through November); *Learning the Art of Cooking* (December and January); *Making Traditional Bread* (February and March); *Learning to Grow Jemez Chili* (April and May). The teachers prepared their lesson plans to reflect the different scholastic and cultural themes for each month of the program year.

### **Piy-K'ee (The South) – Challenges**

The next step is to travel towards the south, the direction of challenges faced. For the ECP team, there have been various levels of challenges encountered. First, the teaching staff and management staff had to make the transition ultimately from a predominantly spoken- and written-English language Head Start program to a spoken-only Towa/Hemish language immersion program, while still held to the standards and requirements of the federal Head Start funding. In the process of making that transition, the Head Start staff had to gain the buy-in from their Jemez Pueblo Tribal Council, the Head Start children's family members, community partners, and community members throughout the Pueblo. After eight years of implementation

with immersion, there are still challenges faced, but the attitude of the Head Start staff was one of determination. Perhaps one of the biggest challenges continues to be the unique position of the Head Start program as a key piece of the overall Jemez Pueblo's language revitalization strategy.

Since the ECP is federally funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children and Families, Office of Head Start, the program staff must adhere to the over 1,000 Head Start Program Performance Standards that provide the requirements for programs receiving Head Start funding. The implementation of program services included all areas of the regulations, such as child development, health services, parent, family, and community engagement, among others. The child development service plan required Head Start programs to have an evidence-based curriculum, documented lesson plans, child observations, child assessment system, parent-teacher conferences, home visits with families, and parent-child engagement activities that can be done at home. The teachers and management staff encountered the Western early childhood program expectations that directly opposed their own Jemez ways of knowing, creating a state of constant negotiation where the ECP staff fought to maintain their own cultural and linguistic identity despite the layers of requirements imposed on the program.

As a Head Start program, the management and teaching staff all faced the challenge of remaining true to their own cultural, linguistic, and traditional values while at the same time delivering Head Start services according to the hundreds of specific requirements to continue to receive the Head Start funding. This meant that the Head Start staff must continually negotiate the dichotomy of the Western ideology embedded within the Head Start child development expectations and the traditional values of their Jemez people. The program's School Readiness Goals were organized around the five domains of the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes

Framework and separated out into overarching school readiness goal for that particular domain, the corresponding New Mexico Early Learning Guidelines, classroom strategies, program strategies, and parent, family and community engagement strategies to support the attainment of each stated goal. It is important to remember that each of these goals was expected to be achieved by the participating children completely in the Towa/Hemish language.

Preschool Head Start programs must also support pre-kindergarten-aged children in their transition to kindergarten classrooms. For the ECP staff, this presented a unique challenge due to the Towa/Hemish language being spoken-only. Grounded in age-old oral traditions, the language has never needed to be written, and the Tribal Council strictly forbids writing their language out of respect. The teachers needed to then confront English literacy expectations and work to problem-solve how to prepare children for reading and writing in English-only classrooms after two years of immersion in the spoken-only Towa/Hemish language.

For participating Head Start children and their families, there were many challenges faced. Head Start programs serve the lowest income families and provide comprehensive services in addition to high-quality early childhood classroom environments and teacher-child interactions. Some families must travel far outside the Jemez Pueblo community to commute to work, which decreases their availability to participate in program events. Due to the ongoing challenges faced by the Jemez people stemming from the centuries of conflict with Western forces, historical trauma continues to present challenges as evidenced by battles with the opioid crisis and social emotional challenges.

### **Piy-Yee-Yah (The West) – Transcendence**

Turning towards the next direction, I focused on transcendence, in the west. During the transition from a standard Head Start program to an immersion program, the ECP Manager and

the program's management team had to think very intentionally about what they wanted to accomplish and how they could accomplish their own community goals of language revitalization as well as maintain the federal funding through the Head Start program. Regular management team planning meetings, all staff planning meetings, strategic planning, program self-assessment, and community assessment activities all happened over the years in order to ensure that staff had buy-in and input every step of the way.

Despite the challenges faced, the Head Start team implemented an overarching strategy of Towa/Hemish language immersion and successfully infused the language and the culture into all aspects of their program. Through the process of implementation, they refined their curriculum approach through defining their school readiness goals through the lens of the Towa/Hemish language and Jemez traditional knowledge and values. Next, the teaching team, with guidance from the management team, developed lesson plans that reflected each theme, according to the time of the year and their traditional activities.

The management team and the teaching team have been engaged in the practice of delivering their lesson plans and family engagement activities entirely through their language. The program's lesson plans were initially conceptualized collaboratively by both the teaching staff and the management staff during their annual preservice professional development in the summer. Their lesson plan format included group activities, self-selection centers, community engagement time, cultural activities time, outdoor/physical activity time, and were expected to be structured according to the day of the week and the week of the month. These lesson plans reflected large group, small group, and child-initiated activities, both inside the classroom and out in the Jemez Pueblo community and surrounding areas. One immersion classroom teacher explained that the curriculum was developed following the Towa traditional calendar and

includes any activities and events that occur in the community (program interview, 10/23/2019). One activity listed on the lesson plan for the month of August, for example, under large group time, was to chase the Pecos Bull. For this activity, the children recreated a specific cultural figure and acted out the activity that is carried out in the larger community during the ceremonial celebrations that same month (program interview, 10/22/2019).

The actual lesson plans developed during the school year were flexible. The teachers acknowledged that sometimes their “activities don’t go as planned” (program interview, 10/22/2019) and when that happened, the teachers had to be flexible and be willing to adapt in the moment. One teacher added that at times, despite the planning and preparation, some activities “won’t come out like we envisioned it. So we have to think fast that way” (program interview, 10/22/2019). Another teacher shared, “I would say it’s a trial and error thing” in describing the ways that the teaching staff approached their planning and assessment of the learning activities as they implemented them (program interview, 10/22/2019). The teachers shared that they draft their lesson plans during the program’s monthly professional development day. Drafts were submitted to the management team, feedback was provided from the Education Manager, and after they made any changes needed, the final lesson plan was posted in the classrooms.

While the themes on the lesson plans remained the same, the activities and the language were differentiated according to either three-year-old or four-year-old developmental expectations. As one teacher explained, “we just all follow one lesson plan and each classroom comes up with the different activities” and another teacher added that “it’s up to each classroom how to teach it and how to go about it” (program interview, 10/22/2019). The teachers also indicated the specific activities by day for each theme. Then, within each lesson plan, the

teachers engaged in preparation and planning to implement the activities on a weekly basis. With each activity, they also prepared the language to be included – new Towa/Hemish words, topic-specific vocabulary, and the types of questions and responses that they would ask and perhaps receive from the children. The teaching teams for the three-year-old classrooms and the four-year-old classrooms each implemented the lesson plans by leading the children through the day according to the daily schedule and the planned activities for that day. The importance of spirituality is clear with the first two months of the school year focused on establishing the morning prayer of “embracing the sun” as a part of the children’s daily routine (program interview, 10/22/2019). As activities were conducted, the teachers were always mindful of having in-depth and constant conversations with the children.

Maintaining daily routines was important for each classroom. One example is in the way that the teachers used mealtimes as crucial learning experiences, since a good portion of time was spent eating breakfast and lunch, both of which were served using family style dining. During mealtimes, the teachers constantly kept a comfortable level of conversation going – asking the children questions about their day, asking them to say the different foods on their plates, negotiating through questions the children may have on their own. The teachers created a homelike atmosphere for the children and surrounded the children with the Towa/Hemish language as they ate their meals.

On the lesson plan for August 2019, there were routines that were followed regularly. The introduction of the self, using four traditional concepts, was taught to the children as part of the daily routine. During large group/circle time, the teacher said the child’s name, and in response, the child was expected to answer back appropriately with their clan, their Indian Name, their moiety, and their location where they live in the community. To support the children’s



learning of this routine, the Family Services Manager created an activity, called the *Identity Shield*, for the parents to work with the child to complete. The *Identity Shield* activity included a visual depiction of the four elements of identity that each Jemez child must know as a member of Jemez society. The *Identity Shield* was a circle divided into 4 parts and the parents fill in images that represent each area. Usually the parents showed either a picture of the child or their meaning of their Indian name on the shield. The manager noted that “this type of project encourages creativity for the parents” (program interview, 10/22/2019).

The implementation of the curriculum also extended outside the classroom and into the surrounding community through the various nature walks, field trips, and community visits. While exploring outdoors in the community, the Education Manager explained the goal is for the children “to see how we live, our living style” (program interview, 10/22/2019). Whenever an outdoor activity took place, such as a field trip, nature walk, or community visit, the teachers prepared the children for the activity the day before they went. This pre-activity work included simply asking the children questions to get them to predict what they would see or experience when they went on the activity. Some of the teachers explained that they also asked the children to complete some pre-drawing before they went anywhere. They asked the children to draw what they thought they would see or experience. Then, after the activity was completed, the teachers conducted follow-up intentionally with the children. One example was given by a teacher: “the next day, when they come in, we ask them: Did you see it? Did you go watch?” (program interview, 10/22/2019). Another teacher explained,

Or during circle time, the next day, we will all sit down again and just ask them, where were you yesterday? Remember the school bus took us? Where did it take us? Just to expand on their language, communication. Some of them will, but others might be just

like sitting there listening. So that's how we kind of like refresh their memory. (program interview, 10/22/2019)

In order to engage the children in recalling the different aspects of the outdoor activity, the teachers had the children draw a picture to express what they experienced. Other times, the teachers had large, full-page photos printed and laminated and used these as discussion prompts for the children to recall specific aspects of the experience or to review specific vocabulary words associated with the activity that they learned.

At various times, during nature walks, the children were taken to the fields to see the planting. The plants that were grown and harvested included chili, corn, and watermelons. In the classrooms, the teachers shared with the children how to cook with corn and with red and green chili. When they discussed this topic, the teachers invited the children's grandparents into the classrooms to share about how they grew up cooking with these foods and described how things are different now. Another nature walk was down to a nearby arroyo to discuss the weather and the impact of water, including the importance of water to the people, the plants, and animals.

While the teachers strived to extend the classroom outside the physical Head Start building, they also sought to bring the community into the classroom. In addition to having parents and grandparents come into the classrooms to volunteer, share stories, or demonstrate cultural activities, songs, or dances, the program also arranged for a variety of community partners who also work to support the children's learning. Whether it was the library staff sharing the latest book or the Fire Department demonstrating stop, drop, and roll, all community members who entered the classrooms were also asked to speak only the Towa/Hemish language. In this way, the children heard their language spoken by all adults they interacted with in and around the Head Start program.

One example of how the ECP staff navigated the Head Start expectations through the lens of their own ways of knowing is through the implementation of the *Importance of Corn* cultural theme. During the months of August through November, the outdoor activities included field trips to the local corn fields where the children are involved in actual responsibilities involved in preparing the field for planting, the planting of the corn, caring for the field, and ultimately, harvesting the corn (program interview, 10/22/2019). One parent-child activity project during this time was the cycle of a corn plant (program interview, 10/22/2019). Several families got creative with using different materials to depict the corn cycle. Some families sent back pictures of their child out in their family field doing the field work with the corn plants. As the Family Services Manager shared, “once they get engaged, then they think beyond the walls of the classroom” (program interview, 10/22/2019). The Family Services Manager then reflected “It’s a joy...to see their projects come to life” (program interview, 10/22/2019). Through these classroom and parent-child activities, the children experienced the entire cycle of corn, from going to the corn fields, preparing the plants, picking the corn, drying the corn in the classroom, then grinding the corn. One teacher shared how she engaged children: “so I was asking them, where was it we got the corn from? They kind of thought about it for a while, but they were so into it, so with that. Then we’d grind it and we make cornmeal” (program interview, 10/22/2019). This entire process ultimately showed the children where they get the cornmeal that they used in their morning prayers. In this way, the children experienced the entire cycle of the corn plants and were involved in each aspect so that they could come to understand how sacred the corn plant is to their people.

Supporting is a cultural construct, according to the ECP Manager (program interview, 10/22/2019). Supporting was manifested in the ways that the teachers intentionally had older

children mentor younger children and help each other say the language that was needed, such as during morning introductions in the classroom. One teacher shared “For us, the ones that know more, we use them as a teacher. We ask them, what, do you remember this? And they’ll say it back, and the rest of the kids will. Because it’s better to hear it from someone else” (program interview, 10/22/2019). The construct of supporting was also implemented when the teachers had a more experienced child pair up to support a child who just recently started in the program and have someone to model the routines and activities in the classroom. Another traditional aspect of learning was through observation and modeling. In other words, to watch is a way of learning. The act of observation is aligned with the cultural themes of the Jemez people. In the classrooms, the teachers often modeled for the children when they were introducing new activities and new concepts with a goal of demonstrating and showing the children so they can observe.

As much as possible, the teachers took pictures during all parts of the day, printed them out, and used them as part of language immersion, mainly because they were not using words in print and instead have found ways to use pictures to teach and to talk about the topics of daily life with the children. In other areas of the classroom, cultural pictures were used as much as possible. In one classroom, on the calendar wall, there was a chart that used the children’s pictures to match up each child with a picture of their symbol for their specific clan. This classroom clan chart supported the children on a cultural level to see how many classmates identify with each clan as well as introduced the mathematical concepts of categorization and quantifying. In each classroom, the teachers posted pictures of each animal and color that are the focus for that week. These pictures were posted by the calendar wall of the classroom and the vocabulary words represented by the pictures were reviewed during large group and circle time.

In the classroom, the teachers intentionally built the activities that are happening in the larger community into the classroom learning centers. One example given was focused on the kiva and fireplace which are where the Jemez people traditional tell their stories. The teachers recreated both the kiva and the fireplace in the classroom's dramatic play area with cardboard and paint, which allowed the children to act out familiar scenes from their community in their classroom.

There were instances of English writing specifically regarding kindergarten readiness and the transition to kindergarten. One four-year-old teacher explained how they work with the children who are getting ready for kindergarten, "Right now we're getting good comments from the kindergarten teachers. But when they were writing sentences, we would say them in Towa: This is what you wrote. We're just trying to get them their fine motor stronger" (program interview, 10/22/2019). For the children, one teacher pointed out that identifying their own English names is a skill that is intentionally taught, even though children are addressed by their Indian name throughout the Head Start day. In the classroom environment, English words were a part of the backdrop – such as the name of the month and the days of the week on the calendar, the words "First Aid" on the first aid kit, and the English alphabet letters with cultural pictures that ringed the walls. Despite the minimal presence of English environmental print, spoken Towa/Hemish was the only language that the children heard every moment of every day they attended the program. One teacher continued to explain how early literacy skills were incorporated into their classrooms: "the first, phonetic sounds. We say the pictures, what we hear, in the beginning in Towa. A for ant, we call it in Towa, then we say B, in Towa, so that the beginning sound and the word is in Towa" (program interview, 10/22/2019). This was an activity

that the teachers indicated they were inspired to implement because of their visits to the Native Hawaiian immersion programs.

### **Siy-K'ee (The North) – Reflection**

In the north, I turn towards reflection, our last stop before completing the story circle. The teachers at the ECP have found a way to deliver the entire Head Start education service plan, and meet all developmental domains as required by the Head Start Performance Standards completely in and through their Towa/Hemish language. They found a way to wrap the children in their Towa/Hemish language and create a homelike environment that draws the children's interests according to their traditional ways of learning. In these ways, the teaching team at the ECP engaged in culturally sustaining curriculum development and through the implementation of their culturally based curriculum, these immersion teachers have constructed an Indigenous immersion pedagogy that reflects their particular ways of knowing. Through the conversations and meetings I have been involved in, the Head Start staff each made it clear they had an attitude of continuous improvement. They were always looking forward to what they could learn from others. The program managers and the director continued to have a vision for the future of their program, and they made each decision with an eye towards the future, with an emphasis on continual improvement in order to be successful going forward.

As the teaching staff put it, the goal is for the children to learn their language, to learn their traditional values, and to carry those ways forward with them; in other words, they are preparing the children for their future in the community. Someday, some of these children will be leaders (program interview, 10/22/2019). The children who attended the Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program embraced the sun every morning as part of their daily routine of being a Towa person. These children also embraced their heritage language, the Towa/Hemish

language, every moment of every day they were in the program. The teachers truly believe these children would grow up to be the leaders of their community in the future; they believe these children would grow up to be successful and come back to carry the community forward. The teachers felt a lot of responsibility to prepare these children to be resilient and to prepare them so they can be successful in their lives. One teacher shared what she tells the children when placing emphasis on a particular concept, “put it in your heart so you can remember, that’s their treasure chest, so they can remember for a long time, as time goes on” (program interview, 10/22/2019).

When thinking about expected outcomes for children’s learning, especially for the children when they leave the Head Start program, the teachers shared the goals they have for the children they work with, which included “To become teachers...so they can teach me;” “To keep the language. To keep speaking the language;” “Understanding the language;” “At least learn something;” “To participate in the dances that go on in the plaza;” and “The main thing about this program I think is that we want them to participate. So that whole traditional life. So they can continue it. They know what to do. On their own they’ll know” (program interview, 10/22/2019). A common goal shared by these teachers was for children to participate in cultural activities in the community outside the classroom. When explaining how they dealt with families who did not participate in the cultural events held at the plaza, one teacher said “talking to the parents” was a strategy used. Another teacher added, “Just involve them, tell them to just go and watch the dance” (program interview, 10/22/2019). One teacher explained the connection between the classroom and community activities, “So, with that if they’re not really exposed to that kind of life, that’s where we come in and that’s where we do a lot of field trips to the village” (program interview, 10/22/2019).

Another goal for the children was to have the appropriate cultural apparel and ways to participate in feast days. In order to accomplish this goal, the Head Start staff implemented family engagement events called Motherhood Night and Fatherhood Night. During recent events, the Motherhood Night, the girls each made an apron and during the Fatherhood Night, the boys made pouches, both the mothers and fathers helped the children. These events and the component of parent, family, and community engagement were overseen by the Family Services Manager. Family engagement was also encouraged by each classroom and parents would go into the classroom and sing with the children. The Family Services Manager looked at the themes and activities the teachers had planned with the children in the classrooms and looked at the things the children were learning to generate ideas for parent-child cultural and language activities to do at home. For her, participation in the family engagement projects showed the connection with the time taken by the child's family. Completing the projects "demonstrates that the family members are getting something out of it by working on the projects with their child" (program interview, 10/22/2019).

### **Reflection on Story 8**

As for my own reflection on the work done by the ECP team, I have been inspired by the way that the focus of the curriculum and instruction was through the spoken-Towa language, with a policy of no English spoken. The teachers worked to plan their activities on a monthly basis in collaboration with each other and with the children's family members. The entire staff worked together to implement their culturally based curriculum with an attitude of continual improvement, since the team took time to assess how they year went on an annual basis. It is clear to me that the teaching team at the ECP believed wholeheartedly that the children they serve will grow up to be leaders in their community. Now that I have shared the curriculum



development story of the first collaborating program, I turn to the next program partner, the Lakota Language Immersion Child Care Elementary Track program.

**Story 9: “They’re the Center of the Universe:” The Story of Curriculum Development at Lakota Immersion Childcare Elementary Track**

After hearing the story that emerged through the conversations and interactions with the team at the Lakota Language Initiative regarding the Lakota Immersion Childcare Elementary Track (Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa Thanka) program, I filtered their process through my Kiowa Encampment Story Circle methodology. Revisiting each of the locations in the story circle helped me to make meaning from this story.

**Piy-Baw-Daw (The East) – Emergence**

Starting again in the east, with emergence, I started this journey by first building a relationship with the Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa Thanka team. Initially, I sent a formal invitation letter to the program leadership and was referred to the Lakota Language Initiative department within the Thunder Valley CDC. Within the Lakota Language Initiative department, I connected with two of the program administrators, the Director of Innovation and Design and the Director of Interpretation and Engagement. Both directors responded they were very interested in helping me and wanting to learn more. Over the next few months, I held a series of conference calls and email exchanges to ensure that the program leadership had all the information they needed to make the decision as to whether they wanted to participate in the project. Part of our communications included me sharing a presentation I had put together to explain the different pieces of my dissertation research project and the process of how I had gone about getting IRB approval. Next, I shared with the program leadership the informed consent form that I had approval from the University of Oklahoma (OU) IRB and covered all aspects of the informed

consent process with them. Then, I shared with them the OU IRB approval letter and approval application packet with all of the documents I had attached as part of my data collection approach.

Finally, in order to support their recruitment of staff that might be interested in participating in the project, I shared with them the outreach documents I had developed, which included a two page handout explaining the process of participation and what it would mean as well as a letter of invitation with further details. Some of the questions asked of me included how much of a time commitment for participating and what was I hoping to learn from this study. I shared with them my vision of focusing on curriculum development processes and telling the story of curriculum development in the way that each program would like it told, and only sharing the things that they would be fine with sharing.

I also explained the data ownership piece, which is an important part of the Tribally Based Participatory Research (TBPR) approach that I had decided to use. Since this program is Tribally-owned and operated, any data collected and any data analysis would ultimately be owned by the program itself. For me to use the data after the end of my dissertation study, I would need to go back to the program leadership to get necessary approval. I also explained that part of TBPR and my methodology includes reciprocity and accountability. In order to give back to each program, I shared that I would provide presentations to the program leadership and community members, as requested, to provide an overview of my study, my approach, and the findings summary. Additionally, I would invite the program staff who participated with me in this journey to serve as a co-author or co-presenter on any presentations or articles that might result from the work together.

Through the conversations we had, I gathered the history of the Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa Thanka, which translates to “elementary school” in Lakota (program interview, 11/27/2019). In 2012, two educators decided to do something to bring the Lakota language back into use by children. After researching the different language learning methods, those dedicated individuals decided to get involved in the Lakota language revitalization movement through using immersion teaching methods. The Lakota Immersion Childcare was first started as a privately funded home-based preschool located on the Pine Ridge Reservation. When they first opened, they had five children between the ages of 18 months and five years-old. Over time, the children and the staff expanded. They found a permanent home with the Thunder Valley CDC and since then have expanded immensely. The Lakota Immersion Childcare has two sites with a total of 27 children. The elementary track program was housed on the campus of the Red Cloud Indian School in Porcupine, South Dakota, beginning with kindergarten through second grade. Thunder Valley CDC partnered with Red Cloud Indian School in 2017 to provide elementary education in Lakota immersion to the graduates of the Lakota Immersion Childcare program. The Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa Thanka serves cohorts of five children, and in the 2019-2020 school year had a mix of first, second, and third graders. As children graduated in cohorts from the childcare setting, they moved into kindergarten and then into the higher grades, adding a new grade each year as the first cohort of students grew older. Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa Thanka was intended to continue to provide Lakota language immersion teaching to those students who had graduated from the Lakota Immersion Childcare program. The 2019-2020 cohort class at Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa Thanka represented the first generation of first language Lakota speakers in decades.

In addition to the program leadership, I had the honor of working closely with the Lakota Language Instructor/Curriculum Developer on this project. She has also served as an instructor at

the Lakota Summer Institute (described in Location 2, Story 4). The Lakota Language Instructor/Curriculum Developer was instrumental in developing the curriculum for both the Lakota Immersion Childcare and the Elementary Track and worked closely with the program leadership to make huge progress towards realizing their collaborative vision for their students, their program, and their community. According to the Lakota Language Instructor/Curriculum Developer,

my goal for all the kids in the classroom is to be able to be a storyteller like that. And to be able to play...For me, I just want them to be happy and proud to be Lakota, and not be afraid to speak Lakota like anywhere, in the store. I just want them to really feel comfortable and be proud and confident in who they are and with their speaking (program interview, 11/27/2019).

The goal of providing a comprehensive education to immersion students through the Lakota language, as introduced in Location 2, Story 4, included providing students with the opportunity to explore reading, math, science, language arts, culture, traditional practices, and athletics, among other topics as they participated in the Lakota immersion classroom. This goal also emphasized that not only would immersion students get opportunities to learn these different subjects in Lakota, but also students would be provided the opportunity to achieve various educational milestones through Lakota as well as receive necessary education at their own pace (Thunder Valley CDC, 2019).

### **Piy-K'ee (The South) – Challenges**

Turning towards the next direction in my research methodology, I faced the south, and next will share what I learned about the challenges faced by the Lakota Language Initiative team as they implemented their Lakota language immersion program. First, the team encountered a

series of unknowns. In the early years of the program, there was always a question about funding and about having enough funds to pay staff salaries, including the salaries for the fluent Lakota speakers that supported each classroom. The team themselves faced the unknowns related to whether their efforts would produce the outcomes they so desired. There were numerous references to this process having never been done before as I listened to the story that was being shared. Additional unknowns were faced by the parents of the immersion students as well, who ultimately placed their trust in the immersion team to provide the best education for their children.

One specific challenge shared had to do with the program goal of normalizing the Lakota language into every aspect of the children's lives. The Lakota Language Instructor/Curriculum Developer shared that children were often hesitant to speak Lakota outside the immersion classroom (program interview, 11/27/2019). The sentiment was the very same challenge faced by Indigenous language immersion programs across the country, and one that various Indigenous communities have struggled with as they progress in their implementation of immersion instruction with young children (Redbird-Post, 2019). The immersion students were surrounded by English, spoken and written, and even though they were bilingual, they tended to speak the language they heard most often with the group of people they were associated with when encountering a given situation. One of the unknown factors going into the elementary grade levels with this first cohort of young first language speakers was what their literacy skills would look like in English. Since this was the first cohort of first language Lakota speakers who had spent their early years in the Lakota immersion program, they had never read English books in the immersion classroom. All of their literacy materials were in written Lakota language. The

teachers and program leadership often wondered how the children would experience literacy as they grew older.

When the program first started in 2012, there was no standardized Lakota language curriculum available. When describing their process of curriculum development, the Lakota Language Instructor/Curriculum Developer shared, “all of this is just like going through it and documenting. And creating lots of trial and error” (program interview, 11/27/2019). Put another way, “It’s never been done before, so it’s kind of ongoing” (program interview, 11/27/2019). Additionally, there were no materials geared towards the early childhood age group available to immersion teachers. The program faced this challenge head on each year as the children in their immersion program grew older.

### **Piy-Yee-Yah (The West) – Transcendence**

Now facing towards the next direction, the west, I reflected on how the program demonstrated the principle of transcendence, especially as related to their curriculum development processes. Despite essentially starting over each year with their curriculum development for each new grade level, the Lakota Language Initiative as a team persevered in building a curriculum development, implementation, and training process that was intentional, comprehensive, and reflective of their Lakota knowledge and values. As the first cohort of Lakota immersion students grew from 18 months old to second and third graders in the 2019-2020 school year, the staff at the Lakota Immersion Childcare and Elementary Track worked diligently to add a grade and corresponding learning materials each year as the students advanced to include all school subjects in Lakota. To create learning materials at the elementary level, according to the different elementary subjects, the program staff started out by translating the entire Red Cloud Indian School’s kindergarten curriculum into Lakota. The Red Cloud

curriculum included science, reading (through a program called Learning A-Z), and math. In some cases, they were able to directly translate the curricula that was already in use in the Red Cloud Indian School; however, there were some times when elder Lakota speakers in the community needed to be consulted as far as word use and vocabulary for the more specialized school subjects. The Lakota Language Instructor/Curriculum Developer shared her perspective on how she approached curriculum development during her first year of teaching when she was first with the cohort of students who were still in the Childcare classrooms:

So, I was able to sit there from the beginning with my computer, I was able to type everything that was being said in English. Like, come in, hang up your jackets, put your bags away. And then create a schedule, like, students arrive, this is what is being said when the students arrive, this is what's being said during the morning circle, at gathering, at breakfast, so I kind of created an entire schedule for the entire day in English. Then, I sent it over to our fluent speaker and translator and he translated it into Lakota. Those were actually my survival cards in the daycare (program interview, 11/27/2019).

As the Lakota Language Instructor/Curriculum Developer explained, the curriculum approach for the younger children, from 18 months old to four years old, was very focused on the structure of the day, including the necessary daily routines that were part of the child's day-to-day activity. This approach was carried forward into the elementary immersion classroom and complemented by the various curricula materials that were developed based on the elementary school subjects. One crucial piece of their approach was the way in which the Lakota culture and language was embedded into each daily interaction:

When we first walk into the classroom in the morning, the kids, there's routines, you know they put jackets and their bags away. And they just know, they go sit down, they're

quiet while it's time to braid the sage off of the stick. Usually we have somebody picked for that day, so they're kind of waiting to see who's turn it is. And then we get in a circle once that's announced, and then we sing the four directions song, while someone's smudging, and the boys are playing the drum. And just creating, just setting the tone for that day, and then singing that song and praying to the four directions. And just kind of teaching them what each direction represents in the morning circle, so when we do pray in the morning circle, they know what they're praying to in each direction (program interview, 11/27/2019).

Additional components of the Lakota culture that were embedded throughout the day included prayer before mealtimes, prayer at the end of the day, the protocol to greet a classroom visitor and offer the visitor food and something to drink, and being respectful to elders including parents, grandparents, and teachers. One of the outcomes that the Lakota immersion team saw was that the curriculum, in its entirety, could be given to an incoming or new immersion teacher and essentially, the curriculum would serve as a "full road map for teaching those subjects over the course of a 9-month school year. Nothing this in-depth has ever been created before" (program interview, 11/27/2019).

Transcendence was also evident in the way the immersion team consistently developed their repertoire of language learning materials through various technological means, including websites, videos, games, online worksheets, online flashcards, electronic books, and various apps. The curriculum was both complemented by and enacted through the many Lakota instructional materials developed by Thunder Valley CDC's Lakotiyapi Press, which were then used in the classrooms with the children.



As the children advanced, so did the programs' ability to keep up with the children as evidenced by the library of Lakota language instructional resources and learning materials that were developed over the past eight years by program staff. One important element noted was that the program achieved all of this by taking a practical, step-by-step approach to curriculum development so that when there was no funding, their attitude was to just start with what they had and grow from there. According to program leadership,

As our students have grown from toddlers into preschoolers and then into elementary schoolers, we have created the Lakota language infrastructure – books, games, assessments, visual aids, etc. – for them to have a fully-realized educational experience, as enriched as their peers in the mainstream “English immersion” classrooms” (Thunder Valley CDC, 2019, para. 7).

In putting the curriculum together, there were often language phrases or vocabulary that the immersion teachers, as second language learners themselves, were not familiar with. The Lakota Language Instructor/Curriculum Developer explained her process for dealing with those situations,

I was writing everything down. And then we have a fluent speaker in the classroom at all times like an elder, and so it's always just asking her how do you say this, how do you say this, and I would write it down. Or if there was something I wanted to say, this was what I needed to say, before I just keep going on with the day and forget what that was, I would go around with a little notebook and I would just write everything down that I wanted to say in English and then sit down with the fluent speaker at break time or lunch or after school and just ask her those things and then right away I could practice those things. Or else I would make labels or write it on the white board or actually create a

poster. So, some kind of visual where I could use it every day. So, then I had all those notecards (program interview, 11/27/2019).

In order to promote sustainability of both the program and the curriculum, the Lakota immersion team went an extra step, as explained by the Lakota Language Instructor/Curriculum Developer,

And we actually combined those note cards and we made a kindergarten survival guide for a teacher coming in. It's like the same thing, like here's all the things you need to know in kindergarten like push in your chair, you know, all that stuff, like line up, just a little survival guide like good job, do your work, erase, all that, you have to learn all that (program interview, 11/27/2019).

Despite the unknown territory within curriculum development, and especially since their curriculum development process was the first of its kind, the Lakota immersion team saw the importance of ensuring that all of the adults involved in the immersion program were also involved in the process of developing and implementing the curriculum, including the immersion teachers, the immersion classroom first language speakers, the Thunder Valley CDC program staff, the parents of the immersion students, and any relevant community partners: "it's kind of getting the whole organization on board, it's causing them to have to take the language, this whole movement is really spreading" (program interview, 11/27/2019).

When describing the way that immersion instruction was conducted with the children, the Lakota Language Instructor/Curriculum Developer shared "I try to find the patterns in things so they can get it. So I do a lot of stuff with repetition and patterns" (program interview, 11/27/2019). The emphasis on daily routines, lifestyle, and traditional ways created numerous opportunities for the children to hear Lakota language used in many different contexts in addition

to gaining experience with speaking Lakota with each other and as part of different daily routines, including addressing each other by traditional Lakota kinship terms (program interview, 11/27/2019). For the elementary track students, one key emphasis was on literacy and reading development. The Lakota Language Instructor/Curriculum Developer described how immersion experiences were conducted with Lakota literacy materials,

So, we do have leveled books, they're A-Z. You know, the A-Z books in English? We have those all translated. So, they start at level A, it's like AA, and then goes A, B, C, so that's how we start with the reading. We have some other books that are very beginning. Like sight word books, like the word "the" like it's "I see the bike" but all of this is in Lakota. We got those all translated. We sit with the kids individually and teach them. It's a syllabic language, so first we teach the alphabet. And then we teach the syllables that go along with each letter. And once they know all the syllables, and they start putting the syllables together, then they start understanding they're making words from these syllables. And it's like black – red – black – red. Like wash-te-wo-la-pe (program interview, 11/27/2019).

The Lakota Language Instructor/Curriculum Developer reiterated that the curriculum development process is really about a team approach and much more than just one person pulling everything together into survival guides or notecards. As she explained, "we have a team of curriculum coordinators" (program interview, 11/27/2019). It was this team approach that made the tremendous progress at the Lakota Language Initiative possible as all of the programs within the department focused together to support the children who were becoming first language Lakota speakers.

As the elementary immersion students got older, the immersion team shifted gears to develop a more comprehensive, intentional cultural curriculum into which all of the daily routines and school subjects were embedded. The Lakota Language Instructor/Curriculum Developer took the lead to develop this curriculum and focused on gathering the teachings, the traditional knowledge, and pulling all of the pre-existing pieces into the framework of the Medicine Wheel. As she shared,

so with creating this cultural curriculum, this is giving me an opportunity to meet with elders and to really talk on a different level, and to ask about things, like so how would I say that in Lakota, how would that translate into Lakota, because Lakota is a really descriptive language, this is really helping (program interview, 11/27/2019).

The cultural curriculum was organized according to traditional Lakota knowledge using the teachings and symbolism within the Lakota's Medicine Wheel traditions:

there are just so many teachings that go along with the Medicine Wheel, like first teaching the directions and what those represent, and what animals represent those. And for stages of life, so we teach that, and there's so much, the four plants, sage, sweetgrass, cedar, those each represent, there's just so much that the medicine wheel represents, so we just really try to use that, four seasons. That's the main thing, because we live our whole life, the Medicine Wheel represents life, and that's the most important thing to teach them, and they're the center of the Medicine Wheel, they're the center of the universe, they have a purpose and a place, and not only put in our Lakota values but all of the other values too. So, we really try to implement those values all day long. Like if we see them holding open a door, we say thank you for being respectful and kind for holding open the door (program interview, 11/27/2019).

She describes another way that she saw the process,

I guess creating this curriculum is observing too. So the process is researching, then getting ideas from different elders in the community, then scripting it out, then getting it translated, then learning it in Lakota, and the vocabulary, and then teaching it and putting it into practice, and then observing it, and writing down. I think that's what becomes the curriculum, the observation of that process (program interview, 11/27/2019).

When asked about the approach for implementing the new cultural curriculum for the elementary immersion students, the Lakota Language Instructor/Curriculum Developer shared,

The first thing I did was I made a pretty big Medicine Wheel, and just started labeling it. I put them in the center. Then put a picture of the animals in the quadrants, the sage, and sweetgrass, those in the quadrants, the grandparents, the babies, you know the four stages of life, and then everything is labeled so they could read it, they could see it. If they wanted to they could copy the writing. And we went over it every day so they got repetition. So, it's going to get the point where each of the students will come up and tell everything that they know (program interview, 11/27/2019).

Recently, the immersion teachers, the program staff, and ultimately, the children's parents received some validation and reassurance that the children's literacy skills in Lakota transferred to written English:

Our entire kindergarten, 1st, 2nd grade immersion class, scored higher, they taught themselves how to read English, it's become normal to them, they are bilingual, it's been amazing to watch this too. Some of these kids have only been in the Immersion program, and have only been with these Lakota books, and have never been given these English

books. I think it's winning the hearts of a lot of people and they are witnessing it (program interview, 11/27/2019).

In addition to implementing these Lakota language immersion methods, the Lakota immersion team also focused on ensuring that the learning experiences that were designed for their students were appropriate for the student's grade level, developmental level, as well as according to the students' interests.

The students who were second graders in 2019-2020 were actually students who were part of the first cohort of first language Lakota learners who started speaking Lakota when they attended the preschool portion of the program in the Lakota Immersion Childcare at the age of 18 months-old. As they have advanced over the years, the immersion classroom and their learning experiences have grown with them. Increasingly advanced vocabulary and phrasing are integrated into the daily learning experiences. In order to keep up with the inquisitiveness of the students, the immersion team has had to ensure that they can provide Lakota learning experiences in a variety of contexts. Over the years, the team has learned to integrate technology into their daily instruction and routines with the children, as shared by the Lakota Language Instructor/Curriculum Developer,

The day is set up so like they come in, and in the morning, after we sing their song, and they know right away they get on this certain program that their worksheets are on. So, we tried to go paperless and all their worksheets are on their iPad. So, then they're doing their little worksheets on their iPad. They read a story first and they have to answer questions. So, it's just like reading, and they have recess, and then they have story time. And we ask them questions like who the characters in the story, what was your story about, where did your story take place, all of that stuff. Just to practice our language and

for us to engage them and for them to really comprehend those questions (program interview, 11/27/2019).

In order to keep up with the learning needs of the immersion students, the Lakota Language Initiative created a website, Icahiye Thanka, that included a series of grammar videos for elementary aged children with a foundational knowledge of Lakota. These videos are between 1-3 minutes long, in order to maintain student interest. In the classroom, students accessed these videos using their individual iPads, or these videos were viewed together as a large group on the large screen in the classroom, and discussions on the video were led by the teacher.

One example was a video on making trail mix. This particular video was live action, created by immersion students who actually demonstrated the process and spoke Lakota while they were demonstrating. The video proceeded to show the step-by-step instructions for making trail mix in the Lakota language. In Lakota, wašíču wasná kágapi means “how to make trail mix.” Each of these videos also had a corresponding translation in English and Lakota on the website for parents to use. The website developed by the Lakota Language Initiative for parents to access Lakota language resources at home was called Wayawa Cik’ala, which translates to “little learners” and was located at wayawacikala.com. Wayawa Cik’ala had resources mainly geared towards ages 1-5 years-old but the team has steadily added resources for older learners as the first cohort of Lakota language immersion participants advanced. For older children, resources included translations of phrases, sentences, and vocabulary used in the classroom, such as a video titled Owáũspe Othí Wičhóiyé and accompanying translation sheet on classroom vocabulary. In Lakota, the video asked Wóũspe othí thimá takú hiyéya he? (what can you find in a classroom?) and then proceeds to show pictures of classroom items along with the spoken Lakota and the written word or phrase. For instance, table is Akáŋwowapi, computer is Wóũspe

omnáye, backpack is Wók'ıñ, scissors are Wíyukse, chair is Oákañke. The video ends with Waná owáyawa-ta glápi iyéhañtu! (Time for school!). These materials were developed so that parents could easily follow along with what the children are learning in the classroom and implement and use the language at home, as a part of their daily life. The Wayawa Cik'ala website included various sections such as educational games, videos, worksheets, translation notecards, which focused on activities like learning the sounds and grammar of Lakota as well as practice with writing and distinguishing the written Lakota language according to familiar topics and themes found in the immersion classroom and in daily life. The immersion teachers were given access to the online resources and materials so that they could develop their lesson plans and learning activities using Lakota language and procedures that have already been developed and implemented. When designing learning experiences in the immersion classroom, teachers drew heavily on the content in the online learning modules and corresponding videos included in the 2LL initiative (Location 2, Story 4).

In order to ensure that students were progressing and not just repeating the same material, the immersion team placed a huge emphasis on child observation, individualization of learning experiences according to the child's needs, and peer-to-peer learning:

And getting to see which ones understand. And lots of group work, too. Like I'll work with the first grade in math. I'll hook up my iPad to the TV, and we do the problems together on the TV. And then they do them on their iPad. And, peer work too. They want to help each other out so much...with this program, with the third grade class, we used to worry a lot about, there were a couple of kids who were just not getting it, just not getting the syllables, just not picking up. And all of a sudden, this year, they came in and they



were some of the best readers. We just had to trust the process that it's working and it's working well (program interview, 11/27/2019).

A critical component of this ability to transcend the challenges faced lies in the emphasis on immersion teacher training and professional development as part of the comprehensive initiative for all program staff and immersion teachers to participate in their second language learner initiatives.

### **Siy-K'ee (The North) – Reflection**

This leads me to the next direction, to the north, the direction of reflection. In thinking about my own impressions of the program and program staff, I stand truly inspired by a team of individuals who kept persevering despite the challenges they faced. As the Lakota Language Initiative program developed and grew with its immersion students and their families, the program staff have truly stepped into the mindset of pulling their own perspectives from an attitude of survival to one of thriving. The goals for the Lakota immersion team at Thunder Valley CDC were summed up through a section on their website: “We see no separation between a quality education that can empower our youth to reach for their most ambitious dreams and an education that is culturally informed and linguistically sophisticated” (Thunder Valley CDC, 2019, para. 3). At the beginning of each school year the immersion teachers identified goals for the children to achieve by the end of that year. One example that was shared:

Like they're able to retell. So, we read them the story in English. So, they really understood this story. Because they're culture stories like how the sunflower came to be the sunflower and how we got the rainbow, things like that (program interview, 11/27/2019).

In addition to setting individual and group goals, there was also an emphasis on peer-to-peer interaction, collaborative group work, and student modeling, as described below,

And the teachers that are coming up and observing in the classroom, they see them, and the kids just know them, it's so repetitious that any one of the students can come up and ask these questions to the class. Not only are we teaching these kids, but we are teaching them to be teachers too. The things that we are doing we are learning for ourselves. So, it's so repetitious, they can teach too. So, I feel like after high school they'll just have this down and they could just come back (program interview, 11/27/2019).

In order to enact the comprehensive curriculum in the Lakota immersion classrooms, the immersion teachers used a variety of methods. These methods include Total Physical Response and the Montessori method along with the integrated use of Lakota language-based technology, apps, and educational, original Lakota language YouTube videos.

The Lakota immersion team started their curriculum development process out of necessity. Beginning first with developing curriculum appropriate to toddlers in the first stage of the Lakota Immersion Childcare program, the immersion team focused on the daily routines that toddlers and young children encountered throughout the course of their day-to-day life. The immersion team took the time to incorporate the necessary Lakota language, traditional values, and protocol according to each age group. Guided by a vision shared publicly by all program staff and with children's family members and their community on the Pine Ridge Reservation and beyond, the Lakota Language Initiative program has worked incredibly hard to continue walking towards their vision and making their vision a reality.

### **Reflection on Story 9**

Reflecting overall on this program, it was exciting to hear the passion behind the story shared, especially since the program staff felt their efforts were part of a larger Lakota language revitalization movement. By bringing their determination and creativity to their work, the team at Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa Thanka continued to see their efforts with Lakota language immersion as contributions to their community and to the future of their people. It was also refreshing to hear how the team worked to support other language revitalization and immersion education efforts, not only in their local community but in the larger community as well. The program staff indicated their willingness to assist and support other Indigenous communities in making progress towards language revitalization goals within their Indigenous immersion programs.

**Story 10: “For Our Children and Our Language:” The Story of Curriculum Development at Wicoie Nandagikendan Dakota Ojibwe Early Childhood Urban Immersion Program**

As I have done with each of the three other collaborating programs, I used the Kiowa Encampment Story Circle methodology to help me interpret the collective story that arose.

**Piy-Baw-Daw (The East) – Emergence**

I turned to face the east, the direction of emergence and I listened to the stories that were shared with me. My interactions and discussions with each of the Wicoie Nandagikendan program staff helped to shape the story of their curriculum development process. I began my conversations with the team at Wicoie Nandagikendan through first reaching out via email with a formal letter of invitation, followed-up by a phone call. At first, I spoke with the program director, who also serves as the supervisor of the immersion classroom staff. Through a series of email exchanges and conference calls, I was able to share my invitation to participate as well as offer additional details about my dissertation research journey. I explained the goals of my research as well as the University of Oklahoma’s IRB approval process. Throughout this time, I

provided several versions of my outreach materials so that the program leadership could make the necessary decisions for participation. At first, my conversations were only with the program director and the office manager, but my later conversations included the Wicoie Nandagikendan Board of Directors, who would give the ultimate approval as to whether the program could participate with me or not. Finally, the board of directors gave their approval after a thorough review of all of my IRB materials and an explanation of the informed consent process, including details on the data ownership. It was through this approval process that I learned about the program's interest in participating – the board of directors, the program leadership, and the immersion teachers themselves felt that their participation was very timely and could have a huge impact on the program's continuous quality improvement goals. After the series of conference calls and emails exchanged, I was invited to visit the program onsite during the month of October 2019. It was an honor for me to work with both the Dakota Immersion Teacher and the Ojibwe Immersion Teacher on this dissertation journey.

The Dakota Immersion Teacher oversees the Deer Classroom, located on the first floor of the building. The Ojibwe Immersion Teacher oversees the Wolf Classroom, which is located on the second floor of the building. Each classroom serves up to 14 children who range in age from toddlers to school-age. Currently there are two teachers in each classroom, one is the immersion teacher and one is the teacher aide. Considering the approach to curriculum development, the Dakota Immersion Teacher started out with the program quite a few years ago and had to start from scratch to build a Dakota language immersion curriculum to accommodate all ages of children served. As she shared,

With that, I took it and I tried to develop as much curriculum as I could in the language.

You know, because we had plans to develop teachers, second language teachers. So, what

I did was while I was developing the curriculum and the lesson plans, I was doing it in the language. (program interview, 10/9/2019)

The curriculum for both classrooms is organized around a list of 38 themes that correspond roughly to weekly themes for each school year. The Dakota Immersion Teacher explained that the themes were created through community input, staff input, and input from children's family members when the program first started in 2006. These themes provided the way that the immersion teachers organized their lesson plans according to each theme. As the Ojibwe Immersion Teacher explained,

We've had these themes for a long time, so as long as I've been working here these are the themes that you cycle through every year. A lot of times there will be variations.

Some years I really want to do this, I got a new idea, I want to implement this, or that one didn't work really well, maybe take a break from that, adapting and changing always.

Even the dynamics of the kids are, like some kids are so fascinated with a certain thing so we'll take a longer time with that if they're really into that, so, those are the general baseline themes that we follow every year (program interview, 10/9/2019).

The Ojibwe Immersion Teacher continued to share about how the units fit into the themes in the classroom,

Unit-wise, every week we have a different theme, so from that theme is where I usually come up with my core seven words that I'll be teaching, and they'll be like some basic concepts, like a few concepts that they should take away from that theme... Then I'll have phrases that will be helpful for either myself or more like, I'm kind of writing for classroom helpers, or if someone were to come into this program midway through, maybe future teachers, to have this framework for anyone who might be doing this, whether it's

this program or any program... And so it'll kind of go more in depth like that. And then, I usually plan a whole week, so I block off (program interview, 10/9/2019).

Some of the themes include required components for early childhood programs in the state of Minnesota, while other themes focus on cultural knowledge, as the Ojibwe Immersion Teacher shared,

You know, there's some stuff like "handwashing" is a theme for January, we have to cover it, it's just something we do, it's just in there. Signs of spring starts coming in the spring time, a lot of stuff will follow that. Or honoring the relatives comes at the start of Indian month, in May. There's a November and a May, and one is national one is Minnesota (program interview, 10/9/2019).

In order to demonstrate how the curriculum is organized, the Dakota Immersion Teacher walked me around a large poster of the four seasons, essentially, a medicine wheel in Dakota, with Dakota labels of the stages of life, the four directions, the plants in season during that time, major cultural activities during that season, all in colorful images. As she went through the quadrants of the medicine wheel and explained how they were broken down into the months on the calendar, she also shared the Dakota names for each month of the year, for instance, the word for January, *Witehi wi*, translates to "really cold rough moon" (program interview, 10/9/2019) and the name for April is *Magaokada wi*, "where the geese lay eggs moon" (program interview, 10/9/2019).

It is important to know that the Dakota Immersion Teacher was herself a first language learner of Lakota, which is in the same language family as the Dakota language. She described the difference as Lakota is the L-dialect and Dakota is the D-dialect. She had the advantage of thinking in the Lakota and Dakota languages. The Ojibwe Immersion Teacher was a second language learner of Ojibwe and was extremely passionate about immersion methodology,

Ojibwe culture and identity, and very dedicated to the program. The Dakota Immersion Teacher shared how she got started with teaching immersion,

I moved out here in Minnesota about 20 years ago. And I was approached by some people from the community saying: Did you know that we're looking for teachers for the immersion program? Back then I didn't really think I had it in me but after I found the statistics of the language dying, that's when I decided to step up and say hey, maybe I can do this, maybe I'll give it a shot (program interview, 10/9/2019).

### **Piy-K'ee (The South) – Challenges**

I turned to face the next direction, the south, the direction of challenges. When I first connected with the Wicoie Nandagikendan program staff, the program itself was undergoing several transitions. There had been some recent changes in the classroom staff as well elections within the board of directors which had shifted several positions. There was also a new program director who was very interested in learning all about the program and the potential for the program to succeed. These changes created an air of uncertainty in the program. The lack of funding security created a daily challenge for the program's administration and leadership. Without state funding, the program leadership had to look to other sources of funding for the program to remain open. The Dakota Immersion Teacher described that oftentimes the children who attended the program came from families who faced difficulties. Due to lack of job security, adequate transportation, and ongoing family challenges, the children who attended the immersion program often expressed themselves through the challenging behaviors that manifested in the classroom throughout the day, as she describes,

it depends, some of the kids, they have their struggles, they come from different backgrounds, some from tougher backgrounds than others, and so if they're not there

every day, that's the thing, they're not going to get the immersed language that we would like to give them (program interview, 10/9/2019).

All of these issues faced by the children and their families impacted the attendance patterns of children in the program. As the Dakota Immersion Teacher stated, when the children were unable to attend the program, then there were increasingly more gaps in the child's ability to acquire the Dakota language through the immersion classroom. An additional challenge the program faced was working to engage the children's parents and family members in the program. Due to the fluctuations in parent work schedules, transportation issues, and other barriers, the program had faced difficulty with ensuring that parents were involved in their children's education.

One challenge faced by the Ojibwe Immersion Teacher was one often faced by early childhood educators. The challenge involved being responsive to the children's needs while ensuring flexibility in routines or schedules to accommodate the shifting needs of the children in care. The Ojibwe Immersion Teacher shared,

when they're just all getting tired. I don't know, it's just kind of a sense, like how you read the room you know? It's like you notice by their body language, or like, all right they're done with this so it's time to move on, even if I think "oh we really need to do this" sometimes it's way not worth the battle, like they're not picking it up if they're not engaged (program interview, 10/7/2019).

In the beginning of developing the curriculum to be used, one difficulty faced was the need to find an orthography of the Dakota language that could be used consistently with the children in the classroom. The Dakota Immersion Teacher shared one of her struggles, "But also, here was the challenge, was being a first language speaker, they never taught us how to spell!"



(program interview, 10/9/2019). She had to work to learn different orthographies of Dakota and then choose one to use in the classroom learning materials. One aspect that emerged for me was that the dedication of each program staff member was so great that they had come to view the challenges they faced as opportunities rather than barriers.

### **Piy-Yee-Yah (The West) – Transcendence**

The attitude of turning challenges into opportunities takes me to the next direction that I needed to face, which is the west, the direction of transcendence. Given the current transition that the program had undergone over the past year, I expected to see anxiety or hear worry in their voices. However, what emerged was each individual staff member's commitment to providing the highest quality experience to the children and families they served every moment of every day. Meanwhile, as evidenced by the program's updated work plan, the board of directors was actively seeking additional funding to ensure the sustainability of the program, especially since the program was seen as a necessary resource for the Indigenous families in the Little Earth and Franklin Ave areas of Minneapolis.

In order to organize the Dakota language immersion curriculum, the Dakota Immersion Teacher explained that “we plan everything according to our culture calendars, through season, and whether that ties into ricing and harvesting. We try to implement our culture with our culture calendar” (program interview, 10/9/2019) which also included activities like “winnowing, they have a basket, with a canoe, they go on the lakes with the rice knockers” (program interview, 10/9/2019). Another crucial piece of the curriculum was the inclusion of Dakota traditional values:

conduct yourself well, we don't hit each other, we take care of each other, and that cultural piece. Because, we know as teachers if they don't listen to elders or to public

authority, there's going to be consequences in life, so we always implement that as a big culture piece (program interview, 10/9/2019).

There were times when additional Ojibwe language was needed to incorporate learning activities appropriately into the themes for that week and month such as “thunderbirds is one of our themes, so I'm like, so what should I do? So, I usually go to an elder and I'll give them tobacco and like “oh, this week we're supposed to teach about thunder beings” (program interview, 10/9/2019). Both teachers documented their lesson plans, learning activities, and overall ideas for each theme through the writing of the curriculum unit, which was updated according to the week of the school year, posted in the classroom, and shared with the other program staff.

These immersion teachers' ability to be responsive to the children's individual needs while attending to the needs of the group all while producing positive language acquisition outcomes in their respective target languages was motivating. The Ojibwe Immersion Teacher shared how she overcame the challenge of children's challenging behaviors in the classroom, they're still learning the same thing, they're just doing a different activity, so knowing when to move to activities that are more beneficial, I guess...In me, what I find works better, is not being too rigid with early child care, it's so, with that big of an age range, we do have a routine but when it doesn't match up to the minute, I'm not going to stress about it because everyone is happier if it's more of a natural movement. (program interview, 10/7/2019)

In thinking more in depth about her approach, the Dakota Immersion Teacher shared, whatever their challenges are, it kind of seems to calm and soothe the kids. And then they get engaged. And we just do it all in the language. I always brought a lot of visuals with me. That way the kids would know what you're talking about. And when you sit down

and you talk to them, you just kind of, you know, show them the visual and just kind of repeat it and repeat it and repeat it (program interview, 10/9/2019).

Despite fluctuations in children's attendance, the teachers worked diligently to ensure that the children and families felt supported and connected while they are with the program. Even though parent engagement can often pose a serious barrier for immersion programs and early childhood programs in general, these immersion teachers took on the challenge as an opportunity to find new and creative ways to help the families feel connected to the classroom and to feel a sense of pride in their children's progress.

Strategies shared by both teachers included the use of a weekly classroom newsletter, one in Ojibwe for the Wolf Classroom and one in Dakota for the Deer Classroom. The Dakota classroom newsletter included a section called *Taku echunpi* "Things individual kids did!" where a success that each child in the classroom had that week was highlighted. One of the Ojibwe classroom newsletters included a section called *Manoominikedaa!* "Let's make rice/go ricing!" where the teacher described the theme for that week and described the activities in Ojibwe and in English such as "We learned a lot about the process of *manominikewin* (making of wild rice)" (program interview, 10/7/2019). They also sent out personalized letters to each of the families, informing them specifically about their child's progress.

There was also an active social media presence for both teachers at the school. They found a way to use social media to engage parents and family members who might not otherwise be interested in being involved. Both teachers recorded lots of videos of the children and shared those videos privately with the children's family. The program also hosted various seasonal and traditional celebrations, such as community feasts throughout the school year, as well as offered

mini-camps for language and culture learning that all families could participate in along with their child.

Another innovation that was clearly evident to me, and another point of transcendence, was the intentional use of technology to support the children's interests and language use in the classrooms. Through creating live action videos of cultural activities being conducted entirely in the language, these two teachers had started to create a resource library for themselves, for future immersion teachers, and for future apprentice teachers to utilize going forward. For the Ojibwe Immersion Teacher, integrating Ojibwe cultural knowledge was important work, which was demonstrated through her process for making videos based on the cultural themes:

I go to the sugar bush each year. The ricing stuff, I'll bring in my rice knockers, my winnowing trays, I'll have them go out and actually winnow the rice and try to be as involved. I make a lot of videos when I'm going to spend time with elders. I'll make videos with them of everything we're doing. Oh, we're plucking ducks, talk about what I'm doing. We're ricing, we make a video of me doing this and talk to me and talk about what I'm doing (program interview, 10/9/2019).

The Ojibwe Immersion Teacher described the way that she integrated technology into her curriculum implementation,

So, I have a lot of videos I'm developing of those natural things, those processes that they'd be involved with so they can really grasp it. Especially seeing a teacher, someone they know, doing those things, also makes it real for them. I never saw them understand ricing until I made those videos (program interview, 10/7/2019).

One way that the Ojibwe Immersion Teacher had been successful in engaging the children in even more Ojibwe language use was through the showing of videos that involved traditional

Ojibwe activities (program interview, 10/7/2019). Another interesting observation about the use of technology was shared by the Ojibwe Immersion Teacher,

This one is really calming for them. It's just this really long video of me pulling in the net and talking about the fish, all in Ojibwe. So, sometimes it helps calm them down. It's really meditative, it's like slow, and there's water, they get to watch the fish coming in. It's such a traditional food source, it's something that these kids don't always have access to being urban, so it's nice for them to see that, be like "I want to do that, that's what I want to do, that looks so good, I love fish." They're always telling me, "I want to do that, can we do that with you?" (program interview, 10/7/2019).

An important aspect of the curriculum was the emphasis on daily routines and keeping to a regular schedule with the children in both immersion classrooms. The Dakota Immersion Teacher shared her classroom daily routine, which first started by singing

the four directions song, they'll say we'll always start west, looking down upon you, like the Creator, then they'll say always pray, then we start west and then they'll say and this one, and this one, and then they'll say look up to the heavens, your great father in the heaven, God, is looking down on you, the Creator is looking down on you, watching over you, the same thing, so pray, and then they'll say towards the ground, look down, they'll say Mother Earth is watching, taking care. And then they say pray. They'd have to stand up and look towards the directions that we're singing to" (program interview, 10/9/2019).

In the Dakota immersion classroom the children started their morning routine following their smudging ceremony and prayer with their daily calendar wall review, where the children practiced counting, the days of the week, the month, all in the Dakota language, as she described,

Then we do the calendar, the number cards to 10, and then we talk about classroom behavior like I mentioned with the visuals. And then, during this time, we sing Dakota songs periodically (program interview, 10/9/2019).

The Dakota Immersion Teacher continued to explain how she conceptualized the cultural aspects of traditional Dakota knowledge and embedded it in the Dakota language immersion curriculum as she developed it,

So, one of the things that I found really effective with the kids is what I would do, is perform my morning circle and we would sit down and we would smudge with sage. And I would sing the prayer song. So that kind of gave the kids a sense of spiritual belonging (program interview, 10/9/2019).

During the course of the day, sometimes Ojibwe values were taught as situations came up for the children,

I'm like you don't just kill something for nothing. You can't just squish those bugs because they're there. You know, those are living things. Every time we pick something we're putting down tobacco, like, have you put down tobacco for that life, like why did you take it?...then when they start having those connections, when they start recognizing the world and they see "oh there's bees" like "oh they're doing this thing" then they become a someone, instead of this thing that they're like "eww, no." (program interview, 10/9/2019)

Another example of incorporating Ojibwe values she related was,

now hearing all these other elders speaking about that same concept, it's like, oh, the things that you do, it comes back to you. So, if you're doing something you shouldn't be, that's gonna come back on you. That's a concept, almost like a world concept built into

the language. So when I'm seeing my student and she's pinching this other kid just to pinch him to make him mad, I'm like, you shouldn't do that, but also I'm telling him like, you know, what you're doing is going to come back to you, so think about that. (program interview, 10/9/2019)

There were cultural considerations that needed to be taken into account when developing the curriculum according to the themes in the classroom:

What I've always, always heard, elders say it over and over. You can't have one without the other, you can't separate language and culture, like they always are so intertwined. To me it feels like I don't have to think "and now I'm doing cultural stuff" it just kind of comes out when we're just doing stuff. Like, when we're out in the garden, we want to gather some sage, oh, we're going to offer tobacco. Or, like ooh, it's thundering outside oh, the thunder beings are coming, and we'll talk about oh, there's thunder beings that are visiting, don't be scared, you should just offer tobacco, they love us, they love Anishinaabe (program interview, 10/9/2019).

The Ojibwe Immersion Teacher continued to share about integrating the culture into the curriculum overall,

So, they're always picking up songs that are more traditional songs. And then they learn about what it is like to be around the drum, like you respect the drum, you don't just hit it for nothing, you offer tobacco when you're gonna sing...like when we go sugar bush, that's a very traditional time of year to make maple sugar, so they get to partake in that process, and we go to a place that does it traditionally too, so that's helpful (program interview, 10/9/2019).

The Indigenous knowledge embedded in the curriculum was expressed in both classrooms according to the emphasis placed on that knowledge and values. In the Ojibwe classroom, there was a special interest in the Ojibwe conceptualization of the seasons and the time of year,

It's the back of the turtle there are 13 panels and there's 13 moons, so it's the name of the different months...so I have a big turtle shell and I'm like I pull it up like this and it's like this calendar that we count every day and we count the things and now we have the same snapping turtle the same kind of turtle in that big tank that was in there too, so there's lot of ways to observe that. Even keeping up with the moons one, the calendar we do our weather on (program interview, 10/9/2019).

In Ojibwe, *Anishinaabe Giizisoo-Mazina'igan* translates to "Anishinaabe Calendar." As described above, the Ojibwe classroom calendar was indicated through using the traditional method of the back of a snapping turtle shell with its 13 panels representing each of the months, or moons, in the Ojibwe year. When I visited the program, it was October, known as *Binaaklwe Giizis*, which translates to "falling leaves moon." The Ojibwe Immersion Teacher explained how a component of traditional knowledge, observing the moon phases as a way to tell time, was implemented in the classroom with the children:

And we do our weather chart, every day we do what's the weather outside, and then we record it on a calendar, where instead of numbers, it has moon faces. So, they see the moon is changing over the month, here's the weather, they become observant of what's happening outside, because that's super important and something kids aren't seeing as much (program interview, 10/9/2019).



In Ojibwe, the way the Ojibwe Immersion Teacher described the moon phases chart which also tracked the daily weather conditions with the children is *Aaniin ezhiwebak agwajiing?* This phrase translates to “what’s it like outside?” (program interview, 10/7/2019)

In the Dakota classroom, the conceptualization of time included first the four directions, known as *Tate Ouye Topa*, the “four winds,” then the four seasons, called *Makoncage*, roughly translated into the “time of year,” then the months or *Wi akenunpa kin*, the seven days of the week, known as *Anpetu sakowin kin*, and finally the Dakota words for each day of the month based on the phase of the moon. The Dakota Immersion Teacher used the Dakota word for each day of the month up to 31 days. In Dakota, the word used to describe the children’s classroom calendar is *Wiyawapi* which translates to “count the moon” (program interview, 10/9/2019). The thirteen original Dakota months, or moons, have been adjusted to fit into the twelve-month calendar. I visited in the month of *Canwapakasna wi*, which translates to “shaking off leaves moon” also known as October (program interview, 10/9/2019).

Through the filter of transcendence, I could clearly see the tremendous depth of experience that both immersion teachers demonstrated through the stories they shared. These two teachers have become cornerstones of the immersion community in the Minneapolis area and throughout the state of Minnesota, even as they remain humble. The fact that one teacher had served as a mentor to four different immersion instructors who have now gone on to serve as immersion teachers in other settings throughout Minnesota speaks volumes about the expertise that the program has access to, as the Dakota Immersion Teacher described,

that was helping the second language speakers learn, learning with the kids. There was one person in particular, she’s a Dakota Sioux and I’m you know Lakota. And she didn’t know, but she was my project. It would be anything from clean up your paint, wipe it,

and throw it away. And then I'll repeat it and I'll repeat it (program interview, 10/9/2019).

Regarding specific immersion methodology used by the immersion teachers, the Dakota Immersion Teacher indicated, "I would do the total physical response (TPR). I would act it out so that way the kids would understand. But, also having that same routine every day it makes it a lot easier for them to transition as well" (program interview, 10/9/2019). Regarding her opinion on being an immersion teacher, the Dakota Immersion Teacher shared her perspective,

being in total immersion really, really helps. It really helps because it helps the apprentices learn along with the kids, and the Total Physical Response, their repetition, you know the daily routine, keep that the same, except for you know, the months are going to change, the seasons, but they just keep all that. A lot of repetition. Because kids have to hear it, oh my gosh, they said it 5,000 times before they actually got it (program interview, 10/9/2019).

Along the same lines as the Dakota Immersion Teacher, the Ojibwe Immersion Teacher shared her perspective on effective immersion instruction as she used it in her classroom,

one method that I was taught was like a 3-5-7 method, so a lot of times when people are learning new vocabulary especially in an immersion setting it's about like 3 words at a time that you can handle, and once you've mastered those 3 words, then you can move on to 2 more, so it becomes 5, and then from there, 2 more. And so, sometimes it will be at different levels too...So, picking words for this unit that are the words that I want them to come away with, to like really focus on and then from there go (program interview, 10/9/2019).

Throughout the day and with each activity and each interaction with the children, both immersion teachers thought carefully about intentional language use (program interview, 10/9/2019). In order to ensure that the curriculum and activities continued to reflect each Tribal knowledge, both teachers reached out to elders and cultural knowledge keepers both in the urban community as well as in the rural reservation communities outside the city limits. The Ojibwe Immersion Teacher was very mindful about maintaining a log of language learning activities and she listened intently to the elder speakers to get ideas and write them down for future reference.

In order to implement each curriculum activity, the Dakota Immersion Teacher shared her approaches for working with the children,

A lot of repetition. And the daily routine. Kids really do learn through song so whether that's Head Shoulders Knees and Toes, you know, counting. Anything can be through song, you can make it through song, whether it's washing your hands, body parts. We find it really effective, you know, just keep at it (program interview, 10/9/2019).

Both classrooms were designed to accommodate a wide age range of children, so both teachers were always thinking about how to differentiate their curriculum and incorporate developmentally appropriate adaptations of the learning experiences for each age group represented.

The Ojibwe Immersion Teacher shared how she developed a new unit and accompanying activities based on the children's interests,

Sometimes I'll come up with new stuff inspired by them. A lot of times they'll just keep asking about something. I developed this whole unit on pollination, because the kids kept asking about bees, and what are they doing, and what is this and that, and I was like, why are they so interested in that, and I'm like "well, how do I talk to them about that?" so I

started looking into elders that have done work on pollination or asking the ones that are able to talk about that nicely you know, so I'll use some of their vocabulary, some of the things that they've maybe already produced on that, and then I did a lot of, just came up with things. I'm like, well they can reenact it. So, I found this bee costume. So I'm like well they can act it out, so I made little flowers with pollen stuck on them, and nectar, and then they went around collecting the nectar and the pollen and bring it back to the beehive that I made, and well if they just act it out they'll have a better concept of it, and they like to dress up and do that kind of thing. And it became really effective, because then after doing that for a couple days, when we went out to the garden to actually observe them doing it, they were like *Aamoog wiidookaagewag ji-aazhawishkaag binibiishaan!* (Bees help to move pollen across!) "they're pollinating!" (program interview, 10/9/2019).

The Ojibwe unit she described was called *Binibiishaan*, or "pollen" and, along with the target vocabulary of bee, flower, honey, nectar, pollen and phrases like "Don't be afraid of the bees!" included a game the teacher created called *Apatoo* which translates to "s/he runs to a certain place" in order to use the concept of pollinating to practice phrases like "where is...?" and "find it!" (program interview, 10/7/2019).

In another example of curriculum implementation, the Ojibwe Immersion Teacher described how she led the children through the fire safety unit in the Ojibwe classroom. The day that I visited, the teacher conducted the activity called "Stop, Drop, and Roll Practice:" "today it was stop drop and roll. So, I taught them about doing that. Each kid had to get up and there was a fire puppet and they stopped dropped and rolled. So, then it's reinforcing those 3—stop, drop, and roll words" (program interview, 10/7/2019). The target vocabulary for that day included the

Ojibwe words: *Noongitaan!* “stop!” *Bangishinin!* “drop!” and “*Ditibizon!*” “roll!” as well as the concept of *Manaaajitoon ishkode* which means “respect the fire or be careful with the fire” (program interview, 10/7/2019). As the Ojibwe Immersion Teacher noted, “We talk about respecting fire, because culturally it’s important, it’s not just all “Fire is bad” so how do you respect fire, you know?” (program interview, 10/7/2019)

Both classrooms use the same child assessment tool, called the IGDI, but the difference is that the tool is translated into both Dakota and Ojibwe for use with the children accordingly. Tracking children’s progress is of special interest to both teachers as they use the results of the IGDI assessment to individualize lesson plans and develop differentiated activities based on the language that the children need to work on or excel in. Both teachers expressed that they look forward to conducting the assessment in order to see if what they were implementing in the classroom was having an impact on the children’s learning. The Dakota Immersion Teacher described the importance of conducting language acquisition assessments in the immersion classroom with the children,

And then, someone said, how do you know the language is effective? Well we got something that’s called IGDIS. And so, we get some cards, we at least show them five cards a week from the IGDIS stack. Whether it’s the native animals, the colors, the numbers, just anything from clothes to food, to material things. We just keep adding and adding and adding. And by the end of the quarter, every three months, they should at least, we’re kind of hoping for maybe 30 words, if possible (program interview, 10/9/2019).

### **Siy-K’ee (The North) – Reflection**

The next direction I turned towards was the north, the direction of reflection. Thinking back through all of the stories that were shared, through the discussions and conversations that we engaged in, I saw a small but mighty team of early childhood language immersion experts who went above and beyond to create meaningful experiences for the children and families they serve. According to the Wicoie Nandagikendan program work plan for 2019-2020, there are several goals in place, as follows

- 1) Improve language immersion school experience for children
- 2) Improve quality of teaching in an immersion classroom
- 3) Improve immersion teaching through community engagement
- 4) Improve program sustainability

Under each overarching goal are four identified objectives that speak to continuous improvement in all aspects of the program and curriculum implementation (Wicoie Nandagikendan, 2019).

The Ojibwe Immersion Teacher shared specific goals that she has for her students,

It's not always easy to do, or someone will have different value systems like come up and that, but I just try to make them feel comfortable like this is normal, like I think that just doing this stuff all the time, I want them to feel like this is normal, this is my baseline.

(program interview, 10/9/2019)

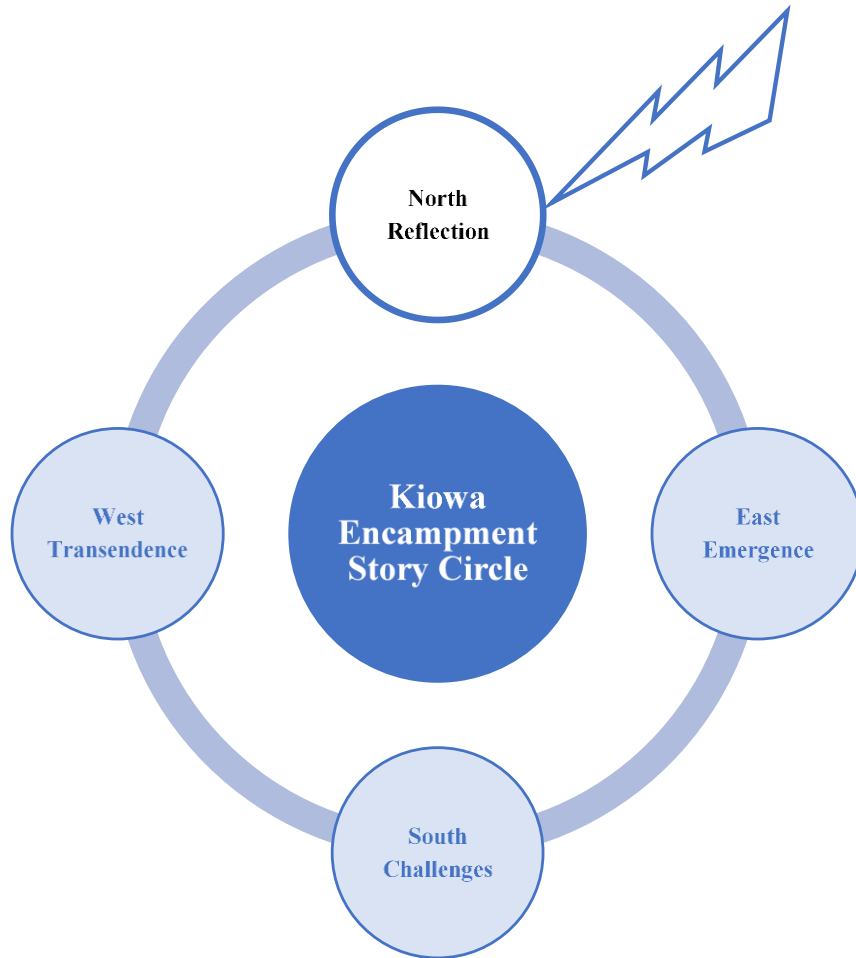
One exciting aspect of Wicoie Nandagikendan's history since 2006 was that the program staff were highly invested in providing the highest possible quality language immersion instruction and, overall, a high-quality learning environment for participating children and their families. To this end, the program staff had been involved in various research projects throughout the program's history, including qualitative studies on community perspectives of language immersion as well as quantitative research on child outcomes data as specifically related to the

assessment system used by the program. One huge reflection that emerged was the request by every staff member to hear what other Indigenous early childhood immersion programs are doing and to always have the attitude of constant improvement, of continuous innovation through immersion pedagogy. Another area of success was the program's collective ability to involve the children's families in program and classroom activities and just remain interested in their children's learning. Additionally, both classrooms embedded technology into their curriculum implementation and language instruction. One of the board members shared the program's overarching goal, "we do this for our children and for our language" (program interview, 10/7/2019).

### **Reflection on Story 10**

Overall, the Wicoie Nandagikendan program staff indicated they were both willing to share and willing to learn from other immersion programs. This program has found a way to balance their traditional knowledge with children's developmental levels within the early childhood language immersion setting. Their curriculum development process was a reflection of the expertise that each immersion teacher brings to the program as well as a reflection of the commitment to ensuring that their tribal traditional knowledge remained infused throughout all aspects of the immersion classroom and the children's daily interactions. The impressive component for me was that this one program effectively developed curriculum that meets the needs of their various learners in two different Indigenous languages. Through a unified team approach and starting with the same set of themes, the same expectations for the format of their units and lesson plan sequence as well as the same expectations for their daily routines and learning centers, both immersion teachers demonstrated their ability to enact Indigenous immersion pedagogy in two languages with a wide range of learners.

## Location 4: Siy-K'ee (The North) – Reflection



**Figure 8.** Kiowa Encampment Story Circle - North: Reflection.

### Story 11: Sharing Our Story

#### Introduction

As I journeyed to each of the four collaborating programs, whether in person or virtually, I kept my eye on the questions that started this journey in the first place. I wanted to know 1) How do Indigenous early childhood immersion programs develop and implement culturally sustaining curriculum? and 2) What is the story that emerges as Indigenous early childhood immersion programs develop and implement culturally sustaining curriculum? Sub-questions



included a) What is the planning process that guides the implementation of Indigenous early childhood immersion culturally sustaining learning experiences? and b) What is the process that underlies the development of culturally sustaining pedagogy in Indigenous early childhood immersion programs? These four questions drove me forward as I worked with each program.

When I think about sharing our story, I think about the message that I saw embedded within the stories shared from each participating program. Remembering the Indigenous Storywork methodology as approached from the Kiowa Encampment Story Circle perspective, I have built my own understandings of the curriculum story that emerged from each collaborating partner early childhood immersion program. I think of Kovach (2010) who stated that the listener must “walk inside the story to find their own teachings” (p. 60). Kovach’s (2010) comment reminds me of the way that I have interpreted stories as a Kiowa person. Whenever I have asked one of my grandmothers or other Kiowa elders a question, their response is always through a story. The lesson or conclusion that they want me to draw is embedded within the story for me to find or uncover. Our elders present the story as they have experienced or heard it told, and I, as the listener, must find my own conclusion, build my own interpretation, and learn the lesson that is embedded within the story, according to my own readiness and willingness to learn. I also remember the seven principles of Indigenous Storywork as defined by Archibald (2008) and that the expectation is the use these principles to make meaning from the stories heard. As I listened to each program’s curriculum story, I used these seven principles to find the meaning in the stories as I approached each story through the lens of my Kiowa Encampment Story Circle methodology: respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, wholism, inter-relatedness, and synergy.

My call to you, as the listener to this story, is to think critically about the various elements that have led to this point. Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous language revitalization, culturally sustaining curriculum development and implementation, four stories of Indigenous early childhood immersion program's curriculum development processes: each of these elements has contributed to the overall story I am sharing through the lens of my own Kiowa ways of knowing and the Kiowa Encampment Story Circle. By taking a step back from the story, the listener can reflect and make decisions about their own interpretation that is made from this story. Over the next few pages, I will share my interpretation of each program's key takeaways I have gathered from each curriculum story.

### **My Message on Behalf of Kiowa Language Immersion**

Taking into account all of the sharing I have done about who I am as a Kiowa scholar and how I have been a part of Kiowa language revitalization efforts has hopefully demonstrated my commitment to my own language learning and revitalization. It is my interest in revitalizing my own language that has provided me with the motivation to pursue this dissertation research journey. As a second language learner of my heritage language, I have become even more motivated to continue the journey towards one day being able to speak my language and have a conversation with one of my elders. As an early childhood educator and curriculum developer, I have been inspired to reignite our Kiowa language thematic, values-based curriculum framework and carry it forward to the new team members who now work with my Tribal government, who may be interested in implementing a Kiowa-specific curriculum geared towards Kiowa language immersion instruction in all domains of daily life, beginning with the youngest learners. After all of the years of hard work put in by Kiowa linguistics, Kiowa educators, and Kiowa tribal government employees, I owe it to all those that have come before me to persevere with

implementing the Kiowa-specific curriculum that was created through our work with the Kiowa Tribe Child Care Program staff and all of the elders, cultural knowledge keepers, university partners, and participating children's family members who took part in conceptualizing the curriculum over the years.

Overall, it has been an honor to have been able to hear firsthand the stories of curriculum development that emerged as part of this dissertation research journey. It was through my Kiowa eyes that I was able to develop culturally reciprocal, respectful relationships with each individual and program that I worked with on this journey. And it was through Kiowa ears that I was able to listen with my heart as the stories unfolded.

### **New Kituwah Academy's Message on Language Immersion**

After hearing the curriculum story of the New Kituwah Academy's second grade Cherokee language immersion classroom, I reflected on the way the teaching team from this program developed their curriculum. One thing I noticed was the way that the curriculum components were woven together. The immersion teacher, supported by the language specialist, worked hard to ensure that each subject-specific curriculum component was both aligned with the state of North Carolina education standards for the second-grade level as well as translated and delivered entirely in the Cherokee language, including through the Cherokee Syllabary. Another unique aspect of their curriculum development process was the way in which the immersion teacher worked to weave the curriculum components together in a way that delivered an integrated, comprehensive learning experience to the children. For instance, the immersion teacher described how Cherokee cosmology is intertwined in the lessons for social studies, science, and language arts according to the specific stories and time period of focus. The use of journals with the children gave the second-grade students a concrete opportunity to produce

written Cherokee in order to capture their own reflections from the content that they explored together as a class.

In thinking about what message the New Kituwah Academy would like to share with other Indigenous immersion programs, I found that this program has developed a curriculum that successfully meets their North Carolina state standards and grounds students in Cherokee ways of knowing, thus supporting Cherokee identity development. Despite challenges like determining an assessment process that works best for the students and pressure from parents to assign grades just like in English-only classrooms, the team at the New Kituwah Academy intentionally asserts Cherokee language, knowledge, and cultural practices as a way for children to be successful in education as well as gain experience as a Cherokee language speaker. The entire team is dedicated to enacting the program's vision and lives that vision through the daily work of implementing their comprehensive curriculum.

Through the process of hearing the message from the Cherokee immersion staff at the New Kituwah Academy, some specific questions came up that they would like to ask of other immersion programs. These questions represent the additional areas of exploration that the immersion teachers would like to address:

- How do other Indigenous early childhood immersion programs create assessments for language immersion classes, especially in the elementary grades?
- What is the academic rigor of their language classes?
- Do other Indigenous early childhood immersion programs address the various components of early literacy development including writing, grammar, phonics, self-expression, and if so, how do they balance their planning and delivery so each component gets included in child and classroom assessment?

The message that New Kituwah Academy would like to send to other immersion programs is one of willingness to share. Their team has undergone trial and error over the years as part of the ongoing process of curriculum development in an early childhood language immersion setting. Due to the efforts put into their work, the New Kituwah Academy team is both willing to share their lessons learned and interested in hearing the lessons learned from other immersion programs.

The team at New Kituwah Academy shared that visitors are welcomed by the school in case there are other immersion teachers and programs that would like to come and visit and observe the immersion classrooms in person. Additionally, the immersion teachers at New Kituwah Academy are very interested in meeting with, sharing with, and possibly visiting other immersion programs.

Overall, my takeaway from hearing New Kituwah Academy's curriculum development story was that they have successfully woven together the various state-mandated school subjects into a Cherokee immersion curriculum for second grade students. The experiences shared by participating school staff expressed the way this school enacts culturally sustaining curriculum. Their curriculum development and implementation process created a way for students to acknowledge, honor, and learn about their own Cherokee identity completely through their heritage language. While I witnessed elements of culturally sustaining curriculum development happening through the story shared by the second-grade teacher, I also saw other elements expressed. Due to the way that the teacher described her process of aligning all curriculum components with Cherokee epistemology and ways of knowing, the actual curriculum that was developed and implemented went beyond just sustaining the Cherokee knowledge and language.

The curriculum developed and implemented represented culturally revitalizing curriculum through the way the teacher intentionally embedded Cherokee values, ideals, and history in each component of the classroom curriculum. Additionally, as the teacher described her process for implementing the curriculum through intentionally designed learning experiences with the children, she pointed to the lack of resources and guidance for Indigenous language immersion programs. In spite of this dearth of resources, the Kituwah Academy Teacher has successfully enacted her own Indigenous immersion pedagogy in order to continually ground the students in their Cherokee identity through their heritage language through the second-grade curriculum.

### **Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program's Message on Language Immersion**

After hearing the story shared by the staff at the Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program, the main thing that stood out to me was their focus on community. In each aspect of their curriculum development and implementation, from first envisioning the curriculum themes to developing weekly lesson plans with corresponding learning activities, the immersion teachers worked hard to ensure that the children saw that the classroom was not just limited to the walls of their physical building. In order to accomplish this, the teaching team incorporated excursions into their lesson plans that took the children on nature walks around the Jemez community, to community fields where traditional crops are grown, and even to the Jemez Pueblo plaza, the centerpiece of the community where their ceremonial and celebratory dances and feasts are held. Even when the children were inside the classroom, the community was invited to be a part of the children's learning. Community partners conducted presentations and demonstrations for the children and the children's family members went into the classrooms to share stories, traditional songs, dances, and other cultural activities. This particular immersion

program accomplished all of this through a spoken-only immersion focus. It is important to remember that even though the language was considered too sacred to write down, the teaching team had found a way to wrap the children in their heritage language and immerse the children in their language every moment of the day, within and outside their classrooms. Additionally, the Jemez Pueblo approach to curriculum development included a way to develop and implement learning activities that were aligned with federal and state regulations for each age group while at the same time delivering learning experiences through the Jemez Pueblo people's own ways of knowing.

According to the team at the Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program, the biggest message that they would like to share is that other Indigenous language programs should not forget who they are in the process of developing their program and implementing their curriculum. Another lesson learned is to think beyond just the walls of the classroom and be open to seeing outside and into the community as learning spaces also.

One important aspect that the Jemez Pueblo team wanted to share is that they are always open to learning new things and they actually have some specific questions for other Indigenous language immersion programs. These questions include

- Could we get to actually see what they're doing in the classroom and compare ourselves, and ask how did they do it?
- How do other immersion teachers learn new words?
- How do the teachers introduce new words to the children in the immersion classrooms?
- Do other programs have ideas on different ways they can reach out to the parents and families?

- How did they get the messages about their immersion program and curriculum across to the program's families?

The immersion teachers at Walatowa Head Start indicated they would really appreciate the opportunity to see what other immersion teachers are doing in other schools. It was really important to the immersion teachers to be able to see other immersion teachers while they are teaching so that they can specifically observe pedagogy, instructional methods, learning activities, and approaches in person. Since the team is very focused on continuous improvement, they would invite the opportunity to travel elsewhere, as they did with Hawaii, and find ways to “transition their teaching, like transitioning it to our culture” (program interview, 10/22/19).

Visiting other Indigenous immersion programs could also provide new ideas and new motivation to the immersion teaching team as they work to continually implement their culturally-sustaining curriculum. The Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program team was also very interested in having a teacher-sharing conference or some type of teacher knowledge exchange in the next year, perhaps during the summer months. One immersion teacher was asked what she would offer to other immersion programs as far as guidance. Her response was, “Don’t forget who you are in immersion!” (program interview, 10/22/19)

This sentiment captured the culturally sustaining curriculum development process that I had heard through the stories shared with me. After further reflection, I came to the conclusion that while the Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program team indeed developed and implemented culturally sustaining curriculum by intentionally practicing their own Jemez Pueblo ways of knowing, they actually went through the idea of sustaining and emerged with a revitalizing curriculum. I found that the immersion teachers at Jemez Pueblo set a precedent for other immersion programs by enacting their own conceptualization of culturally revitalizing



curriculum development and implementation. In order to deliver their curriculum to the children in their classrooms, the teaching team has enacted a Jemez-specific Indigenous immersion pedagogy that is grounded in their own Jemez traditional knowledge and reflects Jemez epistemology, even as the teachers are striving to meet state and federal regulations that are from the Western or linear worldview.

### **Lakota Immersion Childcare Elementary Track Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa Thanka's Message on Language Immersion**

After the team at the Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa Thanka shared their curriculum development story, I reflected on their specific approach. A major takeaway for me was that this program was a crucial part of a growing language revitalization movement in their community. As the first cohort of immersion students has grown older, the community's language revitalization approach has grown alongside them. Each year the children would enter the next grade and each year the Lakota Language Initiative team worked to develop curriculum that reflected the expectations for each grade level according to public school curriculum in the state of South Dakota. One major unknown that was identified by the immersion team was the fact that the first cohort of immersion students were fluent, first language Lakota speakers, having been in the immersion program since 18 months-old. A major part of the immersion curriculum included early literacy skills entirely in written and spoken Lakota language. By the time the students had reached second grade and were expected to be able to read and write in both English and Lakota, the immersion teachers wondered whether that outcome was realistic for that cohort of children. After a year of implementation, the teaching team conducted assessments of the children entirely in English, and the children had taught themselves how to read in English after having exposure to only Lakota language books and videos. Additionally, as the children

grew older, the cultural components of the curriculum grew with them. The entire immersion curriculum was developed using the daily routines and schedules of the children, in other words, the domains of daily life. From the beginning, cultural knowledge and expectations were built into the curriculum experiences. As the children grew older, the cultural routines and expectations grew more complex, culminating in the medicine wheel conceptualization as shared by the immersion teacher who worked with me. The medicine wheel served as the overarching organizing framework for an integrated approach to curriculum development and implementation for the Lakota immersion students, capturing both the symbolic and concrete teachings central to Lakota ways of knowing.

One thing that emerged with the Lakota Language Initiative team was that they were always open to improvement and they were very transparent with their process. They were always available to offer support and guidance to other Indigenous language immersion programs, including providing professional development, training, and presentations on the materials and curriculum approaches as well as providing access to their second language learner Lakota resources such as the Learn Lakota Language website. Lessons learned over the years included the process of getting started with curriculum development; strategies for using daily routines and classroom schedules as a foundation for immersion learning; approaches to integrating technology into the classroom; and methods for embedding literacy learning in immersion environments.

The program staff had an attitude of always being interested in making improvements to their approaches and materials. In the interest of continuous improvement, the following questions were identified through the story that was shared:

- How do other immersion programs deal with children speaking the language outside the classroom environment and school day?
- Are there programs that have successfully normalized their Indigenous language in their community and how did they do that?

The Lakota immersion team at Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa Thanka indicated they were always available to provide support and offer a sounding board to other Tribal Nations who want to pursue language immersion.

The staff at the Iyápi Glukínipi Owáyawa Thanka were able to successfully provide an ever-expanding repertoire of learning activities and corresponding materials as part of their culturally sustaining curriculum and development approach. After hearing their story, and gaining a better understanding of their strategies, I saw that they did not stop at sustaining their culture and language. Instead, they approached their curriculum development from a perspective of culturally revitalizing curriculum development and implementation. With the goal of bringing the Lakota language back into use as a first language, the curriculum development process reflected both the goal of sustaining the Lakota language and knowledge as well as revitalizing the Lakota language in order to make it relevant in the present day society.

### **Wicoie Nandagikendan's Message on Language Immersion**

Reflecting on the emergence story of the Wicoie Nandagikendan program, I could hear that the curriculum development process these immersion teachers used was built into the history and fabric of the urban Dakota and Ojibwe communities in the Little Earth Neighborhood. All of the program staff have built their lives around the program and infused the program with their passion for immersion education as a way to empower children and their families. When I think of emergence for this program, I think of the footsteps of the language advocates that gathered

support for the state of Minnesota to fund Dakota and Ojibwe language revitalization programs in the early 2000s. I also think of the stories shared about how each teacher got started in the immersion field and in the program. The teachers bring all of this context to their computer when they sit down each week and each month to develop their lesson plans according to the themes that are used.

The program team works hard to ensure the participating children and their families feel connected to their heritage language, despite living for multiple generations in an urban environment. One unique aspect of this particular immersion program is that the teachers have successfully implemented a set of curriculum themes across two languages, Dakota and Ojibwe. In order to implement their curriculum, both teachers shared their intentional planning approaches that also included the weaving of years of immersion implementation experience as both a first language speaker and a second-language learner.

The immersion teachers at Wicoie Nandagikendan were both willing to share and also very interested in what other immersion programs were doing, especially immersion programs who serve toddlers through school-age children. Some specific questions that were of interest included:

- What are some effective immersion strategies for incorporating all aspects of early literacy into the classroom, especially for 1-5 year old children?
- Are there any promising practices around effective implementation of phonics in an immersion setting?
- Generally, how do other immersion programs set up their lesson plans and develop their curriculum? Always open to new ideas!

The team at Wicoie Nandagikendan is very interested in a teacher-sharing meeting or a teacher idea-sharing opportunity with other Indigenous early childhood immersion programs.

Specifically, they would love to visit other immersion programs to see other early childhood immersion teachers in action as a way to continue to innovate and continue to gather ideas.

The Dakota Immersion Teacher offers some advice for other Indigenous immersion teachers, “Don’t break your schedule, keep them on track. That way they know what to expect” (program interview, 10/9/2019). The Ojibwe Immersion Teacher shared, “Having back up plans, being flexible, that’s so important. You can’t be rigid!”

After listening to the curriculum development and implementation story, I could hear that the immersion team had found a way to effectively develop and deliver culturally sustaining curriculum in two Indigenous languages. However, upon further reflection, I offered that this team actually went beyond just sustaining the languages and worldviews that they implemented. Instead, I saw that a more accurate term to describe their process would be revitalizing. This immersion team found a way to successfully implement culturally revitalizing curriculum. In addition to developing a culturally revitalizing curriculum, I saw how both immersion teachers also found a way to deliver the curriculum activities, approaches, and daily routines entirely through an intentional Indigenous immersion pedagogy.

Overall, the team at Wicoie Nandagikendan had a growth mindset for both languages even as they engaged in mentoring, coaching, and training of language apprentices for working in nearby immersion programs.

### **Our Message to Other Tribal Nations Who are Interested in Implementing Immersion**

Collectively, I braided together the messages individually shared with me through this process. The four programs I had the privilege of collaborating with would like to share the

following lessons learned with other Indigenous immersion programs, regardless of the stage of implementation:

- Never forget who you are
- There's nothing wrong with adapting a resource to fit your language, culture, and needs
- Keep on trying
- Repetition is key
- Assessment is a challenge, but is a necessary conversation to have with all involved
- Parent involvement can be a challenge, but there are some innovative approaches out there that have worked
- Deciding on whether to incorporate written literacy into your spoken immersion instruction is a decision that all stakeholders should be able to weigh in on
- There is a tremendous amount of pressure on our little ones as they represent the future for each of our Tribal Nations
- You don't have to do everything all at once, take it one step at a time, and start with what you have
- There are resources out there, just ask!

When it comes to Indigenous early childhood language immersion programs, there is a need for avenues of communication between immersion programs and, specifically, between immersion teachers in different programs. Oftentimes, immersion work can feel isolating and demanding; immersion teachers would greatly benefit from hearing lessons learned from other teachers as well as sharing ideas and exchanging promising practices.

## **Story 12: Reflecting on the Journey around the Kiowa Encampment Story Circle**

### **Part 1**

As I listened to the stories that were shared with me, I had to focus intently on hearing the messages shared and also had to gather my thoughts in order to make my own interpretations of each of these stories I heard along this journey. It is my hope that I am able to share my interpretation of each of these stories in a way that is helpful to the programs who have agreed to travel along with me on this journey and useful for those programs who hope to get some helpful pointers from these stories shared. While the main premise of the combined use of the Indigenous Storywork methodology and my Kiowa Encampment Story Circle was to make meaning from listening to each story with an open heart, mind and soul, not just with the ears, I offer my own interpretation of each of these stories as well as make my own meaning from the cumulative impact of all stories taken together.

### **Retracing Our Steps to the East (Emergence)**

The first part of our journey around my Kiowa research framework of the Kiowa Encampment Story Circle began in the east. First, I extended an invitation to the reader to move forward with an open mind, heart, soul as this dissertation story unfolds. As with every journey or activity that is starting, we first faced the east and acknowledged who we are in relation with all things around us, both seen and unseen. To do this properly, I first introduced myself, where I come from, and my background, which informs how I came to this place. Then, I introduced my Kiowa people, whose knowledge I am situated in, and which helps to understand my identity. Next, I introduced each of the four programs that I collaborated with on this dissertation research journey. I have arranged my entire dissertation following the traditional instructions embedded in our Kiowa Encampment Story Circle, starting in the East, traveling to the South, then to the

West, and finally to the North, then back to the East again to complete the circle. I am so grateful to these four programs:

- 1) New Kituwah Academy located at the Kituwah Preservation and Education Program on behalf of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians on the Qualla Boundary in Cherokee, North Carolina;
- 2) Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program located in Jemez Pueblo, New Mexico;
- 3) Lakota Immersion Child Care Elementary Track located at the Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation on behalf of the Oglala Sioux Tribe on the Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota;
- 4) Wicoie Nandagikendan Dakota and Ojibwe Early Childhood Urban Immersion Program located in the Little Earth Neighborhood, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

I will revisit each of the collaborating programs through the lens of the way that we travel around our Kiowa encampment circle, from east, to south, to west, to the north, and back to the east again.

In order to start the collaboration process, I first built relationships with each program partner. Through enacting the principles of Indigenous Storywork through the lens of my Kiowa perspective, I was able to develop collaborative relationships with each program's leadership, administration, and teaching staff. I continue to be grateful to those who invited me in and allowed this journey to take place. For each of the four collaborating immersion programs, I was able to hear each program's curriculum emergence story. With the New Kituwah Academy, their curriculum development began out of necessity as they needed to meet state education standards for elementary students according to their school's accreditation requirements. For the Walatowa



Head Start Language Immersion Program, their curriculum development journey arose out of a community desire to educate their youngest children through their Jemez ways of knowing. Regarding the Lakota Language Immersion Childcare Elementary Track, their curriculum development process started with 18-month-old children and grew each year along with the children. Finally, for the Wicoie Nandagikendan Dakota Ojibwe Urban Early Childhood Immersion Program, their curriculum development spans two Indigenous languages and was initiated through a movement among the Indigenous urban community to revitalize their languages along with both Dakota and Ojibwe knowledge.

### **Retracing Our Steps to the South (Challenges)**

The second part of our journey is to face the south, the direction of challenges. Each program involved specified several challenges that they faced. These challenges included facing unknowns as to whether the immersion approach is appropriate; questions on how to approach immersion assessment (looking at both language acquisition and academic progress); and additional supports needed to focus on student's fluency development. Other obstacles included constant tension between Indigenous traditional knowledge and Western conceptualizations of developmentally appropriate practice as well as the continuous pressure on the participating children to become the keepers of their heritage language. An additional challenge included how teachers could work to support each child's language acquisition so the child can be confident in producing their language in multiple contexts inside and outside the classroom. Finally, another challenge noted was the ability to incorporate elements of early literacy and phonics into an immersion setting, while still being true to each Tribal Nation's and Tribal community's traditional values and ways of knowing.

### **Retracing Our Steps to the West (Transcendence)**

Through my Kiowa research methodology, transcendence has come to mean both the ability overcome and the ability to persevere. In thinking about each of the four programs and their ability to transcend, I offer the following promising approaches to curriculum development, as shared from each collaborating program as considerations for other Tribal Nations who wish to implement Indigenous early childhood language immersion education:

- 1) Supportive leadership
- 2) Community support, including parent engagement
- 3) Clearly defined program vision
- 4) Specific goals and objectives for the students
- 5) Community and elder input into curriculum, fluent speakers especially
- 6) Program staff engaged in the process
- 7) Supports and resources for immersion teachers, especially if they are second language learners
- 8) Start with your Tribal Nation's traditional knowledge, including seasonal activities, ceremonies, songs, stories, and even traditional child development milestones and build from there

### **Retracing Our Steps to the North (Reflection)**

In reflecting back on the journey I have undertaken, I first wish to reflect on my research methodology. According to the Indigenous Storywork principles, I will share how I was able to adhere to each of the seven principles as outlined by Archibald (2008).

For the principle of respect, I demonstrated respect as I entered each program's community and location with an open heart and an open mind. It was with respect that I asked

my open-ended questions and with respect that I listened quietly, with occasional acknowledgements that I was truly hearing what was being shared. I was also very mindful of putting away my curriculum developer hat, taking off my training and technical assistance provider hat, and removing any biased thoughts that would undermine my demonstration of respect to those I encountered.

In order to demonstrate responsibility, I ensured that I carried with me printed copies and that I sent electronic versions of all protocol documents and my informed consent forms. When I was first discussing the journey with a potential individual, I took care to share each part of the informed consent form and ensure that I was able to listen for and respond to any questions that came up. I proceeded with having my storywork conversations only with those individuals who had completed the informed consent form in its entirety. I also informed each individual who agreed to share their stories with me as well as their relevant supervisor about the specific nature of my TBPR approach, which included specifications for data ownership, data sharing, and confidentiality. It was my responsibility to each program to remain true to their story as they shared it and to protect the stories and information they shared according to the Indigenous research methodology that I followed.

For the third principle of reverence, I first started off in the Kiowa way that I have been taught to start any journey or important occasion – with a moment of prayer and reflection. Burning our sacred Longhorn Mountain cedar and asking for blessings on this journey was an integral component of my approach to reverence. As a way to also demonstrate reverence, I also approached each program and each interaction with humility, humbling myself, and allowing for the collaborating program's expertise to shine through, so I would not get in the way with my ego.

I was able to honor the principle of reciprocity by offering to each of the four collaborating programs an opportunity to participate with me as a co-author or co-presenter on any presentation or article that might result from this research journey. Another way I honored reciprocity was to offer the following in return for participation:

- A written program-specific report to share back the story of their curriculum development process as I heard it
- A summary presentation to the tribal leadership and tribal organizational leadership regarding the results of my dissertation research journey
- The option of providing a curriculum development training on a topic of interest to each particular program, tailored to specific audiences and topics
- An opportunity to provide a presentation to the program staff, families, and community on my dissertation research journey
- As requested by each participating program, I look forward to exploring an opportunity to bring the four programs together, whether virtually or in person, so they can each have a chance to share their own stories with each other, ask questions, and share strategies sometime in the future.

In order to enact the principle of wholism, I approached each program and individual through the context that they brought with them. In order to see through a wholism perspective, I paid careful attention to the surrounding community as I entered their location, then I allowed myself to be intently observant, being aware of body language, emotional cues, and tone of voice as ways to empathize with each individual as they shared their stories. I also enacted wholism through ensuring that as I listened to each individual share their story, I remembered to make connections between the individual story and the context of the program overall, including the

other teachers, the program leadership, tribal elders, fluent speakers, cultural knowledge keepers, and even the family members of participating children.

The principle of inter-relatedness was enacted through my constant awareness that each individual and program was connected to each other in a multitude of ways. As I listened to each story and as each conversation unfolded, I acknowledged our connection to our individual past as well as to our collective present and future. Another way I practiced the principle of inter-relatedness was in the way that made connections between the curriculum development stories being shared with me and my own experience in developing Kiowa-specific early childhood language immersion curriculum.

Finally, the principle of synergy was demonstrated through the specific story sharing exchanges that occurred over the course of engaging with each collaborating individual and program.

Synergy was perhaps the most powerful principle enacted for me. As I listened to each individual share their story, I could feel the passion in their words. The tremendous commitment and dedication to the intense work of Indigenous language revitalization through immersion instruction in early childhood reverberated through the air. Even as I listened, I was inspired, motivated by each of these humble individuals who have dedicated their time and efforts to revitalize their endangered languages. Listening to each person share their story was empowering to me, and I felt the kindred spirit found when two people discover they are passionate about the same thing, in this case, Indigenous language immersion instruction.

## **Part 2**

### **Indigenous Immersion Curriculum and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy**

Indigenous immersion curriculum development, from the starting point of culturally sustaining curriculum, was explored through the context of four different Indigenous early

childhood language immersion programs. Due to the nature of Indigenous knowledge and Tribal Nations, it would be inappropriate for me to attempt to draw generalizations and common overarching themes from the stories shared by each distinct program. If I took that approach, a standard qualitative thematic analysis or even a narrative analysis approach, I would essentially be contributing to the history of cultural misappropriation that Indigenous peoples, including my own Kiowa people, have endured for centuries. I say cultural misappropriation because of the long and negative history of research among Indigenous communities in the United States. I could not participate in a process that would extract, break down, tear apart, and minimize the heartfelt stories that were shared and entrusted to me by each Indigenous immersion program. It is for this reason that I have specifically integrated my analysis, which Indigenous Storywork and my Kiowa research methodology says is actually interpretation or meaning making, into each of the individual program's specific curriculum development story as told by them and as heard by me. In the previous section on reflection I shared my research outcomes regarding how I actually implemented my Indigenous research methodology through my Kiowa Encampment Story Circle model.

As I have stated in Location 3, Story 6, my definition of culturally sustaining curriculum development is the set of procedures that comprises the planning and implementation of learning activities that are culturally and linguistically grounded in the Indigenous worldview of the children being served. Culturally sustaining pedagogy represents the intersection between curriculum and instruction within the context of culturally sustaining approaches to teaching and learning. Curriculum provides the framework for immersion teachers to implement instruction. Pedagogy provides the tools, strategies, and approaches to remain true to the curriculum while also providing culturally and linguistically empowering instruction.

I also outlined the historical progression of relevant academic terminology. From the terms culturally appropriate and culturally relevant, to culturally responsive, and most recently, to culturally sustaining curriculum and pedagogy, I traced the evolution of these terms as related to Indigenous early childhood language immersion programs. I also detailed the interplay between culturally sustaining curriculum, Indigenous immersion curriculum development, and culturally sustaining pedagogy, and specifically, why these terms are relevant when collaborating with Indigenous early childhood language immersion programs regarding their stories of curriculum development and implementation.

Overall, the implications of these four stories are best viewed in the context of curriculum development, pedagogy, and instruction. First proposed in Location 1, Story 2, and revisited in Location 3, Story 6, the overarching research questions that guided this dissertation journey focused on the ways in which Indigenous early childhood language immersion programs develop and implement culturally sustaining curriculum. I was also interested in hearing about the planning process embedded in the implementation of culturally sustaining curriculum, including the development and delivery of learning experiences that sustain the culture of the children and community served. Additionally, I listened for the way in which culturally sustaining pedagogy was enacted in the Indigenous early childhood immersion programs who shared their curriculum development stories. I answered these questions through the sharing of each program's curriculum development story as I have interpreted each story in the context of the program as well as through the lens of my Kiowa Encampment Story Circle methodology.

I found that my research questions each had an answer, and then a call to action. After hearing all four curriculum development stories, it became clear to me that each program had found a way to both develop and implement culturally sustaining curriculum. Although the ways

that each program approached their curriculum development and implementation were as unique as the Indigenous languages and epistemologies that they represented, I came to a striking conclusion. It was not just about sustaining their culture, it was about revitalizing their culture, their language, their entire worldview. Sustaining as a term implies that the culture is going to be sustained, which has a connotation of stasis, of becoming stagnant. We know that our Indigenous cultures, our knowledges are alive, thriving, and ever-changing. Through the stories shared with me, I have come to believe that curriculum and pedagogy are not just sustaining, they need to be viewed as revitalizing. Culturally revitalizing curriculum and the pedagogy that enacts it are empowering. Just as the teacher builds the future of their language with every minute interaction with a child in their immersion classroom, so too does the student become empowered to embrace who they are and are inspired to carry their people and their language forward into the future.

Despite the acknowledgement of culturally sustaining/revitalizing curriculum and pedagogy by scholars such as McCarty and Lee (2014) and Jacob and colleagues (2018), I have found that the two concepts, sustaining and revitalizing, should be separated out to stand on their own when it comes to curriculum development in Indigenous early childhood language immersion programs. Through listening to and making meaning from the four collaborating program partners in this dissertation journey, I have realized that culturally revitalizing curriculum should stand by itself as academic terminology for future exploration.

When listening to each individual curriculum development story as told by each collaborating program, I approached my own interpretations through the lens of Indigenous immersion curriculum and culturally sustaining pedagogy. As each story unfolded, I listened for indications of each program's Indigenous immersion curriculum development process as well as



the way in which that curriculum was implemented, and whether the curriculum was implemented through culturally sustaining pedagogy. One major interpretation that emerged for me was that these immersion teachers shared stories of culturally revitalizing pedagogy, even though the teachers did not necessarily use the term pedagogy to describe their process.

If, as Freire (1970) asserted, praxis is the path to enacting a critical pedagogy through intensive reflection and then intentional action to counter the dominant forces in place, then it was through praxis that each participating immersion program not only encountered a critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Wood & Hedges, 2016), and along the way, immersion pedagogy, culturally based pedagogy (Webster & Yanez, 2007), authentic pedagogy (Leach & Moon, 2008), Indigenous-based inclusive pedagogy (Whitinui, 2010), second language pedagogy for endangered languages (Hinton, 2011), place-based pedagogy (Gauci, 2016; Johnson, 2012), Indigenous pedagogy (Hall, 2003; Kukahiko, 2014), culturally sustaining pedagogy (Yazzie-Mintz, 2011), culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy (McCarty & Lee, 2014) and, ultimately, culturally revitalizing pedagogy, they also asserted their own Indigenous Immersion Pedagogy as their approach to implementing their culturally revitalizing curriculum in their immersion classrooms. Referring back to the intersection between the linear and the relational worldviews, as described in Location 1, Story 2, upon reflection, it is clear to me that despite the need for these conversations about curriculum and pedagogy to occur at the tangent points of congruence between the linear and relational worldviews that these four programs' processes go much further than the intersection. I assert that each of these programs has ventured beyond just the intersection points, and instead, traveled entirely through the boundary and emerged on the other side, with their culturally revitalizing curriculum development process and their Indigenous immersion pedagogy situated distinctly within their own relational worldview.

Through the process of developing and implementing each program's culturally revitalizing curriculum, each program has defined their own Indigenous immersion pedagogy as the intersection of curriculum and instruction in their immersion classrooms. While each program's curriculum development process and implementation journey was unique, all four programs expressed through the stories shared their conceptualization of culturally revitalizing curriculum development and Indigenous immersion pedagogy as essential to their authentic and respectful implementation of their curriculum, grounded in their own Indigenous ways of knowing and in the context of the children, families, and community served.

What is pedagogy in an Indigenous context? Yazzie-Mintz (2011), Johnson (2012), and others have tackled this question before me. I offer my perspective, based on the stories that were shared with me as part of this dissertation journey: Indigenous immersion pedagogy emerged as the way in which each immersion teacher implemented their curriculum. The enacting of culturally revitalizing pedagogy, through implementing culturally revitalizing curriculum, serves to empower both the immersion teacher and the immersion student. Teachers are empowered to continue growing, learning, and improving their approaches as they work with each child. Students are empowered to truly embrace their identity and live their life through their heritage language.

Each of the immersion teachers who participated in sharing their curriculum stories with me enacted curriculum through pedagogy, whether consciously or subconsciously. Whether or not they used the term pedagogy to describe how they implemented their curriculum, each teacher still described the intentionality that comes with ensuring that each moment with each child is authentic and grounded in the multiple realities and multiple contexts of each child's experiences. These immersion teachers were intentional, reflective, and always mindful of the

metalinguistic layers of awareness – as they changed diapers, washed hands, asked questions, gave directions, explored the community, resolved disputes – every moment with the children in their classroom was embraced by Indigenous immersion pedagogy. The starting point, the catalyst for this empowering outcome was the presence of culturally revitalizing curriculum. Someone, in each program’s history, made the decision to enact a curriculum that would truly serve to revitalize their Indigenous language and culture. Someone made a decision to support the development of a curriculum that could be flexible enough to evolve with the advances in technology, but also remain true to the Indigenous values, philosophies, and worldview of the children and teachers who enacted the curriculum. The curriculum became the mechanism through which culturally revitalizing pedagogy was possible. The curriculum was the catalyst for authentic Indigenous immersion pedagogy.

### **Part 3**

#### **Coda**

My dissertation research journey took me on a winding path. The way that I structured this research process was intentionally attentive to the nuances regarding Indigenous early childhood language immersion programs. These specific programs are situated within the context of sovereign Tribal Nations and bring with them a complex history that spans millennia. The goal for sharing my research story has been to provide an opportunity for listeners to walk in the story and gather their own meaning from it. When I was first considering adjusting my original research approach, one of my mentors shared with me “rigor is whether you have the appropriate approach to answer your research question” (personal communication, 9/12/2019). This simple statement motivated me to revisit and explore the options to reassess the entire proposed approach that I had submitted to and received approval for from the O.U. IRB. I began to

question whether qualitative grounded theory as my methodology would truly allow me to answer my research questions in the context of the research problem. In order to truly ensure that I made the appropriate decision, I turned back to the literature, and this time I read everything I could get my hands on regarding decolonized research methodologies, Indigenous methodologies, Indigenous research methods, and eventually, one of my mentors mentioned the emerging approach of Indigenous Storywork as a methodology. While I was in the midst of relationship building with my potential collaborating research partner programs, I was also redefining and reframing my entire methodology. After exhausting the literature around these topics, I decided to use Indigenous Storywork as my approach and my actual research would be conducted through the lens of my own decolonized methodology, what I am calling the Kiowa Encampment Story Circle, a research methodology that incorporates elements of Indigenous Storywork along with the various facets and values of my own Kiowa traditional knowledge. In this way, I was able to approach four different Indigenous programs through an Indigenous research methodology as a way to answer my research questions that were crafted from an Indigenous knowledge framework.

I would also like to offer possible extensions for this research journey as follows: First, the use of decolonized research methodologies has gained traction in academia in recent years and has multiple implications for marginalized communities within the U.S. I would offer that future researchers explore the possibility of using a decolonized research methodology when conducting research with vulnerable populations and communities such as the migrant population, recent immigrant populations, and even ethnic minority populations found in cities around the U.S. today.

Next, I would encourage future researchers to explore the applications of Indigenous Storywork as a methodology specifically when working with Indigenous language revitalization programs and even Indigenous immersion education programs. I have found that when we as Indigenous scholars approach other Indigenous communities and Indigenous programs from a place of sincere and respectful acknowledgement of Indigenous knowledge, the collaboration has the potential to grow from just a single research project into a community driven effort with far reaching benefits and positive outcomes. It has truly been an honor to be invited into each collaborating immersion program and I hope that I have upheld my responsibility to each program in sharing their story as they would have it told.

Expanding on the work started by Lyster and Tedick (2014) to present an overview of immersion pedagogy and all its considerations, including “enacting immersion students’ metalinguistic awareness through form-focused instruction, corrective feedback and crosslingual pedagogy” (p. 217), I propose further exploration into the field of Indigenous immersion pedagogy. I call on future scholars to take on the challenge of listening to other curriculum development stories in Indigenous early childhood immersion education programs and explore the intersections between curriculum, instruction, and the enacting of specific Indigenous immersion pedagogies. Potential directions for future research include exploring the implications of Indigenous immersion pedagogy for Indigenous early childhood immersion programs that are just starting their curriculum development journeys.

It would also be worthwhile to explore the implications of developing and implementing culturally revitalizing curriculum for early childhood education programs in diverse communities and various settings. For instance, what would a culturally revitalizing curriculum development process look like in a community of migrant Indigenous dual language learners? When thinking

about the impact of this work on other areas of education, one approach might be a response to Carjuzaa's (2017) assertion that Indigenous language revitalization is a strategy for implementing culturally responsive pedagogy. After experiencing the curriculum development and implementation stories shared by the four collaborating programs on this journey with me, I propose to Carjuzaa (2017) and other Indigenous scholars advocating for Indigenous language revitalization in public education the following: Instead of fitting the entirety of Indigenous languages and cultures within the confines of the definition of the academic terms culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy, I would encourage Indigenous scholars to assert the terms Indigenous immersion pedagogy and culturally revitalizing curriculum as grounded in and respectful of Indigenous ways of knowing.

Finally, I would suggest that future Indigenous scholars explore the possibility of developing research methodologies that are grounded in their own traditional ways of knowing, whether or not those knowledges are explicitly defined. It is worth the time and effort to make the journey towards learning about our own Indigenous knowledge and the context from which we are descended as an Indigenous person.

As I described in Location 3, Story 6, I return to the Kiowa word, *maw-hay-maw* which speaks to the intertwined nature of teaching and learning and that instruction is not separated from learning. In a Kiowa conceptualization of pedagogy, curriculum grounds the interaction between the teacher and the learner and in the Kiowa worldview, the learner and teacher each experience both teaching and learning from their mutually shared experiences. After hearing the four curriculum development stories in Location 3, I assert that Indigenous immersion pedagogy allows for the authentic implementation of Indigenous language immersion curriculum in early childhood settings through culturally revitalizing curriculum development processes.

It has been an honor to follow the path of this dissertation research journey and all of its twists and turns. Oh-bah-hah. Ah-hoh. (That is all I have to say. Thank you.)

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#### **Location 4**

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## Appendix A: University of Oklahoma IRB Approval Letter



### Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects Approval of Initial Submission – Exempt from IRB Review – AP01

**Date:** March 26, 2019

**IRB#:** 10445

**Principal Investigator:** Melody Windsong Redbird

**Approval Date:** 03/25/2019

**Exempt Category:** 2

**Study Title:** Exploring Curriculum Development in Indigenous Early Childhood Language Immersion Programs

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed the above-referenced research study and determined that it meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications as changes could affect the exempt status determination.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Notify the IRB at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or [irb@ou.edu](mailto:irb@ou.edu).

Cordially,

Aimee Franklin, Ph.D.  
Chair, Institutional Review Board

## **Appendix B: Document Appendix – New Kituwah Academy**

- 1) Copy of Lesson Plan Book for Week of October 23, 2019
- 2) Cherokee Cosmology Lesson Sequence – Unit
- 3) Cherokee Apple Traits chart
- 4) Cherokee Classroom Calendar wall
- 5) Cherokee Body Parts and Measurements Charts
- 6) Child’s Science Project in Cherokee
- 7) Map of the World and Continents in Cherokee
- 8) Map of the United States in Cherokee
- 9) Cherokee Syllabary
- 10) Counting by 10s in Cherokee anchor chart
- 11) Counting by 1000s in Cherokee anchor chart
- 12) Classroom Daily Schedule in Cherokee
- 13) Handwashing Poster for children in Cherokee
- 14) Cherokee Prepositions wall chart
- 15) Cherokee Place Value Station
- 16) Cherokee Opposites Vocabulary Chart
- 17) Classroom Word Wall in Cherokee
- 18) Cherokee Classroom Survival Words for Teachers and Students
- 19) 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Calendar Worksheet in Cherokee
- 20) Animal Habitats Slideshow in Cherokee
- 21) Hand It To Me Matching Activity in Cherokee
- 22) Junaluska Portrait Options in Cherokee



23) Calendar Writing Activity in Cherokee

24) Science Unit Rubric for Second Grade

25) New Kituwah Academy Elementary Calendar October 2019

26) Picture of classroom reading corner

## Appendix C: Document Appendix – Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program

- 1) Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion School Readiness Goals document (5 pages)
- 2) Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Lesson Plan – August 2019 (2 pages)
- 3) Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Lesson Plan – September 2019 (2 pages)
- 4) Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Lesson Plan – October 2019 (2 pages)
  - a. Themes identified: Home and Family (Scholastic); Drummer Boy, Cultural Advice, Caring for Siblings, The Importance of Corn (Cultural); Farm Animals (Animals); Red, Green, Brown, Orange (Colors).
  - b. Large Group Activities-Circle Time (Tuesday): Children will learn about the month of October and Fall. What happens in our community this month?  
Societies fasting.
  - c. Large Group Activities-Circle Time (Wednesday): Children will learn how to show respect in various contexts: At home, when taking offering to society houses, when visiting or being visited.
  - d. Self-Selection Centers (Week of Oct. 7-11): Blocks—Create a village using different sizes blocks. Dramatic Play—Grind corn for cornmeal. Math—Put (red, green, brown, orange) shapes in order from small to largest.
  - e. Self-Selection Centers (Week of Oct. 14-18): Fine Arts—Learn to drum, sing your own song. Pre-Literacy—Create ristras using red chile. Science—Finger paint fall trees using fall colors of brown, yellow, red, and orange.
  - f. Daily Outdoor/Indoor Physical Activity: Stretching, Tiptoe around classroom, Feast Dance, Hopi Harvest Dance, Jumping Jacks.

- g. Community Engagement Activity (Oct. 7): Take home-grown fruits and vegetables to Eagle Society.
  - h. Community Engagement Activity (Oct. 14): Chili Ristras-demonstration
- 5) Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Lesson Plan – November 2019
  - 6) Jemez Language Rubric for Theme: Every Morning We Pray
  - 7) Jemez Language Rubric for Theme:
  - 8) Scholastic Themes and Cultural Themes by Month
  - 9) Tribal Council Resolution
  - 10) WHSLI School Year Calendar 2019-2020
  - 11) WHSLIP Jemez Injury Prevention Education Schedule
  - 12) WHSLIP Jemez Social Services Program Schedule
  - 13) Jemez Community Library School Year 2019-2020 Schedule
  - 14) Corn Maiden Room Daily Schedule and Early Release Schedule
  - 15) Bus and Pedestrian Safety is a Community Effort Information
  - 16) Lawrence Toya's Schedule
  - 17) Monthly Program Events Schedule
  - 18) Bus Monitor Schedule 2019
  - 19) Corn Maiden Classroom:
    - a. Numbers Wall
    - b. Colors Wall
    - c. Calendar Wall
      - i. Calendar includes the month in English, the year, a picture representing the month, the days of the week in English, pocket inserts for the days of

the month numbers, a blue card that says “yesterday” and is placed behind the number card for that day of the week, a green card that says “today” and a red card that says “tomorrow.” There is also a weather wheel that says, “What’s the Weather?” in English.

- d. Corn Meal Basket
- e. Toothbrushing Station
- f. Calendar Wall with Alphabet letters and pictures along wall above calendar and below the color pictures (color pictures have a crayon in the color, and a culturally appropriate picture of a cultural item in that color)
- g. Daily Schedule for children’s use – picture pockets of activities, yellow arrow moved along as the time goes
- h. Children’s clan graph – with pictures of images representing the Jemez Pueblo clans along the bottom, and the children’s pictures stacked in the corresponding clan picture
- i. WHSLIP Time Line for Home Visits and Parent Teacher Conference School Year 2019-2020
  - i. Includes important dates such as Annual IHS Health Summit, Classroom Set up, Parent Orientation
  - ii. In two- and three-week increments, schedule includes: Observation and Record Period (2 per month per child); Early Learning Framework Assessment, Individual Development Plan and Report; Work Sampling Family Report, Parent Teacher Conferences and Home Visits timeframes

20) Kiva Room Daily Schedule and Early Release Schedule

21) Kiva Room:

- a. Numbers, Calendar, and Picture Vocabulary Wall (for large group circle time)
- b. Block Area (includes model of Kiva made by children and their families)
- c. Bulletin board decorated with pictures of corn stalks with children's pictures and handprints craft as the corn husks up and down the stalks

22) Adobe Room:

- a. Helper Chart (with children's picture and picture of task, no words)
- b. Bundles of red chiles and woven baskets as well as traditional headwear adorn the ceiling rafters of the classroom. My impression of the classroom, just like hearing the language, is that the teachers wrap the children in the language and their culture.
- c. Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework document that lists the Walatowa Head Start School Readiness Goals
- d. Picture of Writing Area
- e. Picture of Manipulative/Puzzles Area

23) Hallway of Center:

- a. Pictures of PFCE take-home activities that were returned by children and their families (Identity Shields, Pumpkin paper crafts, children's self-portrait drawings)
- b. Names of classrooms: Hemish Room, Corn Maiden Room, Adobe Room, Kiva Room

24) Picture of Playground

25) Picture of Corn Maiden's Parent Bulletin Board in the classroom

26) Picture of Corn Maiden Room's doorway to the hallway with a cornmeal holder on the wall at arm level beside the doorway

## **Appendix D: Document Appendix – Lakota Immersion Childcare Elementary Track**

- 1) PowerPoint file including classroom pictures and samples of worksheets
- 2) Wayawa Cik’ala: Oowa kin He Khili Yelo! – A (all about the letter and the sound A)
- 3) Wayawa Cik’ala: Aǵúyapi čhoǵiŋkhiyapi káǵapi (how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich)
- 4) Wayawa Cik’ala: Čhaŋmáhel uŋk’úŋpi! (In the Woods)
- 5) Wayawa Cik’ala: Čhaŋmháŋska uŋ wíyawapi (Counting Halloween Candy)
- 6) Wayawa Cik’ala: Waníyetu Waná Ú (the season is changing from autumn to winter)
- 7) Wayawa Cik’ala: Nasúla Wóslolye - Čhaŋté Kiŋháŋ (Brain the Robot talks about the heart organ)
- 8) Wayawa Cik’ala: Ĥé Sápa (about the Black Hills)
- 9) Video: Lakota Immersion Childcare
- 10) Video: Ounchage Wowapi
- 11) Video: Mni
- 12) Video: Ecosystem of Opportunity-A Short Thunder Valley CDC Documentary
- 13) Video: Rising Voices/Hothaninpi-Revitalizing the Lakota Language
- 14) Video: Saving the Lakota Language through Immersion Education
- 15) Video: 6<sup>th</sup> Annual ILI Symposium 2015: Peter Hill and Matthew Rama
- 16) Video: South Dakota Focus-Thunder Valley CDC
- 17) Video: 6<sup>th</sup> Annual ILI Symposium 2015: Peter Hill

**Appendix E: Document Appendix – Wicoie Nandagikendan Dakota Ojibwe Early  
Childhood Urban Immersion Program**

- 1) Wicoie Nandagikendan program brochure
- 2) Wicoie Nandagikendan Program Work Plan 2019-2020
- 3) WN Classroom Themes for the Year
- 4) WN Four Seasons Chart (labeled in both languages)
- 5) WN Minneapolis Community Chart (labeled in both languages)
- 6) WN Dakota Immersion Classroom Newsletter – September 2019
- 7) Dakota Calendar reference sheet for teachers
- 8) Deer Classroom (Dakota) Child Art bulletin board
- 9) Deer Classroom (Dakota) Child Emotions Chart
- 10) Deer Classroom (Dakota) Colors Chart
- 11) Deer Classroom (Dakota) Emojis for children activity
- 12) Deer Classroom (Dakota) Children’s Prayer
- 13) Deer Classroom (Dakota) Start the day center wall chart
- 14) Deer Classroom (Dakota) Daily Schedule
- 15) Deer Classroom (Dakota) Lesson Plan for the week of October 23
- 16) Deer Classroom (Dakota) Parent Letter for the week of October 23
- 17) Deer Classroom (Dakota) Survival Phrases for Parents and Children Handout
- 18) Deer Classroom (Dakota) Unit Activities and Lesson Plans:
  - a. All about me
  - b. Feelings
  - c. Homes and people
  - d. Fire safety



- 19) WN Ojibwe Immersion Classroom Newsletter – Week of September 30, 2019
- 20) WN Dakota Immersion Classroom Newsletter – Week of September 30, 2019
- 21) Wolf Classroom Unit Planner – Fire Safety – Ojibwe
- 22) Wolf Classroom Unit Planner – Ricing Schedule
- 23) Wolf Classroom (Ojibwe) Unit Activities:
  - a. Stop, Drop, and Roll
  - b. Making a Fire Picture
  - c. Dress up as a Firefighter
- 24) Wolf Classroom Unit Planner – Pollen – Ojibwe
- 25) Wolf Classroom Turtle Shell Calendar Chart for children and handout for families
- 26) Wolf Classroom (Ojibwe) Four Seasons Collage poster
- 27) Wolf Classroom (Ojibwe) Children’s Art and Parent Bulletin Board
- 28) Wolf Classroom (Ojibwe) Colors and Prayer Chart
- 29) Wolf Classroom (Ojibwe) Four Directions Poster
- 30) Wolf Classroom (Ojibwe) Literacy Center
- 31) Wolf Classroom (Ojibwe) Numbers Chart
- 32) Wolf Classroom (Ojibwe) Ojibwe Sounds Chart
- 33) Wolf Classroom (Ojibwe) Turtle Shell Calendar Chart
- 34) Wolf Classroom (Ojibwe) Types of Trees Poster
- 35) Wolf Classroom (Ojibwe) Weather Chart
- 36) Wolf Classroom (Ojibwe) Phases of the Moon Chart