

FIRST-LANGUAGE CHEROKEE SPEAKERS'
PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

By

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Abstract: In this dissertation I examine the perceptions of the experiences that first-language Cherokee speakers had of their school experiences, and of the higher education or career choices that they made beyond high school, in relation to their lack of English skills when they began school. While much research has been conducted on Native people who were sent to far-off boarding schools, a need to capture perceptions of those who attended English-speaking schools close to home was evident. This oral history methodology captures the stories and perceptions of four Cherokee speakers and examines their elementary school experiences in context with their careers and their progeny. Through lenses of transculturation theory and hermeneutic phenomenology, the essences of each are described and examined, challenging previous notions that Native children who succeed do so in spite of their cultural identity rather than because of it. Implications are determined for educators, administrators, and policy makers and how these perceptions of experiences can inform more culturally considerate teaching and school experiences for Native and other minority children.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Although a thousand miles and decades separate me and my schooling experience from that of the young people today, we are alike. For we are Indian, these young people and I. For they, as I once did, struggle to make sense of their lives and struggle to see, in schools and in books, an image of who they are. (Wilson, 2002, p. 101)

Indigenous languages with few speakers around the world wither away and die when the elders pass. With the passing of both the language and the elders who speak the language, vast treasures of knowledge and experiences disappear. The Cherokee language is no exception from this potential decay. Experiences of first-language Cherokee speakers who attended mainstream English-speaking schools can offer insight into not only the experiences themselves but also to educating Native students in today's educational maelstrom of reform, high-stakes testing, and the continued push for national curriculum.

The educational history of Cherokees and other Native tribes has been one of turmoil. While some children were able to remain in their homes and attend public schools, other children experienced schools far from home. For decades during the latter quarter of the nineteenth century and early to mid-twentieth century, the United States Government attempted to remove the “Indian-ness” from Native American children by removing them from their homes and sending them to boarding schools. Founded in 1879, the Carlisle Indian School was established in Pennsylvania as the first residential school exclusively for American Indian students. According to Huffman (2010), its purpose was “to assimilate Native children into the mainstream of American society as quickly and thoroughly as possible” (p. 160). This objective was to integrate and assimilate the Native youth to mainstream society by teaching them vocational trades, teaching them to speak mainstream English rather than their tribal languages, prohibiting the practice of their spirituality by pushing Christianity on them, and teaching them to dress and conduct themselves in the manner of Euro-Americans (Churchill, 2004, p. 68). “Federal educators assumed they could erase tribal identity by separating Indian children from Indian adults” (Lomawaima, 1994, p. xiii). The dominant culture sought to assimilate the Native peoples by forcing their ways on the Native children, thus hoping to erase the cultural practices and identity of the youth, who would in turn pass along these Eurocentric, mainstream life-ways to their own children.

This practice continued until as late as 1980, when Chilocco Indian School in Oklahoma closed, according to Oklahoma Historical Society’s Encyclopedia of History

and Culture. Not all students during this time period, however, attended boarding schools. Many remained in their home communities and attended non-boarding Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools as well as local public schools. Like the boarding and non-boarding schools run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, these community schools also instructed students in English rather than in tribal languages. Hundreds of Cherokee children in northeastern Oklahoma and western North Carolina, where all three federally recognized Cherokee tribes – Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma, and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in North Carolina - are located, experienced their first contact with the English language at these public schools.

In these community schools, Native children were educated alongside Euro-American children “as opposed to being segregated from them in Indian boarding schools, and the motivation for Native children to assimilate was greatly enhanced” (Peter, 2003, p. 24). Crawford (1996) states:

While using English as the sole medium of instruction, public schools generally did not practice repressive language policies. Moreover, they promoted an ideology quite distinct from that of BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs) schools – one more in line with modernity, economic development, and social integration. These latter forces affect traditional cultures in more insidious, and perhaps more devastating, fashion than direct coercion. (p. 49-50)

These experiences of first-language Cherokee speakers in English-speaking schools would affect not only their education and cultural identity but also their language skills. What I have learned through personal interactions is that many would lose their first-language ability, others would stop speaking their first languages but would retain comprehension, and still others would become strongly bilingual in both Cherokee and English. While some who lost their first language would never regain it, others would actively work to regain their abilities. In recent times, some of these speakers who experienced English-language immersion in early elementary school have expressed during informal discussion with me that their language skills in both languages have been strengthened by the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary in the other.

My own experiences with Cherokee speakers have made me feel the need to better understand their stories. My paternal grandparents, who were Cherokee, voluntarily attended boarding schools for male and female Cherokee students. My grandmother's reminiscences of these experiences, many of them positive, were collected in an oral history archive in the 1980s (Sanders, NSU Archives). This preservation is unusual in that most of these students who were schooled far from home had no opportunity to tell their stories outside of family. Some of these former students, including my maternal grandfather, a full-blood Muscogee Creek who attended Chilocco Indian School, would not even share their experiences with family. To our knowledge he never spoke before his passing in 1989 of the events that took place when he was in school. As most of those who experienced being sent to schools that did not teach in their

native language are of the grandparental generation, I feel a sense of urgency to capture elements of their experiences and determine if and how they might be used to inform the education of today's Cherokee students.

My research project will be to interview four of these bilingual speakers whose first language is Cherokee and to ask them to share experiences through recorded oral histories. These speakers are originally from areas of northeastern Oklahoma and western North Carolina. Today they reside in the same areas. They all attended local schools in regions with strong Cherokee populations but were taught through the English language. Their experiences will likely differ markedly from those who were sent, either forcibly or voluntarily, from their homes to boarding schools.

This study is timely for reasons relevant to Native culture and history. Donna Akers, in writing about the Choctaw Nation, noted that oral histories "can help document changes that come almost too rapidly to be understood" (Trimble, Sommer, & Quinlan, 2008, p. 106). While the changes in the education of Native children whose first language is not English have not happened quickly, oral histories can still provide viewpoints and interpretations that have previously remained hidden. The nature of oral histories also allows for retrospective analysis, which may have bearing on not only the participants but also on children of Cherokee descent. With the last generation of fluent speakers being of the grandparent generation, efforts to revitalize not only Cherokee but also many other tribal languages that still have first-language speakers are becoming more prevalent. The

collection and analysis of experiences can potentially contribute to these revitalization efforts.

My study may be useful in examining contemporary curriculum reform in North Carolina and Oklahoma, specifically for schools with significant populations of Cherokee children, particularly those schools that offer language classes in Cherokee. These oral histories – experiences shared more than 50 years after the introductions to elementary school took place – can inform the relevance to Cherokee students of the current trends in curriculum, including a push for standardized objectives among all of the states. By examining how these standards may relate to curriculum taught through the Cherokee language, educators can develop lessons that are relevant to Cherokee learners while aligned to standards that are part of contemporary educational reform.

In the past two decades, research has filled some of the gaps in historical literature by illuminating the view of the Native people who attended boarding schools (e.g., Garrod and Larimore, 1997, and Lomawaima, 1994). To more effectively bridge the still-existing gaps, we need to elicit the recollections of those former students who experienced the immersion in a new language – English – much closer to home. Their stories are also deserving of being shared to a broader audience.

Although I will expand in the Definition of Terms, I would like to clarify my use of terminology that I use to refer to people of Native descent. The “politically correct” term varies depending upon who is asked (personal conversations). Some prefer the term *Indian* because that is what people who are indigenous to North America have been

called for centuries. However, this misnomer, due to Columbus' mistaken belief that he had arrived in East India (Zimmer, 2009), is not an agreeable term to all. In more recent decades, some academic discussions indicate that many prefer the terms *Native American*, *American Indian*, (Yellow Bird, 1999) or simply *Native*. Indeed, a 1995 survey conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found that "Indigenous people preferred a variety of different racial identity labels" (Yellow Bird, p. 3). The highest percentage at 49.8 preferred *American Indian* while 37.5% preferred *Native American*. Because I generally use the term *Native* in talking to people who are descendants of those indigenous peoples of North America, I use this term most frequently. I refer to the Cherokee Nation, the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma, or the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians when appropriate for specificity. I use the term *Cherokee* to refer specifically to the language spoken by all three bands of Cherokee Indians and the identity of the participants.

Statement of the Problem

For the past five centuries, Native American peoples have striven to maintain their languages and cultures. During this time period, more languages have become extinct than have survived. According to Johansen (2004, p. 566) and the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (yourdictionary.com), language scholars believe that more than 300 distinct Indigenous languages existed when Europeans first arrived in North America. Braun (2009) states that 14 language families existed when Lewis and Clark arrived in what is now Oregon 200 years ago; only five of those language families

remain, most with only a handful of speakers. Today, with only 155 of the original 300 languages still spoken, 135 of these are endangered (Schilling, 2009, n.p.). The grandparent generation and older comprise the large majority of fluent speakers, so the potential is that with the passing of only one more generation, only about 20 Native languages will be spoken fluently. The outlook is dire for the remaining Native languages of North America.

The Cherokee language is not excepted from this grim outlook. The Cherokee Nation, located in northeast Oklahoma, is currently the largest tribe or nation of Indigenous peoples in North America with almost 324,000 members, according to the Cherokee Nation Registration Department (personal communication, November 4, 2016). A 2003 tribal survey demonstrated that roughly 10,000 fluent speakers remained. However, tribal officials have estimated more recently the number of Cherokee speakers who are tribal citizens to be under 5,000. The Cherokees face the prospect of losing the language in the next three generations unless aggressive language revitalization efforts are successfully enacted.

The outlook for Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians – EBCI – in North Carolina is even grimmer: In 1990, “fewer than 10 percent of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, living on part of their ancestral homelands in Western North Carolina, still speak, read, and write their language” (Duncan & Taylor, 2000, p. 35). Also, a more recent study in 2007 conducted by the EBCI determined that approximately 900 tribal citizens on the Qualla Boundary were fluent Cherokee speakers. At that time 72% were over the age of

50. An informal survey conducted by Gilliam Jackson, himself a first-language speaker, determined that 317 speakers remained, with estimates in August 2014 of approximately 250 speakers. Also in August 2014, a Kituwah billboard on the Qualla Boundary noted that only 210 speakers remained. Jackson estimated that 190 remained in November 2016.

With the awareness of the dire condition of many indigenous languages in congruence with several pieces of relevant legislation – including the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, the Indian Education Act of 1972, the Indian Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act of 1975, and the Native American Language Acts of 1990 and 1992, according to Peter (2003) - tribes began to develop their own community-based language revitalization programs. Current revitalization efforts for the Cherokee language are many: encouraging more involvement in community language events; the establishment of language immersion elementary schools in North Carolina and in Oklahoma, with the expectation that family members of students participate in language classes; the establishment of language programs in public schools; and the organization of a group of first-language Cherokee speakers who meet quarterly to recall old words and create new words to fit the developing needs of the language schools. These new words become part of the curriculum of the schools and, like other Cherokee words that have existed for hundreds of years, reflect the culture and heritage of the people.

While historians and other researchers have written a multitude of books about Native peoples, with hundreds of books on the Cherokee people, only a relative small

number have addressed educational experiences of individuals. Authors including Lomawaima (1994), Davis (2001), and Brumley (2010) have interviewed and recorded stories told by those who attended government boarding schools, including Chilocco Indian School in Oklahoma and Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. Still others have written of government relations, forced assimilation, off-reservation boarding schools, and relocation of tribes. Garrod and Larrimore (1997) interviewed Natives who had graduated college and published their stories. But while the government established many schools for Native students, both on and off reservations, many students remained in their communities, where they attended public schools, local schools run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and schools run by missions. A dearth of researched educational experiences of the students who attended these local non-government schools remains.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Cherokee students were likely to attend schools in their home communities. As these generations of first-language speakers are now elders among their people, their stories have seldom been heard outside of their families. Their stories should be brought forth and preserved. As more time passes and the grandparent generation becomes the great- and the great-great-grandparent generation, the recording of their stories become less and less likely.

Cherokees who speak the Cherokee language as a first language and were not introduced to English until they started elementary school share experiences that can be critical to informing today's language issues. These shared experiences are important not only for their historical and cultural value but also for their potential to address

educational issues for today's Cherokee language learners. These voices, seldom heard outside their communities, should be brought forth.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore first-language Cherokee speakers' perceptions of their elementary school experiences with very limited experience or no experience with speaking, reading, or writing the English language, and how these experiences may have affected decisions later in life. These elementary schools were local and public, or were local yet run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. I interviewed four participants, two of whom attended mainstream schools in Oklahoma, and two who attended both BIA and public local schools in North Carolina. Despite their geographical differences, I had anticipated that significant commonalities would emerge through these interviews. These commonalities would likely be relevant to educational experiences, both in school and out of school. Because of the complex, dynamic knowledge that is indigenous knowledge, the kinship with the earth as a being, and the closely interrelated collective knowledge, the themes may manifest in socio-economical forms that can be explained in disciplinary contexts such as science, art, humanities, mathematics, physics, linguistics, and so forth (Battiste, 2007, p. 117). This disciplinary knowledge may affect all areas of lived experiences, particularly those related to educational ones.

I have explored how first-language Cherokee speakers who are now in their 60s and 70s recalled their experiences in schools that were established to provide education

for mainstream populations and may not have valued their more traditional knowledge and life-ways. I sought to better understand how the speakers perceived the experiences at that time and how they perceived them many decades later. I sought to understand, along with the speakers, how those speakers perceived that those experiences influenced their early school education as well as higher education and career choices. Through the collection of oral histories, I have been an active participant in preserving and sharing the stories of a small population of people whose voices have been marginalized.

Research Question

Through oral history interviews of first-language Cherokee speakers, I have sought answers to this overarching question:

How do first-language Cherokee speakers perceive their lack of English language skills affected their school experiences and higher education or career choices?

Theoretical Framework

To orient my study I used hermeneutic phenomenology and transculturation theory. After conducting interviews using an oral history methodology with participants, I transcribed all dialogue into text. I then analyzed the data through the lenses of both frameworks, which are appropriate for analyzing life stories collected through oral history interviews. Hermeneutics has the study of written language at its core; also notable, according to Smith, “is the way in which the hermeneutic imagination has the capacity to reach across national and cultural boundaries to enable dialogue between people and traditions superficially at odds” (1991, p. 195). With an objective of

“describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 59), phenomenology seeks to find the essences of lived experience, while hermeneutics is concerned with interpretation of meanings. Transculturation theory has evolved as a means for understanding specifically the school experiences of Native students as a process for resolving differences; it posits that no loss of cultural self-identity will take place as they succeed among mainstream peers. The three frameworks are indelibly linked through this project and are equally relevant in interpreting the analysis of the data that I have collected. They are particularly appropriate for better understanding the described experiences and influences of early educational occurrences.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

With an orientation toward the “lived experience” and interpreting the “texts” of life (van Manen, 1991, p. 4), hermeneutic phenomenology provides a lens for interpreting the written word. According to Moran, as cited in Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009, p. 24), “the proper model for seeking meaning is the interpretation of a text and for this reason Heidegger links phenomenology with hermeneutics.” Conducting interviews from an oral history methodology allowed for structured yet flexible discourse with interviewees with whom I have a pre-existing relationship; analyzing these interviews with a hermeneutic phenomenological framework allowed me to access a deeper understanding of their recollections and perceptions of these experiences.

As a study of lived experiences, phenomenology can “provide us with a rich source of ideas about how to examine and comprehend lived experience,” according to

Smith et al. (2009, p. 11). Heidegger's view of phenomenology is concerned with the question of existence itself and the activities and relationships that make the world meaningful to us. Heidegger's key ideas, according to Smith et al. (2009), relate to humans as being "'thrown into' a world of objects, relationships, and language" and that interpretation of meaning-making activities is central to phenomenology (p. 18). Both Heidegger and van Manen's definitions bear direct relation to the experiences of children "immersed" into an environment in which they had no understanding of the language.

Hermeneutic analysis, a practice of interpretation, is conducive to analyzing interviews through a non-linear process, which lends itself to a holistic perspective that is pervasive among indigenous life-ways and views. I have attempted to gain a better understanding of perceptions of participants through phenomenological reflection, which purpose, according to van Manen, "is to try to grasp the meaning of something" (1991, p. 77). I then examined the text through the hermeneutic circle:

It is concerned with the dynamic relationship between the parts and the whole, at a series of levels. To understand any given part, you look to the whole, at a series of levels. To understand any given part, you look to the whole; to understand the whole, you look to the parts. (Smith et al., 2009, p. 28)

By examining the data through a process of examining text both in whole sections of text and in smaller parts, I have made connections between the lived experiences of the Cherokee speakers and how educators can more effectively meet the needs of Cherokee children. Making these connections required interpretation not only for the researcher but

also for the participants. While the research is phenomenological in that the researcher attempted to get as close as possible to the personal experience of the participant, participation in the interpretation to some degree was required of both. “Without the phenomenology, there would be nothing to interpret; without the hermeneutics, the phenomenon would not be seen” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 37). This lens of hermeneutic phenomenology is particularly fitting with the methodology of oral history because of the necessity for analysis and reflection.

Transculturation Theory

Transculturation theory has grown from an open rejection of acculturation-based assertions that strong attachment to cultural traditionalism has been a barrier to educational success for Native American students. One of these theories, the “difficult situation,” according to Miller (1971), proposes that Native people are caught in the dualism of life on reservations or designated tribal areas in which culture is strongly maintained, and life in college environments in which cultural integrity is not valued by those outside the culture. This theory conceives of “Native peoples as culturally deficient and in need of greater acculturation with the mainstream of American society” (Huffman, 2010, p. 166). These theories have a historical foundation in the cultural assimilation practice of sending Native children to boarding schools with the purpose, according to Carney (1999), to “kill the Indian to save the man,” as quoted in Huffman (2010, p. 164). This movement was in place to remove culture and traditional practices from Indian students by forcing them to live as the dominant society deemed appropriate.

Cuban writer and ethnographer Fernando Ortiz first introduced the concept of transculturation as a process of resolving cultural differences. His notion of rebellion, compromise, and adjustment as part of a process for gaining status in society has since been altered, yet his conception that the process would lead to positive cultural gains, a resolving of cultural conflicts, remains a cornerstone of the theoretical perspective. Transculturation's current theoretical use is as a form of socialization as a process of learning a new culture. It is similar to the concept of biculturation, which is typically conceptualized as a person retaining his or her cultural heritage while adopting elements of mainstream culture, resulting in the development of a dual cultural identity (Huffman, 2010, p. 176). Through this dynamic, the minority member ultimately experiences some degree of cultural loss. Transculturation theory holds that cultural exchange does not necessarily lead to loss of culture. Rather, the individual retains Native cultural ways, beliefs, and views while learning those of the new culture. The traditional culture is not relinquished as in the theory of biculturation.

Transcultural theory has been criticized because of its suggestion that the Native students rather than the education institutions need to undergo cultural transformation. Though this argument has value, mainstream society has not demonstrated a commitment to strengthening efforts to understand the reasons behind the lag in academic performance and graduation rates of Native students. Huffman's 5-year study of the experiences of 69 American Indian college students of their experiences at a predominately non-Indian university demonstrates that ethnic identity is a powerful voice in the lives of these

students. Their ethnic identity sustained them through their academic careers and provided them with a sense of identity as well as a sense of purpose. As Huffman noted in 2010, “transcultured individuals do not academically succeed in spite of being American Indian, it is because they are American Indian” (p. 171).

Through a lens of transculturation, I became immersed in the language of the participants. This provided me insight into how their transculturation influenced their education and career choices in spite of, or maybe because of, their unique language skills and experiences.

Methodology

The methodology of oral history is an appropriate one to elicit the sharing of personal experiences as elements of life stories. While a traditional oral history that involves multiple aspects of life might focus on one participant, I chose to increase this number of participants to four through purposive sampling, since my specific focus was on educational experiences and their effects on higher education and career choices. I selected participants from among those whom I believed would be willing to actively recall and share their experiences. I determined this number primarily because I believed that it was the largest number of participants I could hope to engage with as an oral historian and do quality work not only recording and transcribing the stories that they shared with me, but also of truly listening and learning and identifying themes that have gone unnoticed for decades. A smaller number of participants would not have allowed the voices and stories of as many speakers to be heard. The importance of providing a vehicle

that allows for these participants to be heard is as important as the stories themselves. Janesick (2010) describes oral history as “an age-old technique used to capture personal narratives that represent an individual’s or sets of individuals’ life stories” (p. 38). Because of the relatively small pool from which I had identified participants, those whom I selected to participate have had a friendly, comfortable relationship with me. Because I had existing relationships with the participants, I anticipated that they have felt more a level of comfort with me as interviewer than they might have with a person whom they did not know, which was advantageous to my study. “The interviewer and his or her background, experiences, and relationship with other community members are critical to motivating narrators to share their knowledge and to understanding what is said” (Schneider, 2002, p. 106). These previously developed relationships played a critical role in whom I asked to participate in my study.

Oral history is a methodology especially fitting to collecting the stories of Native people. Native peoples have strong traditions of oral history. Wilson, in “Grandmother to Granddaughter,” states that for American Indians, oral tradition reflects the fabric of their culture. Some suggest that “from a Native perspective... oral history is contained within oral tradition” (Trimble, Sommer, & Quinlan, 2008, p.21).

Following the completion of the consent form and an explanation of the process involved in collecting the stories as well as how the stories will become part of the permanent collection of the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program, I began interviewing participants. The first sittings with each lasted near 1½ hours, followed by

second sittings of a similar or slightly shorter duration. The length of time was somewhat determined by the depth of the answers. Recorded follow-up sessions, all conducted in person, took from 30 minutes to as long as an additional hour. My follow-up questions were determined by not only what the participants said but also by how I interpreted their statements. Similar to a narrative, the approach to an oral history examines not only the story itself but also the linguistic and cultural resources it draws on (Riessman, 1993, p. 2). Culture is the core of language, and language is the core of these experiences. According to Wilson, as quoted in Bernard, Peter, & Hirata-Edds (2014), “This bleak prognosis of language loss matters tremendously because language is the key to worldview and values, much of which cannot be translated into English” (p. 188).

Positionality

As a descendant of Cherokee on my father’s side, and not a Cherokee speaker but rather a language learner, I have been in a position to conduct interviews from a perspective that a non-Cherokee might not have been able to do. I am of Muscogee Creek descent on my mother’s side and identified as Creek as a young girl, but since I grew up in the Cherokee Nation and had more regular contact with Cherokees, my identity shifted to Cherokee during my high school years. Since then, I have more strongly connected to my Cherokee heritage and culture than to the Creek culture. My lack of fluent Cherokee language skills necessitated that all interviews be conducted in English, though I encouraged my participants to use Cherokee language as a means for helping them

recollect stories and language if this made them more comfortable with the process of telling their stories.

Although I am not from any of the participants' communities, my having identified them through previously established personal relationships likely affected the outcomes of the study; however, in collecting oral histories, personal relationships may not only be acceptable but may be necessary for conducting interviews of a personal nature. Whether or not an oral history interviewer comes from an interviewee's community can influence the interview in either positive or negative ways; likewise, the cultural background of the interviewer can have implications in the outcomes of the interviews (Schneider, 2002, p. 106). Similarities of community or culture can serve to strengthen the relationship. About her interviews with a Haida woman, Blackman (1982) demonstrates that a strong bond between interviewer and interviewee is conducive to the sharing of both personal and community events. "I doubt that Florence Davidson could have comfortably related her life history to me before I had established my commitment to learning about her culture" (p. 15). Therefore, my position as an insider in the large community of Cherokee people – though not as a Cherokee speaker – improved the likelihood of collecting stories that are personal and richly detailed and significantly affected the lives of those who shared their stories with me.

Despite the heritage that I share with my participants, I did not want to make assumptions that I would understand their stories. Also, I made effort not to impose my own perspectives on their educational experiences and the effects of these experiences.

Awareness of my own potential biases is important; with this awareness I paid particular attention to respecting their stories even if they do not coincide with my expectations.

Limitations of the Study

In seeking to understand the perceptions of early school experiences of first-language Cherokee speakers, this study focused on these particular experiences relevant to a particular time in their lives. I interviewed a small number of participants. In a traditional qualitative study, this small number could be considered a limitation; however, for an oral history, a small number of participants is optimal in that it allows for more in-depth interviews and, therefore, more richly detailed sharing of experiences as well as a closer and more contextualized reading of the results.

The age of the participants can be considered something of a limitation. Because participants recalled experiences many of which took place more than 50 years ago, their memories may not be entirely clear. However, the focus of this study is more about the perceptions of those experiences and less about the historical accuracy. Oral history as a methodology is contextualized around the use of memory: “Oral history, in its most standard definition, relies on memories of firsthand experiences” (Trimble et al., 2008, p. 16).

Another potential limitation is the selection of participants. Rather than select them randomly, I identified those with whom I have an existing personal relationship. This selection method could have potentially resulted in the sharing of less varied experiences than might a randomly selected group of participants might share.

Finally, because the nature of the experiences may not have been entirely positive, I was cognizant that the sharing some of their memories of experiences could be uncomfortable; any discomfort aroused by these discussions could have limited the recollections that the participants were willing to share. Therefore, a high comfort level in speaking of their own experiences was a key factor in identifying potential participants. Because of the nature of the experiences of being unable to speak the language in which they were first taught, the participants may have felt some degree of discomfort during their recollections, yet none expressed or conveyed any discomfort. I did not have need to address any duress by providing an alternative yet relevant discussion topic.

Significance of the Study

The voice of a small yet significant group of people with unique educational experiences has not been heard beyond the communities of those people. Studies about schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, such as Chilocco Indian School and Carlisle Indian School, have been conducted (*American Indian Boarding Schools*, 2008; Grinde, 2004; Kelley, 1999; Lomawaima, 1994; Reyhner, 2000). Some of the children who lived through those events have had a voice in their recorded history. But I have been unable to locate the stories of young children of Cherokee descent who attended local non-boarding schools, either in Oklahoma or North Carolina. This study can be a step toward filling a gap that has long been in place. Sharing these stories may not only be cathartic for those sharing them; it can provide educators, researchers, and Native peoples with more in-depth understanding of the experiences and how the experiences

shaped the people, their families, and their communities. These stories can also provide an indigenous view of educational history that is missing from modern interpretations, according to Cruikshank (quoted in Trimble et al., 2008, p. 105).

Definition of Terms

AI/AN – American Indian/Alaskan Native – This abbreviation is used to refer to the collective group of indigenous peoples from the contiguous US states and Alaska.

BIA – Bureau of Indian Affairs

Common Core State Standards – Also known as CCSS, this refers to a set of standards for elementary and high school math and reading. The development of these standards was begun in 2009.

Euro-American, Eurocentric, Caucasian, White – These terms are used in reference to those of mainstream American society who are of European descent and speak English as a first language. The term “White” is generally capitalized when referring to this group of people.

First Nations – These are the peoples indigenous to what is now Canada.

Indigenous, Native, American Indian, Native American, Indian – Throughout the dissertation these terms are used interchangeably to refer to the indigenous inhabitants of North America, more specifically to what is now the continental United States of American. According to the International Labor Organization, Indigenous Peoples are:

Tribal peoples in independent countries whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and

whose status is regarded wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations. [ILO, 1989, Article 1, Section A]

Kituwah – This is an old word that Cherokees use to refer to themselves and the Cherokee language.

Oral History – According to the national Oral History Association (oralhistory.org), the definition of oral history is this:

Oral history refers both to a method of recording and preserving oral testimony and to the product of that process. It begins with an audio or video recording of a first person account made by an interviewer with an interviewee (also referred to as narrator), understanding of the past. A verbal document, the oral history, results from this process and is preserved and made available in different forms to other users, researchers, and the public. A critical approach to the oral testimony and interpretations are necessary in the use of oral history. (Principals and Best Practices, n.d.)

Public Schools – This references schools under jurisdiction of a state department of education which any local student can attend regardless of race. This is opposed to schools under jurisdiction of the Office of Indian Education Programs, and later the Bureau of Indian Education, run by the government, tribes, or missionaries, which were specifically for Native students.

Speaker/First-Language Speaker – Refers to the person whose first and primary language is an indigenous one. This term is generally used in reference to Cherokee speakers who did not speak English until they entered elementary school.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“Before they can appreciate and move freely and confidently in a multicultural curriculum, they must know their own histories, their own lives, and find their own voices” (Wilson, 2002, p. 101).

This chapter examines the existing literature relevant to educating students of Native descent. To the extent that my study attempts to provide an overview of a topic spanning several centuries, I begin with an overview of the education of Native children. Next, I focus on children of Cherokee descent and discuss concepts and values of educating students both prior to and after the forced Removal of 1838-1839, also known as the Trail of Tears. This timeframe is relevant because of the monumental impact that the removal had on virtually all aspects of Cherokee life. Following a discussion of education specific to Cherokees, I discuss Native perceptions of education, and then broaden the focus to the statistics relevant to education of Native American students today, including both public schools run by states and those under jurisdiction of the

Bureau of Indian Affairs/ Bureau of Indian Education. This literature review allows me as a researcher to not only review the existing literature but to address areas in which gaps exist.

This study seeks to understand the recollections and perceptions of experiences of Cherokee speakers who began their school years with few or no English skills, and to better understand the effects these language and educational experiences had on the participants. This study explored how these experiences shaped the educational careers of the participants, and how these stories and their essences might relate to the education of today's Native children, particularly Cherokee children. Because almost all research about the educational experiences of Native children focuses on those who attended boarding schools, research on those who attended non-boarding schools is under-represented or unrepresented in modern research. My research project fills a gap in the area of Native students with few or no English skills who attended public or BIA schools in their home communities with other students like themselves and with students from mainstream society.

Although my research question helped guide my review of the literature, the review has been guided in great part by the context of the study itself, in part because of the lack of research with similar topic and objective. The context of the study is relevant to the application of the results. These children who are today being educated through a language not spoken in their home do not face the same challenges as those of five decades previous; their goal today is one of language revitalization and preservation of

heritage, while the goal of those from early generations was more likely one of survival. Yet the context is relevant; whatever the reason, spoken language fluency in a second language is the goal of the students within the educational system.

This study is specific to first-language speakers of one language yet could be relevant contextually to other Indigenous languages. It could serve as a step toward filling a gap in tribe-specific research with a focus on language experiences and their potential relevance to education. Hermes (2007) states, “Following Lomawaima (1995), I agree that nation-specific research is needed” (p. 55). By interviewing only Cherokee speakers rather than speakers of other Indigenous tribes, I seek to contribute to the body of research that is tribally specific. To better understand the complexities associated with the topic of educating children through a language not spoken in their homes, I explore relevant topics of the historical education of Native children, the educational history of Cherokee children specifically, and perceptions that Native peoples have toward education.

Overview of Education of Native Children

The history of schooling of Native American children in the past 150 years has been chronicled by a plethora of individuals and institutions (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Grande, 2004; Lomawaima, 1994). From government reports to the National Indian Education Association to individual researchers and participants, research in both qualitative and quantitative form has been conducted. Less research exists, however, on the period prior to the boarding school years and from the Native perspective. To situate

the study from a hermeneutic phenomenology perspective with a framework of better understanding perceptions of experiences, it is important to examine accounts from perspectives of both the Native and the mainstream researcher.

The establishment of the governmental agency to deal with the Indigenous tribes pre-dates even the United States of America. The Continental Congress in 1775 created three departments of Indian affairs (Henson, 2009, n.p.). Secretary of War John C. Calhoun established the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1824 (Henson, 2009; Croft, 1977), making it one of the oldest agencies in the U.S. Government. According to the Full Organization Authority Record, (see research.archives.gov/organization/1138768), one of the four charges of the organization is “Providing elementary, secondary, higher, and continuing education services.” This agency would continue to play a significant role in the education of Native children for nearly two centuries.

U.S. Government Act and Treaty Impacting Indian Education

Education of American Indian children was in place well before the arrival of European explorers in North America. Members of societies received instruction in a broad range of topics that included history, religion, arts, crafts, geography, zoology, botany, medicine, law, political science, astronomy, soil science, and theater (Grinde, 2004, p. 26). According to Reagan (2009), the ultimate purpose of traditional Indian education was spiritual in nature with a central feature bound in a communal nature. Traditional education practices were part of daily life, with teaching engaged in by all adults (p. 122-123); kin bore the primary responsibility for children’s education

(Coleman, 1993, p. 16). But since the models of instruction were centered on oral tradition, Europeans did not understand the wealth of knowledge, the spiritual relationship between Native peoples and the Earth, and often typified education as primitive since it was unlike their own. Native peoples “believed that education should feature an emphasis on human beings existing in relation with the natural world and not lords over it” (Grinde, 2004, p. 26). White Americans thus denigrated American Indian education and declared that American Indians had no government, education, or spirituality (p. 26). The lens through which many Western scholars have tended to view non-Western education traditions holds the “assumption that non-Western educational traditions were in some significant way ‘primitive’” (Reagan, 2009, p. 247). This “primitive” / “civilized” dichotomy (Perdue, 1997, p. 76) was the basis for other paradigms focusing on the internal structure of native societies.

Because education of Indian students over the last five centuries has usually taken place outside of formal school, it has often been labeled “informal” (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, p. 27) in an effort to marginalize traditional teaching and learning. According to Coleman (1993), “One of the great Western misconceptions is that peoples without formal schooling are uneducated” (p. 15). What might be considered “formal” education, or that which takes place within schools, did not come to what I would argue might be the forefront of relations between the United States Government and individual Indian tribes until the early nineteenth century. The earliest treaty that specifically dealt with education of Native students was the 1819 Indian Civilization Fund Act (Coleman,

1993; Frank, 2011). This act encouraged benevolent societies, such as Presbyterians and Moravians, to continue to provide schools for Indian children, thus “civilizing” them. According to Frank (2011), religious missionaries had a history of attempting to do just this (Indian Civilization Fund Act section, para. 2), and this act would provide \$10,000 per year to continue the efforts. In 1819 Congress approved an annual fund to encourage these benevolent missions. The Act [*U.S. Statutes at Large*, 3:516-517] stated:

That for the purpose of providing against the further decline and final extinction of the Indian tribes, adjoining the frontier settlements of the United States, and for introducing among them the habits and arts of civilization, the President... is hereby authorized, in every case where he shall judge improvement in the habits and condition of such Indians practicable, and that the means of instruction can be introduced with their own consent, to employ capable persons of good moral character, to instruct them in the mode of agriculture suited to their situation; and for teaching their children in reading, writing, and arithmetic, and performing other duties as may be enjoined... (Prucha, 2000, p. 33)

It is important to note that the intention of the act was seen as one of beneficence that would benefit the Indians who lived near the frontier settlements. The children would learn curriculum similar to that of the children in the settlements, although “performing other duties as may be enjoined” did leave opportunity for broad interpretation, as will be demonstrated in the “other duties” the students performed during the boarding school era.

This act would not have been accomplished without the efforts of Thomas L. McKenney, Superintendent of Indian Trade for the United States. According to Frank (Indian Civilization Act section, para. 3), McKenney began lobbying Congress to fund this campaign to promote cultural change, believing that it could expand the factory system and teach the Indians to become a more agricultural society. This shift in way of life was intended to achieve the allowance of Indians to become citizens while bringing Native lands under U.S. control.

Twenty-five years after the passing of the Indian Civilization Fund Act of 1819, federal funds amounting to \$214,000 had been directed to missionary organizations maintaining 37 schools (Lomawaima, 1994, p. 2). Later in the century, in the 1880s and 1890s, the aid to mission schools was decreased, and eliminated entirely by the early 1900s (Lomawaima, 1994).

During this period, the General Allotment Act of 1887, also known as the Dawes Act or the Dawes Severalty Act, was enacted, summarily splitting up communally held lands and requiring individual land ownership. By splitting up Indian reservations and other lands into allotted 160-acre tracts for each head of family, the government would be able to accomplish Indians' forced involvement in the national economy and in mainstream American society (Prucha, 1985, p. 55). This would also benefit white settlers who wanted more and more land (Justice, 2006, p. 89). By the turn of the twentieth century, allotment as part of a broader assimilation policy had stripped virtually every Indigenous nation within the U.S. of "the ability to determine for themselves any

meaningful way the internal composition of their constituencies” (Churchill, 2004, p. 68), thus attempting to ensure the eventual dissolution of Native societies. With a similar intention to the Indian Civilization Fund Act, the Dawes Act also held as an objective the enabling of Indians to acquire citizenship (Reyhner & Eder, 1992, p. 47).

During this period, according to Lomawaima (1994), “Government schools were responsible for preparing Indians for the independence envisioned in the Dawes Act” (p. 3). With Indian people still not embracing American values and customs, Presidents such as Rutherford B. Hayes as well as the Office of Indian Affairs established schools whose missions were to serve as “effective tools for wrenching Indians from their cultures and traditional practices” (Trafzer, 2009, p. 126). Because many educators felt it a disadvantage that mission schools were in close proximity to the communities they served, the “solution” seemed to be removal of Native students from the influences of their people, thus paving the way for an era of government run boarding schools.

The Boarding School Era

As with any dominant society, so history has demonstrated, emphasis on educating the minority societies according to dominant society will take place; the American Indians were no exceptions. This trend began to become evident in the 1860s, marked by a campaign to extinguish tribal cultures. The model for what became an entire system was established in 1875 (Churchill, 2004, p. 68). In this year Carlisle Indian School was the first of many boarding schools to be established in places far from Native communities (Anonymous, 2008; Churchill, 2004; Lomawaima, 1994). In these remote

locations, federal educators assumed, they could “erase tribal identity by separating Indian children from Indian adults” (Lomawaima, 1994, p. xiii). Under the direction of General Richard H. Pratt, who had campaigned for off-reservation boarding schools, children as young as six were separated from their families and cultures with no contact for years. A former army officer, Pratt worked with the BIA to develop a network of schools “designed to inculcate Indian children with the virtues and values of Western civilization and to eliminate the traces of tribal ‘barbarism’ that their own heritage was thought to represent” (Deloria & Lytle, 1983, p. 241). A staunch assimilationist, Pratt believed that the Indians needed to be civilized and that the best way of accomplishing this was to “immerse him in civilization and keep him there until well soaked,” according to Utley (1964, p. xxi, quoted in Lomawaima, 1994). Indians, about whom Pratt rejected any notions of inborn racial inferiority (Grinde, 2004, p. 29), were to be stripped of their Indianness, resulting in a new set of “religious and social attitudes and skills in concert with the values of the dominant white society” (p. 29). What might at first thought seem surprising, Pratt was in favor of intermarriage with other races (p. 29). Despite his cultural form of racism, Pratt, believing in what he was doing for the students, earned their respect.

With one goal, among many, being to eradicate Indigenous peoples’ languages (Heavy-Runner & Kipp, 2004, p. 191-192), children were forcibly removed from homes, as attendance was mandatory (Anonymous, 2008, p. 18). This was a result of Pratt’s policy of establishing boarding schools in locations where children were far from home

and could be taken from homes at an early age, not returning to their homes until early adulthood (p. 18). This separation from family, community, and culture would, in effect, encourage or force them to assimilate in to the dominant mainstream society.

With a goal that “education would be the greatest tool for the youth to make their way in the new, foreign world” (Brumley, 2010, p. 12), five more boarding schools in various locations around the U.S. were established in 1880. These schools included Chilocco in Oklahoma, Haskell in Kansas, Chemawa in Oregon, and Fort Simcoe in Washington (Brumley, 2010; Lomawaima, 1994; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). Additional off-reservation boarding schools, “seen as the ideal facility to Americanize Native individuals” (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, p. 47), included Genoa in Nebraska, Phoenix in Arizona, and Sherman in California. By 1909 25 off-reservation boarding schools were in operation (Anonymous, 2008, p. 18). In the minds of Euro-Americans, “education was the transformative force that would remold Native Americans into ‘civilized’ people” (Grinde, 2004, p. 27). Following colonial ideology, “Racial and cultural differences are the markers and boundaries used to subordinate” (Weenie, 2000, p. 66). This model of European supremacy, based on the civilized/uncivilized dichotomy (p. 66), demonstrated to the dominant society that they must “civilize” the peoples whom they perceived to be “uncivilized” by immersing the young Native students in their own ways.

Boarding School Conditions and Curriculum

Conditions in boarding schools, “often brutal and occasionally fatal” according to Hoerig (2002, p. 642), were more akin to the military than to traditional schools of the period, particularly those that were off-reservation (Adams, 1995, p. 117). Adams (1995) argues that reformers, federal agents, and educators “waged cultural, psychological, and intellectual warfare on Native students as part of a concerted effort to turn Indians into ‘Americans’” (Davis, 2001, p. 20). It was a system involving harsh punishment for cultural practices or use of Indian languages (Van Hamme, 1995, p. 22) as well as for other infractions including lying, fighting, and insubordination (Adams, 1995, p. 121). Not only were children kept away from their families and societies for sometimes years on end, they were immersed in cultures much different from their own. Students were subjected to such traumatic events and assaults on their identity as the boys’ hair being cut, removing a personal part that held deep cultural significance to the students but was “symbolic of savagism” (p. 101) to the staff. Their manner of dress, styles of hair, religions, values, and language were changed through full immersion in the new culture (Churchill, 2004; Grinde, 2004). Forms of physical and sexual abuse were rampant in many situations (Anonymous, 2008, p. 18). Indian boarding schools, “arguably the most minutely surveilled and controlled federal institutions created to transform the lives of any Americans” (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, p. 2), controlled a physical *safety zone* that could symbolically neutralize the “lives that seemed to threaten American uniformity and national identity” (p. 2-3). This *safety zone*, a theoretical model that traces the

“swings” of Indian policy, demonstrated the ongoing struggle of cultural difference and its perceived threat to a shared American identity (p. 6).

Curriculum in the boarding schools was directed toward preparing the Native students for positions of farming and service within mainstream society; these positions would allow them to become productive citizens who were economically self-sufficient. Because of racism toward Native peoples during this era, “the consequence of this policy was to assimilate them into the bottom of the socio-economic ladder of the larger society. For the most part, schools primarily prepared Native boys for manual labor of farming and Native girls for domestic work” (Anonymous, 2008, p. 18). As late as the 1940’s, manual labor curriculum was seen as “appropriate” for the place of Natives in American society; this is demonstrated through the stressing of “mechanical and construction trades suitable for farm life, small-town living and local service industries” according to Lomawaima (1994, p. 66). Women’s roles in mainstream society reflected “the double burden of gender and race” (p. 81), with the training of Chilocco students preparing them for servile employees of white women or of the boarding schools themselves. Under the guise of teaching vocationalism, efforts were directed not to liberate but to discipline the students for their future “civilized” roles in mainstream society.

Academic curriculum varied among the schools but was of a nature similar to that of public schools. Teaching at government run boarding schools was consistently done in English. Younger children learned a fairly basic curriculum that included the alphabet and numbers, according to Frank Mitchell, Navajo (Coleman, 1993, p. 108).

Autobiographers and government or missionary teachers generally agree on the variety of academic curriculum that included English, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, history, geography, and biology for older students (p. 108).

Although conditions at boarding schools seemed to concentrate on controlling the bodies as well as ways of thinking in the young Native students who attended them, the perceptions of many students who attended government run boarding schools have been recorded as not entirely negative. The effects of the schools, however, remain. According to Anonymous in *Poverty & Race* (2008), “it is generally the case that much if not most of the current dysfunctionality in Native communities can be traced to the boarding school era.” Many Native people today can trace their family histories through this boarding school era, some, including myself, as recently as in the parental and grandparental generations.

A Shift to More Localized Boarding Schools

Throughout this era that began in the late 1870s and continued through the 1970s, government-run off-reservation boarding schools were not the only ones that Native students were attending. A shift was taking place in the early 1900s that did not always require children to be displaced from their homes. These four types of boarding schools, according to Grinde (2004, p. 27), included 1) reservation boarding schools established and conducted by the federal government, 2) reservation boarding schools established by religious groups under contract at a per capita rate, 3) independent reservation boarding schools made independent of supervision by Indian agents due to their distance from

government agencies, and 4) mission reservation boarding schools established by religious associations with their own paid employees. In these schools the government, through its agencies, furnished necessary supplies including food and clothing to the pupils (p. 28). According to Lomawaima and McCarty (2006), a smaller number of students during this time attended public schools, but little is known about these experiences; many public schools denied Indian enrollment until well after World War II (p. 47).

By the mid 1950s, the boarding school system was largely seen as a failure in its attempts at forced assimilation (Deloria & Lytle, 1983; Niezen, 2003; Reyhner & Eder, 1992; Van Hamme, 1995). In the mid 1920s, boarding schools were being closed and day schools were being consolidated, the first indication at the reservation level that the government knew its goal of assimilation was not working and had been a miscalculation of major proportions (Deloria and Lytle, 1983, p. 12). Not only were children not becoming assimilated, the forced proximities of the boarding school situations frequently had just the opposite outcomes. Students clung tightly to their traditions and spoke their languages when opportunity allowed. This policy of forced removal of children to remove all remnants of their “barbarism” was not the success that had been envisioned. These policies aimed at “eliminating all vestiges of attachment to tradition” had unintentionally contributed to “intertribal identity, broader political unity, and the training of educated leaders” (Niezen, 2003, p. 41).

These less-than-successful attempts to fully assimilate the Indian children into mainstream society prompted the U.S. Government to commission a report. This report, which would come to be known as the Meriam Report, would be a critical step in the move away from distant boarding schools to local boarding schools and state-funded, government-subsidized local public schools. Completed in 1928, the Meriam Report was a scientific appraisal by the Independent Institute for Government Research under the direction of Lewis Meriam. It was a critique of federal Indian policy citing inadequate facilities and poor quality of education, condemning the practice of removing Indian children from their families. It explicitly stated that the Indian family and social structure should be strengthened, not destroyed (Meriam, 1928). John Collier, who was Commissioner of Indian Affairs during this period, advocated for Native self-government and cultural survival. He directed that federal schools must allow Native religions expression and language use and adopt “a more humane approach to Indian children” (Deloria and Salisbury, 2002, p. 431a). Collier utilized this as a foundation for the beginning of reform at the federal level, which would continue to present day education of Native children.

Education of Cherokee Children

Throughout not only written history but also oral history, Cherokee people have placed primary importance on education. As early as I can remember, my paternal grandmother talked of her own experiences at the Cherokee National Female Seminary, which she attended from approximately 1905-1909, when the school became

Northeastern State Normal School and went under the Oklahoma state system (Mihesuah, 1993, p. 69). At this time the school, located in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, became coeducational, causing many students, including my grandmother Charlotte and great-aunt Pearl, not to return but to attend public school in their home community near Pryor, Oklahoma. After four months, however, their parents allowed them to return to the normal school. My grandfather, who passed before I was born, graduated from the Cherokee National Male Seminary in 1908. After graduating, both my grandmother and grandfather became teachers, even though my grandmother had not graduated. It was typical of the time for public school teachers to not be particularly well educated by today's standards. My grandfather eventually became one of only a handful of public school administrators who were of Native descent during the 1920s and 1930s. He worked as an educator of both Native and non-Native students throughout his life.

Education among Native peoples, including Cherokees, has been approached both formally and informally (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, p. 27). As a matrilineal society (Perdue, 1998; Perdue & Green, 2005; Stremlau, 2011), Cherokee tradition included educating children in the ways of the mothers' clans; thus, maternal uncles rather than fathers bore the responsibility of teaching young men the ways of nature, of the clan, and of the tribal community. From this ancient tradition sprung what would become the informal education that was part of every young boy's upbringing. Girls learned the ways of mothers, maternal grandmothers, and maternal aunts.

Literacy efforts among Cherokee peoples were far advanced relative to other tribes in the early nineteenth century, in no small part due to Sequoyah's 1821 development of a written syllabary. Efforts at reading and writing "surpassed those of other North American Indians at that time, as well as those of most other communities of similar size on this continent and beyond" (Parins, 2013, xiii). This rise in literacy among tribal people provided a model for other Native people in the years to come. Prolonged exposure to white culture led many leaders in the Cherokee Nation to recognize the benefits and importance of education and, as a result, they sought to bring schools to their people (Parins, xiv).

Prior to the forced Removal of 1838-1839, estimates of literacy among Cherokee were from as little as one third to as high as ninety percent. John Ridge, a young Cherokee man formally educated and charged with collecting information about American Indians, in his 1826 letter to Albert Gallatin, a statesman who had served in Thomas Jefferson's cabinet, stated:

I suppose that there are one third of our Citizens, that can read & write in the English Language. George Guess [sic] a Cherokee who is unacquainted with the English has invented 86 characters, in which the cherokees [sic] read & write in their own Language and regularly correspond with their Arkansas friends. This mode of writing is most extensively adopted by our people particularly by those who are ignorant of the English Language. (Quoted in Perdue & Green, 2005, p.42)

According to the Census of 1835 (Perdue & Green, p. 50), a total of 16,542 Cherokees, including 77.27 percent “full blooded,” were recorded. Among their households, slightly more than half had at least one reader of Cherokee, while 18 percent had an English reader. Literacy skills in both Cherokee and English languages were arguably important to Cherokee people prior to Removal. The adoption of Sequoyah’s written syllabary in 1821 was monumental in preserving language and resulting in greater cohesiveness among the Cherokees. These factors allowed for large numbers of population to become literate in a matter of weeks, quite a significant accomplishment that may not have taken place among other peoples in history. According to Parins (2013), “The syllabary became a gateway to a world of intellectual possibilities and had profound effects on the political, social, economic, and educational affairs of the Cherokee Nation that continue to this day” (p. xiv).

The history of the Cherokee Nation is often considered divided into two significant eras: pre-Removal and post-Removal. The Removal, commonly referred to as the Trail of Tears, was a horrific event motivated by greed for land on which gold was discovered and by racism. With the creation of a written form of language, high levels of education, and many Cherokees spread throughout several southern states including Georgia and North Carolina, the Cherokee people walked a fine line between what the Euroamericans considered “civilized” while also maintaining traditional lifestyles and resisting sudden social and economic change. Although the outward lifestyle of many Cherokees was indistinguishable from that of their White neighbors, President Andrew

Jackson, “in one of the great paradoxes of U.S. history... would nonetheless engineer their violent removal” (Sturm, 2002, p. 61). Many vocally opposed this removal, including Cherokee women who wrote a petition in October 1831, stating that the plan to effect their removal west to obtain their lands was “highly oppressive, cruel and unjust” (Cherokee Women & Neugin, 2011, p. 128. Because of “deep-seated racism in Euroamerican culture” (Sturm, 2002, p. 61), the Cherokees and other southeastern woodlands tribes were forced to endure forfeiture of their property and move west.

Formal Education of Cherokee Children

Following the forced Removal from the Eastern woodlands to what was then Indian Territory and is today Oklahoma, education was viewed not as a privilege but as a matter of survival. Having lost approximately one fourth of their population due to the inhumane conditions prior to and during the Removal, the Cherokees could have been a broken people. Instead they focused their efforts to build a society based on features of white civilization (Capps, 1973, p. 164). Education was a pillar of Cherokee intellectual life. William Potter Ross, in an editorial titled, “The Public Schools,” in an 1847 issue of the *Cherokee Advocate*, “wrote that education was the only hope for the Cherokee Nation” (Parins, 2013, p. 68). The tribe must rely on truth and reason, he said. The pride that Cherokees had historically taken in their civic institutions, particularly education (Stremlau, 2011, p. 98) was evident in their establishing of their own schools following the Removal. While other Indian nations relied on the U.S. Government or on missionaries to provide formal education for their children, the Cherokees provided for

themselves, believing that education served the interests of Cherokee nationalism. As the Cherokee Nation grew in wealth and stature, its educational system expanded from a few missionary schools to a public school network in nearly every Cherokee community.

These schools accomplished more than the teaching of literacy skills; students were encouraged to participate in literary, debating, and dramatic societies (Parins, p. 68). Ethan Allen Hitchcock, a traveler who would later become a Major General in the U.S. Army, recorded in his journal a visit to Dwight Mission, located in present-day Sequoyah County, Oklahoma. His observation included, “Miss Hannah Moore... has about 30 scholars, all girls except one... recited in arithmetic, plain addition and multiplication examples. Saw some writing, pretty fair and heard some respectable reading – mean for any school” (quoted in Perdue & Green, 2005, p. 181).

Prior to 1839, the Old Settlers – those Cherokee who had arrived in Indian Territory prior to the forced Removal of 1838-1839 – had done little about education (McLoughlin, 1993, p. 88). After the arrival of the Cherokees in 1839, the council planned to start with one school in each of the eight districts; parents would not be charged, and attendance would be voluntary. Each district would provide “a common school education” taught in English to the children between the ages of six and sixteen (McLoughlin, p. 88). Most children wanted an education.

The education of young Cherokees was viewed as being of paramount importance by the residents of the Nation, so the Cherokee National Council passed an act in 1839, the same year as the majority of the refugees arrived in Indian Territory, providing the

Principal Chief to appoint a three-member committee to plan a system of general education for the Nation (Faulk & Jones, 1984, p. 49). This “major effort to restore national pride” was undertaken in 1841 (McLoughlin, 1993, p. 86), and the decision was made for the Cherokees to take responsibility for their own education. Legislation followed in 1841 that provided for a public school system controlled by a national board of education. Although pedagogy was not always agreed upon by Cherokee politicians (Stremlau, 2011, p. 99), these would be elementary schools providing schooling in the fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic, along with strict moral training (Faulk & Jones, 1984, p. 50).

According to [Principal Chief] Dennis Wolf Bushyhead, in his sixth annual message in 1884, the Cherokee wanted their schools to train youth in skills that would benefit communities, develop their minds with knowledge of their history, and reinforce values that fostered social harmony (Stremlau, 2011, p. 99). Cherokee politicians “generally agreed that the main purpose of education was to inspire and inform their citizenry” (p. 99). Their intentions were to produce Cherokee citizens who were productive farmers as well as shrewd businesspersons, learned scholars, and able statesmen. In a broader sense, Principal Chief Joel B. Mayes, in his third annual message, described the Cherokee schools as the front line in the Nation’s defense against encroachment (p. 100).

According to a partial census in 1851 of those who had removed from the East between 1835 and 1838, the Cherokee Nation had 27 schools, some of them run by

missionaries but most publicly supported (McLoughlin, 1993, p. 81). Two public high schools were added in 1851. By 1860 there were 30 public schools in the Nation, although this was not enough to educate every eligible child. Shortly after Oklahoma statehood in 1907, the Cherokees lost their community-run schools as Oklahoma assumed control of the schools, which became “government property and educational instruction became subject to bureaucratic control by non-Indian professional educators” (Stremlau, 2011, p. 207). Some of the community schools were closed; within a generation, the attainment of Cherokee education had declined as children became marginalized from public schools.

Cherokee National Male and Female Seminaries

Graduation from these general education elementary schools did not qualify students for admission to an Eastern college, a goal of some of the wealthier families; thus, in 1846, the National Council authorized the building and operation of Male and Female Seminaries, which would be high schools. According to Faulk and Jones, the Male Seminary opened on May 6, 1851, and the Female Seminary on the following day. These seminaries provided free tuition, room, and board, and did not include manual labor, unlike federal government boarding schools of the period.

The seminaries, established and maintained by the Cherokees, were open only to Cherokees. One of the rationales of the Cherokee National Council for establishing the female seminary “was to train the young women of the tribe in order to make them educated, dutiful, and ‘useful’ wives for prominent Cherokee husbands” (Mihesuah,

1993, p. 3), which was arguably a contrast from the older traditional matriarchal system. Many of the attendees at the Female Seminary were from affluent, educated families, while others were from poor families. The girls' physiologies varied greatly in that some were as little as 1/128 Cherokee blood while others were full bloods. A number of the girls were "economically, socially, and physiologically nearly identical to Victorian society's white women, and many seminary students subscribed to the same value system as whites even before they enrolled" (p. 3).

Academic curriculum at these seminaries was challenging. It did not include Cherokee culture, another shift away from tradition and toward mainstream ways. The female seminary was patterned after Mount Holyoke in Massachusetts and included penmanship, phonetics, geography, arithmetic, reading, composition, and grammar at middle grades. High school students studied English history; writings by Cicero, Ovid, Virgil, Homer, Goethe, and Moliere; French and German; political economy; moral philosophy; geometry and trigonometry, and calculus; chemistry, botany, geology, surveying, and zoology; and more, according to *An Illustrated Souvenir Catalog* (Mihesuah, p. 55). The girls had a long day that began at 5:30 a.m. and ended at 9:15 p.m. and included regular chores and walks as well as a variety of activities.

When Indian Territory became Oklahoma, the forty-sixth state, in November 1907, no celebrations were held at either seminary (Mihesuah, p. 68). The Nation's tribal schools were absorbed into the new state system, but the Female Seminary remained under the Nation until it became the Northeastern State Normal School in 1909 and was

taken over by the state of Oklahoma. Thus ended the era of what were and are still known as the first institutions of higher education west of the Mississippi (Justice, 2006; McLeroy, 2014).

North Carolina Cherokees

Despite the U.S. Government's efforts to relocate all of the Cherokees in the 1830s, some escaped the forced relocation and remained in the Eastern woodlands area in what is now western North Carolina (NC). Known as the Eastern Band of Cherokees, tribal citizenship numbered close to 2,000 by 1846 (McLoughlin, 1993, p. 61). An analysis of the 1835 tribal census indicates that the Eastern Band Cherokees had less interracial marriage, less wealth, fewer white skills, and were less likely to be able to read in either Cherokee or English (Finger, 1984, p. 60). This led whites to view the NC Cherokees as "among the most traditional and backward of their tribe" (p. 60). In this region Whites attached great importance to educating the Indians, as some believed that a basic education was necessary for the Indians to comprehend the subtleties of Christianity (p. 64). The NC Cherokees did not possess strong Cherokee literacy skills: according to William Holland Thomas, a white man who had been adopted into the band and was knowledgeable about Cherokee ways, his estimate in 1845 was that only about one-fifth of the population could read and write (p. 65).

Despite Thomas' devotion to the Cherokee people and his diligent work to establish schools among the Indians, he was only able to obtain services of itinerant teachers who might stay for just a few months. He was denied aid by the acting Indian

Commissioner, who noted that “education was already being provided for the Cherokee Nation and would be available for any of the Eastern Band who chose to move there” (p. 65). According to an 1869 census taken by Silas Swetland, less than half of the NC Cherokee could read or write in Cherokee, although the mixed-bloods had a high rate of literacy, sometimes in both Cherokee and English (Finger, 1984, p. 130).

After working diligently to open five schools among the Eastern Band, Reverend William McCarthy, special agent for the Indian Office, was outraged that the Indian Office would be closing the schools. It was their conclusion that the Indians “were far enough advanced to take care of themselves and that state jurisdiction might soon be appropriate” (Finger, 1984, p. 132). In 1876 the schools were transferred to the state superintendent of schools, an unwise move given that it was impossible to oversee the schools from Raleigh, 200 miles away. The schools suffered, and in 1879, Secretary of Interior Carl Schurz let the schools die (p. 135).

Boarding schools began to appear on the Qualla Boundary, the Cherokee Reservation, in 1893 (Duncan & Taylor, 2000, p. 38). While some children were sent to far off boarding schools, others were able to remain closer to their homes and return home for summers. The Qualla Boundary boarding school, run on a military model similar to other boarding schools of the time, was operated by the federal government until 1948. In 1948, according to Duncan and Taylor, the boarding school at Cherokee, NC, closed, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs took over the administration of schools in Cherokee. This agency maintains oversight of the Boundary schools to this day.

Native Perceptions of Education

Throughout the boarding school years and into today's systems of education, Native Americans, including Cherokees, have had their own perceptions of the role of education. As Fixico (2009) explains, there is no one Indian perspective ("First of all," n.p.). Not only each tribe but also the communities within each tribe have perspectives that vary to small or large degrees. In discussing an Indigenous Pedagogy based on Indigenous culture, orality, land, community, and ethics to preserve and expand Indigenous Knowledge and promote Indigenous well-being, Young (2015) cites Grande's explanation (2008) of the need for understanding "that *Nature* is a sovereign entity interconnected with both human subjectivity and struggle for self-determination" (p. 66). This is relevant to Native perceptions of traditional education through the perceptions grounded in visions of sovereignty in the deep connections of Native peoples to place and land, to present and past. According to Young (2015), Indigenous Elders provide educational leadership through pedagogical principles that are deeply relevant to particular places (p. 20). The travesties of forcibly sending children to boarding schools far from their traditional places were a significant element of the trauma that many of the students endured, trauma that was not of a nature that would be understood by those enforcing the Removal.

During the early years of the boarding school era, in the late 1870's, students "entered the classroom with feelings that ran the gamut from hopeful expectation to suspicious hostility" (Adams, 1995, p. 136). All expectations and experiences were not

negative; some of these students “saw the schools as a refuge from poverty, abuse, and abandonment at home” (Kelley, 1999, n.p.), places where they “gained the education and self- control [sic] to be successful.” However, existing research does indicate that the attempts to remove all vestiges of traditional culture from the children led to a lack of academic success to a high degree. Huffman (2010) states, “Many scholars continued to be adamant that the lack of educational success among Native students was largely due to a stubborn resistance to cultural acculturation and an insistence on retaining traditional cultural ways” (p. 166). In later years, as more Native students attended local schools integrated with students of other races, racism would be an additional challenge that many faced. Weenie (2000), in writing of her experiences in an integrated school in the mid-sixties, recalls being ashamed because of her race. She traces the feelings of inferiority and inadequacy to her early school experiences “because of the manner in which my history, culture, and language were devalued and excluded from the curriculum. There was much to be angry about and that anger was directed inward” (p. 69).

As Weenie wrote in 2000 about the lack of culture and Native experiences in the curriculum, not all Natives agree that there is a place for them in today’s curriculum. When discussing the inclusion of traditional culture, including ceremonies and songs, in school curriculum, many disagree as to whether or not this is appropriate outside of a traditional setting. In a 1997 written survey conducted in communities across the Navajo Reservation by Batchelder and Markel, this was a sensitive issue. Elders and others who

closely follow the traditional ways felt that these ways must be passed on through family and community members; many closely held beliefs and values are not discussed openly. When Navajos outside of the reservation were asked the same question about cultural inclusion in the curriculum, many of the younger participants (late teens and early twenties) felt that teaching the traditional beliefs would not help the Navajo Nation move into the future (Batchelder, 2000, p. 3). Different generations disagreed with the degree of inclusion for markedly different reasons. In my experiences with a school that teaches the Cherokee language through immersion, I have experienced the same disagreement as to how much culture is appropriate for teaching through school rather than handed down by family and community.

As a teacher of Indian history, culture, and other topics at the university level, Stephen Greymorning faced ignorance, in a class of 90% Native students, to a disturbing degree. He noticed a number of condescending remarks regarding history and how “our” ancestors had given away their rights and needed to stop whining and get on with it like everyone else. To combat this utter lack of understanding, Dr. Greymorning (2000) taught an in-depth 4-day lesson, which he referred to as “Treaty negotiations” (p. 72), that involved an analogy to better help the class understand how the Indians were frequently duped by the U.S. Government into signing treaties that were not in their best interests, and how they were lied to about the content and intent of treaties. At the end of these “Treaty negotiations,” the students expressed surprise and a stronger appreciation for what their ancestors had experienced (p. 76). I know of a handful of local teachers

who have taught similar lessons to students, both Native and non-Native, involving handing them documents written in Native languages and giving them directions to sign the papers at the risk of failing the class if they do not. Student perceptions of the challenges that Native ancestors faced could be more empathetic if more teachers were prepared to incorporate these kinds of experiences into their lessons.

During the boarding school era, a time when Richard Pratt was strongly influential in the educational concept of eliminating all traces of culture from students, educators believed that students who were removed from their languages and culture would perform better academically. However, according to Reyhner (2000), researchers Donna Deyhle and Karen Swisher (1997) “found that Indians [sic] students who were more traditional did as well or better academically as students who were more assimilated” (p. 127). The importance of incorporating language and culture into today’s educational settings may be critical to the academic success of some students. As Dr. Greymorning demonstrated in his class lesson, to “just get on with it like everyone else” is not possible. These educational policies, which went on for decades and through generations of Native students, have played a significant role in the current situation of not only education but also of broader life-ways. This system that sought to destroy cultures, languages, and values is still prevalent in health problems and in assumptions by educators that children from traditional families, often considered as being “culturally and even cognitively deficient” (Beilenberg, 2000, p. 133), must “change and/or be changed to conform to the mainstream education system” (p. 133). Beilenberg calls for

educators to focus on how Natives view learning and to understand and accept that there are many ways of learning and knowing. Stotts (2009) discusses the cultural disconnect that a child can experience if the cultural values at home are not upheld or are even devalued in a school setting (p. 2). Stotts argues that due in part to this cultural friction, doing well in school may be viewed as the “white way” (p. 5). Thus, today, schools can still become symbols of oppression, particularly for those students living on reservations but attending non-reservation schools. Therefore, because of acts viewed as oppression and assimilation, “Native Americans may view mainstream institutions with skepticism, avoidance, and even defiance” (p. 5).

Nearly 140 years after the era of boarding schools located far from reservations began, Native families still feel the experiences of those who attended. These experiences relate to today’s public education systems and the Native students who attend them. While some students fit in with mainstream students and those of other races and cultures, those Native students who are more traditional may be marginalized. The school structures, Beilenberg argues (2000), must be changed to provide American Indian children with “supportive and culturally appropriate education” (p. 134). Today’s Native students deserve every opportunity to have their academic and cultural needs met, and to build on their strengths rather than be forced to fully conform to Westernized education ways.

Education of Native Students Today

According to the American Indian Relief Council, 60 government-run schools for Indians were in place in the 1880s, serving 6200 Indian students. These included reservation day schools and reservation boarding schools (“History and Culture,” n.d.). By 1909, the system included 25 off-reservation boarding schools, 157 on-reservation boarding schools, and 307 day schools (Anonymous, 2008, p. 18).

In modern society, over 5,000 groups of indigenous peoples live in 70 countries, with a world population of over 300 million peoples (Battiste, 2007, p. 115). Within the United States, 5.2 million people self-identified as American Indian and Alaska Native, either alone or in combination with one or more other races, according to the 2010 Census. This represents approximately 1.7% of the population, higher than in the 2000 Census due to a change that allowed for identifying as more than one race. Among the states with the highest number of American Indians are Oklahoma with the second highest after California, and North Carolina with the eighth highest number. Those identifying as Cherokee are as follows: One tribal grouping identifying the sole tribe as Cherokee reported 284,247, while those reporting two or more tribal groupings reported 16,216. For those reporting Cherokee in combination with one or more race, 468,082 reported one tribal grouping (Cherokee) and 50,560 reported two or more tribal groupings (including Cherokee) in addition to another race besides Native American.

The National Indian Education Association reports that in the 2010-2011 school year, there were 378,000 AI/AN students in the U.S. public school system, comprising 0.7% of the school population. During this same year, the Bureau of Indian Education

reported 49,152 students in BIE schools, including their 183 elementary, secondary, residential, and peripheral dormitories in 23 states. During the same year, private school enrollment was 0.5% for AI/AN students.

The tumultuous history of frequently oppressive forms of formalized education arguably impacts the education of those Cherokee children who attended public state-run elementary schools or non-boarding, local BIA schools in the 1950s. The experiences of these children were highly likely to be far less traumatic, given that they were able to live with their families and speak their native language outside of the school environment. To fully understand just how different their experiences may have been, it is important to have a firm grounding in the historical atrocities that were committed for decade after decade with intentions of changing the very beings of the children. Therefore, this review of the literature has broadly overviewed the history of education of not only Cherokee students but of Native American students in the last two centuries. It has brought populations of Native people, including students, to present date. Perhaps most importantly, it has shed light on how government-run schools marginalized the children who were supposed to be acculturated to the dominant society. This study will add to an almost non-existent base of literature that captures the perceptions of those who were schooled during the time of the boarding schools but whose experiences were likely markedly different from those who were sent far from home. The next chapter will discuss the methodology that was used to record and analyze the perceptions of the early

elementary school experiences of a small group of those children who attended school locally

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

“The term ‘research’ itself is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research,’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary,” as quoted by Smith in Max (2005, p. 79).

The primary purpose of this study is to describe the first-language Cherokee speakers’ perceptions, through their recollections, of their school experiences, and to analyze and identify themes from these experiences. This study explores these Cherokee speakers’ perceptions of the school experiences and how these experiences may have affected their higher education and career choices.

As I collected and examined these stories of elementary school experiences and their potential effects on the adult lives of the participants, I hoped to bring forth recollections and preserve stories that are missing from the collective history of Native Americans. The stories, preserved in their entirety in both digital and printed form, also reflect my analysis. I used qualitative methodology to collect data, relate them to today’s Cherokee learners, and determine implications.

To guide my study, the overarching research question is:

How do first-language Cherokee speakers perceive their lack of English language skills affected their school experiences and higher education or career choices?

This chapter begins with a discussion of the theoretical framework of hermeneutic phenomenology and transculturation theory and then presents the oral history methodology, followed by the selection of participants. The remaining sections discuss the collection and analysis of data and ethical considerations.

Theoretical Framework

Because I sought to work with the participants to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences, I conducted this research project from a hermeneutic phenomenological approach with transculturation theory also guiding my investigation. Oral history was the primary methodology of data collection. After collecting shared stories through oral history interviews, I analyzed the transcriptions and recordings for emergent themes and seek meanings and deeper understandings of the experiences.

The combination of such particular theoretical framework and methodology, which I have not seen in other studies, sprang from my interest in and perceived connection with both hermeneutic phenomenology and oral history. With a focus on perceptions and people, they seem to complement each other. While hermeneutics is interpretive, phenomenology is descriptive; these are related to the critical aspect of context in creating oral histories. As a theoretical perspective, Huffman's transculturation

theory seemed particularly relevant to my study since its application as a theory is one specifically for making sense of educational experiences of Native students, particularly those from reservations and other Native communities.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

With an origin as a science of biblical interpretation, according to Crotty (1998), “hermeneutics” derives from a Greek term meaning “to interpret” or “to understand” (p. 87). Hermeneutics has come to be an interpretive form for bringing meaning to both written and unwritten sources. As a form of text interpretation to understand meanings, even those that may be hidden, hermeneutics looks at underlying conditions. This approach became prominent in the eighteenth century not only for the interpretation of sacred texts, according to Smith, “but also for the newly emergent understanding of science which characterized the Enlightenment” (Smith, 1991, p. 189).

While nineteenth century philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher is possibly the most under-appreciated of all hermeneutic thinkers (Smith, 1991, p. 189), his method of inquiry later became articulated as “the hermeneutic circle.” Edmund Husserl can be credited with overturning the Enlightenment ideal of objective reasoning, demonstrating that thinking and interpreting exist always and everywhere, thus leading the way to contemporary Hermeneutic thought. A student of Husserl, Martin Heidegger believed in the “hermeneutic circle” as a circle of understanding and the question of Being (Crotty, 1998). Hans-Georg Gadamer, then, drew on the work of his teacher, Heidegger, and viewed hermeneutical understanding as historical understanding that mediates past and

present, creating a fusion of the horizon of the past and the horizon of the present (p. 101). Gadamer argued that the phenomena must disclose itself through a kind of Socratic dialogical engagement with the question for the interpretation of any phenomena to take place. In this interpretive paradigm, humans construct meanings in unique ways, depending upon context and frames of reference that are personal and allow for engagement with the world they are interpreting (Crotty, 1998).

Phenomenology, drawing heavily on the writings of Husserl and those who expanded on his views, including Heidegger (Creswell, 2007, p. 58), “describes the meaning for several individuals of their *lived experiences* of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 57). Its basic purpose is to “reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (p. 58). Heidegger (2010) stated that its essential character does not consist in its *actuality* but stands even higher in its *possibility*. It is one thing “to report narratively about *beings* and another to grasp beings in their *being* (p. 36). Phenomenological inquiry attempts to discover the meaning people place on their lived experiences and, according to DeMarrais (2004), enables researchers to examine everyday experience in close, detailed ways (p. 56). As a form of narrative inquiry (Creswell, 2007; Kramp, 2004) or interpretive inquiry (Willis, 1991), it investigates the perceptual portions of individual life-worlds, “where our distinctively human experience begins” (p. 175).

Edmund Husserl, cited in van Manen (1990), first introduced the concept of “bracketing” in phenomenological inquiry as a way to “describe how one must take hold

of the phenomenon and then place outside of it one's knowledge about the phenomenon" (p. 47). Moustakas, as cited in Creswell (2007), focused on Husserl's concept of bracketing, also known as *epoche* (p. 59). Moustakas believed that this state in which a phenomenon is perceived as if for the first time is seldom perfectly achieved. van Manen (1990) stated that we should hold our assumptions at bay and make explicit our understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories (p. 47). This suspension of one's own beliefs and views is necessary to study phenomenon in interpretive inquiry.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a human science that orients toward interpreting and is "a philosophy of the personal" (van Manen, 1990, p. 7). Willis (1991) posits that phenomenological inquiry and hermeneutical inquiry cannot be sharply distinguished, "for human consciousness of perceptions inevitably leads into conscious consideration of what perceptions mean" (p. 176). van Manen (1990) states that phenomenology describes one's orientation to lived experience, hermeneutics describes one's interpretation of the "text" of life (p. 4), and that to do this research is "always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings" (p. 5).

van Manen's (1990) view of hermeneutic phenomenology as a human science is that it differs from nearly every other science because it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience everyday events in our world without reflecting or classifying (p. 9). Reflection must always be recollective of past experience because we

cannot reflect while living the experience. To more deeply understand the phenomena of early language experiences, hermeneutic phenomenology is, as cited in Smith (1997), a “research methodology aimed at producing rich textual descriptions of the experiencing of selected phenomena in the lifeworld of individuals that are able to connect with the experience of all of us collectively” (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007, p. 612).

As in oral history, context is a critical aspect in a hermeneutic phenomenological research project. Contextual considerations may have to do with personal, institutional, and substantive aspects of the project; the methods may include audio recording, note taking, photographs, and other means of collecting anecdotes and descriptions of significant moments and events (van Manen, 1990, p. 163). Kvale, as cited in DeMarrais (2004), describes the purpose of the interview is to obtain “uninterrupted” descriptions of an experience (p. 58). Keeping the participant focused on the experience, and not on an analysis or rationalization, is important.

Hermeneutic phenomenology, as a human science form of research, provides an appropriate framework for a study of the lived school experiences of Cherokee children who are now adults of the grandparent generation. Although they may have analyzed their experiences over 5-6 decades, the interviews are structured to describe the experiences reflectively rather than analytically.

Transculturation Theory

In addition to hermeneutic phenomenology, I oriented my study by transculturation theory. Transculturation theory is also strongly relevant to understanding

the early childhood experiences of the participants and has a direct connection with indigenous peoples. This application of a transculturation theory is relatively recent and is unique to the American Indian educational experience. According to Larimore, McClellan, and White Shield, this theory is not widely known but is growingly recognized in application (Huffman, 2010, p. 163). Unlike other theories that attempt to explain Native students' experiences in mainstream education, transculturation theory has evolved with a specific focus on Native students rather than as a theory borrowed from other minority groups. It specifically examines students from cultural backgrounds and their success or lack of success in mainstream education. This theory posits that a strong cultural identity is necessary for academic success and contends that Native students who are successful in a school environment are successful *because* of their cultural identity, not in spite of it.

This application of transculturation theory has evolved from Fernando Ortiz' concept, which he introduced in 1942, according to Allatson, as a process by which cultural differences could be resolved (Huffman, 2010, p. 169). In coming decades this notion would be fundamentally altered by American social scientists Alfred Irving Hallowell, Maurice Sill, and Terry Huffman (p. 169). In 2008 Huffman offered the definition of the concept of transculturation as "...the process by which an individual can enter and interact in the milieu of another culture without loss of the person's native cultural identity and ways" (p. 170). This definition determines two important features: that it is a type of socialization in which an individual learns to function in a new cultural

setting, and the process of learning a new culture does not necessitate the loss of the person's heritage. Huffman's premise asserts, "American Indian students engage in the process of learning the cultural nuances found in mainstream education while retaining and relying upon their cultural heritage to forge a strong identity and sense of purpose" (p. 170). Thus, unlike other theories, it is a framework that examines why Native students succeed rather than why they fail.

To date scholars have applied transculturation theory almost exclusively within studies of American Indian students in higher education. In a study published in 2013, Huffman more recently applied it to a study of American Indian educators serving reservation students. While some studies have provided evidence of the importance of strong cultural identity among Native students (Powers, 2006; Vadas, 1995; Whitbeck, Hoyt, Stubben, & LaFromboise, 2001), others (Whitesell, Mitchell, & Spicer, 2009), according to Huffman, did not determine a significant relationship. However, the longitudinal study by Whitesell et al. may not be entirely contradictory to the other studies. According to Peshkin, as cited in Huffman (2013), "many Native students need a strong identity to succeed in schools but some students with a strong cultural identity reject schools as foreign institutions that do not represent their cultural values, worldview, and identity" (p. 141). If academic goals are not consistent with beliefs and values, students with strong cultural identity may view school as representing mainstream values, which could be in conflict with their own.

In a review of the recent education of Native students and achievement results from standardized tests, Whipple (2012) considered theories that can provide an explanatory framework for lower academic achievement in specific academic areas and the variable experience of the cultural experience in different social and academic environments. Whipple referenced Huffman's transculturation theory as a theory that, in Huffman's view, "enabled access to the underlying 'why' and offered sound reasoning for root causes of Indian student performance as opposed to simply relaying dismal numbers and statistics" (p. 9). Within this context the application of this transculturation theory can function as a tool for making sense of the phenomena of English language experiences that took place more than 50 years ago.

Transculturation theory is highly relevant to the topic of early elementary experiences of first language Cherokee speakers. It views cultural identity as an integral element of academic success for Native students. This theory's fundamental premise "that a strong cultural identity facilitates educational success, especially for culturally oriented Native students" (Huffman, 2013, p. 147) can serve as a tool for better understanding the phenomena of these school experiences. It can also function as a tool in helping better understand how more culturally relevant education for today's Native students can be effected.

Qualitative Methodology

Oral history informed my research design as a means for collecting and sharing data. Oral history is an effective form of qualitative methodology that can be a medium for informing the community about past events through interviews with elders and other participants. Though forms of oral history have existed for thousands of years, today's methodology is a novel approach. It is not simply a more in-depth form of journalism. Journalistic interviews can take place at any time or place and require less background knowledge than effective oral interviews require. Journalists may select quotations from a subject's interview, but most of the writing or presentation will be their own words. Conversely, an oral history transcript will contain very few words of the interviewer. Rather, the document has been transcribed from a recording that consists of recollections of the subject being discussed; both recording and transcript are preserved and made available.

Creating oral history requires a great deal of preparation, including learning about the topic of the interview and the participants being interviewed. As a researcher, I needed to have background knowledge of my participants' lives, their experiences in elementary school, and the historical context of these experiences. This knowledge was critical to how I planned and prepared for the interviews. Rather than what would be considered an unstructured interview in oral history, I used a semi-structured interview format, meaning that I guided the process from planned questions but redirected and probed for more depth as I needed to explore some topics in more depth.

Within the methodology of oral history, I utilized a subject-oriented genre. This genre, which focuses on recollections of experiences of a similar nature, is more specific than a life history or family history genre. Regarding the subject-oriented genre, according to Henige, researchers need to consider whether the subject is a significant one, whether the subject will contribute to informing its context, and whether the work has been done before (Larson, 2006, p. 106-107). A need for research on the topic or a need for a different approach must exist. “If earlier attempts at the topic have ignored the voices and experiences of important groups, then these people must be incorporated in the new research” (p. 107). Researchers have largely ignored the voice of the Cherokee students as language learners in local schools, rather than boarding schools, in the 1950s and 1960s; thus, a subject-oriented genre is appropriate for informing the methodology.

The theoretical approach within the genre of oral history will be the elite/nonelite dichotomy. Interviewing the nonelites, the ordinary people, will provide a different perspective from those found in history books and biographies. According to Gary Okihiro, as cited in Larson, a nonelite approach is crucial to the identity of oral history: “Oral history is not only a tool or method for recovering history; it is also a theory of history which maintains that the common folk and the dispossessed have a history and that this history must be written” (p. 114). My intentional choice of interviewing the ordinary people rather than those whose histories have already been recorded will provide a framework for capturing the voices of those who may have been marginalized in their childhood school experiences.

Context is a critical element of an oral history methodology. Though modern technology provides us with methods of collecting interviews including exact words and inflections, it cannot preserve meaning. Meaning must be derived from context. Schneider posits (2002), “The predicament we face with oral history is that recordings produce a fixed record of words that were spoken by one or more people to others at a particular time and place” (p. 6). Though this record is important by itself, the context of the interview(s) and relationship between participant and researcher must be fully described. Blackman (1982), in reviewing the life history work she conducted with Florence Edenshaw Davidson, contextualized the significance of her collaboration: “Questions of audience, the politics of cultural representation, and the changing narrative of Native American history” (p. xii) were all cause for re-examination of the completed project. Because of the importance of establishing context including the relationship between the two women (oral historian and interviewee), Blackman wrote three chapters of the book before introducing Davidson’s voice in the fourth chapter. In these three chapters she described not only the physical setting of Davidson’s birthplace and home, but also how the relationship between them evolved despite generational, social, and cultural differences. This relationship is evidenced in Davidson’s sharing of personal and community events with a person who was an outsider to both the Haida community and family. Without this connection between the two women, the elder Davidson was unlikely to share cultural and family experiences to an outsider.

Blackman's 1989 epilogue in the life history of Sadie Brower Neakok, an Inupiaq woman from Barrow, Alaska, reiterates the relevance of context to an oral history:

Parts of the story are inevitably withheld, consciously or unconsciously, and a series of transmutations occurs from the actual telling of the story to the printed word: the translation of experience to words, the selection of words appropriate to the audience, and the rearrangement of those words by the interviewer/collaborator for publication... The life history is a singular creation born of the collaboration of two unique individuals, working together at a particular time and place. Yet there is a structure to the story that transcends audience, place, and time. (p. 234)

The question of how this context can be conveyed via written transcripts is one that continues to plague oral historians. The written transcription does not capture the tone, the body language, the setting that is part of the sharing of oral history. According to Mazé (2006), the relationship between the oral history interview and the printed transcription has been debated as early as the 1940s (p. 242). While the technology to more rapidly transcribe the recorded interviews progresses with each decade, the issue remains: "The oral history interview is a multilayered communicative event, which a transcript only palely reflects," as stated by David Dunaway in a 1984 commentary (Maze', 2006, p. 242).

In addition to capturing a recollected experience at a later time and place, oral history allows for a paradigm conducive to an indigenous holistic worldview. It is

conducive for demonstration that indigenous knowledge is not stagnant but is in constant use and can inform contexts in today's education of indigenous students. According to Trimble, Sommer, and Quinlan (2008), oral tradition can be used to educate: "It provides an indigenous view of history that is missing from standard interpretations. It can be used... to provide insight into tribal cultural growth and change... brings out new interpretations of events" (p. 105). This view of history as dynamic is consistent with the indigenous holistic worldview and preference of learning style.

Oral history can also bring to light issues surrounding the decay of indigenous language. In her description of indigenous peoples, Battiste (2007) notes that language has developed through patterns and that it has been "embedded in the collective community's oral and literacy traditions; transmitted in the values, customs, and traditions; and passed on to each generation through their indigenous language as instructed by the Creator and their elders" (p. 111-112). This knowledge of traditional language has been eroded by Eurocentric education and political systems. Through modern conventional educational systems, indigenous peoples have learned to mistrust their own indigenous knowledge and their own instincts. Conversely, according to Battiste, mainstream education has been pressured to make education more accessible and relevant to indigenous peoples. This includes making public schools more receptive to the inclusion of indigenous languages and knowledge in the curriculum. Like many researchers and philosophers before her, Battiste questions whose knowledge is of most worth. This question can relate to the curriculum of today's schools in that educators face

the challenge of critically reflecting on whose knowledge is offered, who decides what information is offered, and how outcomes can be achieved in an ethically appropriate process.

Schneider (2002) described oral history as referring to both the act of recording oral tradition and personal narratives as well as the record that is produced. Phyllis Morrow, following Michel Foucault, refers to “the authoring function, which is the power that the compiler/recorder/writer assumes when he or she works with a narrator’s story” (p. 64). The Oral History Association states that the document that is produced, the oral history, “results from this process and is preserved and made available in different forms to other users, researchers, and the public. A critical approach to the oral testimony and interpretations are necessary in the use of oral history” (from orallhistory.org). Due to its content and its in-depth extent as well as its preservation, oral history is distinguished from other forms of interviews.

Participant Selection

Due to the very personal nature of the project, I selected participants in a purposeful rather than random method. Through personal relationships, I know of approximately 40 people who are first-language Cherokee speakers and learned English upon starting school. Of these people, I have had casual conversations with about 20 concerning these experiences. Because as an oral historian I must have an established relationship with my participants, I selected four from these 20. Not all of these Cherokee

speakers are comfortable sharing their experiences in an interview setting, so I did not select those who do not seem comfortable. My participants represent both males and females as well as those from varied backgrounds and educational achievement. Two attended public elementary schools, two local BIA-run elementary schools. One was sent to a boarding school in the sixth grade. These four participants share similarities yet are also diverse in gender, level of traditional education, region, and elementary experiences. A true and socially more valuable form of local oral history will be created when a diverse group, rather than a self-selected group, of subjects is drawn and included (Thompson, 1998, p. 30). I interviewed two from Oklahoma and two people from North Carolina. This provides a diversity of experiences that took place at similar times yet were almost 1000 miles apart.

With a goal of developing rich or dense description of the experiences of each participant, the number of participants that I selected is limited to a minimal number. Because I expect my interviews to total approximately three to four hours per person, it is important that my number of participants reflect the depth of the interviews. Conducting two in-depth interviews followed by an additional shorter interview that address follow-up questions for each participant has provided me with rich data from which I can determine themes and establish connections between past experiences and today's curriculum trends. Through this kind of research, opening new areas of inquiry and challenging assumptions, bringing recognition to groups of people previously

unrecognized, “history becomes... more democratic” (Thompson, 1998, p. 29). The voices of those who lived the experiences can enlighten educators and students today.

Participants

Participants for my study include one male and one female from Oklahoma as well as one male and one female, siblings, from western North Carolina. The participants vary significantly in school experiences and in education beyond high school, which all completed.

One participant is a retired educator from Adair County, Oklahoma. Pauline TeeHee was born in February 1952 and attended elementary school in Adair County at Wauhillau, Stilwell High School in Stilwell, also Adair County, and college at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. She began learning English as a 5 year old in elementary school. Pauline became a lifelong educator and is a member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma.

Another participant from Oklahoma is Johnny Lee Chewey, member of the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma. John, born in December 1945, is a man of many trades, including horse shoer and cobbler. He began learning English as a 6-year-old elementary student in Delaware County. His educational experiences include a one-room schoolhouse that was taught in all English, a larger public school that also taught in all English, and a boarding school for most of his middle school and high school grades. John was drafted into the army for the Vietnam War.

From the small community of Snowbird, in Graham County just outside Robbinsville, North Carolina, Shirley Jackson Oswald knew four words of English when she started school as a five year old. Born in November 1954, she attended elementary at Snowbird Day School, a Bureau of Indian Education School, in Robbinsville, and attended upper elementary and high school in Robbinsville schools. Shirley works to teach the language to high school students at Robbinsville High School.

Shirley's older brother, Gilliam Edwin Jackson, was born in October 1951. He attended the same schools as his siblings and went on to earn a Master's degree at the University of Tennessee. He knows of no others from the community where he grew up who have also earned Master's degrees. Gil has worked in education for most of his adult life. He and his siblings are full blood Cherokees and are members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

Data Collection

I obtained approval for my study through the university Institutional Review Board (IRB). Because this study will be part of an existing oral history project, my transcriptions and interview recordings will be attachments to the existing project "Spotlighting Oklahoma: An Oral History Project" through the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program, under the principal investigation of Sarah Milligan, Tanya Finchum, Kurt Anderson, Mary Larson, and myself. The transcripts and recordings will become part of the project's collection. After I obtained approval to begin collecting data, I contacted each participant and discussed his or her role in the study, how the interviews

would take place, and how the information may be disseminated upon completion of the project. I obtained their verbal approval to participate in the project. Following verbal approval, I provided each participant with an informed consent form as well as a gift of deed form, which states that the interview transcripts and recordings will belong to the project's collection, and asked that they be signed and returned. I ensured clear understanding that the participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and that they would have an opportunity to review their interview transcripts after I have fully transcribed them.

After receiving written approval from individual participants, I set up interviews with each. No one besides interviewer and participant was present for the interviews; no participant made this request. To ensure accuracy of the interviews, I made audio recordings, which I then transcribed soon after the interviews. My questions were developed to elicit detailed responses. Examples of these specific questions (See Appendix A) are as follows:

- Tell me about yourself and your family.
- How would you describe your English language skills when you started elementary school?
- How did your teachers try to help you with language and with lessons?
- How would you describe your education beyond high school?

For a variety of reasons, the questions during the first two interviews with each participant varied. The primary reason for this is that I directed many of my questions based on previous responses. Another reason is that some of the participants seemed to feel strongly about particular topics and wanted to discuss them more. With one participant in particular, some of the responses at first seemed to be significantly off topic but would then circle back more to address the question. Rather than going on with more questions, I listened to the seemingly unrelated stories this person told. It was important that I honor the stories even if they seemed to be off topic.

I first scheduled the interviews with the two North Carolina participants during a week I spent in Robbinsville and other areas of western NC. My first interview was with Gil Jackson and lasted for an hour and twenty minutes. Our next interview was two days later and was just under an hour. My first interview with Shirley, Gil's sister, took place the day after the first interview with Gil and lasted a few minutes short of an hour and a half. Our second interview was two days later and lasted an hour and five minutes. Conducting the siblings' interviews closely together and interspersed provided for an interesting dynamic that allowed me to immediately consider differences in their experiences.

The schedules for the two Oklahoma participants were significantly different. While I was in North Carolina, the two participants there made themselves available to me. Scheduling people who live near me would seem to be less difficult than scheduling interviews across the country, but the opposite turned out to be the case. My first two

interviews with Pauline were exactly three months apart. The first lasted a little over an hour and a half, the second for an hour and twenty minutes. Pauline and I had some difficulty aligning our schedules due to my work schedule and her raising her great-grandson, who had just started kindergarten. The time between the two interviews did not have any detrimental effects on the second interview.

Scheduling my other Oklahoma participant was even more challenging than scheduling Pauline. The person whom I had originally planned to interview met with me informally and completed the paperwork that needed to be in place to begin. But each time we would schedule time for an interview, his work demands required him to reschedule or cancel. After four scheduled times that we were unable to meet, I went to John, the person whom I had considered as an alternate participant. He is from the same community as the other person whom I had planned to interview, and he is considered a very strong speaker. I was not at all hesitant about interviewing him. Our two interviews were thirteen days apart, the first lasting an hour and 23 minutes and the second for only two minutes less than the first.

The final follow-up interviews took place approximately one year after all of the original interviews had been transcribed. This was so that I could do analysis for each participants' stories determine what questions I needed to follow up on and what topics needed more depth. While I would have liked to do them closer together, it was more important that I conduct them in person and transcribe them entirely myself so that I become more intimately engaged in the stories.

Data Analysis

After conducting oral history interviews with participants, I transcribed all dialogues into text. Before I began to analyze, I provided each of the participants with a copy of the transcriptions and asked them to review for errors, to make any edits to the Cherokee language that I had written phonetically, and to clarify any segments that they or I felt needed clarification. During this period I also gave the digital recordings and documents signed by the participants to the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program at Oklahoma State University.

Following the completion of the interview transcriptions, I began the process of analyzing them in search of themes through the lenses of both hermeneutic phenomenology and transculturation theory, both appropriate for analyzing life experiences of Native people collected through oral history interviews. van Manen (1990) states, “Phenomenological themes may be understood as the *structures of experience*,” the “experiential structures that make up that experience” (p. 79). Theme, when articulated, helps to clarify and interpret the recollections of experiences, serving us to help make meaning of the phenomena into which we are delving. I spent time with each individual’s transcript, beginning with the first participant. I focused on his story completely, reading and rereading and looking for nuances, listening to the recordings for expression. I analyzed the transcripts, first for the content I felt was the most relevant, and also for themes. I highlighted and underlined different passages, phrases, and words. I wrote and color coded entries on large self-stick easel paper, four pages of which I stuck

up on doors where they remained for several months. Then I began the slow, somewhat circular process of writing the story. This stage was critical as I wanted to capture as much of the voice and personality of the participant as I could. A more linear approach was not appropriate for telling stories of personal histories. Although van Manen states that “human science is a *systematic* study of human experience” (1990, p. 168), a circular approach is more relevant to life experiences in relation to language. These analyses will be described within the participant stories as well as in Chapter 8. Next I filled in any gaps with the third transcribed interviews. I then looked for common themes across the participants’ experiences. These also will be detailed in Chapter 8.

Following the analysis of the interview text and identifying themes, I described the themes of these life experiences using rich details. I organized the emergent themes in a thematic order in addition to individual participant stories, since, according to van Manen, “human science is a *systematic* study of human experience” (p. 168). Although persisting with a theme and systematically exploring its meaningful aspects may be difficult, a phenomenological description needs organization.

While I did have some assumptions of what some of the participant responses would be based on previous casual discussions with participants, I expected to identify recurring themes through hermeneutic analysis of the interviews. This framework is most conducive to description of the phenomenon of early language experiences through use of rich description and identification of themes as well as providing a framework for the interviewer to more fully understand the experiences.

Permissions

Permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained. Since the participants whom I interviewed are not affiliated with any institution or are even members of the same band of Cherokee, the only additional permission I required was that from each participant. I provided them each with a personalized letter outlining the purpose of the study and arrangements for interviews. Before or during the first interview session, I assisted each with completing a personal information form, which is required through the Spotighting Oklahoma oral history project; a deed of gift for the rights to the transcript and recording of their interviews; and a consent form. I also took photos of each participant; these will become part of the permanent project. I ensured that they understood what their rights are and how the results of the study will be used. Ensuring that the participants felt that their stories are told in a way in which they are most comfortable is a high priority, particularly so since these recordings and transcriptions will remain as permanent collections in Oklahoma State University's Spotighting Oklahoma: An Oral History Project of the OSU Library.

Ethical Considerations

Qualitative research necessitates that the researcher be considerate of those who are sharing their experiences and conscientious of appropriate interview protocol. Some of the participants may have been sharing stories and experiences that they have not shared before and that will be accessible in digital format for many years in the future.

I did not anticipate discussing experiences that may be traumatic, although one participant in particular discussed some traumatic events, which he related to the importance of his language use. None of the participants showed symptoms of experiencing discomfort or distress, although I was as prepared as possible to deal with this situation in case it arose. Confidentiality was not a concern; all participants are identified by their English names and Cherokee names as well. Participants gave permission to be identified by their real names rather than pseudonyms.

CHAPTER IV

UTLANISGADA AGWALI: GILLIAM JACKSON

I will eat and drink with my white brothers, and will expect friendship and good usage from them. It is but a little spot of ground that you ask, and I am willing that your people should live upon it. I pity the white people, but they do not pity me... The Great Being above is very good, and provides for everybody... he gave us this land, but the white people seem to want to drive us from it. (Cherokee Chief Attakullakulla, writing to John Stuart, British agent, in Rozema, 2007, p. 20)

With the youngest participant being 61 at the time of the first interviews and the oldest 70, I had anticipated that many details would have been lost in the decades that had elapsed since many of these school experiences took place. For many experiences, this belief held true. In others, however, the memories were remarkably clear, memories related to teachers, family, and school, positive, negative, nostalgic, humorous. My one-on-one discussions with the participants provided them opportunity to share remembrances and feelings that may not have been shared in a very long time, or in some

cases, had not been shared before. These stories shed light on the perceptions of experiences in a way that our briefer, informal conversations had not. From culture shock and struggling with frustration and dismay to feelings of acceptance and pride, the perceptions of these four participants have spanned just about every feeling in between. I fully appreciate their willingness to share these memories, both nostalgic and painful, which will become part of permanent record.

To do the participants' stories justice, I first describe, reflect on, and analyze their individual interviews. Following that, I focus on themes among them as well as on my own perceptions and expectations that I had prior to interviewing the four participants. I begin with the participant whom I've known the longest, Gilliam Jackson of Robbinsville, North Carolina. To honor the contributions of each individual, I write a separate chapter to share each of the participant's stories.

A "Real" Cherokee Indian Community

Comprising only 5.2% of Graham County, North Carolina's population and 6.9% of all resident North Carolina Cherokees (Neely, 2011, p. 38), Snowbird Cherokees are by number a small group. But despite their mountainous land area with little land cleared for farming and industry, or maybe *because of* this, the Snowbird Cherokee community is persistent and successful. Many organizations and activities that represent Cherokee culture and history take place in this area, including the Trail of Tears Singing Organization and the Ed Jackson Scholarship Fund (p. 35), which for several years hosted the Trail of Tears Walk, a fundraising event that included a 7.5 mile walk on what is actually a part of the original Cherokee Trail of Tears. The scholarship was for

Cherokee athletes to attend college and was established by the children of Ed Jackson, two of whom are Gilliam Jackson and Shirley Jackson Oswald.

A 1950s Hotel in Robbinsville

The dining table was wobbly, about to fall apart, in fact. I folded up some paper towels and put them under two of the legs in an attempt to stabilize it. The toaster barely worked, merely warming the bread, and the kitchen only had one working outlet, which I needed for my recorder. But my work area did have a refrigerator, stove, coffee pot, and plenty of dishes. This station would be the setting for my interviews with Gil Jackson and his sister Shirley.

The hotel had been built in the 1950s and was still run by the same family who had built it. Although the kitchen and bathroom had been recently remodeled, the four-room basement unit had the definite feel of a hotel built quite a long time ago. The wood paneling in all of the rooms except the bathroom appeared to have been in place for decades. The worn carpet in the bedroom and living area and the peeling linoleum in the kitchen spoke of better times. The lumpy, misshapen couch seemed to have been original when the hotel was new. All of this contributed to a faint but unmistakable smell of disuse and age. The candles I brought with the expectation of this kind of smell were somewhat helpful in temporarily masking it.

The hotel was located at the high point of a hill just two blocks off the highway, which was also the primary street in town. Unfortunately, the side street that ran beside the quaint hotel often had some noisy traffic, primarily motorcycles and trucks. Some of their sounds can be heard on the recordings with the participants. One of the most well-known biker highways in the country, Tail of the Dragon, is just a few miles north on

Highway 129. In the summer the bike traffic is heavy in the area, and though it was not yet summer, the traffic was picking up. Another problem with noise was when the elderly owner tried to contact me to send someone in to fix the table after I had mentioned its lack of stability and that the table was one of the reasons I had selected this unit at this hotel for my week-long stay. Despite my having talked with the owner and the housekeeping staff and letting them know that I did not want to be disturbed before noon due to my conducting interviews, the elderly owner called more than once and later knocked on the door, all during an interview with Shirley. The housekeeping staff was regretful and expressed that they had reminded her of my activity, but she was headstrong and determined to contact me. The phone calls and knocking on the door can be heard in a recording.

Regardless of smells and noises, the basement hotel room was a prime location in a small town to host my participant interviews. It was cozy and comfortable with plenty of coffee and air conditioning. Parking was at a rather uncomfortably steep angle, which made me uneasy, but Gil and Shirley didn't give it a second thought, having been accustomed to living in the mountains their entire lives. This became the setting for some interesting conversation, both recorded interview and informal discussion.

Utlanisgada Agwali: Strong Friend

When I first met Gilliam Edwin Jackson about eight years ago, he was an administrator of a Cherokee language immersion program for early childhood in Cherokee, North Carolina. I had heard about his engaging sense of humor but was unprepared for just how entertaining he was in person. I was out of my element at a writers' workshop for developing stories written in the Cherokee language and was the

only participant from Oklahoma. I knew no one there. Gil immediately made me feel at home and a valued part of the program. He shared with others that though I was not a Cherokee speaker, I did have strong skills of phonetically writing stories told in Cherokee. Because of him, people who had previously paid me no attention began coming to me for help with writing their stories. By the end of the workshop, I felt a part of the group with several new friends, most of whom I have seen again many times over the years.

Gil has lived all of his 65 years in the western North Carolina area, specifically in the Robbinsville/Snowbird area and in Cherokee, both on the Qualla Boundary, which is sometimes referred to as the Cherokee Indian Reservation. The area is not an actual reservation but is an area designated through land ownership for the Eastern Band Cherokee Indians. The exceptions to Gil's living in this region are when he attended college at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee and the University of Georgia in Athens as an undergraduate, and the University of Tennessee in Knoxville as a graduate student. Cherokee territory – the Qualla Boundary – is ingrained in him. I have always appreciated that any time I have visited North Carolina, the first thing Gil tells me is “Welcome home,” a reference to the Qualla Boundary as part of the longtime homeland of the Cherokee people prior to the Removal of 1838-1839. And in some ways it truly does feel like home.

Gil was a middle child from a family of several children, all of whom spoke Cherokee as a first language, with the exception of four older siblings who lived with their mother, Ed Jackson's former wife. Gil is the only one in his family to have attained a Master's degree. In the last four years, he has become a grandfather of two. While his

own two children are not fluent speakers, he is working with his older grandchild, Jakob Edwin, named for Gil's brother, to help him develop bilingual skills. Gil is dedicated to his two grandkids and spends a great deal of time with Jakob, often speaking solely in Cherokee. As a lifelong educator, he recognizes the benefits of bilingualism, but more importantly, he wants to pass on his heritage language.

Sharing Experiences

On a cool, overcast Sunday afternoon in May, Gil arrived at the motel in his usual good humor. Dressed in cargo-style pants and muddy hiking boots, he was ready to go hike after we completed the interview. The plan was that he would give me some time afterward to ensure that the recordings were saved, and then he would take me hiking somewhere that I hadn't been before and was not too strenuous. Earlier in the day Gil and his daughter, Tamara, also known as Iya, or Punkin, had taken me to a small church in the Snowbird community. Almost all of those who attended the church spoke Cherokee as a first language.

He took his cup of coffee and sat at the wobbly table, ready to begin our first session. Before I turned on the recorders, I reminded Gil that the recordings and transcripts would be available online at a later time for anyone who might like to review them. Legs stretched out, ankles crossed, he seemed entirely at ease with this and expressed no reservations. Since we had discussed the project on multiple occasions, in person as well as via text and email, he was well informed and expressed that he was glad to have the opportunity to participate and be part of my project. Gil seemed comfortable speaking with two recorders and with me making notes while interacting with him. A

gifted teller of stories, particularly humorous ones, he conveys his personality through his easy way of speaking.

When we conducted our third interview thirteen months after the first two, the setting was in a newer hotel in Cherokee, about an hour drive from Robbinsville. The hotel rather non-descript, the room small. I borrowed a chair from the breakfast room as there was only one in my hotel room. I had to turn off the noisy air conditioner so it wouldn't be picked up on the recording.

During the few days prior to our final interview, Gil and I had spent time together hiking and visiting waterfalls. We had talked to some extent about our previous discussions and what the topics of our final interview would be. I had also sent him questions about two weeks prior to my visit, so I believe he was comfortable with the topics we would be discussing. As before, he was dressed in relaxed hiking clothing. Our plans were to have dinner with his daughter and two grandchildren and then visit some waterfalls until dark.

A Three-Room Cabin

Born in October 1951, Gil was in the middle of his father's eleven children, the older four not Cherokee speakers, and an older child of his father and mother's seven. He was delivered by a well-known midwife in the area, Maggie Axe Wachacha. Maggie held the distinction of being the first Beloved Woman of the Cherokees since the early 1800s. This title represents a woman of high distinction among Cherokee people. This may have been something of a significant beginning for a boy who would go on to become an educator and would work diligently to maintain his heritage language.

As a young boy, Gil lived in a three-room cabin with six siblings and his parents. The frame house had no insulation or running water but no shortage of language usage from his siblings and mother, with his father less talkative. From an early age, Gil's passion was to be in the woods, a passion that has led him on many adventures, including hiking the entire Appalachian Trail in 2013. This passion for nature and the outdoors, which becomes part of nearly all of our conversations, is one that provided him with resources to purchase a guitar when he was a young boy, after he sold pounds and pounds of moss that he had collected. He passes this passion on to his grandchildren.

With very little formal education of their own, Gil's mother and father instilled in their children the desire for and importance of school education. Despite not understanding the system of grades and the necessity of homework, Ed and Ella Long Jackson were proud of their children and the education that they were getting at Snowbird Day School, a local elementary school run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs for Indian children.

Gil and his siblings had regular chores to do each day, including gathering wood for the cooking stove. The boys would "crawl" all over the mountains looking for dead trees to bring down. Later their dad would chop up the trees for the wood stove and the heater. At some point very early in Gil's elementary years, he moved in with his aunt and uncle. He doesn't recall exactly when because "That's been like 60 years ago."¹ He does believe that his performance in school was affected by his not being able to read and do other assignments outside of school. "By the time we got home it would be dark and it

¹ All quotes from Gil from this point forward are from one of his transcripts. Pagination can differ due to formatting because it is an electronic file.

would be time to eat. I'm not sure what we did afterwards, but I know it wasn't doing homework. While Mom stressed education, they didn't understand the concept of homework, so they never gave us a time when you said, 'You gotta do your homework.'" They also did not have tables or desks on which to work or lighting conducive to reading and writing: "They only had one light bulb in the middle of the room, per room." After Gil moved in with his aunt and uncle nearby, his responsibilities would be greatly reduced.

While language and outdoor experiences abounded, money did not. "We grew up extremely poor, although we didn't know it." The children, who walked to school, usually went barefooted until around the middle of October, when their dad bought them their annual pair of shoes. They didn't have a car and didn't go to town often, but their dad would sometimes bring home a case of Coke, which they called "dope" or "Co-Cola," and a case of beer for himself.

At one time Ed was injured and unable to work for an extended period of time: "It seems like years but it was probably months or just weeks." So Ella took a job working in Fontana, a community over a lake and about an hour and a half drive away. During that period Ed would drive Ella and the kids to and from work each day. Gil recalls that it was during this time that he began to have some exposure to the English language but didn't understand it until he started school: "I don't think we really made a big connection about these folks speak a different language."

From Outhouse to Indoor Plumbing

When Gil was about five years old, he moved to his nearby aunt and uncle's house and never went back home to live. They were "a very unusual couple in that they

both worked.” It was unusual for any couple at that time but even more so for an Indian couple. His uncle worked in a lumber mill, and his aunt worked for a pharmacist and was also a housekeeper for other families. They had no children of their own but recognized that Gil had the potential to be successful in school. They committed to ensuring that his expenses would be paid.

Moving out of his family’s frame house with no insulation or plumbing to his aunt and uncle’s house with drywall and an indoor bathroom was quite an experience for Gil and out of the norm for the community. “And everybody was kind of making fun. They said, ‘If I gotta go use the bathroom I usually have to go outside, and now I’m gonna have to run inside!’ And which was okay with me because it was cold when you had to go outside to the outhouse.”

A Whole New World

As a five-year-old, Gil began to attend the local elementary school for Cherokee children. Snowbird Gap Day School had two teachers and two classrooms: one for grades one through three, taught by Mrs. Lee, and one for grades four through six, taught by Mr. Lee. Other than a few words for candy and drinks, the only words Gil recalls knowing in English were curse words that his older siblings had brought home. He was unable to even ask to go to the outhouse on the first day. After asking some of the older boys how to say it in Yoneg – English – he was able to ask the teacher. Gil recalls once, when he had been in school for a week or two, the teacher said, “It’s noon time.” According to Gil, “And then the bright boy that I was, I figured he’s talking about potatoes. The word for potato is *nun* (pronounced *noon*) in Cherokee, and so I said, ‘Oh, it’s time to go eat potatoes!’ And I was happy!”

Gil doesn't have memories of a specific schedule or a typical day in first grade, but he does remember when he started to learn to read from primers about Dick and Jane and the dog, Spot. He recalls that the words did have meaning for him because they were so simple. "I had comprehension, yeah. If somebody had said, 'Can you explain that to me in Cherokee?' I would have said, 'Yeah.'" He was not able to read or write in the Cherokee language at this time because, as he recalled, "We didn't have anything to write with at home. We didn't have anything to read. And, I mean, you've got to have something to read to be able to read and write."

In those early years, Mrs. Lee, whom Gil was later able to talk with as an adult, was very helpful to the children struggling to learn the English language. He felt that the Lees, particularly Mrs. Lee, possessed a great deal of patience and also had a strong understanding of and connection with the community. They understood the values of the families and that education was not highly valued at the time in the community. "That we would go over there sometimes on Saturday mornings, and they would invite us in and they had a TV and we'd get to watch TV with them, and sometimes she'd fix us a snack, and she understood, you know, that these guys speak different and was, from my memory, very patient, very kind, very sweet." The Lees, husband and wife, had children of their own who attended the public school in Robbinsville since they weren't Native. Their children interacted with the students from Snowbird Day School. The family was highly regarded in the community.

Even more than the Lees, Gil recalls that peers were important in his acquiring English language skills. Most of the other students spoke Cherokee, with only a few speaking English when they began attending school. One friend in particular was

Cherokee and, even though his parents were both Cherokee speakers, he only spoke English, which was unusual at that time. He participated in all of the activities that Gil did, including football, swimming and softball. This friend was significant in Gil's language development. Gil recalls that he was probably able to communicate in English with him and other non-speakers in second grade, maybe even at the end of first: "And he probably had more to do with me learning the language than the teacher."

Since nearly all of the students beginning school at Snowbird did not speak English, Gil did not feel that he was treated differently from other students due to language, which likely would have been the situation in a public school. He did, however, think it a possibility that he could have been treated somewhat differently from the other students because his parents were well known as leaders in the community, and his uncle with whom he lived was a tribal council member, a prestigious position that Gil would also hold as a young man.

Despite being treated well by his teachers, Gil did not like elementary school. He particularly hated to stand up and make reports, which were made more difficult since he wasn't able to do homework. There was nowhere to sit and work at his parents' home, and he had to gather wood each day. "My voice would shake, I wouldn't have never done that, and often times we didn't never have a chance to read our assignments at home, you know we did what we could at school." He remembers oral reports as being "frightful, it was horrible, you know it was a very bad experience." He was sure the other kids were either feeling sorry for him or laughing at him, but he assumed they were laughing at him even if they weren't. "So I never did any kind of eye contact with the students or the teacher." Gil believes that even if he'd been better prepared for the presentations, he

would have had difficulty speaking in front of the class because that's natural for most kids: "They're afraid that they don't like to be in front of other kids because I think the thought is they're gonna be laughing at me and they're gonna make fun of me." He did not feel that his fear of speaking in class or lack of eye contact were related to his cultural upbringing. He attributed it as just how kids are.

In addition to his fear of presenting in class, someone, "I think it was a teacher," told Gil's uncle that Gil "reads like a little girl" due to his young voice. He recalls that it didn't bother him. He was secure in his identity at that time, although "somewhere along the line I lost it though." He believes this shift came later in public school, where the Cherokee students were treated differently.

Gil's dislike of elementary school resulted in his missing quite a bit, in one year missing 21 days. At one point his mother told him if he didn't start going to school, he would have to go back home and live. Gil's aunt and uncle were spoiling him, according to Gil, and he used it to his advantage. One time when he was supposed to go to school, he told them, "I'll go, but you got to buy me a bag of marbles." He recalls the memory with laughter: "They ran to the store and bought me a bag of marbles. So I had more marbles than any [other] kid in school." He doesn't recall why he didn't like school; he doesn't believe that language issues were a factor. It may have been related to his being the youngest in his class, which could relate to another potential reason: "It could have been that the boys were beating me up, I mean they were bigger." Despite being smaller than most of the other boys, or maybe because of it, Gil was involved in many physical altercations. "The truth of the matter is that I was afraid to not fight, that people would think I was afraid of that boy even the fact that I might get beat up, which I don't think

that I ever got beat up.” He then recalled that a boy two or three years older did beat him up, but the next day Gil’s older brother “came in and whooped the crap out of him and taught him a lesson.”

For Gil, learning English was “just something that we had to do,” and he didn’t have any particular feelings about it. He did state that he and his friends spoke English rather than Kituwah [Cherokee] when they were on the playground and other places that were outside the classroom. He stressed that they were not punished for speaking Kituwah at school, as were other Native children in other schools. Although he did not value it, he does remember having a sense of pride in being able to speak two languages, even when his English was still “broken.” Being somewhat shy and not confident, he also recalls thinking that if he spoke English, he would not attract attention to himself when in town.

Gil believes that his “playground language,” or informal, non-academic language in English, reached a conversational level when he was in about the third grade. He was able to ask his teacher for help when he didn’t understand something, which he recalls as being often. When he entered public school with mostly non-Native students in the seventh grade, he was able to communicate and play with the other kids. He considers one of the primary problems with Cherokee speakers acquiring English language skills to be that English is “flipped,” as he describes it. The English words seemed to be coming at him backwards and had to be turned around, “which is a very complicated process.” He intentionally clarifies that neither language is “backwards,” just that they are structured differently. For many years the process of having to mentally reverse the language was necessary.

Another language issue that set the Cherokee students apart from their peers in the public school was pronunciation of English words. The Cherokee language uses some sounds and glottal stops that are different from English. The students' problem, though, was the sounds used in English that are not used in Kituwah. These include sounds represented in English by *R*, *F*, and *TH*. Another difference is between dialects; the Eastern Band Cherokees use a *SH* sound for words written phonetically with *S*, while Oklahoma Cherokees pronounce it as *S*. Consequently, the students from Snowbird Day School were not accustomed to making the *S* sound. "I had a real problem saying my *S*'s. I have to just like be ready if I'm talking." The word *sunshine* is one that he still struggles with because of the use of both the *S* and *SH* sounds.

The family of the one Snowbird student from Gil's class who graduated high school with him, the Wachachas, also struggled with some particular sounds. They would say *mudder* and *fadder* rather than *mother* and *father*. These pronunciation problems did not prove to be a problem while they were in elementary school: "Because we were not English speakers, we didn't catch it. So if you were using *mudder* and *fadder*, it was okay. Because we didn't know that it was not the correct way to pronounce words." The pronunciation issues would, however, become conspicuous in public school and provide a source for non-Indian children to make fun of the Cherokee children, many of whom were already struggling with the transition to a much larger and diverse school.

A Bigger World: Public School

While Gil does not directly attribute language issues to his not liking elementary school, he did begin to like school around seventh grade, the same time he felt he was able to communicate well in English with other kids. This change could also have been

effected by his discovery of girls and by his love of sports. His peers from the same grade at Snowbird Gap Day School, however, didn't make the transition as Gil did. Of the seven or eight who went to public school in Robbinsville, only Gil and another boy, a Wachacha, stayed: "So when we graduated, there were two Indian kids that graduated in 1969. The rest of 'em quit." He recalls that in elementary they were accustomed to playing with and communicating with other children so naturally, doing activities that kids do, and then they were put into an environment "where everything is backwards. And we still had not mastered English by that time." He remembers other kids laughing at them because they didn't always speak correct English. Gil attributes not only language but also cultural shock for the other Cherokee students dropping out of public school.

The transition to public school for Gil was not an entirely easy one. He remembers his first day of seventh grade: "And this was the very first day that I had been around so many White people." He happened to know one of the White boys, Dale Wiggins, who lived off the reservation. They had spent some time together, and Dale invited Gil to sit by him:

...he said he wanted me to sit by him and he hollered and just friended me just from the very first day and that felt very good to at least have a buddy or someone that I knew, and I... think he must've had a pretty significant impact on me in that I did fairly well in school. I got to meet people through his friendships.

One has to wonder if the other Cherokee students who dropped out might have stayed had they had the support of a non-Cherokee friend such as Dale Wiggins. In addition to

Gil's connection to sports, this friendship with Dale may have been a critical element of Gil's not only staying in school but also of his academic success and social experiences.

At the junior high level, Gil's fighting with other boys continued. He doesn't remember clearly if it was a matter of race or not, but believes it could have been over simple differences of opinion. He continued to be ready to fight, one time beating up a boy who was twice Dale's size and picking on Dale. He remembers fighting quite a bit in junior high and into high school. In the culture of the school, blended with mostly White students and a few Cherokee ones, Gil had to establish his role as a minority student who would not back down. This role, including a lack of fear of conflict, could have been highly relevant to his feeling that he belonged in school with students who were unlike him.

Academically, Gil continued to excel at math into high school. He believes this is at least in part due to the fact that math is the same regardless of the language. His elementary teacher, Mrs. Lee, noted his natural ability for math and in second grade, he was placed in the second classroom, for grades four, five, and six, for math. He believes that math was a gift to him and that "math in Cherokee is the same as math in English."

In high school he needed to take college track courses such as chemistry and physics. One experience that stands out to him was when he waited in line with buddies to sign up for higher level classes. The teacher behind the desk told him he was in the wrong line, to go over and sign up for general science. Because he lacked the self-confidence and self-esteem to stand up to the teacher, he just signed up for the general class. "The teacher looked at me and said, 'You're the wrong color, boy.' That's really

what he said. ‘You’re the wrong color.’” This is one of the few instances of racial discrimination that Gil felt he faced in his academic career.

Gil’s strong math skills may have been instrumental in his academic success in public school. Writing, however, was a challenge. Writing was a problem that plagued him from elementary until he gained more confidence in his ability while in grad school. His fear of writing, in fact, held him back from grad school for “the longest time.” He attributes his becoming a much more proficient writer to a social work professor who friended and mentored him and helped him improve his writing skills. As he gained confidence, he wrote grants, many of which were funded, in his various leadership positions.

Throughout high school, Gil took a challenging course load and made good grades. He stated that he could have made all A’s if he’d really wanted to. He enjoyed his time in school, particularly flirting with girls and playing sports. “Made good enough grades to get into college, made good enough grades to be able to play athletics. Didn’t feel like I needed to do any more than that.” As a child who developed the ability to think in two completely unrelated languages, Gil did not at that time consider the benefits of his bilingualism.

Athletics played a big role in not only Gil’s but also in all of his siblings’ school experiences. They played football, basketball, and baseball throughout school. Gil considers that he and his siblings were “extremely gifted,” and most were offered college scholarships. Gil and his sister Shirley and two other sisters attended college, with Gil the only one to complete a bachelor’s degree. He would also continue and complete a master’s degree. An older brother chose to go into the Marines rather than accept a

scholarship offer. Gil does attribute his athleticism in part to his success in school. “So the school really did take us in. They really liked the fact that we were making a contribution to the athletic program and the public school.” As a seventh grader in public school, he recalls being told by a teacher to take a note to Snyder’s store. He handed the note to a clerk, who took him to the back and gave him a pair of state-of-the-art Converse shoes. “So I kind of put two and two together and thought, ‘I guess she wants me to play basketball.’”

In contrast, the Cherokee students from Gil’s class who did not participate in competitive sports did not complete school. While Gil believes he lost his sense of identity during this period, it was a temporary loss brought on by how he feels the Cherokee students were treated. He attributes his family’s athleticism as to why they were not treated as badly as the other Cherokee students: “So the school kind of valued us way more than other Indian students because we contributed to the school and its athletic program.” His parents and aunt and uncle who raised in him had instilled in him a strong foundation that enabled him to overcome significant challenges.

Leaving the Qualla

After high school graduation, Gil decided against playing ball at the college level and chose to attend Western Carolina University. Proximity of the university in Cullowhee was the primary factor in his decision. “I knew myself well enough that I did not want to be too far away but far enough away, and that was the closest university available, which was about a two-hour drive at about the time I started school, which was 1969.” Because of the foundation laid by his parents and the support throughout his childhood from his aunt and uncle, Gil did not experience what he would call culture

shock; he was, however, surprised about some of his experiences. Gil arrived with only a suitcase, having caught a ride with someone who happened to be heading to Cullowhee. He saw other kids being dropped off by a parent or parents, with other people helping them carry in all their belongings. He was self-reliant enough to realize that it didn't matter. He didn't feel a need to be like the other students. He was happy and glad to be where he was. While even non-Indian kids from Graham County experienced difficulty adjusting to the different ways of life outside away from home, Gil was able to adjust: "I can't really answer why that I stuck it out." He references the shift of having all Indian friends in elementary to mostly non-Indian friends in high school as a possible element in his ability to adjust.

Gil had opportunity to attend other institutions of higher education from not only athletic scholarships but also from the support of a local pharmacist and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Ingram. They were in some part responsible for planting the seed for higher education in Gil when they told his aunt and uncle that they would pay his expenses at whatever school he wanted to attend. He credits them in part for his motivation to achieve a higher education. Gil eventually taught in the same elementary school as Mrs. Ingram, who, he recalled, "was just a real jewel, just a fine lady."

During his two years at WCU, Gil discovered his affinity for drinking and partying until the early hours of the morning and still being able to get up and go to class on time. This ability to wake himself early he considered a gift he'd had since he was very young. His aunt and uncle never had to "drag" him out of bed, and today he still rises early in the morning and has never needed an alarm clock. Nature vs nurture: there

is no way to know whether this trait was a learned one from living an early childhood of hard work and poverty, or an innate trait that has served him his entire life.

After two years at WCU, the University of Georgia in Athens became Gil's new home. There he would be assigned a roommate, Chad Smith, who would later become the chief of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. Gil, having made a D in advanced composition twice at WCU, took the course again at Georgia. And again, with the same results. On the sixth try, during his final semester before graduation, he passed with a C. Gil completed his bachelor's degree there and returned home to Robbinsville to teach at the elementary, where he was the first Native to teach. He stayed for three and a half years before leaving to take a position as a director of a children's home in Cherokee.

After about a year and a half of working for the children's home, "I decided I didn't have the training that I needed to be in that kind of work." He looked into graduate programs, including Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, and Chapel Hill, North Carolina, eventually selecting the University of Tennessee. He packed up his wife and baby girl: "So we had an old pickup and we loaded it up like the Beverly Hillbillies and loaded everything up in that truck and went over the mountain to Gatlinburg, Sevierville... and the truck broke down." The truck "started smoking and started steaming and we were sitting on the side of the road with everything that we had roped in the back of that truck." They eventually arrived at UT, where Gil met the professor who would help him develop his writing skills.

Although his struggle with writing continued well into adulthood, Gil does believe that his bilingualism was not only *not* a barrier to his pursuit of higher education but that it made him smarter:

I don't think language was a barrier in any way. In fact, I think the opposite. I always tell people that because I speak two languages, I'm smarter than I would have been had I just known one language. And I certainly don't want to imply that I'm smarter than anyone, I'm just smarter than I would have been had I just learned one.

His own bilingual experiences have strengthened his commitment to helping his family, including daughter Tamara, relearn the language. Fluent as a child, she lost much of the language due to limited use but actively works to ensure that her own two children become fluent.

Gil describes fluency as "if we are talking [to] somebody who's able to have a conversation. In most any subject matter." Someone who is able to use few words from the first language to convey meaning is someone he considers fluent. For his grandchildren he wants them to not only be fluent in Cherokee but for them to also have a sense of wonder and respect for nature.

What I'm teaching Jakob, and Taya eventually, I'm teaching him to be in the woods, to respect nature, to understand nature, and to not be afraid. It is so therapeutic, and I think mental health is on the downhill too. It's² a great book about teaching your kids to explore even if you don't know anything about plants, even if you don't know anything about insects. Kids have a natural sense of wonder, and I think it exposes and enhances their creativity when they're in

² Louv, Richard. (2005) Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill

nature because they're so inquisitive... You can teach math, shapes, numbers, you learn literacy... Everything that can be taught in the classroom can be taught outside.

Gil is teaching Jakob the Kituwah language through nature and sensory learning. Jakob is inquisitive and observant, often noticing small animals including bugs and frogs that blend into their backgrounds. He frequently tells Gil, in Cherokee, to "Look" or asks, "What is that?" Gil sees the reflection of Jakob's appreciation of nature in his language: "And he knows the word *udati* because he's always telling me 'Agwudati.' It means, "I'm kind."

Like others who learn second languages, Jakob has strong comprehension but doesn't often speak except in English. He will respond to any actions that Gil tells him. Gil believe that Jakob has the strongest comprehension among his classmates at the language school, which is called a language immersion school but is in reality more of a dual-language or bilingual school. When Gil tells him, "*Dilatadegi, togaya!*" which means, "Jumper [Jakob's Kituwah name], put your head under water!" Jakob will put his head underwater. He will still speak little Kituwah. When he does speak, his pronunciation is accurate.

And he'll say it once, if I, you know he won't say it real loud. And I'll say, "Say it again," like "*Sigwu*," [pronounced *she-gwu*] which means "again." He'll say, "I already said it." But he does say it. The sounds are perfect.

A year younger than Jakob, Taya is also making progress in her language. She only recently began attending the immersion school but does comprehend Kituwah well.

Taya doesn't speak frequently in either English or Kituwah but conveys her comprehension through her actions and laughter.

Through teaching his grandchildren the values and beliefs as well as the language that have always been part of Gil's life, he will be instilling in them the same self-confidence and sense of stability that were part of his own childhood, thus bringing the values of his family and community full circle.

CHAPTER V

SELANI: SHIRLEY

There are a whole lot of historical factors that have played a part in our being where we are today, and I think that to even to [sic] begin to understand our contemporary issues and contemporary problems, you have to understand a little bit about that history. (Wilma Mankiller in Marsico, 2010, p. 88)

Shirley arrived for her first interview dressed neatly in slacks and colorful blouse. She had taken her husband, Mack, some breakfast after her morning language class at Robbinsville High School and before arriving at the low-ceilinged lower level hotel unit ready to answer questions and talk about her experiences, family, and hopes. To put her at ease, I asked her some questions about how her classes were going. She responded that she was very proud of some of the progress that a few students were making yet concerned about situations that others were dealing with. I replied that as a former high school teacher, I understood the conflict and frustration she was experiencing. We want to help students better themselves and experience success, but sometimes personal situations and responsibilities can be overwhelming to them.

We sat at the wobbly table in the kitchen, Shirley drinking bottled water, me

drinking iced tea. She had agreed months earlier to participate in my study and share her experiences. With her calm, unassuming demeanor, I was worried that she might change her mind. I may have misperceived that quiet demeanor as shyness, but if I did, I was wrong. I did not know her as well as I knew her older brother Gil, but in my experiences, she was passionate about the Cherokee language and about education and would do whatever she could to help people. This was evidenced in her ensuring that I was well fed during my week in Robbinsville and by her and Mack's standing invitation that I was welcome to stay with them. It is no wonder that she is highly thought of in her own community as well as among Cherokees in Oklahoma: she states her opinions yet is careful not to offend others. And her opinion includes her passion to save her language, which she has worked toward for years.

When Shirley and I met for our third and final interview 13 months after the first two, she was thinner and had a persistent cough due to health problems but seemed happy to share her experiences with me. I had sent her some follow-up questions a couple of weeks before my arrival. This time, rather than the hotel where we had met previously, we sat on the front porch of her house, a two-story with a porch and lovely view of the Smoky Mountains. The June day was overcast and breezy, a perfect time to be sitting on the porch drinking tea and visiting. On occasion the breeze could be picked up in the microphone as well as birds, sirens, and the occasional motorcycle, but that did not dampen our enthusiasm for continuing our interview; rather, it provided a sense of contentment for both of us.

As we prepared for our discussion of Shirley's experiences, we chatted casually about topics including how language use can differ from sibling to sibling, and how

today's young people are not learning some of the more traditional skills of their grandparents, such as canning fruits and vegetables. Shirley is an avid gardener and canner and is dismayed that so few from the younger generations are learning the art of food preservation.

Dressed in casual capris and a blouse, Shirley invited me for dinner that evening. Some friends, who are also first-language Cherokee speakers and whom I have come to know over the years, were cooking and bringing dinner to Shirley and her family. This is just an example of the close-knit language community in the Robbinsville and Snowbird area. They take care of each other as generations from the communities have always done. It is always a humbling experience for me to be invited to share food with the people of these communities.

Language Consortium

The first time I met Shirley Jackson Oswald was about 2008 when she came to Oklahoma with a group of first-language Cherokee speakers from different parts of western North Carolina. This was for a meeting of a group known as the Cherokee Language Consortium, who met each quarter to recall and record old words and create new ones to be used in curriculum for the language immersion schools in Oklahoma and North Carolina. While I did not participate in these meetings, I did observe and join in meals.

It was during these experiences, in discussions with the speakers about some of their school experiences, that I became interested in learning more of their stories. I had heard stories from my Cherokee grandmother, who was not a Cherokee speaker yet had voluntarily attended a school for young Cherokee women. I began to wonder how the

experiences of these first language speakers who lived at home while in school might differ from the stories of those who had been unwillingly sent to boarding schools, where a primary goal was to separate their culture from the students, making them more acculturated to mainstream society. I wondered about how these experiences as children might contribute to their later educational choices, career choices, and even how they might relate to their own children and grandchildren.

During informal interaction, I began cautiously discussing early school experiences with many speakers from both Oklahoma and North Carolina. Knowing that my paternal grandfather, who was sent to Chilocco Indian School in Oklahoma, and my mother, who was sent to Sequoyah Orphanage, also in Oklahoma, would not discuss their own experiences, I gingerly brought up the subject and quickly abandoned it if it seemed to cause any level of discomfort. However, one sixtyish male was the only one who expressed that the experiences were bad and he was not comfortable talking about them. The others seemed comfortable sharing, and many seemed pleased to be asked about their own experiences. Some felt strongly that it was important to use their own experiences to help guide the schools that were providing Cherokee language immersion for elementary students. In all I probably had informal discussion with 25-30 speakers.

During this time that I began to know Shirley, she struck me with her kindness and sincerity as well as her sense of humor, which was never at the expense of others. Her Christian faith is an integral part of her identity, and she lives her beliefs in all that she does. She always seemed happy to explain words and phrases to me and to others who were not fluent speakers. Her easy-going, friendly manner made her approachable. Although I don't remember the first time we talked about language in relation to her

elementary school experiences, she did come to mind when I began to seriously consider my topic and the participants whom I felt would be willing to share their stories.

Growing Up in the Mountains

Shirley is known as *Selani*, pronounced shay-law-nee, the Cherokee word for *Shirley*. Like her brother Gil, Shirley grew up one of eleven children, seven of whom lived in the family home with their mother and father. Also like Gil, Shirley was born at home and was delivered by midwife Maggie Wachacha, who would become a prominent figure among Cherokees. Maggie was married to Shirley's grandmother's brother and was the tribal council secretary for many years. She and her husband regularly walked to meetings in Cherokee from Snowbird, a drive through the mountains that takes nearly an hour, and took notes in the Cherokee language. She was a respected medicine woman as well as council secretary and used good medicine to help people, including helping Shirley when her ankles would swell up every week during basketball season: "I don't know what she did. I know she used some herbs because I remember seeing her go out and get them and boil the herbs... But I know it works."³ A well respected institution among the Cherokee, Maggie lived to be over 100. She was named the first Beloved Woman in more than 100 years. Shirley expressed the significance of Maggie's role in her birth: "I'm, you know, always proud of the fact that Maggie Wachacha was the one that helped my mother have me."

Born three years after Gil, in 1954, Shirley was one of the younger children, with two sisters younger than her. They lived "way up in the mountains in Snowbird," a few

³ All quotes from Shirley from this point forward are from one of her transcripts. Pagination can differ due to formatting because it is an electronic file.

miles outside of the larger community of Robbinsville, just off the Qualla Boundary. Because they were such a large family and their land was not good for farming, “we were probably one of the poorest families in the community.” They didn’t see much of anyone else except the mailman because they were somewhat isolated and the roads were bad. The mailman’s was usually the only car they saw during the day.

Except for one year when she lived in Alabama with her husband, Shirley has spent her life living in the Snowbird/ Robbinsville area. Shirley perceives the mountains as home and as protection. Given the history of the forced removal of Cherokees from the homelands, it is understandable that the mountains offer comfort and a sense of security; the winding roads that weave throughout the wooded mountains seem to preserve the people and their lifeways. Her husband understood that she wasn’t happy during their time in Alabama and needed to be back home in her beloved mountains. Shirley and Mack have lived in her home community ever since.

Shirley conveyed a sense of pride in her family and their roles within the community. Both of her parents were born in Graham County and came from large families. Her maternal grandmother, who came from a family of 13 children, was a Wachacha, and many of her descendants live in Snowbird. The name *Wachacha* comes from a leader who took a group of Cherokees on the 1838-1839 Indian Removal, the Trail of Tears, and “they kind of hid out and backtracked and came back to Snowbird, so that’s the family we originally come from.” The name has since become a surname since people now have both first and last names.

On the paternal side of her family is the Long name. She doesn’t know where the name *Jackson* originated but believes it could be from a census taker. Her paternal

grandmother spoke no English, so “when the census taker came and he couldn’t figure out what she was saying, he probably just gave us the name Jackson, which is an English name.” This would not have been an uncommon kind of occurrence at that time; many names of American Indian individuals, such as Six Shooter and Long Walker, have become surnames or replaced with Anglicized names.

Although Shirley’s parents, Ed and Ella Long Jackson, were not formally educated, they strongly encouraged their children to attend school and become educated. They believed that education was the key to getting better jobs in town. Ella’s goal was for all her children to graduate high school: “You know back then that was a big deal.” Graduating high school was a big deal and considered the summit of education; they did not talk about the children attending college. Ed and Ella’s encouragement was well placed: As adults, the siblings used their education as foundations to establish careers that included education and health care.

Shirley reciprocated her mother’s encouragement. She recalled that Ella, who spoke broken English, was “always embarrassed to speak English.” She would often ask Shirley to speak for her when they were in town among English speakers. Shirley encouraged her to speak for herself, but Ella would say that she didn’t speak “so good.” Shirley told her, “You speak good English. Not only that, but you speak two languages. They only know one.” Ella never became confident in her English speaking, but as Shirley matured, she gained stronger understanding of how much better her mother comprehended Cherokee. Shirley’s father, Ed, was very fluent in English but was very quiet. Except for sports, which “he got really excited about that,” Ed didn’t talk to the children very much: “We didn’t just sit around and converse.” He was always at their ball

games, sitting quietly in the stands, and on the way home from the games, he would coach them about particular plays, which let Shirley and her siblings know he was really paying attention.

In those days before parent/teacher conferences became standard in schools, the Jacksons did not go to school to discuss their children's academic progress. Shirley recalls seeing parents of non-Indian students when she was in school in Robbinsville, but she did not understand why they were there. Explaining her mother's perspective, Shirley stated, "As long as you were in school, which she made sure you went to school, but as long as you were there, she thought you were okay." Grades were not an issue for the children because their parents were unaware of the grade system of evaluation and so emphasized attendance, including staying in school through high school. Even if the importance of good grades had been stressed, the Jackson children had little time for studying or doing homework. Ella cooked with a wood stove – "We didn't have a electric stove 'til I was probably in high school" – which required that the children bring in wood every day. She recollects her father would have cut down some trees and cut the limbs off, and then she and her siblings would drag them home, where Ed would chop them with an ax on the chopping block. The girls would also collect wood chips for their mother to start the fire. "So that must have took a couple hours after school. So there was no time to do homework or study or do anything else."

Following in the Steps of Older Siblings

When Shirley's time to start first grade came, she knew four words of English: "Good morning, Mrs. Lee." Her older siblings had taught her that the teacher would greet her, and this was how she should respond. On her first day of school, the teacher greeted

her with “Good morning, Shirley.” Shirley replied, “Good morning, Mrs. Lee,” just as she had been taught. The teacher continued to talk. “And I just kept saying, ‘Good morning, Mrs. Lee,’ because that’s all I knew how to say.” Mrs. Lee quickly realized that despite her greeting, Shirley had no other English language skills.

Like her older siblings before her, Shirley attended Snowbird Gap Day School, a community school run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The two teachers, a married couple named Mr. and Mrs. Lee, both Caucasian, spoke no Cherokee; they did, however, communicate well with the students, almost all of whom spoke no English when they started school in the first grade. Shirley states multiple times that the teachers were “helpful,” “patient,” and “kind.” Despite her almost complete lack of English language skills when starting as a six year old, Shirley felt that the students learned the language quickly in great part because of how the teachers encouraged them and the positive environment that they created.

They never discouraged, nobody ever, the teacher didn’t wash our mouth out with soap or nothing like that. You know, you’ve heard those horror stories... of boarding schools and no, our teachers didn’t do that. So we were allowed to speak Cherokee. But I remember we spoke mostly English when we were outside during recess... Because we were trying to learn English, we were so proud of ourselves for learning English that we used a lot of English outside.

Shirley expressed that the students were proud of themselves for speaking English because it became something of a competition among the students in her class. She recalled that the girls would play house during recess and would use all of the English that they had learned, and their play turned competitive. They would strive to use all of

the English words that they knew. She relates these experiences to how her own Cherokee language students learn by playing competitive games. Although competition is not considered to be a Cherokee trait or value, Shirley believes this was a critical element of her language learning.

Also, learning English pleased her parents, who encouraged their children to learn English so that they could become “successful” adults. When other children at school struggled with learning English, children who “seemed to be a little bit more coming from families that didn’t have any older siblings to kind of help them along,” Shirley and others would teach them on the playground. This quality of helping others learn was one that she took home with her; when she would go home from school, she would put her stuffed animals on the bed and read to them, in the same manner that Mrs. Lee had done with her class, mimicking her gestures. Her older sister would get mad and tell on her because she wasn’t helping with the chores. Shirley recalls her mother telling her that she was going to be a teacher. Shirley’s response was, “No, no, no, no, I’m not gonna be no teacher!” Sometimes mothers do know best, as Shirley did eventually become a language teacher for her community and states that Mrs. Lee was the teacher who was the most influential in her life: “She was just kind and accepting and very, very patient.” Sadly, Shirley’s mother did not live to see her become a teacher.

In addition to being kind and patient, Mrs. Lee was inclusive of her Cherokee students with her own children of whom she had five or six. The Lee children did not attend Snowbird since they were not Native, but they “just kind of blended into the community.” When Shirley was in about the second grade, Mrs. Lee asked her if she’d like to have a birthday party with one of her daughters, whose birthday was near

Shirley's. In Shirley's culture, a birthday was just another day, but, always trying to get along and not draw attention to herself, she replied, "I guess." Mrs. Lee then held a celebration for her own daughter, Lucy, and for Shirley, which Shirley still remembers because it was the only birthday party she had as a child.

Shirley believes that teachers like Mrs. Lee were rare and is thankful for her experiences with Mrs. Lee:

I'm just so thankful that we had such a good teacher that understood us and then tried to sympathize with us when we were speaking incorrect English, she was so patient with us. I wish all Native students had had that opportunity because I've heard so many stories about teachers being mean.

Rather than punishing children for speaking their heritage language, as had been the situation for decades in boarding schools during this period, Mrs. Lee encouraged English language usage. Many years later when Mrs. Lee returned to Snowbird to visit and talked with Shirley as an adult, Shirley asked her how she had taught them to speak English so quickly. Mrs. Lee responded that she had everything labeled in the classroom in English, demonstrating her efforts to create a positive learning environment. Shirley remembers that Mrs. Lee was so nice and friendly that they wanted to please her, and learning English pleased her.

Despite the level of difficulty that the English language is considered to have, Shirley never struggled to learn it: "That to me was one of the easiest languages to learn was English... I remember my first day of school. That's when we learned English. It was never hard." Based on my readings of language learning accounts and on conversations with first-language speakers, this perception of learning English easily is

not common. Even Shirley's brother Gil, who had the same teacher as Shirley, stated that he struggled with it a great deal and still does not feel entirely fluent. Shirley's perceptions of her own experiences could have been shaped in part by having a caring and effective teacher but also by being a younger child in a household in which the older siblings spoke some English. Her parents' expectations of the children completing school could also have been critical to her positive perception of learning English.

The influence of the older siblings may be seen in the language skills that Shirley describes in her two youngest siblings. Shirley doesn't remember if they specifically tried to teach the two youngest sisters to speak English, but she does believe that the older siblings spoke English to them because they were so proud of their own emerging language skills. She recalls that they both did well in school and were good students who didn't have trouble with English at school. The youngest sister, Esther, started school the year following the closure of Snowbird Gap Day School and began her schooling at Robbinsville in a public elementary. Esther was the only sibling not to attend Snowbird Gap Day School. Shirley credits the siblings' pride in speaking English with how Esther was able to go directly to an English speaking school with few Cherokee students and be successful.

A Survivor

Snowbird Gap Day School came to an end when it was closed down by the Bureau of Indian Affairs after Shirley's fifth grade. With the transition to the public school in the sixth grade, her love of school, teachers, and learning English shifted to something of an introverted survival mode. In middle school she felt that she was not "so good in math, or I'm not so good in English," areas which had not been cause for concern in the

elementary. She didn't like history. She did, however, love reading. But being required to give oral book reports was a source of continuous stress, a prospect she considered "the worst day of my life in high school." Talking in front of her peers was an overwhelming stress-inducing experience for her. She feels like her parents would have supported and encouraged her had they understood what took place in the classroom, but "they just didn't know none of that stuff." Survival of a large family requires hard work, and her parents were hard workers both in their jobs and at home. They just weren't able to be part of their children's formal education and so left it up to the schools.

One of her first experiences in middle school that Shirley particularly remembers is when a non-Cherokee boy walked up to her on the first day of school and said, "Hello, Squaw," a term with unclear origin that is often taken by Natives to be a derogatory reference to women. She recalls that it took her a second to react, and her reaction was to smack him on the side of the head. He didn't understand what he had done wrong as that was how he had seen Native women talked to on television. She later told him not to talk like that, and he apologized. Today they are very good friends, and Shirley laughs at her recollection of how he was just "ignorant" about how to talk to Cherokee females.

Her academic understanding did not develop at the same rate as her spoken language skills. At the small elementary school, with 10 or 12 students in her grade, she excelled and felt comfortable with her English skills. As a public school student, however, she felt far from confident:

But when I got to public school, and I don't know if it was the language barrier or because the school was bigger - all of a sudden there's 30 kids in each classroom, there's 3-5 rooms of the same kids in the same grade, no longer are you just all

Indian kids that you grew up with and played with all your life. Now there's all these strangers.

To keep from getting in trouble for asking questions, as did some of the non-Indian children, the Cherokee kids quickly learned to be good, quiet students who "didn't cause trouble." Despite Shirley's comfort with conversational use of English, the rules of Standard English "just never made sense to me." It was after failing English 3 in community college that she began to understand the importance of language rules and how they were important to her Cherokee language skills, particularly as a teacher.

A shy child, Shirley believes that their traditional culture is a "big piece of why we are like that." As children they understood not to be overbearing or outspoken, and the women would sometimes talk among themselves about anyone who behaved inappropriately. It is considered disrespectful and "not pretty" to be outspoken. She remembers that any time the siblings would be loud in the house, her father would put down his newspaper, look over his glasses, and make a "tut tut" kind of noise. "That's all he did. He never had to raise his voice with us." As a cultural trait, "I think that's our culture, that's who we are as people to not be loud, rambunctious, to be always opinionated..." Having an opinion is fine, but other people's opinions must also be respected. She did feel that being so shy was an impediment to her education.

Also relevant is that they were taught to try to get along with people and not disagree vocally because that would be arguing and thereby disrespectful. It was more appropriate to demonstrate agreement even if they did not actually agree; Shirley demonstrated this trait often in her frequent response of "I guess" as a young person. She believes this quality may be why "sometimes the Cherokees have been left behind."

Other races bring attention to themselves, often in a negative manner, and so “Squeaky wheel gets the grease.” She believes there have been times that the Cherokees should have spoken up, and then the history might have been different.

Still shy in middle school and high school, Shirley figured out that she could play basketball and decided to excel in it. At that time basketball was a big sport in the community and brought in money for the schools. Shirley, along with other Cherokee girls, became part of a dominating team that consistently outplayed their competition. Playing for the school required academic eligibility, so the teachers would “just kind of push you along or give you extra credit things you could do to make up for your shortcomings so you can play ball, to be eligible to play ball.” She used basketball “to make up for my shortcomings in school subjects so that nobody noticed... Nobody noticed I wasn’t so good at math or English, and I didn’t like history.” Similar to how the National Collegiate Athletic Association is accused in more recent times of exploiting athletes for the revenue that they bring in, so the Cherokee athletes may have been used for bringing recognition and championships to the school.

Shirley describes her demeanor during this time as “very quiet and shy. Other than the Native students, I didn’t talk a lot to the non-Native students.” While they did communicate with each other for basketball, they didn’t talk “any more than we had to.” She had difficulty making eye contact with both students and teachers, a common cultural trait, and was not comfortable expressing herself:

So it was hard for me to be outspoken and to say what I wanted to say; it was like, well, we just need to get along with everybody, you know. Keep the peace; otherwise, they’ll think bad of us. We’re Natives, and we always knew, I think,

that we were a minority. And it was like you got to behave yourself because if you don't... they would think bad of us.

During the time Shirley and her siblings were excelling athletically and were highly regarded in the school and in the community, other Cherokee children were “lost in the shuffle.” Shirley wasn't aware until she had conversations as adults that some of her peers were “mistreated,” according to what they told her. She remembers that nearly all of the Cherokee kids were shy. Two had gone to other schools previously and did not act shy, but the rest of them did. Her oldest brother, Billy Jack, often got into fights because some of the boys at school would make fun of the Cherokee students for being shy; they would not take up for themselves.

She believes the students who didn't stand out had nobody to look after them, and their parents didn't know how to play an active role with them at school. Also, their parents were not active in the community, which Shirley believes contributed to the lack of support in the children staying in school and learning. She credits her and her siblings' athletic ability as a critical factor in their completion of school: “Because we were good athletes and I guess they felt we were contributing something to the school.” She figured out that they had to survive one way or another, and basketball was the key to her survival in public school.

A Shy Adult

Shirley's self-described characteristic of shyness continued into adulthood and became something of a detriment to her higher education. As a high school senior, she was offered a full scholarship to the University in California, Berkeley, at the recommendation of her school counselor. When he asked her if she'd like to apply for a

four-year full scholarship for Native students, “I was very quiet and shy and just wanted to get along with everybody, so I said, ‘Yeah, yeah, I’ll do it.’” The counselor completed and submitted her application. Her full scholarship was announced at graduation. She thought that was good and, not fully understanding, accepted it.

At some point that summer, her brother Billy Jack, whom Shirley refers to as a genius, asked her if she were really going to Berkeley. “I guess” was her reply. He then asked her if she knew where Berkeley was located and how far away it was: “I just shrugged my shoulders because I had no idea.” She hadn’t considered how she would get there or how far from home it was. Then Billy Jack told her about a Bureau of Indian Affairs project at a community college nearby; it would pay Native students to go for an engineering certification. So, wanting to get along, she and Billy Jack filled out the application for the community college, and she “never gave the Berkeley scholarship another thought.”

Having been accepted to the engineering program, Shirley arrived at the community college to find that she was the only woman in a class full of men, not even young men just out of high school, but older men with surveying experience. Her year of experience in the program became a year of strife. The men were chauvinistic and disrespectful toward her. “They sexually harassed me. Every day in class, it was just something all the time.” A couple of them were respectful of her, but “the rest of them were just awful.” She dropped out and went back home. It is not possible to determine if her cultural traits of being harmonious, respectful, shy, and not making eye contact contributed to her being subjected to the negative treatment. Shirley was not able to articulate whether the men discriminated against her because she was Cherokee or that

was just the kind of men they were. It is possible that the men might have behaved less aggressively had she stood up for herself and expressed her displeasure in their conduct. “Today I would not dare let a man talk to me like that. Maybe it’s just because I was young and just wouldn’t speak up and had I spoken up back then on the first day that they started, maybe they would have stopped.”

Following that experience Shirley felt lost and didn’t know what she should do. She decided to visit a friend who attended Haskell Indian Junior College in Lawrence, Kansas. She was shocked at how “wild” the students from Haskell and from the university [Kansas University] were. She was there for a month and realized she just needed to go home. It would have been the “perfect opportunity” for her to get into drugs, but “I can always hear my mom’s voice saying, “Don’t do that. Don’t do that.”” Instead, she went back home, married Mack, and started a family a few years later.

With their young family at home and Mack’s job not paying very well, Shirley thought she’d like to go back to school. She started taking classes at Tri-County Community College. Working two part-time jobs and raising her children, Shirley completed two years of college. She then decided that she needed more than a two-year degree and decided to attend Western Carolina University, where she began to express interest in learning to read and write the Cherokee language. Her passion for the language would begin to develop from her course work.

In the early 1980s Shirley worked with Family Services as a social worker aid while attending school. In her position she learned of a program called Save the Children that provided resources for children in impoverished communities. Through this program she became aware of another program entitled Home Instruction Program for Pre-School

Youngsters (HIPPY). She was able to get the HIPPY program funded and became the coordinator. She had a small office and sent teachers to homes to work with mothers of pre-school students to help them learn to prepare their children for school. After working for the program for three years, she was hired to become a program evaluator.

While working for HIPPY, Meriam Westheimer, who oversaw the program, contacted Shirley and asked her to present at an upcoming literacy conference in Chapel Hill, which is a six-hour drive from Robbinsville. “And I said, trying to get along, I said, ‘Okay.’” She thought about it and realized she wouldn’t be able to do it due to her fear of speaking in front of people. She called Meriam, whom Shirley describes as an approachable person who was “so accepting,” and told her there was just no way she could give a presentation. Meriam tried to put her at ease by telling her that she was just going to be talking about what she knew, and talked her back into agreeing to give a presentation. Feeling better, Shirley decided she could go through with it. As the date of the conference drew closer and Shirley learned more about the conference, she realized thousands of people would be attending and again decided she couldn’t go through with it. Meriam explained to her that she wouldn’t be addressing the group but only a small group, and talked Shirley back into agreement. During her preparation Shirley decided to show a video provided by HIPPY, which she thought would take up most of the time.

Because she was so nervous, Shirley couldn’t go the day before and spend the night in Chapel Hill. Instead, she got up early and drove all morning, thinking about what she would say and getting more and more nervous. A group of 25 or so people showed up for her presentation.

I told them about our program, I told them what we did, I showed them the video.

They had a few questions. It was over so fast. And I thought, “Wow! There was nothing to it! All these years, I’ve been afraid to speak to people. There was nothing to it!”... And after that it was like, “I can do anything!”

In her thirties at that time, she realized that it’s simple. “You’re not expected to know everything. Took me a while to realize that.”

That experience allowed Shirley to overcome a challenge that had plagued her since her school days. She credits Meriam for her new-found confidence. She considered Meriam’s believing in her to be life changing: “She doesn’t know what a gift she gave me.”

The Next Generation of Oswalts

Shirley’s three children all attended school in Robbinsville and still live within a few miles of Shirley. She expresses pride in all of them. Her oldest son, Eric, is a police officer who is nationally certified in training police dogs. He uses Cherokee commands for his own police dogs so that most people won’t understand what he is telling the dogs to do. Daughter Leslie runs the child development center in Snowbird and is a mother of two. Her Cherokee name is *Disdelisgi*, “helper,” because “she’s always been a helper for everybody.” Kenneth, the youngest, has struggled the most but is “the smart one in the family when it comes to books.”

Shirley did not teach her children to speak Cherokee. “At the time I didn’t think it was that important they learn.” She now conveys regret at doing what she thought was most helpful to her children at the time: “I was still in the same mode as my parents were, trying to get what was best for them.” She felt that speaking Cherokee would not benefit them in their education, and at that time not many speakers were teaching their own children the language. Shirley wanted her children to go to college, and speaking

Cherokee did not seem to provide a path to that goal. “Nobody ever gave it much thought, so my generation didn’t teach our children to speak.”

Language use is different for Shirley’s granddaughters, Jazlyn and Journey. Shirley homeschools Jazlyn, who will soon be a teenager and has inherited her grandmother’s love of the Cherokee language. She attends language camp in Robbinsville every summer and has a strong comprehension. Like her grandmother, Jazlyn is shy and loves to read. Her love of animals, even insects, has been somewhat contagious to Shirley. Unlike her grandmother, Jazlyn is more outgoing and likes to share her Cherokee language with others and has no fear of sharing what she knows with others. She is learning reading and writing as well as speaking; Shirley didn’t learn to read and write until adulthood. Shirley believes strongly in passing on her cultural values to Jazlyn, including humility and being accepting of others who are different or don’t believe the same way.

Journey, a toddler, is making progress in understanding the language. She particularly enjoys when Shirley and her brother Gil, whom Journey calls *Dootsi* – “Uncle” - pronounced *du-jee*, play a language game with her. They will send her back and forth between them, telling her to repeat something. She wants to please her Dootsi: “If he tells her to speak Cherokee, she speaks Cherokee.” With Jazlyn’s language use and a non-Cherokee father who speaks Cherokee well, she has a good foundation in the language.

Community Impact

Shirley has continued with the role that her parents modeled of being active community citizens. Her passion for her language, which she realizes did not develop

until well into her adult life, has led her on the path of being an educator. She considers her language a gift from her parents and has dedicated her adult life to teaching not only adults but also young children to speak. She recalls that she “kind of felt ashamed” that she was a speaker with the ability to contribute to the language yet wasn’t. She credits a Cherokee man named Bo Taylor, who is now a tribal council member, with igniting the language fire for her. It was he who helped her realize they were “losing our language” and that she should teach it. She started with a night class in Snowbird and received no compensation. “All you had to have is a paper and pencil and somebody to teach you.”

Her impact on Cherokee language learning has been significant. When a tribal foundation for language and culture was established after the casino’s development, she applied for a grant for a summer camp to teach the language to children. She received that grant, followed soon by another to teach night classes for adults. She was able to be compensated for her time. After that she approached the chief about establishing language classes at Robbinsville High School. She was not only able to get language courses offered, teaching them herself, she was also able to push for statewide recognition of the language at the higher education level. Western Carolina University was the first to accept the courses for credit. Today all institutions of higher education in North Carolina accept Cherokee as a foreign or world language.

She notes the irony of the reversal of roles: “The roles are reversed and everybody wants to be a Cherokee speaker, very fluent in Cherokee speaking, instead of English. So it’s kind of made a circle. It’s come back.” Her pride in her heritage language is evident in both what she says and in what she doesn’t say. Despite serious health problems, she continues to work toward a greater understanding of the language for both Cherokees and

non-Cherokees. She participates in a language support group via an app on her phone and believes that “it may take a non-Indian to save our language,” a prospect that would make her happy regardless of who is credited.

In another reversal, Shirley has recently begun to see an outpouring of support from the communities for which she has done so much. They held a fundraiser to assist her with the cost of medical treatments, and the turnout was greater than anticipated. No less than a woman who has given to others all of her life and led by example deserves.

Fondly recalling her early elementary experiences with the Lees, Shirley wants her granddaughters to be able to say what they learned from her, whether related to language, how to treat animals respectfully, or standing up for themselves in the future. “So you never know how you influence a child or a person or a student. I always wanted to be that kind of influence to the people, kids especially.” Ella Long Jackson, Shirley’s mother, was either prescient or very observant to have seen the traits in Shirley at a very early age that would help her become the kind of teacher that her people needed.

CHAPTER VI

GAKITLOSDA – PAULINE TEEHEE

We are endowed with intelligence, we are industrious, we are loyal, and we are spiritual but we are overlooking the Cherokee mission on earth, for no man nor race is endowed with these qualifications without a designed purpose... Our pride in ancestral heritage is our great incentive for handing something worth while to our posterity. (Redbird Smith, stated in early 1900. Retrieved from <https://www.aaanativearts.com/native-american-quotes/ Cherokee-quotes.html>)

Sitting with me in my office in Tahlequah, Pauline seemed to be relaxed with our conversation yet impassioned in sharing her experiences with being immersed into a “foreign” language as a young child. These experiences greatly influenced her nearly 30-year career as an educator determined to prevent children from having school experiences similar to her own. She would become a mentor and advocate for those who were the small fish in a large pond and needed a caring, empathetic adult to push them toward learning in non-traditional environments. After retirement from teaching, she would continue to work to better educate children by developing and translating classroom

curriculum materials into the Cherokee language. Considered to be a master speaker of the language by other speakers, Pauline has impacted the lives of many children, particularly those in high-poverty, somewhat isolated areas.

Our first two in-depth interviews took place in my office. Pauline and I met for the first interview at a local store so that she could ride with me to my office. The second time, she came directly to my office. Both times she arrived after having taken her great-grandson, Kaden, to school. She was dressed casually and seemed relaxed, except when she questioned if I were recording our conversations. I explained to her that I would let her know when we were both ready to begin, and I would give something of an introduction before beginning. This seemed to reassure her and put her back at ease.

For our third and final interview, nearly a year later, we decided to meet at a local park. She had an appointment and needed to be in town that day, so it worked well for both of us. I arrived a few minutes before she did. I checked out the situation, and it seemed appropriate: sitting in a gazebo out of direct sunlight in the 90+ degree weather, with mostly noises from birds and some quiet traffic nearby, a few shouts from the men working on a construction site nearly a block away, but not too frequent or too distracting. This seemed like an idyllic spot to discuss childhood memories, some potentially painful, and her career and family.

Pauline arrived in her black truck, and I was set up and ready to begin our discussion that would lead into the interview. Both recorders were set up. We hugged and started chatting since we hadn't see each other much in recent months. As we sat down

and discussed our topics, a loud noise began: an industrial size lawn mower heading our way through the park. Our idyllic location was ruined.

We decided to go to a nearby coffee shop. Since it was mid-morning, we hoped it wouldn't be too busy. Pauline didn't want anything since she had recently drunk two cups of coffee, but I ordered a frappe'. The manager very graciously allowed us to use an upstairs room that is often rented out for groups.

The problem with the new site for our recorded interview was that the room was open to the rest of the upper level, and a large opening for the staircase allowed many noises from the first level to be picked up in the recording. Noises such as people talking and the blender running are heard in various parts of the interview; while distracting, they do not override the discussion.

Rural Oklahoma

According to the 2012 US Census, Adair County has a population of 22, 254 and is mid-sized for Oklahoma, with 38 of 77 counties smaller by population. Possibly because of its rural location and its largest city, Stilwell, only having a population of about 4,000 people, Adair County is considered a high poverty area, with a poverty rate of 26.3% compared to the state's average of 16.8%. It has no local institutions of higher education and only three high schools. Of the adult population, 87% work for private wage or salary or are self-employed. The ethnic diversity within the county is split almost evenly with 44.4% White residents and 44.2% American Indian/Alaskan Native (2015 US Census).

Adair is not a county with many populous areas. The county is dotted with several dependent schools, which go through eighth grade. These schools, including Rocky Mountain, Dahlongegah, Greasy, Peavine, and Bell, are cornerstones of their communities. These small communities are where many of the Cherokee speakers in Adair County reside; some of their families settled there following the 1838-1839 Indian Removal, also known as the Trail of Tears. Education beyond eighth grade has not been a priority for many of the families that reside there, particularly those who live far away from one of the three high schools. Even today some students never make the transition following their eighth grade graduation to a high school in Stilwell, Westville, or Watts.

The community of Bell, with a population of 535 according to the 2010 Census, is small and growing smaller, having lost 11.1% of its population from 2000 to 2010. The median household income is about 25% less than the Oklahoma average. At the heart of Bell is a small school with fewer than 100 students. It was in this community that Pauline was born and raised and later taught at the school, which is known today for its high percentage of Native American students. The school population is 100% minority (“Public School Review,” 2016).

Gakitlosda

When I first met Pauline, *Gakitlosda*, a name without a particular meaning, she was beginning a position as a developer of curriculum materials, which required translation from English to Cherokee for many of the materials. As an elementary educator, she was highly qualified for this position. Not many Cherokees have both a bachelor’s degree and

a master's degree, are first language Cherokee speakers yet fluent in English, and have the background to understand the needs of students and classroom teachers. I was excited to be working with someone who was so exceptionally qualified and highly recommended as both a retired educator and master speaker.

Pauline is the kind of person who is introverted, not comfortable in large groups, and focuses completely on whatever the topic at hand is; she does not like to be interrupted. I was careful not to interrupt her when she was engaged in her work. When I did need her attention, I often used humor to ease her away from her focus. From this we developed a strong working relationship in which I frequently experienced her wry sense of humor. At times I would tell people within earshot of her that if she didn't get to see me often enough, she would get grouchy from missing me, so I always had to stop and check in on her. This never failed to make her smile or laugh.

I don't know how long I had known her when we first began to talk of her elementary school experiences. However, recalling the level of interest I have had in the topic for many years, I would assume the topic came up early in our relationship. When her great-grandson was born, we talked in depth about how she was planning to help raise him in the language. She had raised her own daughter to speak. Her granddaughter is not strong in the language but can write in syllabary. Pauline's language experiences and plans for creating books in the language were frequent topics when we talked.

Generations in Adair County

Pauline was one of many generations spanning from the mid-1800s to today to make her home in the Bell community. Her parents lived there, and Pauline's daughter, granddaughter, and great-grandson live there today. This close-knit community was where Pauline spent time with family, learning to farm, can vegetables, and catch crawdads and fish in the creek.

Pauline's father, William Taylor Glass, was born at home in Bell in 1902. He was a farmer and builder but also traveled to Colorado or Kansas with "a good truckload of people"⁴ to pick broom corn or cotton. He would be gone for weeks at a time. His wife, Jennie Christie Glass, was born in approximately 1926; Pauline does not know the exact year. She was born in the community of Wauhillau, in the western part of Adair County, near the Cherokee County line. Her mother was a homemaker and a seamstress who made all of Pauline's clothing during her elementary school years.

An only child, Pauline was born on Leap Day in 1952. She recalls her parents being hard workers. William, who built the family's 3-bedroom home including a chimney, worked the 5-acre garden with a horse and plow. He had gone to high school at Sequoyah in Cherokee County, which at that time was a boarding school for Native American students and "was a real rough school." He went through eleventh grade but was not able to graduate due to his father's passing. He had to leave school and attend to things at home. When it was time for Jennie to begin school as a five-year-old in the early

⁴ All quotes from Pauline from this point forward are from one of her transcripts. Pagination can differ due to formatting because it is an electronic file.

1930s, she went to the local elementary. After her first day, she went home and told her mother that she didn't like it and wasn't going back. She never went back. She helped at home and became a seamstress and homemaker as well as an active member of the community.

The TeeHees were self-sufficient. They grew enough vegetables to be able to feed themselves all year round and provide those in need with food. Potatoes and corn and sometimes other vegetables were available to whoever needed them. They maintained a smoke house, which "had a lot of stuff." Their self-sufficiency, which was common in Pauline's world, created a sense of shock for her when she experienced the ways of eating with non-Native people. It was traditional for Pauline and those she knew to always have plenty of food prepared at meals. Children were fed first. They didn't overfill plates as they knew there was always enough for everyone. When she experienced what she considered "the White man's way," in which the kids were last to eat and only enough food was prepared for one serving, "I still am shocked even to this day sometimes." When she first experienced meals served in this way, she wondered if the people didn't have enough food but was too embarrassed to ask. "We never worried about not having enough. There was always plenty." In her home today, with four generations of family, Pauline's great-grandson is still the first to be fed.

Not everything could come from the farm, so when they needed something from town, William, who was a Cherokee speaker but spoke some English, would make the trip in his truck. If they all happened to go to town, the adults would take care of business

and bring back treats for the kids who were in the truck. After his passing, Pauline learned that he wrote in the Cherokee syllabary. She found his notes in his Bible. It was difficult for her to read given that the Cherokee syllabary wasn't really standardized in writing until more recent years.

Unlike William, Jennie did not speak English. When Yonegs⁵ would come to her door, she would hide. "We didn't let anybody in, if we didn't know them." Pauline believes it was because Jennie was unable to communicate clearly with those who did not speak Cherokee. Pauline never heard her mother speak any English.

Pauline helped at home and spent her free time with her cousins at her aunt's house, which was about three fourths of a mile from her home. Her aunt and uncle had nine children and a three-room house. Food was always plentiful, with leftovers available in a cabinet above the stove, where they stayed warm. The cousins were like siblings to Pauline. All of the people whom Pauline had contact with spoke Cherokee. Therefore, it was an eye-opening experience for her when she attended school on the first day and learned that people spoke another language than Cherokee.

Pauline recalls playing in a creek that ran below her aunt's house, "so every chance we got that's where we were." She and her cousins would follow the creek for miles, catching fish and crawdads, and be gone all day. They made sure to have enough stringers of fish and buckets of crawdads for everybody; then they would fry them up for

⁵ *Yoneg* literally means "white" and is used by Cherokee speakers to refer to White people.

dinner. She reflected on how different the times are today: People don't leave their doors unlocked any more, it's not as common for kids to be outside all day, and some things have disappeared. "But back then the crawdads were a lot bigger than they are now. And they've kind of disappeared, just like the Cherokee language now. They're gone, and I don't know what happened to them."

Living in "Eagle"

Although Pauline lived a close distance to Bell Elementary School, when she turned five and was about to begin school, her parents sent her to live with her grandmother in the community of Wauhillau (pronounced *wah-HILL-uh*), which means *Eagle* in Cherokee. She had visited her maternal grandmother regularly and was quite familiar with the two-room log house in which her grandma, grandpa, aunt, and uncle lived. When she was told she would be starting school at Wauhillau, "I thought, 'Well this could be good.'" She moved in to the house with glass windows, and slept on a mattress made of chicken feathers. They slaughtered their own chickens, and Pauline had the job of plucking them. She also made her pillows with chicken feathers.

Pauline did not know why she had been sent to a school about 22 miles away from home when a school was in such close walking distance to her home. Her theory, developed as an adult, is that they did not send her to the local elementary school, Bell, because "all those kids that graduated from the eighth grade, all the way up until here recent, never went on to high school." Although Pauline's parents did not actively encourage her education, they may have felt that by providing her with a solid experience with students

who were more likely to continue to high school, they were in their own way encouraging her to continue on to high school.

On her first day of school at Wauhilla, her dad drove her from home in his “big giant truck.” She thought he would stay with her, but he didn’t. This was a new experience for five-year-old Pauline in many ways:

That’s when I first realized that English existed. ‘Cause I thought everybody spoke Cherokee. Then I had no idea what the teacher was saying, and of course the other kids, we were the minority there. There was only about... two... there was only about seven of us [who spoke Cherokee].

Because they didn’t speak English at home, she didn’t realize at that time that her two older cousins already spoke some English. The language immersion she experienced at school was not something she would have chosen. “I was forced into learning it. I say forced because I didn’t want to learn it, to be honest.” She perceived it as “something I had to do to survive.”

Pauline doesn’t clearly recall when she first started speaking English. She does remember knowing what the teacher was saying by her gestures, and she would respond to the teacher but her answer was “always incorrect even though it was correct ‘cause it was in Cherokee.” She learned her colors and the ABC’s, which they recited daily, by mimicking her peers. She had no understanding of the ABC’s and that they made words, but she could recite them. The teacher would sometimes point to colors, giving each child a turn at naming them. When she pointed at the color red and asked Pauline to respond,

she would say *gigage*, which is “red” in Cherokee, but because the teacher did not understand that, she would tell Pauline she was wrong and that the correct response was “red.” From many experiences like this, she learned not to speak out in class and to sit in the back row with her head down, which she did all through school, even into college.

Whether or not this kind of behavior might be cultural or innate is difficult to distinguish, yet Pauline replied to the question, “but in a way it’s easy to answer. In Cherokee there’s no reason to hide. I guess it would be the same as in English... you have no fear because you already know what it is,” referring to people who are taught through their first language. School and English language were, to Pauline, unnatural experiences she was required to undergo rather than authentic experiences with language such as she experienced at home. The inauthentic experience of learning language in an academic setting created a concept of self-consciousness that “never left.” It also created a mission for Pauline: to become an educator herself so she could help as many children like herself as she could.

Wauhillau Elementary School had two rooms at that time, which would have been about 1957. First through fourth grades were in one room with fifth through eighth in another. Each room had about 16-20 students. When Pauline started school, in what they called the “little room,” about six students were Cherokee speakers. This class included her two older cousins who did not speak English at home.

She laughs about “always getting in trouble” and recalls one particular time. While coloring, a non-Cherokee girl asked her something about a color; Pauline

responded in Cherokee, “*Gvnage*,” (pronounced *GUH-nuh-gay*) meaning “black.” “And she told the teacher I was calling her black.” At that time, “there [sic] no Blacks in Stilwell, no families living there. So I didn’t know those existed.” Pauline did not have understanding of why she was in trouble for naming the color of the crayon. Now, reflecting as an adult and great-grandparent:

It’s funny how much I got in trouble... it’s not really funny but it’s funny, when you think back at the time it’s not funny. ‘Cause you need to go to the bathroom: How do you ask to go to the bathroom? Well you plead with your teacher, “*Doya unatsvsdi wawedasdi awaduli*.” She looks at you like, “What?” Well you can’t hold it any longer so you just take off and go. That’s what we did. So several of us again got in trouble for going to the bathroom, but we asked.

Her teacher in the “little room,” grades 1-4, was Thelma Webb, of whom Pauline says,

“Actually she wasn’t a bad teacher. We just didn’t communicate.” As Pauline matured and became a teacher herself, she realized how difficult it must have been for Mrs. Webb to teach both English and non-English speakers in the same class. Pauline very much wanted to talk to Mrs. Webb as an adult, “but she passed away long before I ever got to talk to her.” Pauline remembers Mrs. Webb realizing that the Cherokee speaking students were not understanding and then “getting everything separate, trying to get us to understand what she was talking about.” She may have done something “special” to make Pauline understand, but Pauline doesn’t know what or how she “wound up” in her

position as an educator. She credits Mrs. Webb with empowering her, possibly inadvertently, to become a teacher: “Maybe because the fact of what I had to go through at school. I didn’t want another Indian child going through what I went through.”

The school days were much like today’s elementary school schedules. They recited the Pledge of Allegiance each morning: “Finally memorized that – took me forever.” Reading seemed to be the most important skill they worked on. They also worked on math and did lots of coloring and sometimes arts and crafts. The small school had a lunch room in addition to the two classrooms. They had one cook, who prepared lunch for all of the students, around 40 in the whole school. After lunch was recess, when the children would play ball and play games. Friday afternoons were special; after doing school work in the mornings, the whole school would attend ball games in the afternoons, usually basketball or softball. They played against “little bitty schools around there which don’t exist anymore either.” These schools included Rabbit Trap, Titanic, Horn, and Piney. Zion was another, and it still exists.

Pauline’s English language development was not achieved quickly. She believes her ability to converse in English and understand what was being talked about developed in about third grade, yet “It wasn’t ever complete...I never had a full command of the English language because, simply because there’s too much to learn.” In the early grades, her classmates were not helpful because they were either Cherokee and had skills similar to hers, or they were White and “they didn’t know nothing [sic] about our language. So

it's kind of like a split." Therefore, the Cherokee students mostly stayed away from the non-Cherokees until they reached a level that allowed communication.

While Pauline felt confident with her math skills – “Math is easy because you’re dealing with numbers” – she found English and reading to be the two most difficult subjects. She did learn to decode words in primers such as Dick and Jane books, but she had no depth of understanding. She struggled with understanding the directions for assignments because, while her conversational language skills were improving, she had not yet developed the academic language required for doing even basic English lessons. Vocabulary presented the biggest challenge to her gaining a command of English. She believes not having the vocabulary she needed did not allow her to master the language in a way that would have led to her feeling that she was a fluent speaker.

With limited vocabulary skills and no English speaker in her home, she had no homework through elementary school. Her family with whom she lived in Wauhilla had no schooling and spoke little to no English. She had no help and no way to practice her English skills. As a result, she believes that, even as an adult with a master’s degree, she does not have a strong command of academic language. While she was confident in her teaching skills, which she considered her “safe haven,” the confidence in her English language skills did not develop.

The Big Room and Beyond

As a fifth grader, Pauline transitioned to the big room where she was in class with students from grades five through eight. She still walked the two miles to school in any

kind of weather, sometimes sticking to the road, other times taking a shortcut through the woods, until about the seventh grade. That year her teacher, Carthel Means, a long-time educator in Adair County, would pick up students in his truck. Students would ride in the back of the truck, which had sideboards. Then in the eighth grade, “we got a bus finally.” This would have been in the mid-60s. But that would be the only year that Wauhilla had a bus. “Whenever I graduated in the eighth grade, that was the last of Wauhilla.” The school shut its doors for good in about 1968 when it consolidated with Maryetta School.

Pauline enjoyed her years in the big room. The older children were able to play ball and visit other schools or play against other schools at their own school. Playing outside on the basketball court, “a slab outside by a little creek where we had to chase the ball down the creek because a lot of times the ball would bounce... into the creek,” was a good time for her. The softball field was up on a hill, so they didn’t have to chase balls from there.

After years of not understanding assignments, she recalls that her teacher, Mr. Means, realized that she didn’t comprehend and was able to convey information in a way that made sense to her. One time that she recalls, the students were given an assignment to identify all of the prepositional phrases on a paper. Noticing that Pauline sat with a blank paper and was not able to go outside with the other children, he explained what prepositions were and gave her examples and a way to remember. With no prepositions in the Cherokee language, Pauline had no basis on which to compare, but Mr. Means

enabled her to understand how they functioned in the English language. This was an event that she remembers clearly more than 50 years later.

Although Pauline considers her English skills, “I guess I picked it up pretty fast,” she continued to struggle particularly with academic language. This affected her performance in school to a significant degree. She believes that she didn’t develop the basic vocabulary that she needed until about the eighth grade. This was reflected in her grades: “I got A’s, B’s, C’s, and D’s. And a F [sic]. I got all the letters that you can get on my report card,” she stated with a laugh. While reading and English continued to be the most difficult subjects for her, she began to enjoy history:

We always had little bitty books like Sam Houston and stuff. We had to give book reports... So I guess I kind of got into that. And that’s funny because I could read that but I couldn’t read the other books. Because it was a book I wanted to read... And then I could go back and tell you things about it, whereas I couldn’t on the other things that we read.

This demonstrates that her reading skills were improving significantly, but the academic language that she needed to further her education was still at a more developmental level. She states that she could envision the events from the small books, but the textbooks did not provide “a little play in your head,” as did the high interest books, thus not promoting comprehension for her.

As a student in upper elementary, possibly grade eight, Pauline began to realize that the Cherokee language was becoming less and less common. By the time she reached

high school, “there were a handful of us that still spoke the language.” Of these students who still spoke, “Some of them stuck to their roots that only spoke Cherokee.” These students, who congregated with each other, did not graduate from high school. She recalls unsuccessfully trying to convince a cousin who was a senior to stay and graduate, but the cousin stated that school was just too hard and dropped out. Pauline noted that there was sometimes a difference between siblings in that one might graduate while another dropped out. Among the reasons for dropping out, she considered that a weak English language vocabulary and the challenging course content, made more challenging by the limited vocabulary, were critical.

For Pauline these experiences with a second language, both her own and her peers’, solidified for her the decision that she would be a teacher. She recalls that when they went to different schools to play ball, or other schools came to them, “there were never, ever any Indian teachers. I never saw one.” She recognized during her elementary years that her calling was to become a teacher and help other students like herself so that they did not have the same struggles that she had faced, both with language and also with culture. She understood the importance of children identifying with someone who looked like them and shared similar experiences. She followed through on that decision and worked with bilingual education for her entire professional career as an educator.

Beyond Elementary

By the time she went to high school in the larger town of Stilwell, “I had two teachers that said or claimed to be Indian. But they didn’t speak the language.” She found

high school “difficult in some areas” and didn’t always make strong grades, but being “headstrong,” she persevered even when others whom she’d known for many years dropped out. The students Pauline recalls as having the most difficulty were those who “stuck to their roots that only spoke Cherokee.” She doesn’t know what role the language played in this situation, but she did recognize that these were the students who did not finish school. She has indicated that self-confidence was critical for those who made the transition from rural elementary schools to much larger high schools.

Because her high school did not have counselors that she can recall, her only encouragement to attend college came from a Bureau of Indian Affairs employee who talked to the Indian kids at Stilwell and asked if anybody was interested in going to college. Pauline did not have a clear idea of what college was: “I only found out by accident I could go to college.” As the BIA representative talked about ways to go to college for any of the Indian kids who were interested, Pauline thought, “And I’m sitting there listening, ‘What’s college?’ We weren’t prepared. We were living day to day.” But she was determined to become a classroom teacher and followed through with the process of getting admitted and enrolled at Northeastern State University. While school had never been “a bad thing” for Pauline, the atmosphere created by the dichotomy of not knowing English and getting in trouble for not being able to express themselves in English created for her “the atmosphere of wanting to further my own education from that area.”

It was during her college years that she encountered a teacher like her, someone who was a Cherokee speaker. Anna Kilpatrick taught the Cherokee language, and Pauline enrolled in her classes “just to see what was happening, what was going on, what was being done” with the language. Her experiences with a teacher who shared a language and cultural values may have provided the support that Pauline needed to accomplish her goal.

After graduating from NSU, her long career as an educator began. She was confident in her ability to provide children with support and understanding that she had not received in her own school experiences. For her:

That’s what I wanted to do. That’s what I wanted to be... That was my safe haven. That was where it was my turn to create, as my teachers created me, I guess. It was time to mold things again. To see if you can mold... I wasn’t molded too well.

She may have been ahead of her time in establishing an environment that was positive and constructive, and allowed students to feel comfortable and safe and not have to behave in ways that teachers had traditionally expected. She ensured that students did not feel intimidated but did feel free to be themselves, including sitting in the back of the room, putting heads down, just listening at times, not being called on. For students who were like Pauline, being called on to answer questions felt like being picked on. Even though that was not teachers’ intention, it was intimidating and felt “belittling” to the

Native students. Once trust was established between teacher and student, they would approach her individually and ask questions. She worked tirelessly to provide them with the vocabulary that she felt would help them be academically successful, something that she and her peers did not have. Pauline believes strongly that vocabulary is an important basis for academic success; students who do not have it will struggle much more than traditional students since vocabulary is necessary to understanding higher level concepts.

Despite her best efforts to support and encourage her students, many of the students who finished eighth grade at a rural school did not go on to high school. As a teacher of arts and crafts, working with all grade levels in the first through eighth grade school, she witnessed first-hand how so many students' academic experiences ended with eighth grade graduation. She attributes the high attrition rate to language, a lack of confidence, and a lack of encouragement to continue on to high school. In her last two years of teaching, she offered an incentive to all of her eighth graders: if they graduated high school, she would give each of them \$100 at graduation. Sadly, none of them earned the incentive. As adults they remembered Pauline's offer and expressed regret at not taking her up on it. When she asked why they didn't, they expressed that they just couldn't do it. It was too hard. Overcoming language and cultural challenges seemed an insurmountable obstacle for them.

Although she was able to pursue and earn both a bachelor's and master's Degree in education, she believes it was due to her self-motivation since she had no direct support or encouragement. Her ability to think in two languages may also have been a

critical skill. “I don’t know why I liked school as much as I hated it to begin with because I didn’t understand anything, but ...I wish I could have made school my career.” Her cultural background, she believes, was something of a hindrance, yet she persevered, knowing it would be hard. Determined to find ways around any “dead ends” that she might come up against, she believes the “dead end” to her pursuit was her retirement. I reminded her that she is still an educator, working with her great-grandson, Kaden, to ensure that he understands his heritage and language.

Family

When it came to raising her own daughter, Pauline questioned the relevance of teaching them the language, questioned whether it “would do to her what it did to me.” Like many of her generation and previous generations, she did not teach her daughter fluency in the language. She did, however, teach her words so that she could communicate with Pauline’s mother, who didn’t speak English. When her granddaughter was young, she tried to teach her more of the language. She likened the experience to a circle that was slowly turning from fluency among speakers to children no longer being taught to speak fluently.

It was that pattern that followed of everybody thinking, ‘Am I gonna be in trouble?’ or ‘Will they go through what I went through?’ or ‘Am I gonna change that and have them not go through what I did or what others did?’ ‘Cause you hear different stories, you know, of what other people went through when they started school.

Her daughter and granddaughter completed high school; her granddaughter started college but didn't finish.

Pauline recalls being “more open” to teaching her granddaughter the language than she was with her own daughter. By this point she perceived the “circle” as starting back and people were realizing the importance of teaching young people the language. “They’re trying to backtrack, but you can’t backtrack. It’s hard.” She strongly believes that for fluency to be learned, it must be taught in authentic situations, through conversation and discussion, not through academic learning.

Despite her efforts to provide authentic experiences for Kaden, who is learning the language, she considers herself the last speaker in the family. At six years old, Kaden’s first language is English. His writing and emergent reading skills are right on track for his age, far beyond where Pauline herself was at his age when she didn’t even realize languages other than Cherokee existed. She does perceive that there is a limit to the depth of the language that he will learn since he is not immersed in it. Culturally, he is very knowledgeable: “He will have benefits there. He has had the opportunity and still has the opportunity to learn the way we live. The way we lived. The way we will live.” He knows about natural foods, such as mushrooms, and knows how to hunt and dig important plants. He knows to fish only for what they need to eat, nothing more, using traditional methods. He has learned not to waste food.

Pauline believes that if he were immersed in the language, if she had him to herself all day, he would be fluent. But English is always intrusive, whatever the

atmosphere. He demonstrates strength in speaking words and has comprehension, but he doesn't use sentence structure required for more in-depth language skills. His language is not strong enough to hold conversations with other speakers.

When he started school as a five year old, Pauline was pleased to learn that his teacher "was brought up the way we were," referring to a traditional approach and system of beliefs and values. However, Kaden was the only child in the class who spoke any Cherokee. Pauline does perceive that he will benefit from the language skills and cultural knowledge that he has attained thus far. He may have a different view of the world, different perspectives on situation brought about by his cultural knowledge, which is strongly connected to the language.

Loss of Language

Pauline expresses regret at the continued loss of language, which she believes will die out completely within a generation. She wishes her generation had not experienced the discouragement that they did and would have taught their own children fluency. In attempting to make formal education more attainable for their children, they unknowingly contributed to the cycle of language loss. As a first-language Cherokee speaker, Pauline felt that "it was a disadvantage to know Cherokee as my first language because I couldn't, I barely survived school, I guess you could say."

Through technology, Pauline hopes and believes that children have the tools to better understand what their options for life beyond high school are. Technology won't

save the language, but it does provide tools to better enable marginalized children to perceive a future that is productive and contributes to society.

CHAPTER VII

TSIGALILI – JOHN CHEWEY

Within the history of American Indian education we are searching out the conditions under which Native people have created or fought for a sense of self and community, often under tremendous duress. We specify a sense of self as well as community because the concept of the individual is not absent from Indian communities. A sense of the individual is critical to many Native communities' sense of empowerment and choice, as it is up to each individual to muster the drive, knowledge, and dedication necessary to nurture a healthy, productive community." (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, pp. 13-14)

Of the four participants of this study, John is the one I have known for the least amount of time and know the least well. However, I do not believe that our knowing each other for a shorter amount of time had a negative effect on the interviews, in which John willingly participated. I perceive that some of his stories have been shared many times over the years, and some much less so. His recollections provide a different perspective

of both public school and mission-run boarding schools. Considered by many speakers to be a strong speaker of the Cherokee language, John is highly regarded both for his work skills and for his language. A citizen of the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians, John and his horse shoeing skills were highlighted in their April 2013 publication of *Gaduwa Cherokee News*.

The first time I saw John was when I was walking with a Cherokee speaker, who is from Delaware County, from my office to his car. He struck up a conversation with a man in a truck whom I later found out was John. They spoke in Cherokee for several minutes. I understood some of what they talked about, but much was lost on me. I wondered through the entire conversation who this person could be as there were not any speakers in my building. After the conversation, my guest explained who he was and that, although John was a few years older, they had known each other their whole lives. John had been on campus to see his wife. My visitor expressed a very high opinion of John, for his language skills, for the work that he does, and for his continuation of cultural ways.

I first actually met John through his wife, Darla, with whom I work. She was aware of my commitment to learning more about Cherokee experiences in relation to language and shared that her husband was a fluent speaker. John and I quickly discovered that we had some mutual friends, including the guest I had witnessed speaking with him earlier. From the first time I met him, he seemed interested in sharing his experiences. His friendly personality and sense of humor made him seem to me like someone I had known much longer. Introducing him to my other male participant, Gil Jackson, after our

final interview was a highlight of Gil's brief visit on his way to North Dakota to stand with the water protectors for the second time⁶. The two men connected immediately and determined that, due to the similarities in their language, their families were likely both originally from the Snowbird, North Carolina region. They thoroughly enjoyed talking together and made plans to get together in North Carolina in the upcoming weeks.

John, a farrier, horse shoer, and cobbler, makes his living by working with his hands. At seventy years old, he works every day, showing no signs of slowing down. When he came to my office for our first two interviews, his left hand was in a cast from an accident that had cut ligaments in two fingers, requiring surgery. At that time he was anticipating getting the cast removed and starting on physical therapy so he would retain flexibility in his hand. He wore clothing fitting for a person who works with animals: worn, comfortable boots, jeans, hat, and a red jacket. He relaxed comfortably in an office chair, legs outstretched, drinking bottled water.

For our final interview, nearly a year after the first, he no longer had the cast on his hand; he had regained flexibility except in a knuckle of his index finger. He still wore boots and jeans, but this was the first time I had seen him without a hat. His appearance is that of a much younger man due to his dark hair and lack of wrinkles. His quiet

⁶ In reference to the Standing Rock Sioux's stand against the Dakota Access Pipeline across tribal land and under the Missouri River. Native peoples from all over the world have participated in the protest to protect the water.

confidence, introspection, and sense of humor came through in telling stories of his family and school years.

Delaware County

With 41,487 people, according to the 2010 Census, Delaware County is located in far northeastern Oklahoma, sharing its eastern border with Arkansas. With a median household income of just under \$28,000, compared to the state average of more than \$47,000, according to the 2015 Census ACS 1-year survey, Delaware County is considered to be somewhat impoverished, particularly in the rural areas. The 2013 poverty rate is 21.5% compared to the state average of 16.8% (2015 ACS 5-year Estimate by Census Bureau). Delaware is a larger county by area, ranked 25 of 77.

The town of Jay is also the county seat. At 43.8%, American Indians make up the largest racial group in Jay (city-data.com). White alone comprises 37.4%, and two or more races comprise 8.8% of the population in the town of less than 2,500. Delaware County has five high schools, including Jay High School, which John Chewey attended for two of his high school years. The elementary schools that he attended no longer exist.

***Tsigalili* - Chickadee**

Born and raised in Delaware County by his mother and father, both full blood Cherokees, John grew up in a community where only Cherokee was spoken: “That’s all I knew until I started school.”⁷ Also known as *Tsigalili* – Chickadee - he was born in 1945

⁷ All quotes from John from this point forward are from one of his transcripts. Pagination can differ due to formatting because it is an electronic file.

to Willy Chewey and Mary O'Field Chewey, both also born in Delaware County. Willy was a rancher and farmer who taught John many of the skills he has used throughout his life, and Mary was a housewife with a traditional knowledge of nature. John had several siblings, including three older half-siblings, an older sister, two younger siblings, and a cousin who was raised as a sibling.

Willy supported his family by working on a ranch as what John refers to as “an Indian cowboy” who did everything that cowboys did with horses and cattle. He shod horses and taught John the skill that he still uses with his own horses. Willy was a storyteller with a gift of making others laugh, something that John feels that he and a brother inherited or learned from him. Like many other Cherokee speakers who have expressed to me that stories are funnier in Cherokee, John also mentioned this. He recalls one story that Willy and a friend named Hugh told about a group of outlaws called the Wickliffes. One of the Wickliffe clan had come by Hugh's house on his way to Fort Smith and asked, “Can you loan me a horse as long as Fort Smith?” The translation in Cherokee means a horse literally as long as Fort Smith, to which Hugh replied he didn't have a horse that long. The man got angry and started to leave until Hugh told him he was only joking. John uses this as an example to demonstrate the humor in the language but also expresses how humor is used as a way of healing from historical and lived trauma.

Willy Chewey's way of disciplining his many children was to ask questions and then “show” them “why you don't do this.” He would sometimes use a belt on his

children and was very strict, but John appreciated the way his father raised him. He learned how to work hard and use his hands, but possibly the most important value he learned from Willy was this: “He would always say they may take everything you have away from you, but don’t let them take your language.” Willy spoke some English and used it when he needed to, but Cherokee was the language he used in everyday life.

Even when his children were grown and would gather at his house, Willy did not allow English to be spoken. He would say, “No, in this house you speak my language.” John never lost the importance of his heritage language. Sometimes he hears words that he hasn’t heard in many years, yet he remembers them when he hears them. Other speakers have said that John speaks “the old language,” referring to a form that may have remained somewhat constant after the displacement of the Cherokees on the Removal in 1838-1839. This is a source of pride for John. It is also indicative of the possible dialect similarities between John and Gil, who is from a strong language community in North Carolina.

John recalls an incident from his childhood when someone from “the city,” possibly from the county courthouse, arrived with papers for Willy to sign. He told Willy that the papers had power and he had to sign them. Willy pointed to the small creek that ran through their land and told the man that the papers have no power: “This is just paper. Water got power.” In his broken English, he made clear what he was talking about. John also learned from his father that anything that was killed must be used; wildlife must be respected. Animals were to be treated “in a good way,” not misused. The men would go

hunting together and then share with the families, thankful for what they had provided. They would bury the parts of the animals that were not of use to show respect for them.

Although uneducated, Willy was “very quick with numbers,” something that John struggled with. He remembers Willy doing quick calculations in his head, such as when building a building or addition to a house or barn. He had the ability to communicate with anyone he met: “his hands would be going crazy trying to explain something,” another trait that John has acquired; he moves his hands a great deal when he speaks. Like his son John would be, Willy was highly respected in his community. One neighbor said of him that “Willy Chewey was the best Indian I ever knew.” John and his brother express pride in growing up to be very much like their father.

In addition to working on the ranch, Willy would sometimes go to Colorado to work the broom corn harvest, taking a carload of Cherokee men with him. John recalls holding onto his father, not wanting him to leave. Willy would tell him he could go when he was old enough. An athlete, Willy would put together a baseball team and played against the baseball team in the farm town where they were staying. He would laugh and tell John later on, “We beat the heck out of them.”

Though Willy had the ability to communicate with and get along well with all people, John says that he felt he was “pretty protected... in growing up because I didn’t really know the White man’s ways.” They didn’t associate with people outside the family and community of Indians, didn’t associate with “the outside world.” He felt that his father never felt trust for White people, even though “they weren’t mean to him.”

Sometimes after encounters with Whites, he would reiterate that they might take everything else away from them but not to let them take the language.

While Willy was strict and humorous and outspoken, Mary was not. “She was a real lady who was very quiet, never said a whole lot.” If she did have to get on to someone, “it made you feel like you were the lowest person in the world because you had done something wrong.” She showed you why it was wrong and what the results might be, and John considered that worse than getting beaten. She spoke no English that John heard, yet he thinks she must have known some because she was able to communicate with non-Cherokee speakers.

Mary stressed education and graduating from high school. This was particularly important to her as she had never had the opportunity to attend. As the oldest child in a family with many children and only one pair of shoes, she usually had to stay home and take care of younger siblings while working alongside her mother. Whoever went to school got to wear the shoes. She did go as high as about the eighth grade.

As the matriarch in a matrilineal society, Mary was “the glue of the whole family.” She was strong in her knowledge of nature and the environment. From her John learned about wild vegetation, including what was edible. She picked wild onions, wild potatoes, and mushrooms and cut poke. Each time she would pick something, she would say “*Etino*,” meaning “next year,” as a way of showing appreciation to what the Creator had provided while also leaving enough so that the plants would continue to grow. She raised a garden, which John and his sisters had to weed. She was a very good cook.

John doesn't remember ever hearing her speak English, but looking back, he realizes she must have spoken some to communicate with neighbors and others. When a White neighbor would come to their house, Mary would say, "*Naquu gado usuduli?*" meaning, "What do they want now?" She provided stability for the family as well as a sense of identity. John learned to "live in both worlds," referring to mainstream society and his traditional society and the dichotomy of world views. She would have loved to have gone to school, and she ingrained in her own children the importance of education. He considers his sisters as being very like their mother: "They were just quiet and got along with everybody."

His parents never spoke harshly to each other in front of the children. From them John learned to always treat people well, and it will come back to you. If you treat people poorly, it will come back to you. He recognizes the foundation and identity that his parents provided, and he carried them with him even during two years spent serving in the US Army, including fourteen months in Vietnam. He recalls his mother always telling the children that it didn't matter what they were doing or where they had gone, but they must always come home. That has stayed with John, and he has passed it on to his own children.

Early School Years

As a five year old, John started school in Lindberg Public School, no longer in existence. This would be his first experience with a language that was completely foreign to him. It would also be his first experience with an indoor bathroom.

If you can imagine what that feeling is like of being dropped off in the middle of something... 5 or 6 years old, and then you're standing there in a building... that you have never been in before and it was huge. Never knew what a bathroom was... And then people talking and not understanding what they're saying.

He recalls trying to communicate with the teachers and trying to use an English word he had heard to convey that the other children were crying to go be with their older sisters or brothers. The teachers would get frustrated when they couldn't understand him, and he recalls that they would pull the hair on the back of his neck, or jerk his ear: "I assumed that was their only way of communicating with me."

He mostly associated with his sisters, yet he had one non-Cherokee friend with whom he could communicate. Other children tried to befriend them, but due to his sisters' shyness and their language barrier, the other children would give up and leave. John and his sisters would then discuss what the White kids had been saying. "So we understood what they were saying, and whether we didn't know what to say to them or not, I don't know." John had not been in school long when they moved from a house that had belonged to his father's cousin, who had moved to California during the Great Depression, to a house on a ranch where his father would work. So John left the public school and began attending a rural school in a one-room schoolhouse known as Taylor School. He and his siblings were the only Indian children there. He remembers the teacher being proud and telling people, "These are my Indian kids." This was confusing to John because he did not understand her use of the pronoun "my" and how they could

be “her” Indian kids. But she was a kind teacher and wanted the children to do well. He recalls her telling his parents, “I have never taught Indian kids.”

He remembers the teacher, Mrs. McWilliams, as being “an old white-headed lady” who was sweet and patient: “She would make me understand what she was trying to convey to me.” She recognized when he didn’t understand something and would work with him on a one-on-one basis. Her husband, who was not an employee of the school, would sometimes take her to school and do custodial work around the school. He often sat outside the well house, reading the paper, which interested John. He would tell John to learn to read the whole paper because that’s how he would know what was going on in the world. He remembers thinking, “Aw, he don’t know what he’s talking about.” But it did have an influence on him even years later. He recalls that Mr. McWilliams seemed to take a particular interest in him and to this day he reads the whole paper.

One of his best memories from the school was when he participated in a 4-H Club Share the Fun night. A Pottawatomie business lady in a nearby community entered John and his sisters in the event. She made him regalia, including a Plains-style headdress and ribbon shirt, and the girls jingle dresses, which have many ornaments of metal cones that make a jingling sound. The children sang three Cherokee songs, which they had learned in church. Mr. McWilliams was in the audience and told them later how moved the audience was by their singing. Although they didn’t win the event, it was significant to their family; their mother kept the ribbon shirt “forever,” and John’s sisters still have pictures that were taken at the event.

John believes he learned more English in his years at Taylor School with Mrs. McWilliams than anywhere else. He recalls that his sisters, who were bashful and wouldn't speak much, would talk with him after "those White kids" would leave, so he believes they did understand what the other children were talking about. He learned to make himself understood by using a combination of English and Cherokee.

From a young age, John stood up for those who didn't stand up for themselves. He recalls one incident when a shy boy named Henry Runabout was blamed for pulling out plants that the class had planted in milk cartons. The boy who had actually done it told the teacher he had seen Henry do it, so Henry got in trouble and was punished. "Henry never said anything. He just bowed his head, and man it made me furious." When they went outside for recess, he "put it on" Mike, the boy who had pulled out the plants and blamed Henry:

Of course I got in trouble. But that was just one of the incidences in my younger years. As I got older, I was always still the same way, always taking up for somebody that I thought shouldn't be treated that way.

When the small schools, including Taylor, were consolidated, John and his siblings were sent to a nearby public school. He attended this school for a brief time until being pulled out and sent to a different school by the state or the county; he wasn't entirely sure who was behind the decision. This change of school, likely a result of poor attendance, would be more traumatic than the other schools he and his siblings had experienced.

Involuntary Removal

When John was in the sixth grade, he and his two sisters were taken from their local school and sent to a mission school that provided boarding for Indian students but was also a public school open to all students. Oaks Indian Mission, a Cherokee mission home, was run by Lutherans. Oaks-Mission School is located in southern Delaware County in the community of Oaks, almost on the border with Cherokee County. At that time more than half of the students attending the school were Indian, from what John recalled.

Although his English skills had improved and he could communicate with non-Cherokee speakers, he still had problems with English. He considers that he “learned English pretty much right away, I guess, because I had to.” He recalls that the other students in the same situation could speak English since they had also come from public schools. Even though they didn’t know each other, they were glad to see others like themselves with whom they could speak their language. He was also able to communicate well with the Cherokee students who did not speak Cherokee, although he did associate more with those who did.

He continued to struggle with the academic understanding of English. Rather than having the patience of Mrs. McWilliams, the teachers at Oaks-Mission would quickly grow frustrated with him. Instead of working with him to help him understand, they gave him low grades, which frustrated John a great deal. They would tell him that he was lazy and didn’t want to learn. He often felt left out of what was taking place in classes.

At one time the teachers were going to put him in special education classes. He wanted to go because there were Indian kids, and he welcomed going to classes with them. "I think there were more Indian kids in there than there were of the White kids." He never went to special education classes and doesn't know why since the teachers perceived that he was "slow."

At lunch and other free times, the students who spoke Cherokee would congregate. A few White boys would associate with them and try to learn some of their language. He remembers one younger student in particular who had a red wagon, which John would pull him in. John would tell him, "*Hatsaga*," "get in." "And he learned that, so every time he brought that wagon around, he'd say, '*Hatsaga*.' And he didn't realize that he was telling me to get in because he would get in." They became good friends and remained friends as adults. He always greeted John with "*Hatsaga*."

Though he had friends and was able to speak his language outside of class, John remained angry and confused about having been uprooted from his close-knit family and home, causing him to become rebellious:

I didn't understand why I was taken out of my home and put into a school. I didn't understand and I was more or less taught the White man's way, and they were trying to take away our language, which at that time, things were changing. He had heard from his grandparents about the conditions in schools run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and he realized that the conditions at Oaks-Mission were not as bad as the conditions in many boarding schools had been. He was able to speak his language with

other Cherokee students. His first wife's grandmother, whose first language was Cherokee, told him of her own experiences with boarding school. She remembered Army trucks showing up and the kids screaming and being dragged from their homes and loaded up. The families were devastated and would sometimes follow their children and grandchildren and camp outside the facilities. She would say, "We weren't bothering anybody. We were just trying to live." John stayed angry at the government for this treatment.

He recalled that when one of the boys at Oaks-Mission got in trouble, within a matter of minutes of being away from the instructor, they would talk in Cherokee and laugh. They used the language to cheer each other up. When incidents would take place within the community, "it was always the Indian kids, the Mission kids" who were blamed, even when they were nowhere near where the incident had taken place. Laughing when they got in trouble was a way of coping for the children.

Not only many of the students but also some of the school employees spoke Cherokee, including some cooks and the girls' dormitory matron. At one point a new journalism teacher who was a speaker began teaching at the school. John developed a close relationship with a janitor named Coleman Fields, who spoke the old Cherokee like John did. On the nights of basketball games, for which admission cost money that John and the other Indian students didn't have, he would sit in the basement near the furnace with Coleman, who would often send John upstairs with money to get them some pop

and candy. He enjoyed talking and joking with Coleman and was saddened to learn years later that he had passed away.

Always one to take up for the underdogs and for those who wouldn't take up for themselves, John often got in trouble with the bullies and with the dorm matrons. His cultural foundation had taught him to treat people well, and he didn't understand why some of the people behaved the way they did. Because he took up for others, as he had done since his public school years, he was "marked as a bully." He carried this trait throughout his life.

Return Home

After running away from the mission and going home, taking a young unhappy boy from his community with him, John determined that he would not go back to the boarding school, and his father agreed. As a high school sophomore, he began attending Jay High School, the local school. There he was enthusiastically welcomed by coaches and athletes due to his athletic prowess. He had made a name for himself as a stand-out basketball player. Still struggling academically, he considers his athletic abilities as "the only thing that got me through public school."

Being an athlete allowed him to "hold my head up because I got respect 'cause I was able to do that." While many of the Cherokee boys who were good athletes and would have excelled in high school sports did not participate, John tried to convince them to. "Being full blood, lot of them are bashful or they don't want to get involved." He believes they were afraid of being put down or belittled. He recalls that only a handful of

boys played high school sports. One earned a football scholarship but soon got injured and then drafted to serve in Vietnam.

Academically John was not outstanding. He made B's, C's, and D's. For his family, the goal of school was to become educated and to graduate; letter grades were not consequential. He continued to struggle with math, as he had since elementary school, but enjoyed history. Later he would convey to his grandson the importance of understanding and being able to use numbers for any kind of trade, including working with horses. He would also learn much more about the history of Indians and realize that other tribes existed. This led to much of the anger and disgust he would feel with the government system. Yet he still loved learning about history and how the country came to be.

Even with his impressive athletic skills, he still didn't feel as though he fit in. He remembers ball games in the old gym in 1962, when the Indians stayed on one side of the gym and the non-Indians on the other. He mingled with both, a skill he had learned from his father: "I could understand both English and Cherokee. I could communicate with the full bloods and the non-Indians." He had friends on both sides yet still felt he didn't fit. This feeling was affirmed when at times he would overhear a derogatory comment made about an Indian by people he considered his friends.

He recalls feeling pressure from the Indians because he was associating with non-Indians, and pressure from the non-Indians because he was Indian. "And so I was just pretty much caught in the middle. But I didn't let that get me down. I played both sides." He credits his "humorous attitude" and ability to make people laugh as part of his ability

to get along with everyone. More important, his identity was critical: “But I knew who I was. I knew where I came from. And I knew, number one I was Indian.”

Vietnam and Adulthood

After high school, John was drafted and sent to Vietnam. This was a difficult experience for him in many ways. He had heard of the war and Vietnam but knew nothing about it, including its location: “I didn’t realize there was another world.” He recalls boot camp as being very difficult; they were called names by the drill sergeants and “they tried to break us” during the training for the purpose of “to go fight and kill.” John refused to be broken; he rebelled in his mind.

Because of the way he had been raised with a mistrust of White people, John had difficulty fitting in. He realized by this time that “not all White people were bad,” yet he detested the government for what “he” had done to the Indians historically and for the war that took away two years of John’s life. It took him a long time to understand that “he’s [government] the big guy, so we’re just nothing.”

His trait of standing up for underdogs served him in the military as well as in school. When some of the young men were unable to do the set of 75 monkey bars required to enter the mess hall for meals, John would do the monkey bars for them; just out of high school, he was athletic and in good shape. His trait of getting into trouble followed him in the military. He often made smart-aleck comments and got punished. One evening he ducked into a building to avoid the evening head count in formation; he was seen by a lieutenant, who reported him to his sergeant. His punishment was to hold a

rifle over his head and run until dark. He considered this punishment one of the hardest things he had done, yet it was an empowering experience to him: “I guess they knew how to, but they never broke me.”

After basic training, he was sent to AIT school for Advanced Individual Training. He briefly considered going AWOL [Absent Without Leave] but realized he wouldn't be able to get home from where he was, so he decided to make the best of it and look out for himself. A Cherokee man named Sanders from a community near John's was near John's group for a while, and they enjoyed speaking their language together until Sanders got orders and was sent elsewhere.

After two years in the Army, including fourteen months overseas, John felt that the government had deprived him of two years of his life. To make matters worse, his officer, who was a general or major, told the men in their last orientation that it would be better not to wear their uniforms home due to anti-War sentiment. He had begun to feel proud of wearing the uniform but after being told not to wear it home, he was conflicted:

And I thought, “My God, they made me wear a uniform to fight for something I didn't know nothing [sic] about, and when I get home, they're outside of the post and they're throwing rocks at us and calling us baby killers, and they're telling us not to wear our uniforms.”

This was a confusing time for John. For two years his identity had been related to the uniform. The time following his service was difficult; he refers to the years following his tour of duty overseas as “darker years.” During this time he remained resentful and

struggled with alcohol; today he considers himself fortunate to be alive. Although he did abuse alcohol, he always “carried myself pretty well.” He retained a sense of pride in who he was.

He recalls becoming an activist in the American Indian Movement [AIM], a group that advocates for civil rights yet is viewed as militant by the government. He believed that this was an opportunity to “make things right” for the Indians. He participated in the AIM incident at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, a historic protest that stemmed from a failed attempt to impeach the Oglala Sioux tribal president. The situation turned violent, and some of the AIM members were imprisoned for their roles in the protest. This experience reiterated for him that the government system can’t be changed, and so he determined to work with it and benefit from it rather than rebelling.

After the AIM situation at Wounded Knee, he hid out because of warrants for his arrest. He married his first wife, and they had two children together. During this period John leased and ran a club, through which the Mafia out of Kansas City ran money, and he got into dealing drugs. Still angry and traumatized from his overseas experiences, he recognized that he was “headed down a road that was to nowhere.” The trauma of witnessing his young brother-in-law shoot himself in the head was an awakening for him: “I had to get those demons out of my head... there’s got to be a better way of life.”

The marriage did not work out, and he later married Nancy, who was Cherokee and Shawnee. She had three children that John raised. They also had a child together. They both went back to school at Northeastern Oklahoma A&M [NEO] in Miami, and

then John went to the vocational school that was part of NEO. He learned skills to become an electric lineman and worked as one for about ten years. He later worked as a counselor at Seneca Indian School, a Bureau of Indian Affairs school, in far northeast Oklahoma. John and Nancy were married for 41 years until she passed away.

Progeny and Perpetuation of Language

Because neither of his wives spoke fluent Cherokee, his children did not learn the language. His first wife was of Muscogee Creek descent, so her children learned to speak some Creek since both Cherokee and Creek are matrilineal societies in which the children identify with the mother's culture. Their daughter was killed at age twenty-one, another traumatic experience in John's life. Their son "may know a few words in Cherokee, but he probably knows more Creek than he does Cherokee. Because he was raised up in the Creek culture with his mother."

John did not try to teach the language to the three kids he raised with Nancy. Although they all have Indian names that John gave them, "I guess it didn't seem to be that important for me to teach them the language. And then we didn't speak it in the home, so English was their first language." Their mother's mother and grandmother were strong Cherokee speakers who spoke the old language like John. Nancy's father and his side of the family spoke Shawnee, and he was "a strong peyote man" in the "peyote church." John respected their traditional ways but realized those ways are gone now, as far as he knows.

As his children had children of their own, John, as the elder in the family, had the responsibility of giving them Cherokee names, which he has proudly done for his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, just as his mother had done. He remembers her wrapping up a baby and carrying it: “I remember her telling that baby, she said, ‘I’m gonna carry you a while. ‘Cause you have a long ways to walk in your lifetime,’ she’d say.” He thought that was sweet and poetic and understood what she meant. “So I’ve always hung on to that when I see my little grandkids.”

John’s grandkids are not speakers; they only know a few words. When people have asked why he didn’t teach them, he thinks that maybe he should have, but he also realized that they would not have had opportunity to use the language every day, making it seem less important. He brings up a recent experience with a man who spoke Cherokee. John said something in Cherokee to him, but he wouldn’t answer back. He stated that he did not want to speak Cherokee, which John found odd. It was confusing for him as he had always been proud and never ashamed of his language, “whereas a lot of people are.” This could be in response to negative experiences they had as children and with families instilling the value of English.

John is saddened that people he knows who speak Cherokee will no longer respond to him in Cherokee. One example is his cousin and her husband, both of whom speak better Cherokee than English, in John’s perception. When he saw them at a restaurant and spoke to them in Cherokee, they both replied in English. He talked to them

in Cherokee until “I made them speak Cherokee to me.” He doesn’t understand the shift away from the language in people of his generation.

John continues to speak his language at every opportunity, with family members and people from his community. He talks with elders about the old words and the old language. He laments that the language children are learning in immersion schools and programs is not the language of the elders; in fact, he believes that the traditional speakers would not even be able to understand the language that the children are learning. He appreciates that many mixed blood Cherokees are working to learn their language, even though their pronunciation is not the same as that of heritage language speakers. He did not realize how truly complex the language is until he was an adult. He values the work that tribal members have put into developing a Cherokee dictionary and other publications; he even references the dictionary when he has difficulty recalling a word.

John would like for his grandchildren and great-grandchildren to learn the language as well as the culture, but he realizes this is unlikely. “They don’t know the culture... All they know is they’re Indians.” He wants them to understand the perspectives and lifeways of Native Americans, which he considers “very, very different” from the “White, Caucasian world.” He acknowledges that he has learned to live in “both worlds,” and that he is not the most educated person by Westernized standards, but he reads. He expresses pride in almost all of his children and grandchildren going to college and having good jobs. One of his sons is a welder, a skill, among others, learned from John: “And I’ve taught him the things, what I taught: morals and values.” His son’s son is

also a welder, working for big companies and making good money. “So I guess I taught them something.”

His grandchildren are proud of their heritage and sing songs that he has taught them. He laughs about his youngest granddaughter getting her tribal citizenship card and proudly sending him a picture. He told her, “You’re Indian now, aren’t you?” She replied, “Well we’re not Indians.” He said, “You’re not?” Her response was, “We don’t live in tipis!” Although he laughs at her misconception of who her people really are, he is disheartened by the common perception that all Indians wear colorful regalia like the Plains Indians, who are often portrayed in media. He explains to his progeny where they came from and why there are here and who they are. He works to instill cultural knowledge and values in them, yet it’s challenging because he doesn’t see them all the time. Still, “they’ve got some pride in knowing that they’re Indians.”

It is a sad realization to John that the language is going away among all generations, yet he holds on to it as his mother and father instilled in him the importance of his language as a critical element of his identity and his connection to his ancestors. With the young generation of his great-grandchildren, he hopes to perpetuate the same cultural knowledge that has carried him through the struggles and the good times of his life, becoming a person of whom his parents would be proud.

CHAPTER VIII

IDENTITY, LANGUAGE, AND CIRCLES

“When the white man discovered this country Indians were running it. No taxes, no debt, women did all the work. White man thought he could improve on a system like this” (Cherokee Proverb, n.d., Online).

The purpose of this oral history study was to collect and analyze stories from a small, select group of people who have one identified commonality: being first-language Cherokee speakers who began elementary school with no grasp of the English language. The stories offer perspectives of not only school experiences but also of family values, lifeways, histories, and beliefs. Through a better understanding of the phenomena and how they were perceived by the participants, I believe that a more holistic picture of how language affects lived experience, especially related to perceptions of school and choices for higher education and careers, can emerge, and that, just as important, the four

participants would have opportunity to better contextualize their own experiences through sharing and reflecting.

Examining their shared stories through both hermeneutic phenomenological and transculturation lenses has allowed numerous themes to emerge relating to gender, skills, culture, and relationships. The number seven is a sacred number to the Cherokee for many reasons and is reflected in many aspects of cultural life, among them sacred woods, directions, and clans. Therefore, seven is a culturally appropriate number to represent the number of identified themes that are most relevant for this community of people. These themes are related to identity, athletic ability, value of education to families, discontinuity of language in children, perpetuation of language in grandchildren and beyond the family, gendered role and traits of males and females, and positive roles of teachers.

To elicit these stories, I met with each participant on three separate occasions with the purpose of conducting the recorded interviews. Additionally, I met with all four individually prior to the first interview to discuss the questions I would ask and to ascertain their willingness to participate in my study, as there was a time commitment and the potential for bringing up painful memories. None expressed reservations about sharing their stories. Following the interviews, I sent them the transcriptions of them.

Emergent themes had begun to appear during the writing process, but it was only after all four stories had been written that I began to review the transcripts and notes with theme in mind. As I purposely identified what I felt were both overt and covert themes, I reflected on the experiences and the perceptions of the experiences of my four

participants. Through their stories, they have shared how they have navigated the duality of living in “both worlds.” These identified themes, which I examine through both hermeneutic phenomenological and transculturation lenses, conceptualize the relevance of their cultural backgrounds to their success as adults who have learned to navigate the dichotomy of two cultures.

While I had somewhat anticipated that a strong identity was critical to the participants’ staying in school when most of their peers did not, and I was well aware of the current condition of the Cherokee language and its decay, I found the importance of athletic ability to school success to be surprising. As a result of the interviews and transcriptions, I have more awareness of the personal reasons for loss of language and for the lack of language perpetuation in progeny. The phenomena of their lived experiences as non-speakers of the mainstream language became evident. Phenomenological inquiry allows me as the researcher to closely examine what, to the participants, were everyday school experiences (DeMarrais, 2004). Transculturation is a tool that can help make sense of the phenomena of experiences with the English language (Whipple 2012) that took place more than five decades ago.

I don’t attempt to dismantle any pre-conceived notions but do examine to better understand the essence of each person’s story in relation to language, successfully completing school, and attaining success in the mainstream world. In each section, I analyze and consider each theme as a critical piece of a larger whole, while also considering the whole and how the themes contribute to encompass it. This hermeneutic

analysis (Smith et al., 2009) contributes to my attempts to describe the participants' lived experiences through questioning the way we experience the world (van Manen, 1990). Through their activities and relationships that make the participants' worlds meaningful, I apply Heidegger's perspective of existence and interpreting those activities and relationships (Smith et al., 2009).

My focus on participants who attended non-boarding schools was to call attention to and better understanding the phenomenon of experiences for the everyday, non-elite people who attended schools in their home communities. This focus was something of a response to the significant body of research on Native students who were sent to far-away boarding schools, many enduring horrific conditions for years before being returned to their families (Anonymous, 2008). All participants attended both small rural schools and larger ones for high school grades. One participant did experience living at a nearby mission-run boarding school for four years. I do not perceive this as taking away from his public school experiences; rather, I view it as contributing to nuances of what took place in four different schools, only one of which was a boarding school. I do consider this relevant to the overall themes that have emerged, particularly the use of humor as a means of coping, surviving, and healing.

Who We Are – Identity as a Cultural Core

In keeping with the importance of tradition and culture, identity was a thread common among all four participants. Reaching across boundaries of culture, hermeneutics encourages a closer look at how identity is constructed. Identity is the

holistic essence of who we are, encompassing our beliefs, our values, our life-ways. It comes from families, lineage and extended kin networks, and a communal network of communities that ensures the survival of all. According to Sturm (2002), some Cherokees express identity in relevance to “traditional Cherokee communities as sites where Cherokee children develop a distinct cultural identity and a sense of connectedness to their extended-kin networks” (p. 134). Another Cherokee man referred to the interdependence of language and identity as elements of the Cherokee social classification (p. 134). Without identity we have no solid foundation upon which to develop and learn and unfurl as a person secure in how to interact with the larger world yet maintaining a sense of belonging. The participants were not successful in completing school *in spite of* their cultural foundation and sense of identity, but *because* they knew who they were and where they came from.

Identity was critical in each participant’s experiences in schools where communication was performed in an unfamiliar language. While all four interviewees were raised in environments that ensured they understood their culture’s values and ways of life, they also questioned their roles in schools with large populations of mainstream students. Instead of losing elements of their cultural identity, their identities were affirmed through the cultural exchanges that all four experienced throughout their school years, as transculturation theory posits (Huffman, 2010). All four participants maintained fluency in their language as well as strong values that reflect their cultural upbringing.

Growing up in a community of Cherokees in western North Carolina, Gil firmly credits his parents with giving him a “foundation” of self-esteem and confidence. His values included his relationship with the earth, standing up for those who were oppressed, and an appreciation of his traditional ways. As a seventh grade student entering a mainstream school in which he was part of a small minority group, he could have decided not to stay, as did all but one other boy who had attended elementary school with him. Instead, his firm identity made him able to adapt to a situation that challenged his self-perception and empowered him to befriend those who did not share his values and beliefs. He began to better enjoy school so much that he did not want to miss it. He learned to feel good about himself despite differences between himself and other students, or possibly because of those differences.

In the transition from high school to college, which no other students from his elementary class made, he was confident enough in himself to realize that he did not need the markers that other students had that identified them as part of the current culture, including polyester shirts, cufflinks, and platform shoes. Gil was comfortable in jeans and his clothes from home, secure in knowing that the clothing does not make the person. His cultural identity provided the foundation that was critical to his academic success

Also growing up among only Cherokee, Shirley was less attuned to her sense of identity as a child than was Gil. However, hers served her well in high school and beyond. As an elementary school student who enjoyed learning English and competed with the other Cherokee girls to see who knew the most English words, she was

comfortable in her elementary school. The shift to a public school in her middle school years was somewhat overwhelming for her. Unlike Gil, she did not seek out those who were unlike her and her family. She identified much more with other students who were like her, although many of them stopped attending school before graduating. She found herself a niche with the basketball team, which required that she actively communicate with non-Cherokee girls. Her confidence increased, though she still struggled with giving book reports or doing anything in front of the class: “I was just a different person back then. I did not want to speak in front of anybody.” She struggled with her identity and the shame at feeling that she was different from the others, but this was a short-lived struggle. As many young people experience this sense of shame when perceiving difference between their own families and others, she now feels ashamed that she ever felt that way. Eventually her identity as a woman with important knowledge worth sharing strengthened and made her capable of presenting in front of audiences both formally and informally, giving back to her home community and to the broader Cherokee language community, proud of who she is and where she came from.

As a young child, Pauline basically raised herself from the time she was five and started attending a public school while living with grandparents. She recalls that her childhood involved getting herself to and from school, a two-mile walk each way; making sense of a language that she had never heard before her first day of school; and doing all that must be done to pass on to each grade level. She learned self-reliance from her family, who not only supported themselves but also helped out others in the

community with extra food. Not encountering any teachers who were like her impressed upon her from an early age the concept that she was meant to help other children who were like her. She blossomed from a child not confident using a new language to a self-motivated student determined to make a difference for those who shared her culture. Her strength that she drew from her identity helped her complete high school when almost no other Cherokee students at her high school graduated. Her values of family, community, and caring for others are significant strands of her identity, woven throughout her experiences.

John's school experiences from sixth through tenth grades were markedly different from the other participants in that he attended a mission-run boarding school in the same county as his home. He learned from an early age to value what is found in nature, including plants and wildlife, to always speak his language, and to help those in need of help. In high school he developed the capacity to interact with all students, both mainstream and minority. Although he never felt that he "fit in," he developed strong friendships with his peers. His story differs from the other participants in another way, as well, since he served in the military for two years, spending fourteen months in Vietnam during the Conflict. While his identity was important to him as a child and as a student at the boarding school, it was much more critical to his survival in the war. He never forgot who he was, and even when he desperately wanted to return home, he was able to follow through with something he strongly disagreed with but was committed to doing. He spoke Cherokee any chance he had, even talking to himself aloud. He credits his identity

for his survival in a strange land where some tried to “break my spirit” and others tried to kill him.

Through transculturation we can view these experiences as empowering in that they allowed the participants as children to not only hold onto their traditional values and life-ways, but to also learn the ways of the dominant society and fit in with them. Caught in the dualism of two cultures, they learned to rely on their concepts of who they were as individuals and as Cherokees to navigate the confusing world of the Westernized education system. Transculturation as a lens, unlike others that were not developed with the concept of Native American academic success as the crux of the perspective, does not believe that Native students “must undergo some form of assimilation in order to succeed academically” (Huffman, 2010, p. 121). Rather, transculturation illuminates the adherence to traditional philosophy, worldview, and self-concept as Cherokees as important for their success as students. It is a type of socialization that is “a cultural process in which an individual learns to function in a new cultural setting” (p. 170), a complex process that “results in the ability to effectively participate in more than one cultural setting” (p. 171). My participants’ stories demonstrate that their strong sense of cultural identity was elemental in their persistence and ultimate success in completing school in environments that were in many ways contrary to their socially supportive backgrounds.

A Reason to Excel - Athletic Skills as Critical School Engagement

While a sense of identity was a critical trait for the participants completing their formal education, athletic skills also played an integral role. Their aptitude to excel at playing team sports contributed to a positive sense of self and created social environments among teammates that were critical to their perseverance. Three of my participants felt that their athletic talents kept them engaged in high school. One did not play high school level sports but did emphasize the importance of going to the “big room” at elementary because the older students got to play games with other schools. Many other Cherokee students who attended schools with the participants dropped out. For all four, this phenomenon of competitive sports required contact with non-Indians yet also kept them from “falling through the cracks,” as Shirley stated in reference to the Cherokee students who were not athletes and were not successful in school. In the essence of lived experiences, participating in sports was the glue that kept the participants in school and earning passing grades.

Gil and John both talked extensively about the important role that athletic ability played in their lives, not only in school but also beyond. Both played competitive basketball and football. Both were able to communicate well with Natives and non-Natives. Both continued to play ball beyond high school, and both stressed the relevance of sports to their success in school. Gil was well known in his community for being athletic and was often asked about his workouts by people in the community. He was given special treatment from the teachers: “And that really helped us in education because the teachers kind of took a special note, made sure that we were passing.” John

was known as a strong basketball player at the mission school, from which he ran away and then went to public school in Jay. His reputation had preceded him; the coaches and ball players were welcoming to him as an asset to their team. Grades were not particularly relevant to him: “It just kind of more or less didn’t matter what kind of grades I made as long as I played in any kind of sports that was there.” He later played baseball on an Army team while stationed in Germany, which helped make being away from home more bearable.

Entering public school in the sixth grade, Shirley transferred her competitive instincts from learning English to basketball skills. Although she primarily associated with other Native girls, playing ball required that she communicate with non-Native players. This was challenging for her; however, she believes it made the difference to her staying in school. Other Native students who did not play ball “just kind of got lost in the shuffle.” She reasons that athletes brought money into the school, so “they kind of had to keep an eye on us, so we didn’t get below a C.” Non-athletes did not have this measure of support, something Shirley did not understand until she was an adult. She was surprised to discuss school with adults who would tell her that they were mistreated. Their parents did not know to play an active role in supporting them in school, and they were not supported by educators likely due to their quiet, unobtrusive natures. Historically Native children have not received strong support for academic learning outside of their families; they were primarily prepared for manual labor and domestic work (Anonymous, 2008). Thus, sports became a bridge that connected the academic culture to the social culture of

athletic teams yet was not a direct attempt to acculturate the children to mainstream society.

Pauline did not play high school sports, but seeing the students in the “big room” playing ball on Fridays was motivating to a young girl who had many responsibilities. Once she reached the grades in the big room and was able to play sports, she took advantage of going to other schools for games and stayed vigilant in her search for a teacher who was like her. She never saw one at any school until she met one year later as a university student. Her value of caring for others was strengthened into determination to provide for others what had not been provided for her: a school experience in which she could communicate effectively with a teacher who understood and appreciated her cultural differences. This influence of negativity on her own school experiences became a driving force for her to change the experiences for future children by providing a safe environment in which Cherokee children could build on their traditional ways rather than work forcibly against them.

Stubborn resistance to acculturation into mainstream society is a tenet of transculturation. These participants maintained strong connections to their traditional culture and values while blending in with mainstream students on the court and field, where they were appreciated and valued as peers. The notion of *self*, according to Huffman (2010), is, in part, “who we believe we are and determines how we choose to present ourselves to others” (p. 168). Their strong concepts of *self* as Cherokees contributed to reaffirming their identity and providing incentive to excel among both

Native and non-Natives. Thus the concepts of cultural identity and resistance to acculturation became arguably the most critical elements in their success.

Taking Opportunity – Importance of Education as a Means of “Success”

Native people have traditionally educated children in ways of nature, social structures, gendered roles, and all other aspects required for survival of individuals and of society. Traditional education was spiritual in nature (Reagan, 2009) and included a broad range of natural topics, including religion, geography, zoology, botany, and medicine (Grinde, 2004). It was centered on oral history and emphasized humans existing in relation with the natural world (Grinde, 2004). The very structure of Westernized schooling goes against Native tradition. The concept of public education as we know it today is a Westernized one, developed for males of the dominant society. None of the parents of the participants had a formal Westernized high school education; some did not have even an elementary education. Yet the parents perceived the concept of a formal education as more than just a benefit; it would be critical to their children getting what they considered good jobs after graduating high school, to what they considered to be “success.” They did not express to their children a fear that a formal school education could negatively influence them; they may not have considered it since they themselves did not have formal education. The essence of a formal education, to the families, was that it was a value worthy of attainment, and they pushed their children to achieve high school diplomas.

Gil, who had moved in with an aunt and uncle when in early elementary school, enjoyed his years in middle and high school. He was well aware of his parents' expectation that he and all of his siblings graduate high school. His parents had almost no communication with the school and did not understand the concept of letter grades as being indicative of academic progress. Regardless, they overtly encouraged their children to graduate high school, never speaking of higher education beyond high school as that was a concept with which they had no personal experience. They considered a high school diploma as making something of yourself and an end of attainment rather than a stepping stone to more advanced learning.

Shirley was also encouraged to stay in school. She recalled the pride of her parents in that she and all of her siblings graduated. Shirley had been a strong student in elementary school but was much less so when she started attending public school. She struggled with learning the rules of English and applying them; the rules of grammar never made sense to her. Yet she persevered and graduated and was offered a full scholarship to the University of California, Berkeley. While she did not attend the university, she did attend college locally, along with at least three of her other siblings. Her mother struggled with English and only spoke a little. She was embarrassed by her lack of language skills and would ask Shirley to translate for her, to which Shirley responded that her mother should never be ashamed of her broken English because that meant she knew two languages, while most other people only know one. Shirley's mother didn't understand the coursework or letter grades, but she ensured that her children

attended regularly. Shirley proudly refers to herself as a “survivor” who realized she was a strong athlete and worked to excel in basketball.

John also recalls his mother encouraging the children to go to school. She had always wanted to go to school but had to drop out around the eighth grade due to family obligations and not having shoes to walk to school. She used her own experiences to encourage her children to stay in school and graduate. Pauline, however, was not directly encouraged to attend school. Rather, her family may have indirectly encouraged her by sending her to a school across the county instead of the local school. Although they never shared their reason for doing this, it is likely that they did not want their daughter to drop out of school as most of the students who attended the local school did. They gave her a foundation that allowed self-reliance, resulting in her setting a goal as a child and following through and meeting that goal as an adult. Determined to fill the void of Native teachers, she did become a teacher who helped other Native children navigate the complexities of traditional schooling.

In strong relation with identity, the encouragement, both covert and overt, that the parents gave the children set them on the path to graduating high school despite facing challenges far different from mainstream students. Being in school with peers both Native and non-Native reinforced the identity associated with Cherokee ethnicity. According to Kurt Lewin’s view on ethnic identity in America’s minorities, he argued that “individuals need to celebrate and embrace their ethnic identity. In so doing, minority individuals gain a strong sense of personal self-identity and group belonging”

(quoted in Huffman, 2010, p. 168). This sense of identity in association with expectations of staying in school had a direct effect on the participants' graduating from high school.

Systemic Change – Discontinuity of Language with Progeny

The word *language* conveys much more than words and how they are used to construct meaning. In Native cultures, language cannot be separated from all that it conveys: identity, life-ways, ancestors, culture, history, harmony with family and community. It represents “a symbolic and practical marker of social connections with and commitment to Cherokee community life” (Sturm, 2002, p. 121). The Cherokee language in particular is broadly descriptive, often using lengthy words with descriptive phrases rather than shorter words unrelated to what they name. For example, *digatuleni* is one term that refers to a vehicle and means “big eyes,” referring to the headlights, while *adladitla* refers to rubber tires. Other terms that refer to cars include *dawaweli*, meaning “wagon,” and *atsododi*, “something to ride in.” These descriptive terms were developed by speakers in different communities as the name for automobiles became necessary.

From the generation of the four study participants and generations prior, the hegemony of the English language has become more insistent with each passing generation, beginning with those children who were sent to boarding schools and thus did not teach their own children their heritage language. Each succeeding generation became less and less likely to teach their children to speak Cherokee as a first and only language in the hopes of helping the children acculturate to mainstream society with less difficulty than their ancestors had experienced. The result of these positive intentions is that, as

discussed in previous chapters, the Cherokee language is decaying, with few fluent speakers below the age of 50. This systemic change is reflected in all of the participants' families.

Despite his father's reminders to never let the language be taken away, John has not passed on fluency to his own children and grandchildren. This is in significant part due to his children's two mothers not being fluent speakers. In matrilineal societies, such as Cherokee and Creek, children learn the language of the mother. Since his wives spoke other languages, the children learned these, in addition to English as a first language. While he does credit Cherokee language immersion programs and community language classes with attempting to teach some language, he realizes that no participants in the programs at any level will become fluent. He believes that he "gave my kids and my grandkids a stable life" and taught them his own morals and values, yet he wishes they had their language, even though fewer and fewer people are able to speak: "I know there's different ones have said that they were told not to speak it because it's, it won't be a use for you." He recognizes that his grandchildren and great-grandchildren do have pride in being Indian, but they don't have the cultural knowledge he wants for them.

Though Pauline did teach her daughter the language, she is not a fluent speaker, and neither is Pauline's granddaughter. Pauline's daughter spoke well enough as a child to be able to communicate with her grandmother, Pauline's mother. With her daughter not being fluent, "it didn't bother me so much at that time." She recalls the pattern of

thinking in which speakers questioned whether or not to teach their children the language:

It was that pattern that followed of everybody thinking... ‘Will my kids be in trouble? Will they go through what I went through?’ or ‘Am I gonna change that and have them not go through what I did or what others did?’ ‘Cause you hear different stories, you know, of what people went through when they started school.

By the time her granddaughter was born, she was “more open” to teaching her Cherokee than she had been with her own daughter. She felt that the language was making a circle that had started to turn back toward teaching the language. With her great-grandson now beginning elementary school, she has worked to teach him the language but realizes that, with English as his first language, he will never be fluent in Cherokee.

Gil worked actively to teach young children the language for several years, until he retired from a tribal-run language immersion school, which he clarifies is actually a bilingual or second-language school rather than full immersion. His daughter, now in her late 30s, was a fluent speaker as a child but did not retain fluency. His son, in his early 20s, learned both languages until “he had just heard so much English that the English just took over,” and so never attained fluency. His two grandchildren attend the immersion school today and Jakob, the older of the two, speaks well and has strong comprehension. Taya has not been in the school long but had learned some language before starting and is making progress. He credits second-language learners who are teachers at the immersion

school with teaching the children in a manner that is conducive to their language learning. Gil hopes that, just as the second-language-speaking Hawaiians saved the Hawaiian language, it may take second-language learners to save the Cherokee language from extinction. However, he acknowledges the extreme complexity of the language and doubts that any second-language learner could ever attain fluency.

Like her brother Gil, Shirley has also worked with language revitalization programs. As a child she recalls her parents telling them, “Learn English. Learn English.” Still in that frame of mind as an adult, she did not teach her own children her heritage language: “I was still in the same mode as my parents were, trying to get what was best for them.” She remembers thinking that White people had it so easy with cars, lots of money, and food that the Cherokee people didn’t have. And so “we wanted a piece of that world,” which meant that they “kind of left our roots behind, even though we hung on to it a little bit.” Today she works with the older of her two granddaughters to teach her the language and is committed to writing some books in Cherokee together with her. The books will reflect culture, including caring for animals. Like Pauline, Shirley perceives the shift of the language as something of a circle, with efforts being made to bring it back to prominence. She believes that “it may take a non-Indian to help save our language,” but who accomplishes it is irrelevant as long as the language is perpetuated.

While all four participants have experienced success as adults, crediting strong cultural foundations that include language, none have children or grandchildren who are fluent speakers. This is due in large part to questioning whether the language would

benefit their children or if it would be detrimental. They all agree that knowing a second language does have cognitive and cultural benefits, and they all wanted success for their own children, as their parents wanted for them. Yet the circle of language did not encompass their children. The hope is that the grandchildren and great-grandchildren will perpetuate the language, keeping it from dying out.

Closing the Circle - Perpetuation of Language in a Full Circle

All of the participants have worked to perpetuate the language beyond their families. They all perceive language as being intertwined with culture and life-ways and have actively worked to teach language or develop materials to support language learning. An essence of language is identity as Cherokee people, and the theme of language perpetuation cannot be separated from identity but rather is “more like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes” (van Manen, 1990, p. 90). The theme itself is “the form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand” (p. 87); all four participants struggled with understanding their own experiences with language and how passing on first-language fluency to their children would affect them.

As a career educator of elementary children, Pauline worked in schools with high populations of Cherokee children, becoming that foundation with whom they could identify. Although she did not teach language, she did support her Cherokee students through cultural ways of learning. After retiring from teaching, she worked to translate and develop materials in the language for elementary students, thus perpetuating both the

language and the culture by making the materials culturally relevant. She collaborated with the immersion school curriculum department in North Carolina to share materials, written in Cherokee syllabary, thus supporting student learning in Oklahoma and North Carolina.

Although John does not teach language, he is working with a program through his church that will translate some materials into Cherokee, including a version of the Bible. He learned to read and write the Cherokee syllabary as an adult. His mother tried to teach them when they were children, “and I think the girls learned. But me, I was little hard-headed... So it wasn’t until later on in years that I thought this would be good if I learned this, and learned to read.” He believes this project will be a step toward preserving the old language that some of the elders speak but is rarely heard now.

Gil worked with children in an immersion setting until retirement and now perpetuates the language in different ways. During summers he works at a language immersion camp that his sister Shirley runs. He has also begun teaching language classes at University of North Carolina – Asheville. He realizes that none of his students will achieve fluency, yet the language is part of who he is, and its continuation is critical to him. Shirley also sees the critical need for teaching the language in their community and actively works with both children and adults to teach it. She strives to be the kind of teacher that she had as a child, patient and kind. Her accomplishments over the years include helping establish a childcare program in the impoverished area of her home community, securing approval and funding for high school counselors to address the

needs of Cherokee students at Robbinsville, teaching language classes at Robbinsville, and working at the state level to accomplish the recognition of Cherokee language courses as meeting the criteria for foreign language credit throughout North Carolina.

The teaching of language and developing materials is in juxtaposition with the knowledge that the language itself is in a process of decay. This painful realization has served as an impetus to directly engage in language revitalization efforts.

Transculturation theory posits that “American Indian students engage in the process of learning the cultural nuances found in mainstream education while retaining and relying upon their cultural heritage to forge a strong identity and sense of purpose” (Huffman, 2010, p. 170). This sense of purpose stemming from cultural heritage has manifested as a need to accomplish what they were not able to do with their own children: perpetuate the language in younger generations. For the children who learn to speak Cherokee as a second language, we must question how their identities will be shaped, and whether they will embody the values and world views that are inherent in the language.

How We Act and Interact - Gendered Roles and Traits in a Matrilineal Society

According to van Manen (1990), “The methodology of phenomenology is such that it posits an approach toward research that aims at being suppositionless” (p. 29). By attempting to “bracket” my existing knowledge of the essence of gendered roles, as described by Husserl in van Manen (1990, p. 47), I endeavored to view the nuances of the participants’ stories with sensitivity and clarity. Roles of gender in traditional Cherokee society contribute significantly to identity. The everyday lived experiences contribute

greatly to the essence of how the participants grew into maturity and raised their own children with values passed on through gendered relationships.

Males

The role of males in traditional Cherokee cultures prior to the Removal of 1838-1839 was taught from maternal uncles primarily due to the clan system. Boys were taught the roles and values of their mothers' clans, so the father had less of a role in his children's upbringing. Due to a shift in the last 200 years, in large part due to the allotment of land and separation of extended generations living in close proximity, the father became the primary figure in the lives of Cherokee male youth. As indicated in the cultural identity of both Gil and John, some of the traditional roles are evident while some less traditional traits have also emerged.

Both Gil and John are from families who have a strong male figure as father, one who worked multiple jobs to support a wife and many children, one who valued language and Westernized education. These role models conveyed the importance of family and of life-ways. They demonstrated the value of appreciating nature and all that it provides, from foods to medicines and sources for cooking and heating. They conveyed the ethics of doing for others and treating others well, even when those others were unlike themselves.

From these traditional underpinnings, Gil and John were able to not only survive in the duality of their cultural lifeways and the Westernized educational system; they excelled in ways unrelated to academics. They discovered that competitive athletic skills

provided a bridge from their own culture to that of the mainstream society, the majority of students with whom they attended school. This bridge enabled them to develop relationships outside of their own cultures, relationships that were critical to not only their academic survival but, more importantly, to their identity as athletes who were accepted and respected among their peers. Through the form of socialization lived through athletic experiences, they learned much of the culture of the mainstream society while relying upon their own solid cultural foundations. As a form of socialization, transculturation “is the process of learning a new culture. Thus, to be successful in mainstream educational settings, many American Indian students are required to learn and understand its cultural context and meanings” (Huffman, 2010, p. 175).

Outside of athletics, both Gil and John were able to develop relationships with non-Indians. John had learned from his father that not all Whites are bad, the underlying meaning being that many Whites were bad, likely more in a historical context than a personal one. Despite his having been raised with this mindset of inherent negativity toward Whites, John was able to communicate with and establish relationships with those outside his own ethnicity and culture while still maintaining his values. Transculturation posits that “the reflective and rational individual is capable of retaining intact Native cultural ways, views, and beliefs while learning the ways, views, and beliefs of a new culture” (Huffman, 2010, p. 176). While Gil was not overtly taught negativity toward White people, he was not in a position to socialize with them until he was a young teenager attending a public school for the first time. Through his middle school and high

school years, he earned their respect and appreciation, even being elected to hall of fame positions such as “Best All Around” by his peers.

In addition to athletic skills and having established relationships with non-Indians, Gil and John each developed a sense of humor that has carried them through school and through society as adults. Their ability to see the humorous perspective in many situations may have served as a traverse between two distinct cultures. For John it had a much deeper meaning, relating to survival in an unfamiliar place away from his family, and in promoting healing with other boys who were in the same situation.

While jocularities is certainly common among Cherokee people, it often remains within the group. Robert Conley (2008) noted that White people’s perception is that “Indians had no sense of humor” (p. 103). Humorous remarks and even jokes told by Indians were not understood by White people. Conley explains that “Indian humor is different in kind from white people’s humor.” Gil and John’s ability to use humor not only within their cultural group but also outside of it likely contributed to their relationships with other students while in school, and within wider society as adults. In doing so they lost nothing of their own identity but rather learned to better understand the cultural ways of the mainstream society, as an international traveler might do, thus resulting in “a more culturally proficient individual” (Huffman, 2010, p. 177).

Females

Traditional roles of females within Cherokee culture have changed less markedly than have those of males. Shirley and Pauline were both raised by mothers and extended

female family members. They and other young relatives (siblings for Shirley, close cousins for Pauline) learned the traditional values and lifeways of their generation. These traditions included value for nature, care for others, and hard work, among others. Possibly less overtly than these, they may have learned to have an inherent distrust for White people, as evidenced by their mothers' lack of using English and their vocally questioning, in Cherokee, the reasons when White people came to their homes.

In addition to the more evident values, they learned other values as children that affected their educational experiences. They learned that females were to be quiet, to always get along with other people, and to not stand out. These character traits may have been impediments to surmount rather than tools for success in mainstream society. Shirley and Pauline did not characteristically stand up for themselves. They did not readily develop friendships with non-Cherokee students. They did not question what their options were beyond high school. While Pauline had a firm concept of becoming a teacher, she was not aware that college was required until she had almost completed high school. Shirley had not planned to become a teacher and willingly accepted a scholarship to a university across the country, having little understanding of exactly what was involved in a college educational experience. In efforts to "just get along" with others, her responses to questions were often, "Okay," or "I guess." Neither referenced close friends who were White.

Although these cultural attributes may not have directly contributed to academic success in mainstream high school settings, they did provide foundations for success and

purpose beyond high school. Neither woman made strong academic grades at the high school level. This in itself can be viewed as a Native perception of educational success, according to Pidgeon (p. 186). By not excelling academically, the women may have resisted the “‘cultural nuances’ (i.e., the knowledge base and evaluation standards typical of mainstream education)” as “a form of cultural achievement for Native students.”

Pauline became one of few Cherokee women to earn not only a bachelor’s degree but also a master’s degree, returning to work with primarily Cherokee children. Her cultural foundation contributed directly to her determining her purpose as a young girl and following through with her focus throughout her adult life. Shirley did not develop this focus as a student in public school but did as an adult with children of her own. From her own identity, values, and experiences, she worked for decades to improve the lives of others in her community. From a transculturation perspective, both women demonstrate that “a strong ethnic identity operated to sustain most of these individuals through academia and supplied them with not only a sense of identity but also a purpose” (Huffman, 2010, p. 187), their purpose being to perpetuate their heritage language and culture.

Influence of Educators – Learning in an Imposed Situation

In an era when a concerted attempt was still in progress to remove the “Indianness” from Indian children via imposed language and attempted acculturation in schools, school teachers were under no obligation to facilitate mainstream language and learning for Native children in a caring way. All of the participants experienced teachers

who were not considerate of their special needs. Pauline's teacher for her first four years of school was, in Pauline's view, likely a good teacher, but she did not understand the needs of her few Cherokee students. These teachers whose expectations of their Cherokee students did not fit their reality made indelible impressions on the participants.

Even under institutional constraints, however, some teachers were committed to educating children and demonstrated care and benevolence and desire for the children to learn in the ways that were effective for them, in a non-imposing manner. These were the teachers who made lasting impacts on children, impacts still recalled six decades later. From a lens of hermeneutic phenomenology, humans construct meaning in unique ways, depending on context, allowing for engagement with their world (Crotty, 1998). The participants have in both conscious and less conscious ways constructed meaning from the experiences with educators who cared about them as children, who treated them as important people worthy of their time and expertise. For them the meaning of these compassionate teachers was the impact that they had on learning English.

For Pauline, her move from the "little room" to the "big room" was a positive one not only for the competitive sports aspect; possibly of more relevance was the change in teacher. No strong connection appeared to have been made between her and her early-grades teacher, who seemed to have demonstrated little understanding of the needs of students who were in a foreign culture. It was Mr. Means, her teacher in the upper grades (fifth through eighth), who would realize that she did not understand concepts and would explain in a manner that helped her become more engaged in her own learning. By the

time she had Mr. Means as a teacher, she had already made the determination that she would become a teacher to help students who were like her. Through him she realized that caring teachers who were committed to educating children did exist.

As a young child beginning school, John recollects mainly negative experiences, with teachers who used physical means to attempt to communicate with children who understood no English. When his family moved to a ranch and he began attending a one-room schoolhouse, school became a much more pleasant experience for him and his sisters, the first “Indian kids” that their teacher, Mrs. McWilliams, had taught. Mrs. McWilliams was a devoted and considerate educator who worked one-on-one with the children to ensure that they understood what she was trying to convey. John credits her with his learning more English than in any other situation or school.

Of the four participants, Shirley and Gil were in the most effective environment for learning English. Their teachers, Mr. and Mrs. Lee, were both experienced educators accustomed to working with Native children. All of the children at the school were Cherokee, and almost all spoke Cherokee as a first language. Shirley referred to the Lees numerous times as “kind and patient,” the kind of teacher that she aspired to be once she determined that teaching was where her path would take her. The children felt accepted and supported in their language learning and academic learning. The Lees demonstrated a strong understanding of and appreciation for the community, which may have been unusual for that time and situation of teaching all Cherokee children. They met each child and family’s needs with sensitivity and empathy.

While Shirley's perceptions of elementary school were more positive than were Gil's, they both gained some confidence in their English abilities; however, in the transition to the public school for middle school grades, they would lose much of this confidence. Regardless, the Lees were positive role models who created a positive learning environment for the children who would likely otherwise have been marginalized had they begun attending a public school in early grades.

By creating affirmative atmospheres that were conducive to learning difficult concepts and skills, these educators played more significant roles in the lives of children than they likely realized. In today's society knowing a second and third language is seen as beneficial yet is voluntary; in the constraints of schools both public and run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, language learning was imposed on children, many of whom, including Pauline, had never been exposed to English or any other language other than Cherokee. These teachers who exemplified care and patience helped make what were traumatic experiences for many Indian children into much less intimidating ones. According to Huffman's description of the transculturation hypothesis, American Indian ethnic identity serves as an emotional anchor in acquiring the necessary tools to interact and achieve (2010, p. 200). These considerate and effective teachers encouraged their students to acquire these tools and ultimately achieve academic success despite obstacles that many of their peers could not surmount.

CHAPTER IX

IMPLICATIONS

“We often say that the past illuminates the present, but it works the other way too. Present events can remind us of a story from the past, thus bringing into focus both times” (Schneider, 2002, p. 74).

Throughout this study, from determining participants to analyzing data, the concept of honoring the participants’ voices and experiences has been at the forefront of my writing. The recorded interviews and transcripts will be available indefinitely for anyone who may wish to access them through Spotlighting Oklahoma: An Oral History Project of the OSU Library; the analyses of their stories will be available only through this writing. Therefore, it is important that, even though the participants may not entirely agree with my own perceptions of their stories, they still understand the intent is to preserve and honor their contributions.

In collecting these experiences and stories, I have been affected as well as have the participants. This process has been a personal journey as well as an academic and

cultural one for me. Through examining and attempting to better understand the phenomena of their experiences in learning English and the relevance that Cherokee as a first language has had on participants' school experiences and life choices, I have also examined my own beliefs and cultural values. I explore these later in the chapter.

In this final chapter, I address the research question holistically and discuss implications for educators, for policy makers, and for those working with Indigenous language revitalization and language diversity. I explore limitations of the study and potential future research. Finally, I reflect on how this study has affected me as the researcher.

Coming Full Circle

The overarching research question is this: How do first-language Cherokee speakers perceive their lack of English language skills to have affected their school experiences and higher education or career choices? To answer this question, I draw first from the individual participants' perceptions of elementary school, middle school, and high school years. All of the participants enjoyed some but not all of these years. All of the participants successfully completed high school at a time when many Cherokee students in public school did not. All of the participants struggled with language use. Yet their stories are different, as are their perceptions of learning to speak, read, and write English. All of the participants have come full circle in their journeys of language.

Gil, as a child raised from a young age by an aunt and uncle, enjoyed elements of elementary school but missed school frequently. He felt that learning English was difficult, yet the environment he was in was somewhat homogenous as the children were all Cherokees, learning to speak a new language, with few exceptions of students who

already spoke English. He struggled with learning English and felt that his speaking and comprehension skills were not adequate for his transition to public school as a seventh grader. His perception is that the teachers in the public school thought that the Cherokee students were developmentally delayed due to their struggles with English; students sometimes laughed at the Cherokee speakers' inability to speak English well. He did not realize the depth of his lack of proficiency until he was thrust in the midst of students who were first-language English speakers; only one of the handful of his peers who made the transition with him completed the seventh grade. Gil attributed language and cultural shock as the primary factors in the attrition of Cherokee children.

Despite his lack of what he felt was fluency or proficiency in English, he flourished in middle school and high school, making friends and gaining popularity among Cherokee and non-Cherokee students. The letter grades he earned in course work were mostly average, reflecting his struggles with language arts and his strong comprehension of math. Although he felt somewhat hindered by his struggle with academic language, he enjoyed the socialization that he experienced in school and rarely missed any days. He credits a strong sense of cultural identity with his ability to fit in and be successful in sports and in social relationships.

This same cultural foundation, interwoven with language, enabled him to make the dramatic transition from high school in his community to college outside of his community. From an elementary experience as one of many who were like him, he was able to overcome what most other Cherokee students were not able to and completed not only an undergraduate degree but also a graduate degree. The growth he had experienced from language learning was essential to his identity and self-confidence, allowing him to

make friends and fit in with others from both traditional and mainstream societies. This is reflected in his teaching his oldest child to speak Cherokee when she was a child, although she lost her skills when she started school.

For Gil the circle of language didn't begin immediately after college. He became an elementary teacher after receiving a scholarship for teaching during his junior year. In the public school where he taught, he worked with very few Cherokee students. The circle began to become more complete years later when he worked as administrator for the Cherokee immersion school. His administrative decisions directly impacted the children in the school, a school established with the sole purpose of revitalizing the language through children, a school whose essence was antithetical to the schools which for decades had taken away Native languages and culture in an effort to assimilate Native children to mainstream society. Today, as a college instructor in the language, he continues to directly impact Cherokee language learning, imparting his knowledge and experience to younger generations of learners who choose to learn what for some is their heritage language. With this shift in teaching his heritage language to students who willingly learn, his circle has completed.

Shirley's language-related experiences were different from her older brother Gil's. Whereas Gil struggled with English in elementary school, Shirley did not consider her learning to be a struggle. She was part of a group of girls who were proud of their language learning and were competitive with each other. Her perception was that the language was not difficult to learn and that she and her friends started speaking English quickly. She considers her elementary school years to be positive and engaging, with teachers who were patient and kind.

When Snowbird Gap Day School closed, Shirley had to go to public school as a sixth grader. Like Gil's class, not all of the students from Shirley's elementary class made the transition and succeeded in public school. Her dread and dislike of speaking in front of her class, likely a cultural trait ingrained in females, made what had been an enjoyable experience at school into one that she no longer enjoyed. Her teachers did not seem to respect her background and cultural attributes. Shirley's academic performance was not strong. Always a quiet, shy girl, she became even more so in public school. The learning of English that she had happily taken part in as an elementary student was no longer fun since she was part of a mainstream system, away from the support system of her peers and teachers at the school for Cherokees. Unlike Gil, she did not associate with non-Cherokee students outside of team sports, which required her to communicate with her teammates.

Beyond high school Shirley attended colleges at different times, including after her children were grown. She completed many hours but did not finish. This could be a direct result of her negative school experiences in public school. Her work for many years involved doing work for her community, including procuring funds to develop a child-care program. Although she did not earn a bachelor's degree, she did become a teacher of the Cherokee language in different venues. She received funding to teach high school language classes at Robbinsville and has taught many community classes. She also established a summer program for children to learn Cherokee language skills and has worked many years with a group to develop a Cherokee language immersion center for young children. Her mother identified her traits and actions as a teacher when she was an elementary child. Shirley had no intention of ever becoming a teacher, but her mother's

intuition proved correct. Her struggles with language may be reflected in her not teaching her own children to speak Cherokee as a first language yet working with language revitalization most of her adult life.

For Shirley the circle of language was not a consideration until she was raising her children. Concerned about how Cherokee would seemingly not benefit them, she chose not to teach them to speak when they were children. During her years in the workforce, working to better her community, she still was not concerned with how language had affected her and whether it would be perpetuated. Once the idea of sharing her gift of language was brought to her attention, her circle began to complete. She devoted herself to helping others learn it. It was during this time that she began to understand the relevance of the language on her life and how it had impacted her, realizing that as a grandmother her purpose was to develop opportunities such as schools, camps, and classes, for language perpetuation. Having impacted hundreds of people through her gift, her circle of language is complete.

Pauline's experiences learning English in school were what she perceived as just something that she had to do. She found learning English to be frustrating and a struggle, directly related to her difficulties in school and in her behavior in that she and other Cherokee-speaking students often got in trouble for not using English. As one of only three Cherokee-speaking students in her grade level, among a total of eight students in her grade, and seven Cherokee speakers in the entire first through eighth grade school, she did have older students in the "little room" where students spent their first four grades before moving to the "big room" in fifth grade. Pauline recalls knowing her colors in Cherokee but being told that her responses were wrong because she could not name them

in English. With so few Cherokee speaking students, it is understandable that the teachers did not have a good understanding of methods and strategies that could help them be academically successful. Yet it was here in the early grades that Pauline determined to become a teacher so that other Indian children would not have to endure the language and cultural challenges that she and her cousins had to, a concept that empowered her to persevere all the way through earning a master's degree in education. Her experiences were in sharp contrast with Shirley's, whose teacher was caring and skilled in working with Cherokee students. Pauline did not develop the love for school that Shirley did in her early years. While Pauline's drive to become an educator was in defiance or opposition to the treatment she received, Shirley's determination in her later years was always with the thought of being the kind of teacher that she had had in elementary school. Pauline's negative experiences would seem to have been more intensive as a motivator.

When Pauline transitioned to high school at the largest school in the county, there were several other students who were Cherokee speakers, although they were still the minority. She remembers being self-conscious, a concept that followed her all the way through school. It was here in high school that she first saw two Indian teachers who were Cherokee but were not Cherokee speakers. She felt that they did not understand the struggles that children who had been raised traditionally and were speakers experienced in school. She refers to a "fear" for Indian students to go into the classroom, a fear that teachers did not lessen.

Academically she performed well, finding math easy but reading and English very difficult. Pauline believes she was able to converse in English at some point around the

third grade, yet felt like she never truly mastered the academic language necessary for success in school. Even working on her master's degree and then later working to develop curriculum materials in the Cherokee language, she still felt insecure with her English skills.

In Pauline's experiences the Cherokee students socialized with each other while the non-Cherokee students stuck to themselves. This continued through high school. Because of her limited contact with non-Cherokees, other students were not helpful to her in her learning of English. While she was not discouraged in elementary school from speaking Cherokee, she believes that the atmosphere of the school incited her to further her own education, even though she had not been provided with any information on how to do so. School for her was not entirely negative, although it was not particularly enjoyable. She felt that as the students' language skills progressed, they were performing near the same levels as others in their class, yet it was difficult to make that determination due to the difference in communication and comprehension. She did not gain self-confidence until she applied for a teaching position; it was in her skills learned in college that she felt comfortable. This was likely in part due to her fluency in both languages, also demonstrated in her teaching her daughter to speak some Cherokee so that she could communicate with her maternal grandmother.

The language circle for Pauline was one of determination and intentionality. Having decided what her path would be as a young girl, Pauline persevered and became an elementary teacher. As a teacher, she established a learning climate for her students that would help them be comfortable in their culture, both traditional and mainstream. She impacted a generation of students in ways that she will likely never completely

understand. She fully realizes that her own early lack of knowledge of the English language, or of even the existence of the English language, was directly responsible for her career calling. Unlike Shirley, she determined her path very early in her life, but like Shirley, she has impacted many, and her language has come full circle.

John's school and language struggles were different from the other participants in that he attended both a one-room school and a larger elementary before being sent to a boarding school for Indian children, completing his education at the largest high school in his county. His first public elementary school, which he attended for a short while, was his first experience with an indoor bathroom and with English. Although some other children there spoke Cherokee, he mostly associated with his two sisters due to their lack of English skills. He recalls the teachers at this school would get frustrated with his and other students' lack of English and would attempt to communicate with him physically, such as by pulling his hair or jerking his ear. His memories from this school he moved to early in elementary school are much more pleasant. The teacher, Mrs. McWilliams, and her husband seemed pleased to have John and his siblings in school there. She was patient with John and his siblings and referred to them as "my Indian kids." Her husband took a special interest in John and encouraged him to become a life-long reader. In John's perception, he learned most of his English skills while at this school, which he attended until sixth grade. Like Pauline, he considered English just something that he had to learn. He recalls that he learned English pretty quickly because he had to. However, his English learning process was different from Pauline's in that his teacher was exceptional and cared about her non-mainstream students, while Pauline's teacher may have perceived that they were an inconvenience.

When he and several other Cherokee students were sent to a mission-run boarding school as sixth graders, John recalls that he and other students were able to speak some English. It was a relief, however, to be among other children, even though they didn't know each other, with whom he could speak the language, which they were not disallowed from doing. Even though his social language skills in English had come a long way, he struggled significantly with academic language. The teachers would get frustrated with him because he had little comprehension of what they were teaching. While he felt like he was working hard, he remembers that the teachers would just assign him a low grade rather than trying to ensure his understanding. He would get frustrated, contributing to his dislike of school.

After running away from the mission school in his sophomore year, he attended the local public high school, from which he graduated. His struggles with language and academics continued through high school. He recalls that the teachers would tell him he was lazy and didn't want to learn, so his frustrations continued.

Due to his irritation with formal education and schools, John did not pursue higher education until much later, after he was married to his second wife. His life after high school was interrupted for two years when he was drafted into the army. During this time, he spoke Cherokee as much as possible, such as when he would come across others who spoke Cherokee, and even in conversations to himself, aloud. His father's words to never let his language be taken away were always with him, and he was resolute in not losing it.

Following his stint in the army, John became an electric lineman for many years, also continuing to work with horses. The values, skills, lifeways, and language he learned

from his family remained a steadfast part of his identity. Even today when he reads in English, he sometimes mentally translates passages to Cherokee to better comprehend them. Although none of his progeny are fluent Cherokee speakers, he still speaks at every opportunity, refusing to lose his language that is ingrained in him.

For John the circle of language has remained partly open. He perceives that his lack of English skills directly impacted his school experiences, causing him to struggle in ways that he believes he would not have had he been a first-language English speaker. Yet his choices beyond high school relate directly to his culture, which cannot be separated from language; therefore, his heritage language was what contributed to his decision to be like his father and work outside and with his hands, knowing that he would have been unhappy with a job that required being inside. Even though his children and grandchildren do not speak his heritage language, he is working to perpetuate it in a different way. When John sees progress being made on his language translation project, he will better understand the impact that he has and that he will have for years to come, thus completing his language circle.

To return to the question of how the four first-language Cherokee speakers perceive their lack of English language skills as having affected their school experiences and higher education or career choices: The impact for each was significant yet different. None were overall academically strong performers in elementary or secondary school. All experienced frustrations and a sense of not belonging at various times. All experienced some positive perceptions of school, such as elementary for John and Shirley and secondary for Gil and Pauline. All experienced some positive perceptions and some negative perceptions of teachers. All felt that they faced challenges unlike their

mainstream peers, challenges that affected them academically, socially, and culturally. All persisted with finishing school despite many other students who were like them not finishing. All maintained their traditional ways of thinking and speaking, demonstrating the transculturation concept of learning a new culture while losing none of their own.

As learners of a language that was imposed on them, a language that their mothers did not speak and that their fathers did not speak fluently, the participants were unwittingly placed in environments in which their heritage language was adversarial to their academic learning. Although none of them were forbidden from speaking their language at any level of schooling, the fact that they were in environments with a purpose of making their language and culture insignificant to them is relevant. Mainstream language and culture were conveyed, both covertly and overtly, as being necessary for their future success. The teachers who went beyond what was required of them, who demonstrated compassion and empathy, made the difference for the participants at the earliest levels, with the exception of Pauline. She did not experience a compassionate teacher until her upper elementary grades, by which time her career choice had already been made. Of the four participants, she has been the most confident in her English skills as an adult, possibly a result of having a teacher in the early grades who was not compassionate to her language struggles and of her responding to her challenges in a resistant way. While all reacted to their situations by doing what they had to do with varying degrees of enjoyment, Pauline consciously resisted her early negative experiences and related to her more positive ones in a manner that led to success: creating positive learning environments for students who were like her.

The choices the participants made beyond high school were pertinent to their perceptions of English. For Pauline in particular, their decisions were consciously related to their experiences with language. All four have in some way come full circle to perpetuate their heritage language both with family members and in their larger communities. All four, particularly Shirley and Gil, are working to spread their language to generations that didn't have opportunity to learn from their families. They are the facilitators of change that will save an endangered language from extinction. While all have been successful in learning mainstream culture and language, they have remained strong and held steadfast to the beliefs and language of their people.

Implications of the Study

One of the primary implications of this movement is that children who are marginalized due to a lack of proficiency in the mainstream language, imposed via institutions of public and BIA-run schools, should have their needs met with care, consideration, and understanding. The experiences of the four participants demonstrate that they were able to learn and perform adequately in school both when the teachers made attempts to meet their needs and ensure that they understood concepts as well as when these attempts were not made. However, the frustrations with teachers who were not considerate of their needs affected the participants deeply, in John's situations causing him to not want to remain in school and to run away from one, in Pauline's setting her on a self-determined course to prevent other children from having to experience teachers like this. Concern and empathy may be more critical traits to the academic progress of marginalized children than pedagogical skill. Children should be

made to feel that they are appreciated and accepted especially when they do not conform to mainstream concepts of standards.

Directly in relationship to this is the necessity of educators who demonstrate cultural competence, educators who understand that children from non-mainstream cultures, particularly from non-Westernized cultures, have different values and perspectives. Educators play a significant role in the lives of children and must have an intercultural sensitivity to difference. For some teachers this is an innate sense of desire to help all children, identifying those most in need and working to find strategies to meet their diverse needs. These teachers effectively create positive learning environments and scaffold content for the learners, building on their understandings. For other teachers, these children may be considered an annoyance, too time consuming, and are therefore much less likely to get the attention that they need and deserve. It may be easier to brush them aside and merely tolerate them rather than making sincere attempts to understand and help them. While no teacher can be well versed in every culture, teachers can consciously work toward understanding that they do not always appreciate why some children behave in ways that may seem unusual to them. Rather than assuming a child is being disrespectful, they could instead look for deeper meaning, such as cultural traits that may include less common behaviors with authority figures or an intense discomfort with speaking out in class.

There are implications for school counselors, administrators, and other school personnel as well. It cannot be expected that children and families from minority groups understand all of the expectations of them and all of the resources that may be available to assist them. Families of Native American children are the least likely to ask for

assistance or for clarification of concepts they do not understand, making cultural competence of non-teaching personnel important. Counselors and teachers at the secondary level should be charged with providing available resources relevant to higher education and providing training to Native families in a manner that elicits clear understanding with open channels of communication allowing for questioning via whatever method makes the families most comfortable. Additionally, school administrators have an obligation to provide supported, ongoing professional development in multicultural strategies and support systems. Teachers who receive training in strategies for working with particular minority students and who are supported in their teaching are more likely to be sensitive to the needs of the students.

To better prepare educators including classroom teachers, counselors, and administrators, teacher education programs should include courses or lessons specific to teaching Native children. These could be woven into topics relevant to teaching English language learners and working with diverse student populations. While universities programs for pre-service teachers do have requirements for preparing educators to work with diverse populations, not all focus on the cultures and needs of Native children. Encouraging pre-service educators to better understand and appreciate non-mainstream cultures will benefit all of the students in their care. Additionally, having some knowledge of linguistic aspects of relevant languages will better enable them to help Native children make connections to concepts in curriculum that are somewhat standardized. Farther-reaching implications related to the specific needs of educators in rural areas as opposed to urban schools should be considered, as all of the participants attended both small and larger schools that were significant in size within their counties

yet small in comparison to many urban schools. Resources in these schools are often more limited than in more affluent schools, so preparation for teachers is critical to student success.

Other than schools, groups who are working with maintenance and revitalization of heritage languages may find significance in this study. Cherokee, considered one of the most highly complex languages in the world, has been identified as an endangered language. Tribal agencies through the Cherokee Nation and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians have established programs to maintain and revitalize the language; however, these programs are not designed to elicit fluency among the participants. The four study participants as well as many other fluent speakers believe that fluency can only be developed when the language is learned in the home as a first language. Groups who sincerely desire to elicit fluency among young speakers may consider the stories of these participants as relevant. They offer unique perspectives and perceptions of the intricacies and challenges of learning a highly complex language.

Finally, there are implications for legislators and policy makers. While the era of boarding schools and other schools with the intention of removing Indigenous language and cultural traits from children has ended, more effective policy should be developed to address the critical condition of many Indigenous languages. The pendulum swing of the safety zone, as referenced by Lomawaima and McCarty (2006), has turned, and policy should reflect the shift from viewing heritage languages as an obstacle to learning, toward viewing them as assets that create citizens who are global thinkers. One step toward accomplishing this would be to eliminate the English Only initiatives that have become prevalent in many states in recent years, initiatives that have been developed to

disempower those who speak heritage languages rather than the mainstream language. A respect for other cultures should replace the fear and dislike that has also become pervasive in today's society. Legislation that effects consideration and appreciation of other cultures and languages would go far toward making our society more progressive and critically thinking.

For this circle of Cherokee language to continue and strengthen this upswing toward true revitalization of what was once a robust language, the experiences of our elders must be shared and examined. It is only through their stories and perceptions of their experiences from which we can determine teaching strategies that may be culturally significant. It is through their stories that the needs of children raised in traditional Cherokee households can be identified and met. It is through these stories that experiences taking place many decades ago can be remembered and perpetuated.

Limitations

What could be considered a limitation is the small number of study participants. Given that there are roughly a few thousand Cherokee today who self-identify as first-language speakers, the study size of four does seem to capture some of the experiences of a very small sample. In addition, the oral history methodology utilized for collecting data could be considered a limitation; additional data collection such as conducting focus groups and interviewing family members could contribute to a fuller picture of experiences. Finally, the limit to the Cherokee language community rather than expanding to other Native tribal language communities may bear less relevance outside the Cherokee community than if it were broader in scope.

While these elements of the study could be viewed as limitations, they can also be considered strengths of the research. The small number of participants, use of oral history methodology, and limitation to the Cherokee language community all contribute to the relevance of this study of a small yet significant group of people. Since the purpose of this study was not to provide a broad analysis applicable to any marginalized group but to examine and contextualize the perceptions of a particular group of people, the participants' stories and their analyses have contributed to much more in-depth inquiry and description than would have more traditional forms of research, thus adding to the depth of understanding of events that are relevant to many today.

Future Studies

Future research projects stemming from this study could take place in different directions. First, though dramatically less in number, younger generations of first-language Cherokee speakers could be interviewed to determine their perceptions of school experiences taking place at later times than the 1950s and 1960s, and also to consider if there is a connection between these experiences and their post-high school career choices.

Next, although gender was not a primary focus of this study, gendered norms within the group did emerge and could be examined more closely. Also, due to the consistently high rate of Cherokee students who drop out of school after completing elementary (eighth grade), similar to when the participants were in school, an approach to explore these children's perceptions of both their school experiences and their needs could contribute to developing more culturally effective strategies to help them successfully transition to and complete high school.

In addition, while tribally specific research is needed, a similar life story approach to understanding first-language speakers of other Indigenous languages could be utilized to look at commonalities among groups and what their contributions may be. Finally, and arguably most important, studies conducted among siblings from the same families, such as Gil and Shirley's siblings, could shed light on themes such as academic success and post-high school careers choices in relation to language experiences. Gil and Shirley's siblings all graduated high school, and most earned college degrees. This family's accomplishments were quite uncommon in a time when most Cherokee students from their community did not go to school beyond elementary.

Wilson, in his discussion of the need for an Indigenous research paradigm (2008), stated that since about the turn of the twenty-first century, research and researchers have begun to change. Indigenous communities have been brought into the research process, rather than being viewed merely as ethnographic subjects. A catalyst for this change has been the growing number of Indigenous people who focus their studies on their own peoples. To be culturally sensitive to the Indigenous beliefs, values, and customs, an Indigenous research paradigm that considers worldview, lifeways, and ethical beliefs would be an appropriate one for studies stemming from this project. While Huffman's theory of transculturation is relevant to educational experiences, broader paradigms reflecting lifeways and heritage are needed.

Impact on Researcher

Throughout prolonged interactions with my four study participants, I would venture to argue that not only have they been affected as they have examined their own recollections and perceptions, but I as a researcher have also undergone change. Listening

to, reflecting on, and closely examining the participants' stories has affected me as a person and more specifically as a friend, as a researcher, as a Native, and as an educator. Since I began this project longer ago than I care to admit, I find myself often reflecting on ways that I may be overtly or inadvertently affecting those around me, particularly my university students. My participation in this study has impacted me personally as well as academically and culturally.

As a researcher, I have found myself viewing everyday experiences from a different perspective than I did prior to beginning this study. I find myself questioning what is the essence of various experiences for different people, especially so now that I deal with chronic pain. I often consider those whose physical pain levels are higher than mine and wonder how this may shape their perceptions. I consider how my own study might have been different had I completed it more quickly, which would have been likely had I not had surgeries and been dealing with pain for three years.

When I read of or discuss minority students who have excelled in particular areas, especially academic areas, I wonder if they have experienced success in spite of their culture or because of their culture. If they excel at sports or the arts, I consider what role this might have played in their school experiences, if this is a primary reason why they were able to graduate high school. The researcher in me often considers the impact that early school experiences likely had on students from non-Westernized cultures and how much of their culture they have maintained.

These questions especially strike me in my role as an educator. I often reflect on students I have had who were from different cultures, including from Native American tribes, Middle Eastern countries, and South and Central American countries. Reflecting

on the perceptions that my study participants had of their own school experiences, I consider my long-time role as a teacher and question myself: Did I do all that I could to help those students who were marginalized and most in need? Were my intentions and efforts always directed toward helping them to learn the concepts and skills that would most benefit them? What could I have done differently? Was I the kind of teacher these children needed when they needed me to be? These questions continue to haunt me and have made me an even more conscientious educator of pre-service teachers than I might have been prior to conducting this study.

I have been impacted in a different way as a Native person. Having had many informal discussions with Cherokee speakers about their language-related experiences, I felt rather well prepared to undertake this project. What I had not considered was the amount of personal reflection about my own culture and the experiences of some of my family members that I would undergo. I have dealt with many emotions throughout this research project: frustration, melancholy, empathy, joy, amusement, appreciation, disheartenment, and a deep sense of anger. Some of these have been a result of the experiences of my participants, while others are more personally related to what some of my own family members experienced. The sense of anger is one that has always simmered below the surface but became stronger and more pronounced as I wrote of the history of the treatment of Native American children, treatment that went on for many decades, even centuries. We still see the effects of this treatment today, particularly on reservations, where Native peoples were assigned to the land that mainstream society did not want. We still see these effects in the conditions of schools and in the lack of opportunity that these children have both in their communities and often even outside of

their communities, in the lack of appropriate health care, in high rates of incarceration, in disregard for their historic land.

Hearing the stories of my participants did somewhat assuage my anger at how so many tens of thousands of Native children had been treated in schools. Understanding that the participants struggled in different ways yet were not physically punished for speaking their language has helped me better appreciate the importance of hearing the story of the non-elites, the everyday people.

I have experienced frustration throughout the process as well. My sense of frustration at not being a Cherokee speaker has been heightened in my communications with the participants. Knowing that my paternal grandfather was a strong Cherokee speaker, and my maternal grandfather was a fluent Creek speaker, and knowing that I speak neither language, has long been frustrating to me. From my earliest years I remember wanting to learn to speak Creek, yet my grandfather did not speak a word of Creek in my presence, even when I asked. Having a much better understanding of the conditions of the boarding school that he attended, I have, as an adult, a great deal of empathy for his refusal to speak his language or speak of his experiences at the school.

An even greater sense of frustration has emerged over the past decade. My awareness of the withering of the Cherokee language has intensified, yet I empathize with the speakers, including those in my family, who thought they might be harming their own children by teaching them the language. At various times, this was likely true. With later generations this fear of causing harm transitioned more to a feeling of the language having no purpose. Sadly, by the time I was born, the last grandchild in my family, no fluent Cherokee speakers were left. I learned after my father had passed that he did speak,

although he wasn't fluent, and I resent that he did not speak around me or teach me. I will never understand why.

Despite the negative emotions that I have experienced throughout this process, my overall perception is that it has been a positive experience in so many ways. I have laughed and made closer connections with my participants, my friends. Three of them expressed that they had enjoyed our interviews and were appreciative of their stories being made available to anyone who will want to listen to them in the future. One did not express this in speaking, but her mannerism conveyed clearly that she had enjoyed our discussions. I am appreciative of their letting me into their perceptions, some of which were painful. I have become a more reflective person, especially in the areas of culture and education. My perceptions of my own identity, both cultural and non-cultural, have been reaffirmed through this process and reflection. My experiences with this project have made me an even more empathetic and hopefully more effective educator, one who puts the needs of students above everything else.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Oral Language Interview Questions

These questions will be adapted to the individual situations and the interview process.

1. Tell me about yourself and your family.
2. When did you learn to speak English?
3. How would you describe your English language skills when you started elementary school?
4. Tell me about some of your earliest school experiences.
5. Do you feel that you were treated differently from other students because you didn't speak English?
6. How did your teachers try to help you with language and with lessons?
7. How would you describe your high school experiences?
8. How would you describe your education beyond high school?
9. How did your early school experiences affect your career/higher education choices?
10. What else would you like to share?

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