



Tribal education : a case study of Blackfeet elders
by Dorothy M Still Smoking

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
Montana State University
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Abstract:

A major concern exists in tribal communities for the preservation of the native language and culture. For many generations, tribal people have relied on the traditional educational system to support their future. Through this educational process, the family role of transmitting tribal knowledge has been severely weakened as formal educational institutions do not transmit Blackfeet knowledge, language, or cultural elements as part of their learning process.

Since the public schools are not supporting the cultural and language needs of the tribe, the responsibility rests on community programs to provide alternative opportunities of tribal holistic learning for tribal ways.

The viewpoint of the elders is the link to tribal knowing. Educational institutions have neglected to teach Blackfeet cultural elements, and the views of the elders have not been incorporated into these systems. Thus, this traditional knowing is excluded from the current educational system and is in danger of being lost to the tribe.

The purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions of selected Blackfeet elders (a) concerning what constitutes the traditional Blackfeet knowledge base and (b) concerning how they believe this knowledge base should be passed on through the various formal and informal institutions that exist in the Blackfeet community.

Following the model of the Rowland study with the Northern Cheyenne, 20 elders were interviewed. The interviews were conducted in Blackfeet in order to preserve the rich context of the language.

Findings were in the areas of (a) Blackfeet ways of life, (b) family relationships, (c) importance of Blackfeet names, (d) significance of Blackfeet ceremonies, (e) importance of respecting and restoring the language, (f) reflections on the formal school experiences of the elders, and (g) the role of the language in transferring Blackfeet knowledge and culture. The role of the family has been weakened as the use of the language has declined. The elders clearly see that the hope for the future for Blackfeet people rests in developing and restoring language usage through the children. Recommendations were made in the areas of restructuring formal educational systems to include language training, continuing to involve community-based programs in language restoration, and involving parents and elders in language implementation programs.

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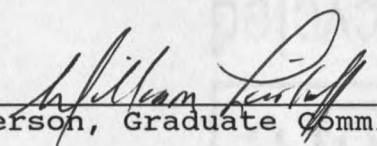
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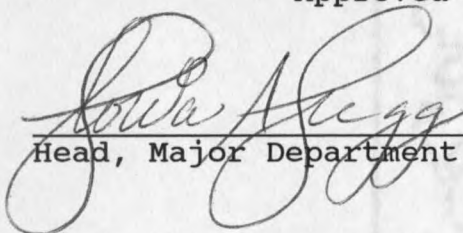


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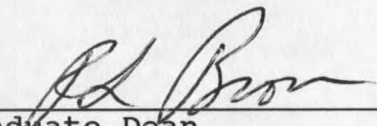


Head, Major Department

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Date

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Graduate Dean

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ABSTRACT

A major concern exists in tribal communities for the preservation of the native language and culture. For many generations, tribal people have relied on the traditional educational system to support their future. Through this educational process, the family role of transmitting tribal knowledge has been severely weakened as formal educational institutions do not transmit Blackfeet knowledge, language, or cultural elements as part of their learning process. Since the public schools are not supporting the cultural and language needs of the tribe, the responsibility rests on community programs to provide alternative opportunities of tribal holistic learning for tribal ways.

The viewpoint of the elders is the link to tribal knowing. Educational institutions have neglected to teach Blackfeet cultural elements, and the views of the elders have not been incorporated into these systems. Thus, this traditional knowing is excluded from the current educational system and is in danger of being lost to the tribe.

The purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions of selected Blackfeet elders (a) concerning what constitutes the traditional Blackfeet knowledge base and (b) concerning how they believe this knowledge base should be passed on through the various formal and informal institutions that exist in the Blackfeet community. Following the model of the Rowland study with the Northern Cheyenne, 20 elders were interviewed. The interviews were conducted in Blackfeet in order to preserve the rich context of the language.

Findings were in the areas of (a) Blackfeet ways of life, (b) family relationships, (c) importance of Blackfeet names, (d) significance of Blackfeet ceremonies, (e) importance of respecting and restoring the language, (f) reflections on the formal school experiences of the elders, and (g) the role of the language in transferring Blackfeet knowledge and culture. The role of the family has been weakened as the use of the language has declined. The elders clearly see that the hope for the future for Blackfeet people rests in developing and restoring language usage through the children. Recommendations were made in the areas of restructuring formal educational systems to include language training, continuing to involve community-based programs in language restoration, and involving parents and elders in language implementation programs.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Enter this lodge, oh Sun, that we may share your strength.

Our friends are before us.

They have purported great things.

They have undertaken difficult tasks.

Make plain their trails before them.

Bring them health and strength and good fortune.

Keep their minds and hearts toward all people

As straight as this pipe stem:

Their deeds and thoughts as fragrant

As the incense of this sweetgrass:

Give their eyes the vision of the eagle

to see the needs of the people:

Their ears the alertness of the deer

to hear the cries for help and understanding:

and into their hearts the courage of the bear,

to speed to the relief of distress

swift as the flight of the arrow;

Make them strong like the bull buffalo,

That swerves not from its course

But overcomes all obstacles

That stand in its path.

As the smoke of our pipe spirals upward

So rise our thoughts in prayer.

We invite you, oh Sun Spirit,

And all friendly spirits

To enter this Medicine Lodge

And smoke with us the Medicine Pipe,

Kimoki, kimoki.

Have pity on us. Have pity on us.

Bird Rattler, 1931

(Prayer recorded and transcribed from religious ceremony held at Bird Rattler's residence on Cut Bank Creek, 1931.)

The above message was translated from a prayer of Bird Rattler, a Blackfeet medicine pipeman for his people. The

main element of the prayer is a clear invitation to members of the tribe to investigate means to assist the tribe's survival since "the journey of the tribe will rest upon the shoulders and dreams of its children, and those adults who choose to share with them, and all people, the powers gifted to the tribe eons ago" (Kipp & Still Smoking, 1994).

In a collection of presentations entitled "Stabilizing Indigenous Languages" from Northern Arizona University's Center for Excellence in Education Monograph Series, a discussion of native language preservation, restoration, and research was made by professionals in the fields of linguistics, Indian education, and anthropology. One professor from the University of Alaska in Anchorage stated his concern about tribal languages:

Families must retrieve their rightful position as the first teachers of our languages. They must talk our languages every day, everywhere, with everyone, anywhere. But if they are going to relinquish this teaching responsibility to the schools they must be supportive. They must make sure the schools use teaching methods which are oral-based.

All presenters stated that everyone must keep discussing issues surrounding Alaska Native/Native American language preservation efforts. Dr. Richard Little Bear, Northern Cheyenne, stressed regarding to tribal languages that "it is the last and only time that we will have the opportunity to save them."

For many generations, tribal people relied on the "traditional" United States educational system to support

their future as indigenous people. This historical dependency can be traced from colonial times to today, illustrating hundreds of years of the assimilation process. Tribal people accepted this approach to education and have replicated it over the years even when given the choice to develop their own formats. Attempts to move tribal educational formats away from the "traditional" American approach were made through the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 when tribes were given greater control over their educational policies. In 1978, Congress passed the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act allowing Indian communities to charter their own institutions of post-secondary higher education. In the 1990's, an even greater defining of Indian education needs to take place.

Current educational philosophy applied to Indian children is in need of change in order to benefit from recommendations derived from the historical analysis of the reservation school systems' record in educational achievement. The educational record clearly illustrates the long-standing negative consequences of "traditional" American educational formats on Indian children (Rowland, 1994).

In spite of the legislative effort giving tribal communities more control over their educational process, change has been slow and weak. For example, the long-

standing practice of eliminating tribal languages from the educational process continues to devastate and negate "indigenous" attempts to educate tribal people. Too often Indian education formats merely replicate the traditional mainstream public school model. The educational model that is needed to educate Indian children successfully needs further revision and definition. Statistics indicate innovations in the traditional model of education to increase Indian children's achievement rates have been pseudo-treatment because little statistical improvement is noted in the record of public education on reservations (D. R. Kipp, personal interview, 1996).

In a community survey conducted by a Blackfeet Community College bilingual project (BCC, 1984), Blackfeet students expressed shame at being unable to speak the language, and they lamented its disappearance and all the attributes connected to it. This expression of cultural shame among tribal members points back to a time the Blackfeet language was forbidden to be spoken in educational institutions.

Rowland (1994) chronicled support for the notion that education can transmit tribal culture for future generations by incorporating Cheyenne philosophy and beliefs into the present Cheyenne reservation educational system. The study sought to help resolve the dilemma of poor student achievement and cultural conflict facing the Cheyenne people

in their schools. The study explored the perceptions and reactions of Northern Cheyenne elders concerning the educational process and the resulting implications on the Northern Cheyenne reservation educational system.

The Blackfeet were no exception to the arrangement of educational services through government contracts with public and parochial movements (Howard, 1965). Since the first mission schools offered by the Catholic Church and U.S. federal government to recent public school acquisitions with modern educational gadgetry, the puzzle remains to what are positive methods for educating Blackfeet people as opposed to mere theories based on the mindview of the day about Indians and their abilities.

Many theories heavily influenced by biased sociological considerations were used to establish educational formats on Indian people; these techniques were considered practically barbaric in this day and age. For example, the practice of removing Indian children from their homes and sending them to far away boarding schools has ceased. Today, due to the lack of objective history and reflection on what took place in the past, a majority of reservation residents--including the educational cadre--know little about the dynamics of education applied to Blackfeet people. Assumptions about learning based on biased information can have an impact on the treatment of the learners. Further, few university and college curricula researchers are in any better position to

advise due to their own lack of candor and knowledge of the quintessential tribe. (D. R. Kipp, personal interview, 1996).

For example, the speaking of the native language by Indian students has never been socially and educationally accepted by educators and their theories (D. R. Kipp, personal interview, 1996). Instead of a true investigation of the role of language in learning, educators have simply assumed it is a negative factor. Once established, bias become fact. History shows the Blackfeet were no exception to the widespread bias. Maintaining eloquence in two languages is still considered to be linguistic retardation by reservation school educators (D. R. Kipp, personal interview, 1996). Learning a second language while keeping the first is still thought to handicap a child. Nothing is further from the truth, yet the notion persists. Therefore, speaking a tribal language at school was grounds for punishment (Rowland, 1994). In an unfortunate way, this remains true today.

In the past 90 years, most papers written about the learning patterns, abilities, and difficulties of Blackfeet children have presented little factual knowledge. In the same time span the Blackfeet Tribe has suffered more than its share of irrelevant studies with over 250 major studies having been conducted on the reservation. Studies have ranged from elaborate and sophisticated intelligence testing

formats to perfunctory walk-through observations conducted in less than an hour. The spectrum of analyses, recommendations, and predictions derived from these studies have often been biased and incompetent. Nevertheless they have been influential in dictating curricula and learning-teaching practices for Blackfeet people. Without reform, these abuses will undoubtedly persist into the future.

In the 1930's, Douglas Gold came to the Blackfeet Reservation as a young man to be a school teacher and, ultimately, the superintendent of schools. Over the years he has enjoyed a solid reputation as friend and benefactor to the Blackfeet. Most importantly, he was viewed as one of those insightful outsiders who, upon living with the community for a suitable time, had come to know and understand the tribe.

Yet, in spite of the good will of the Blackfeet community towards Gold and his obvious attachment to them, it is ironic, if not illustrative, that he wrote one of the most damaging studies ever done on them (Gold, 1934). Gold so eloquently stated, based on his investigation, nothing less than the notion that the Blackfeet Indians were born less intelligent than White people. Gold based his knowledge of the traits and characteristics of Blackfeet children as exhibited in early Indian schools; writings presented through the Report of the Secretary of the Interior, and executive documents. Gold distributed a

survey which solicited estimates of Blackfeet intelligence by local White people and teachers. These estimates of the intelligence of Blackfeet children contained biased data supporting the premise that intelligence correlated with the amount of Indian blood a child possesses (Gold, 1934).

Blackfeet History

David Thompson, one of the earliest visitors to the Blackfeet Tribe is cited with providing the earliest description of the tribe. "The Piegan, the frontier tribe of the Blackfoot Nation, were on the Plains of the Eagle Hills, near the North Saskatchewan River, in 1730, a distance of over 400 miles east of the Rockies" (Ewers, 1958, p. 8). He referred to the Blackfeet as:

Descendants of the Algonquin linguistic family, distinguished for noble tribes, stalwart warriors, and a high aboriginal development, the Blackfeet constituted a powerful nation: a fierce, proud, haughty tribe. They were one of the great Indian people of the northwest, with thousands of lodges, and holding by force of arms their hunting grounds....They were an intelligent, and when aroused, an extremely warlike people....These red men had rarely known defeat in battle, and considered themselves the aristocracy of the fighting tribes of the whole vast Rocky Mountain country. Their war parties ranged from the Saskatchewan on the north as far south as the Salt Lake, and not a tribe that inhabited that great area but knew and feared the raids of the Blackfeet. (p. 8)

Historians did not write then nor do so now of the intricacies of the native culture, the dynamics of the language patterns, the systems of social order, the learning

order of the patterns of life, the dynamics of family structures, or the sophistication of spirituality and psychological interpretations of life. Yet, it is true that a common philosophical perspective kept tribes together and functional. Spirituality connected to language interpretations gave strength and meaning to life. The Blackfeet had their own distinctive mindview. When it was intact, tribal self-description came from within the tribal bands of the Blackfoot Confederacy.

The Confederacy of the Blackfoot people consists of three main tribes. To the far north in Canada are the "Siksika" or Blackfooted people. Their reserve is located near present day Gleichen, Alberta. Further to the south are the "Kainah", today called the Bloods. The word "Kainah", means Many Chiefs. Their reserve is at present day Cardston, Alberta, and is called the Blood Reserve of Canada. The southernmost contingent of the Confederacy are the North and South Piegan, known in the language as the "Pikuni" or "Pikani". The North Piegans, after the institution of the Canadian/American border, were kept in Canada and are on the reserve on Pincher Creek, Alberta. Their agency town is Brockett, Alberta. The South Piegans are located on their reservation at Browning, Montana. The word "Piegan" is pronounced "Pay-Gan". This pronunciation came about as a result of the early French trappers inability to say "Pikuni" (Ewers, 1958, p. 5).

The policy of colonizing native tribes has taken its toll on the Blackfeet. Treaties were made the law of the land in hopes of "settling down" the tribes "roaming" the plains. Treaties became avenues for abuse by defining and focusing on the land bases of tribes in terms the tribes could not understand. Treaties were interpreted through courts based on English law and embedded in a notion of "ownership" foreign to the Blackfeet philosophy of land stewardship.

An example of this is the Agreement of 1895. In this treaty, the starving Blackfeet people relinquished their mountain range, which is now Glacier National Park, to the federal government for 15 million dollars. Bookkeeping sleight-of-hand meant that little money actually reached the tribe. Included in the transaction was Chief Mountain, a sacred area for the Blackfeet (Ashby, 1985). Of this action, White Calf, a tribal leader, stated:

Chief Mountain is my head. Now my head is cut off. The mountains have been my last refuge. We have been driven here and now we are settle here. From Birch Creek to the boundary is what I now give you. I want the timber because in the future my children will need it. I also want all the grazing land. I would like to have the right to hunt game and fish in the mountains. The first treaty this people made with the Great Father was what was known as the Stevens Treaty. That was the first. That was the time we gave the Judith Country to the Great Father. Afterwards we made another treaty on Badger Creek. We made a good treaty then, but we were blind. (Minutes of 1895 Agreement)

Each treaty contained agreements to "educate" the

Indian people. The Senate documents of 1868 specified how Blackfeet were to be schooled (Gold, 1934).

In order to insure the civilization of the Indians entering into this treaty, the necessity of education is admitted. Especially of such of them as are or may be settled on said agricultural reservations, and they therefore pledge themselves to compel their children, male and female, between the ages of six and sixteen years, to attend school; and it is hereby made the duty of the agent for said Indians to see that this stipulation is strictly complied with. And the United States agrees that for every thirty children between said ages who can be induced or compelled to attend school a house shall be provided, and a teacher competent to teach the elementary branches of an English education all be furnished, who shall reside among the Indians and faithfully discharge his or her duties as a teacher. The provisions of this act to continue for not less than twenty years. (Gold, 1934, p. 17)

The 1840's brought the Jesuit Order, or Black Robes, who introduced Catholic catechist work. English was the spoken word. The Jesuit influence extended into the Blackfeet territory when St. Peter's mission school on the Sun River was opened in 1859. Eventually, the federal government subsidized each pupil attending. Soon after, day and boarding schools were built in the vicinity of the Blackfeet Agency (Blackfeet Heritage Program, 1980).

Parallel to the establishment of schools, a treaty was signed with the Blackfeet in 1855 and later in 1888, and an Indian Agent was assigned to direct the affairs of the Blackfeet. The treaty specified monetary terms for educating the Blackfeet. The educational policy established then still prevails: Convert Blackfeet children into an

acceptable image unlike their ancestors (Blackfeet Heritage Program, 1980).

Early annual reports to the Washington, D.C., Central Office show the early day foundation of today's bias toward the education of Indian people. The Superintendent-in-Charge of the Agency between 1873 and 1876 wrote that:

They appear to have no purpose in life except to hunt and to procure robes and peltries for the traders; no thought of settlement; no knowledge of the value of agriculture; no comprehension of social or family relations or morality; the animal instinct of self-preservation; and the cunning that provides for it. (Howard, 1965, p. 10.)

"Educating" the Blackfeet by imposing a new way of life on them was difficult. The Jesuits, rejecting the established patterns of the Blackfeet, tried to mold the children into "educated" and "civilized" individuals, meaning an idealized white people. This remains true today. As the reservation grew smaller, the mission and government schools were more and more able to insist that white values be accepted by Blackfeet children (Blackfeet Heritage Program, 1980).

The diminishing of land bases, the extermination of the buffalo, and the continuing waves of disease among the Blackfeet created dependence on schools and Indian Affairs agencies. In exchange for help, the Blackfeet had to accept and give in to a whole new system of thinking, acting, feeling, looking, and talking. Between 1883 and 1884, the infamous Starvation Winter exterminated one fourth of the

tribe. By 1885 only 1,400 Blackfeet were left on earth (Ewers, 1958). Survivors took a second look at education as a means of survival.

In the early days of the Holy Family Mission, half of the enrolled students were orphans. Indoctrination of tribal elders, parents, and children continued until most families could repeat the dogma fed them over the years. In 1887, Chief White Calf, who keenly felt the loss of ancient sacred lands, contributed some of his own allotted land to establish the Holy Family Mission. Completed in 1890, the school programmed Catholic religious and moral instruction on young Blackfeet children along with vocational on-the-job training. Strict teaching methods and rigid schedules were used to eradicate Blackfeet language and culture with punitive actions (Blackfeet Heritage Program, 1980).

Years later, when tribal elders were interviewed and invited to reflect on those years, they said that school meant abandoning everything Blackfeet and adopting the white Christian way. Speaking the Blackfeet language was forbidden by harsh punishment. Though families camped around the Agency in order to be close to their children in the school, the traditional family lifestyle of the Blackfeet was already being altered without their participation or permission (Transitions, 1992).

The new ideas of the Boarding School Era published comments that illustrate this mentality. Agent Wood,

affiliated with the Blackfeet Agency, remarked that "a boarding school is the only practical method in which to inculcate and ingress the minds of the coming generation with the superiority of civilized over the uncouth and precarious course of the life in the wigwam" (Blackfeet Heritage Program, 1980). Now the separation of Blackfeet children from their home environments could be completed by sending them to distant schools for years on end before allowing them to return. In 1889, 45 Piegiens were sent to Carlisle, Pennsylvania, to attend school. Naturally, when the young people returned home, they were entire strangers to their parents, tribe, and culture (Howard, 1965).

Other forms of schools sprang up. Public and day schools were built. Education was a concern to both families and agents. Military posts were converted into government schools. Government boarding schools across the country sprang up to accommodate policies and dealings with tribal groups.

The Public Works Administration opened up many rural schools for adults throughout the Blackfeet Reservation, which then became centers for indoctrination of parents as well as the children. An ethnologist among the Blackfeet said,

The work of civilizing the Indian children required much more than the constant drill in the three R's. It required painstaking indoctrination in the basic fundamentals of the whiteman's culture and learning to be civilized meant learning a host of little things--to comb one's

hair, to wear a coat, trousers and shoes, to sit in a chair, to sleep in a bed, to use a knife and fork, to tell time, and much more. (Ewers, 1958, p. 309)

Adapting to the new culture meant internalizing a whole new way of thinking, acting, and living. Education, ironically, became one of the fastest growing, most acceptable activities of the Blackfeet people. With it came change, indoctrination, and conversion. Without it came starvation, hunger, and hardship. Parents saw it as a means of survival. However, the success of education, in this sense, is questionable.

Statement of the Problem

On the Blackfeet Indian Reservation today, Western education is highly valued but seldom attained. At the same time the family role of transmitting tribal knowledge has been severely weakened. The formal educational institutions do not transmit Blackfeet knowledge of language, history, and cultural elements as part of their learning process. The Blackfeet people value their tribal language and traditional ways. Public schools are not supporting the cultural and language needs of the tribe. This responsibility rests on community programs to design, develop, and provide alternative opportunities of tribal holistic learning for tribal ways. The Blackfeet Community College is one of few institutions of learning where there has been a serious attempt to incorporate community and

tribal ideals. The tribal college is still struggling with this attempt.

There is no documented evidence that the elders of the tribe have been included in giving input, ideas, and recommendations toward the transfer of tribal knowledge. On occasion, a group of elders has been interviewed to share their educational experience and viewpoints as they reflect back on their lives. Tribal knowledge consists of Blackfeet philosophy, religious concepts, traditions, customs and language. Language and culture are inseparable; therefore, language needs to be the medium for learning and acquiring tribal knowledge. The problem of teaching the Blackfeet language in formal school settings is almost non-existent or acceptable.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions of selected Blackfeet elders (a) concerning what constitutes the traditional Blackfeet knowledge base and (b) concerning how they believe knowledge should be passed on through the various formal and informal institutions that exist in the Blackfeet community. The goal of the research was to uncover challenging designs for transmitting tribal culture for future generations by incorporating the Blackfeet language learning formats with children and families. A qualitative study approach of interviewing the

tribal elders to share their concerns, perceptions, and recommendations on the Blackfeet way-of-knowing was utilized. This approach supported incorporating Blackfeet philosophy and beliefs into the present system of education on the Blackfeet reservation.

According to Rowland (1994), the viewpoint of the tribal elders is the link to the tribal way-of-knowing. Educational institutions and learning environments have neglected to teach Indian cultural elements, belief systems, and traditions, and views of the elders have not been incorporated into these systems. Rowland made the assumption that education provides a vital role in transmitting culture for future generations. This study includes this plus the additional vital assumption that tribal knowledge is transmitted through the language of the tribe. This concept holds true with the Blackfeet Tribe. Education is the means for all learning to take place. This process must be started early with young children and their families prior to the direct influence of the formal education.

Research Questions

The research project utilized a qualitative case-study research design. The qualitative approach is the appropriate design for descriptive studies which focus on discovering new information, insights, and interpretations

of phenomenon as they relate to specific groups of people (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Merriam, 1988). This study was delimited to the Blackfeet Tribe. By means of in-depth, personal interviews, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What are the Blackfeet concepts of wisdom and knowledge?
2. What are the characteristics of Blackfeet teachers and students?
3. How does a person learn the Blackfeet culture?
4. How does a person learn in the Blackfeet culture?
5. How are the Blackfeet ways passed on in the culture?
6. How important is the language in transmitting Blackfeet knowledge?
7. What roles should various community institutions be playing in passing on the Blackfeet Way-of-Knowing?

Culture conflict and its resulting negative effect is a key element for many groups suffering a high rate of illiteracy. For example, the high rate of school drop-outs in reservation schools can be attributed to culture conflict, but it is usually disguised in educational jargon of the day. This explains the reasons for achievement at the expense of the drop-out, but, again, it avoids investigation and solution of the real problem. While the mainstream culture rarely uses the word "culture" to encompass itself or else uses the term to refer to elements such as the arts as standards of status within society,

minority groups threatened with extinction use the word frequently to refer to the distinctive characteristics they wish to keep.

This research, which is based upon the model of Rowland (1994), offers a way for minority groups to do participatory research to better understand the philosophical foundations which make their group unique. This knowledge in turn can be invaluable in making the curriculum for each group culturally relevant.

Culture is closely connected to the spoken language of a society. The monolingual American society has shown a distinct preference for its one language basis. In America, the spoken language is closely associated with nationalism and patriotism. Language in America is a political animal and not just an educational entity. It is difficult in America to discuss the merits of multi-language learning environments and teaching methods without rousing political issues. Yet, in order for tribes to keep their languages alive and dynamic, an educational purpose must be documented and validated. Research must lead to a multi-language format proven to be educationally beneficial to Indian people while at the same time defusing the political and negative bias present in today's educational philosophies. Articulate people can best define themselves. The term culture and what it means to a minority group such as the Blackfeet Tribe will ultimately be best defined by

articulate Blackfeet-English speaking people.

Delimitation

This research is a case study done with Blackfeet elders. Therefore, it was delimited to the Blackfeet Reservation. In addition, because the study was concerned with language, the interviews in the study were conducted in Blackfeet to gain the most benefit from information transferred from the elder to the researcher.

Definitions

Bands--Exogamous groups within the greater tribe tied together primarily through family and friendship connections. The greater bands: Pikuni; Kainai, Small Robes (extinct), and Blackfoot of the Blackfoot Confederacy were further divided into numerous smaller bands that remain identifiable even today. During the establishment of the Blackfeet Reservation the bands were often purposely allocated land in different areas of the reserve to break down the band alliances.

Blackfeet--English term used to describe the Pikuni tribe. The term became popular form in 1930's when the first established government under Wheeler-Howard Act was put in place. Official United States charter for the newly established government was "Blackfeet Tribal Business Council." Term "Blackfeet" is not used to refer to the tribe in the Blackfoot Language.

Culture--This difficult to define term is used by minority groups to describe characteristics they hold in value about themselves and group.

Elder--Older members of the tribe that exhibit lifetime experiences of special note. Not all older members of the tribe are given the special distinction, but older people are in general held in esteem by the tribe.

Head Start--A federally funded national emphasis program for economically disadvantaged children designed to prepare pre-school children (ages 3-5) for public school

systems. A comprehensive approach to early childhood development on education, health, parent involvement, social services, and disabilities and nutrition, which gives children a literal "head start" on their schooling.

Piegane (as in they can)--French speaking corruption of the tribal name Pikuni (Bee Kun ee). First outsiders to meet with the Pikuni were Frenchmen from Hudson Bay Company. They are called "real white men, (Nitsitapikooan)" by the Piegan/Pikuni since they were the first white people the tribe met. Today, the term Piegan is used as the correct English form when referring to the Pikuni.

Reservation--Legal definition of the land reserve protected under federal trust statutes for tribal inhabitation. In Montana, the Blackfeet Indian Reservation is approximately sixty square miles of land (1.5 million acres) held in trust for the tribe. This is a small part of the estimated 21 million acres owned by the tribe prior to 1888.

Self-Determination--last in a long list of buzz words, or one liners, to describe latest philosophical shifts in treatment of Indian tribes. The term actually began in the Eisenhower administration as part of the "termination" movement of the time. Currently, the term means the process of tribes moving towards independent behaviors.

Traditional--Term used by assimilated populace of the tribe to refer to those knowledgeable about themselves and their tribe. Often used to define fluent speakers of the tribal language; tribal religious people, and anyone in the tribe maintaining, or displaying, tribal cultural elements.

Tribal Immersion Schools--not unlike any school in America, except all instruction is carried out exclusively in a tribal language without English. Schools have excellent records of student achievement and community acknowledgement.

Tribe--a biologically bonded group of people homogeneous in culture, genesis, religion, and language. All are under siege.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is an abundance of literature related to the history of the Blackfeet Indians. However, much of this has been written from a non-Blackfeet perspective. It is important to recognize that research is limited in presenting the worldview of the Blackfeet (South Piegan) people from their perspective. The influence of institutionalism cannot be overlooked as having a major effect on a group of people. "Institutions must be kept from becoming oppressive or useless or taking the place of the vitality and life of people" (Horton, 1990, p. 49.).

Dr. Claude E. Scheaffer (1951) carried out extensive field work amongst the Blackfeet and Kootenai Indians in the 1950's. In 1962 suffering from a terminal illness, he contacted a colleague, Dr. Hugh Dempsey, at the Glenbow Provincial Museum in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Upon the death of Dr. Scheaffer all of his field notes were delivered intact to the Glenbow Archives. Scheaffer's field notes covered the full spectrum of tribal lifeways with heavy emphasis on language. Much of this literature review is based upon the sources in this collection.

Blackfeet (Piegan) People

The Blackfeet are the children of people put on earth by Apistotokiwa, the Maker. The Nizitapi, or Real People as they call each other, originated on a homeland covering today's southern Alberta and western Saskatchewan, in Canada, and central Montana in the United States. Today, the tribe resides on a reservation in Montana, adjacent to Glacier National Park and to the Canadian-United States border.

The Blackfeet belong to a confederacy of the Blood; North Piegan; Siksika tribes of Alberta, Canada; and the Small Robes. The Small Robes, two thousand strong in 1835, were exterminated by smallpox and warfare. "For nearly two centuries the three Blackfoot tribes have been known to White men by their separate names. They are the Pikuni or Piegan (pronounced Pay-gan'), the Kainah or Blood, and the Siksika or Blackfoot proper which are often referred to as the Northern Blackfoot to distinguish it from the other two tribes" (Ewers, 1958, p. 5).

When George Catlin, the artist, visited the Blackfeet in 1832, he estimated the confederacy population at 16,500 members. German Prince Maxmilian zu Wied and Carl Bodmer, an artist who visited a year later, noted the population closer to 20,000 members. Bodmer's and Catlin's depictions illustrate why Catlin called them "the most powerful tribe of Indians on the continent" (Ewers, 1958, p. 60).

In the tribal language, the term Blackfeet is never used to describe the tribe. The name Blackfeet is an exclusively English term. The tribal name is Amskapi Pikuni. Pikuni derives from an old form meaning, "Spotted Robes" (Holterman, 1996, p. 132). Occasionally, elders will evoke, Sokeetapi (Prairie People), and Apikunipuyi (Speakers of the Same Language) as descriptive names. Tribal speakers refer collectively to confederacy members as Nitzitapi, or "Real People." Another popular form of address is Nixokowa, which means my relations (Holterman, 1996, p. 32).

Creation Story

Blackfeet origin tradition confirm the tribe's residency in their homeland for thousands of years. They were people of the plains and buffalo. Percy Bull Child, a Blackfeet author of "Sun Came Down," presents creation stories and the connection to the Apistoki, Sun, the powerful, as told to him by his elders.

Creator Sun created the world starting with a mud ball. Then he created a snake, the only living thing. Soon there were too many snakes, so with his powers he made the mud boil from beneath of dirt surface. One female snake escaped into a crevice.. As time went on she had her eggs, and more snakes came about again. Again, Creator Sun dealt with them by using natural causes. Creator Sun invented green grass, and soon the huge ball of earth was covered with green

grass, deeper and deeper where it would not quit growing. Getting bored and discontent with his creations, Creator Sun wanted to create an image of himself. He created a mate, the Moon. A little one was born looking just like Creator Sun. As time went on seven more little ones were born, later becoming the Big Dipper. The mother snake related how she came to survive and what Creator Sun did to the other snakes, until one day one male snake could not take it any more. He wanted Creator Sun to pay for his damage to the snakes. Each day Creator Sun, Moon, and the seven children would rest, get up, and go out daily to keep busy and then come home as a routine. Life was enjoyable and happy for this family.

A handsome, tall, slim man appeared to the moon while she went out on her journey and chores. She was startled but got over it. Soon she knew everything that had happened to the snakes. She became totally attracted to this man who had some power left from Creator Sun. She would stomp outside of his den to meet him. Creator Sun knew there was something going on with Moon, so he followed her to the den to confirm his suspicion. He then told his seven sons of the affair and wanted them to be prepared for whatever might take place. On her next visit to the den, she found her snakeman's head cut off, and she went into a rage. Creator Sun then set fire to both of them, and his sons helped keep the sparks from flying. However, one spark must have gotten

free, because this spark of power gave her life again. She came after her family using chilling screams of terror and threatened to kill her youngest son, Rawman, to get even with Creator Sun.

She chased Creator Sun and their seven sons for a long time, never catching up to them. Creator Sun gave each of his sons something to toss at her to prevent her from catching Rawman. The first one used a bladder of water; the second one used a stick; the third one used a beautiful bird; the fourth one used a small rock; the fifth one used advised to use his fingers; and the oldest used a bladder of air. These have become the rain, forests, whirling winds, lightening and rain, mountain ranges, canyons and oceans of waters. Each time these items were thrown before her to slow her down. When floating through the ocean, Creator Sun and sons were ascending into the sky. She came up from behind them using the last of her power. This time she grasped Rawman. Creator Sun threw his flint hatchet at her and cut off one leg. This freed Rawman. At this time, he tried to take her power away from her. Still she threatened them. The chase was too tiresome, so he created night and day for separation. She could not see them at night, and they could rest freely again. She sat there for four nights and days trying to heal her leg back together. Consequently, now no one sees the moon for four nights until a new one appears. The elders say that as told by Percy

Bull Child, "This life we all have will then come to its end when Severed Leg the Moon catches Creator Sun and their seven sons, the Big Dipper" (Bull Child, 1994, p. 36).

The creation stories have true meaning to the Blackfeet people. From this point in time, a new beginning of creation takes its course, and each time lessons are learned. After Creator Sun finally rested from the chase, he remarried Mother Earth. Soon they created Mudman as their son. Due to his loneliness, they created Ribwoman to be his mate. Offspring came about, more and more, until such time groups of people went in all four directions-- north, west, south, and east. Before Creator Sun left humans alone to fend for themselves, he selected various humans to bring back important ceremonies. One was the Sun Dance, brought back by Scarface. Napi, the Old Man, was also put on earth to teach Blackfeet how to live like Creator Sun and Mother Earth in a sinless life. Napi did teach the people many lessons until he started making mistakes by misusing the power entrusted in him to help the people. He can transform into many characters and gets carried away with his jokes and pranks. Napi does himself in by his own foolishness. He misuses the power given to him and becomes mischief. Soon this turns into wickedness (p. 229).

Creator Sun takes pity on his people each time they are in a bind. For example, when the people were getting sick

and start dying of colds, he empowered individuals with doctoring powers to heal. These supernatural powers did not come to just anyone through dreams or visions. Only certain ones gained or acquired the power for different purposes. As Blackfeet pray, prayers are started out by "Ihyo, Nahtosi" to the Creator Sun, the Holy One, and the Maker of all living and non-living things.

Ceremonialism

The Piegan people have lived spiritually. They do this through ceremonies handed down by Creator Sun. Careful instructions were given in conducting ceremonies that were sacred to this earth life form. For example, sweat lodge is used for purification, but the fire for it must be built in a certain way and only certain kinds of materials can be used. Special procedures apply to the willows, the pit, the rocks, and the direction in which it is faced.

The Medicine Lodge of the Piegan was an annual event for everyone in the tribe to partake. A lot of preparation took place prior to erecting the lodge. A medicine woman had to make a vow to hold a Medicine Lodge ceremony. The cutting of buffalo tongue, fasting, singing, dancing, offerings, praying, and greeting the sun each morning provided strength and power. The significance of the vow was important. The symbolism of four had meaning to ceremonies. The four directions, four sweat lodges, four

rounds of songs all had symbolic meaning.

Bands and Societies

There were many bands and societies in each of the Blackfoot tribes. The Piegan tribe maintained many bands with names that changed as a split from one band created a new band of Piegans. The field notes of Claude Scheaffer recorded in 1951 by informants Adam Whiteman and interpreter Louis Bear Child began to recollect these bands through interviews.

Around 1878-80, there were 12 bands of Piegans identified with their respective leaders or chiefs. These were Skunks (White Calf), Fat Roasters (Three Suns), Blood (Fast Buffalo Horse), Lone Eaters (Running Crane), Buffalo Dung (Middle Calf), Black Doors (Middle Bull), Hard Top Knot (Double Runner), Moxkami (Heavy Runner), Don't Laugh (Big Road), Worm or Bug (No Runner), All Chiefs (Horn), Little Robes (Bad Trail), and Small Brittle Fat (Big Snake). This is only one point in time, and the names and even the bands changed periodically. (Scheaffer Field Note, 1951)

Bands derived their names from how they conducted themselves. The names referred to certain deeds or an individual. For example, the Small Brittle Fat (Inaksikakixpuyiks) were described by Chewing Black Bones (an elder informant) as the band whose name was derived from a man who carried a small piece of tallow about with him all

the time. His failure to share it with people gave rise to this name.

The Buffalo Dung (Kamixtaiks) evolved through a tale of Red Old Man eloping with the wife of a chief. Since the Crows capture horses and trophies, upon their return, Red Old Man gave her four buffalo chips as a supernatural protection against her former husband's vengeance. These people became the Buffalo Dung people.

The Small Robes band's leader was Bad Trail (Calf Robe or Eagle Head). This band which usually camped near Sweet Grass Hills and around the Rocky Mountains was large. They were a group of Piegans who were friendly to everyone and never fought with tribes across the mountains. The original leader used to wear a small calf robe around his shoulders so the people nicknamed him Small Robe. He took the name and used the name for all his people in the band. Bad Trail his son became the leader. He was a medicine man who could foresee the future. This band was wiped out by smallpox in trading with the Whites. The band numbered about 50 lodges or 150 people when they were seen by Jim Bridger, a trapper and explorer, in their lodges effected by the disease (Scheaffer Field Notes, 1951).

The bands were groups of individuals or families that camped with each other. Societies were groups that kept order around the camp and were formulated for a specific purpose. Sometimes a leader obtained the vision or power to

bring a group together.

A society of great significance is the Matoki, which is still in operation today in Canada. This is an all women's society. The leader of the rite is called nanstamiaki, "center-pole-owner-woman." The purpose of the rite is to insure good fortune and to restore health to individuals. A version of the origin for this society occurred when a tribal member saw four old bulls doing a dance. This happened when the Bloods had broke camp and were moving to another site. One of their members went back to the old site because he had left something behind. Upon returning to the old site, he saw four bulls coming toward the camp and dancing. He glanced away briefly, and when he looked again he saw a woman wearing a buffalo headdress. Glancing away again, he saw their lodge, a pole erected in the middle, and all the buffalo headdresses were hanging on the center pole.

Naming

As told by tribal elders to the informants in the early 1900's, giving a name to a person was a very important characteristic of a Piegan person.

When a man has a child born and he is not able to give this child a name himself, he will call a Chief or some old man to come to his lodge. He will tell him that he has got a child and that he wishes to raise this child, that he wants it to have good luck, not to fall ill, and that he would like him or her to be useful (Scheaffer Field Notes, 1951).

Many names were derived from battles or war successes, from a deed against an enemy, or after the old man's dreams and what he heard from the spirits and powerful beings. For example, a man may want his son to be named after a gun he reaped from the enemy. Then the old man would suggest Takes Gun because this deed meant a lot to the man with the child. Then he would pray that the child would have good luck and would be safe from all illness and that the child would be useful when grown up. Names can change also throughout a person's life depending how one acquires recognition and accomplishments to earn another name.

Dog Days

The descendants of the ancient ones inhabit the lands along the eastern front of the Rockies from the northern part of what is now Alberta, Canada, to the southern portion of present day Montana; it extends east along the river now named Mussleshell to the Fort Peck Reservoir and north into the far reaches of today's Saskatchewan. The Pikuni have always been in this area in which they now reside although this area has been greatly reduced after years of losing title to much of their original territories. This is the land the Creator gave to them where Napi (Old Man) lived with them at one time and where Mythological character Kutoyis (Blood Clot) and Scarface were sent among the people to bring hope and strength. According to the notes of

Claude Scheaffer, one-time curator of the Plains Indian Museum in Browning, Weasel Tail gave the following succession of leaders beginning with Scarface. He listed Scarface; Scabby Robe; He Helps Other Tribes; Sitting Up At Night; Back Fat who was chief when horses were first acquired by the Blackfeet, Spotted Calf, Blue Face, Seen At A Long Distance the Chiefs present during the Treaty of 1855, Seen At A Long Distance who was the son of , Red Crow (younger brother of Seen At A Long Distance), WolfFlap Ears (or Many Horses), and his son of the same name. Other chief descendants were Generous Woman, Little Dog, White Cow On Hill Side, Little Plume, Fast Buffalo Horse, Running Crane, Big Swan, Boy Chief, Red Paint, Brings Down The Sun, Four Bears, Screaming Owl, Lodge Pole Chief, Big Stone, Rising Head, Big Lodge Pole, Three Suns and White Calf. (Scheaffer Field Notes, 1951)

The Pikuni during the dog days probably lived more so along the rivers and streams of their lands, and traveled shorter distances than in the days of the horse. Tepee rings dating back to the dog days are found in areas that served as herbal or paint gathering points. The nomadic travels of the people would bring them to certain areas every few years for these harvests.

Warfare amongst tribes was of a different type during dog days. Most warfare amongst tribes was usually of a ritualistic exchange with members of the tribe lining up

against each other slightly out of the range of bows. The battle would continue on throughout the day with some advances made, as well as retreats. Small raiding parties usually were more deadly. (Scheaffer Field Notes, 1951)

Horse and Gun Days

Within the oral tradition of the Blackfeet are several accounts of the first encounter with the horse. Called "Elk Dog" by the Blackfeet, the horse served to change the Blackfeet's culture and lifestyle greatly. These accounts of the Blackfeet indicate the horse was obtained from southern tribes. Most accounts in the oral tradition indicate that the gun was obtained from the Cree Tribe to the north. Most accounts give credit to the Spaniards for introducing the horse to northwest tribes following their early 1600's invasion of what is now New Mexico (Berg, 1960).

Another interesting account of how the horse was introduced to this area is chronicled in the book "Mysterious Horses of Western North America" by W.A. Berg. According to Berg, the daughter of Montezuma, Iztcuitl, escaped the 1520 sack of her father's land along with Cortes' veterinarian, Juan Alvarado. Together with Cortes' favorite Appaloosa horses and a party of servants, they eventually migrated over the next 20 or 30 years to the Columbia Basin of the northwest. Berg argues that this

party along with its horses ultimately served as the ancestral group of horses for the Nez Perce and Yakima Indians. It is from this group, recorded by early white explorers as having enormous herds of spotted horses, that Berg speculates western Indians such as the Blackfeet obtained their horses. It is known amongst the oral traditions of the Nez Perce that chief threat to their herds were the Shoshoni and Blackfeet. Regardless of how they originally obtained their horses, by the period 1700-50 the Blackfeet were sufficiently mounted to become noted horsemen and were hunting buffalo from the horse (Ewer, 1958, p. 22).

During an encounter with the Shoshoni, the Blackfeet saw the horse for possibly the first time. The mounted Shoshoni attacked the Blackfeet and bashed several in the head with clubs causing the Blackfeet to lose several of their best men. Thereafter, the Blackfeet sought to acquire the horse. They first called the horse Big Dog and later named it Elk Dog (p. 22). One oral tradition tale, recorded by Schaeffer, has the Blackfeet enlisting the assistance of a Gros Ventre ally, who could understand Arapahoe, to steal a stallion and five mares. After spending several hours observing the horses and how they were being handled, the Gros Ventre convinced the Blackfeet that he could enter the camp, mount the stallion, and ride it away and that the mares would follow. The Blackfeet, planning a more direct method, finally relented and allowed the Gros Ventre to

carry out his scheme. Unfortunately, the horse onto which the Blackfeet jumped failed to heed his commands and, instead, ran back through the camp where the novice rider was riddled with arrows. Other Blackfeet raiders ultimately used more conventional methods and stole the horses.

A numerous of oral tradition tales survive in connection with the Blackfeet's first encounter with the wondrous Elk Dog. Several are told in a metaphoric style alluding to mythological gifting by the gods of the horse. No doubt the important impact of the horse upon the Blackfeet made them most thankful for its appearance despite the fact that theories of how the horse actually was transferred from the non-Indian to the Indian are still open to speculation.

In the matter of the gun, again oral tradition speaks to the first encounters. According to record, the Blackfeet were fired upon by the Cree with guns. Subsequently, the Blackfeet managed to capture one but could not fathom how to make it work. Finally, the chief told the members of the band to dream how the gun worked, or how they could get it to work. They remained unsuccessful in determining its workings, in spite of collective dreaming. Finally one individual dreamt the Blackfeet visited the Cree with an abundance of special gifts and were rewarded by having the Cree show them how to use the gun. Upon hearing the dream, the chief instructed his people to prepare for the visit as

outlined in the dream. This they did. After presenting the Cree with the gifts and after feasting and visiting, the Blackfeet were soon in possession of several guns, ammunition, and knowledge of how to operate the new weapons. With several Cree consultants along, they immediately used the weapons on their southern enemies the Shoshoni. As the two tribes closed on each other in the traditional fighting stance of the Dog Day warfare, the Blackfeet chief instructed his gunmen to close to approximately 60 yards and to fire. The results were profound, and soon the Blackfeet were extending their territorial domain to the south and west (Ewers, 1958, p. 24).

Pre-Agency and Agency Period

The first government agent was assigned to the Blackfeet in 1833. It is doubtful that the agent actually saw a Blackfeet. The Laramie Treaty of 1851 is significant to the Blackfeet although they did not participate in it because it clearly stated the territorial boundaries of the Blackfeet. Also, it established the precedents of government to government relations between the United States and the Indian tribes. Following the signing of the Laramie Treaty with the Sioux Tribes, government agents entered Blackfeet Territory to make arrangements for a treaty meeting with them.

Isaac I. Stevens was in charge of the negotiations. He

was instructed to contact all "American" Indians and inform them of the meeting. Stevens traveled as far north as today's Calgary, Alberta, contacting the tribes. On October 17, 1855, the Judith Treaty, or better known as the Lane Bull Treaty, was signed. It was to establish peaceful relations with the Indians amongst themselves and with the U.S. government. Education and agriculture were also to become part of the lives of Indian people, and \$15,000 was gifted to them at the time to begin (Ewers, 1958, p. 219).

It was not until the 1860's that the Blackfeet had to deal with serious treaty making again. In 1869 after a series of unratified treaties, the Blackfeet boundaries were pushed back from the Missouri and Sun Rivers, and an agency was established at the present site of Choteau, Montana. This agency was known as the Three Persons agency and was the one and only agency site picked by the chiefs themselves. Shortly thereafter, the Blackfeet lost more of their territory to the federal government and were moved north along Badger Creek to the agency known as the Running Crane agency. Again, after a few years, they were moved down the creek to the site now known as Old Agency. While at this agency, several major changes occurred that had a profound effect on the Blackfeet. By the year 1882, it was common knowledge that the huge herds of buffalo were on the verge of extinction. The traders, government officials, and, indeed, the Indians themselves realized that a major

change was about to take place.

By the winter of 1884, the buffalo were gone. When the Smithsonian Institute sent investigators to the Blackfeet reservation in 1885, they could find no more than 15 animals and they were on a ranch. The Blackfeet had been disarmed and placed on rations with food such as hogsheads, rancid bacon, beans, rice, and coffee. Flour was also given as rations, and bones were found in it. The Blackfeet believed that they were poisoned by this during the Starvation Winter. With the buffalo gone, a large number of Blackfeet settled in for the winter around the outskirts of the agency.

Thereafter, in 1888, the Blackfeet lost an enormous amount of territory in the Sweet Grass Hills Treaty. The Blackfeet lost lands stretching over one-fourth of the current state of Montana. It is not surprising to many that the State of Montana officially became a state one year later, having acquired enough land to make it worthwhile to become one. The Blackfeet were never fully compensated for this loss until the 1970's. The state territories were pushed as far north as Birch Creek. Later, in 1896, the Blackfeet lost more land when they sold a large portion of their western frontier for Glacier National Park (Kipp, 1994)

The role of the federal government was to make peace and act as a trustee of the tribes once their affairs were

settled. This role is questionable especially where the Blackfeet people were concerned. In a short period of time, two major catastrophes for the Blackfeet people took place.

The Baker Massacre occurred in 1870. This was another dark moment in Blackfeet tribal history as recorded. In a freezing dawn attack on January 23, 1870, troops of the Second United States Regiment of Cavalry under Major Eugene Baker's command massacred the camp of Heavy Runner; 173 Blackfeet were killed. They were mostly women and children, and 140 were taken prisoner. When it was discovered that the prisoners had smallpox they were set free upon the freezing prairie. Major Baker set out to search for the Mountain Chief band, to take revenge on him and his younger brothers because Baker believed they had if not they then "the younger" brother killed Malcolm Clark, a prominent pioneer. Although this killing was the result of a family quarrel, the authorities used it against the tribe. Many Blackfeet today are direct descendants of the victims, and recounts of the event are part of tribal history.

The winter of 1883 was the most severe in years. With no rations available to sustain the people, approximately 1,600 Blackfeet died. This inglorious winter is undoubtedly the darkest period of Blackfeet history. The tribe was reduced to its weakest state of being through starvation and the bungling government administration. Agent John Young has been blamed publicly by many people like James Willard

Schulz, published author. James Willard Schulz adopted member of the Blackfeet and married to a full-blood Blackfeet woman. A well educated man. The annual agency reports to Washington, D.C., stated the Blackfeet were becoming self-sufficient on cattle and sheep. When Agent Young finally realized the seriousness of the Blackfeet starving and the lack of rations to give to the people, he initiated a letter-writing campaign to the national office for help, and he requested to personally meet with officials. However, budget appropriations and rations had been reduced and the national office did not respond in any way. One letter dated September 13, 1883, from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs abruptly stated that:

Referring to your letter...that the balance to be delivered will not be enough to prevent suffering and the destruction of the stock herd, you are advised of the fact that the total appropriations made by Congress for the Indians belonging to your agency has already been exhausted...and as it is not in the power of this Department to make any further provisions for their support....Nothing further can be done. (West, 1959, p. 8)

This dreadful point in history can only be reflected as another event breaking down the morale of a group of strong people who once faced death bravely.

These events are worthy of note because to date the Blackfeet are faced with a state of total helplessness, and these events contributed to this condition. The buffalo had always been the main stay of Blackfeet life. Through fur trading and whiskey dealing, however, the Blackfeet began to

realize the scarcity of the buffalo. Upon settling on the reservation, the government set about trying to replace the Blackfeet nomadic lifestyle based upon the buffalo with what they considered a more compatible farming and ranching support system. Throughout this forced transition, which was often incompetently handled by the government, one element became more and more clear to the Blackfeet. This was the fact that assimilation was both a means of salvation and disease. Education and assimilation began to mean the same thing--the destruction of the Blackfeet way. This is further intensified by the impact of liquor being illegally smuggled and sold to the Blackfeet causing havoc because of its effects.

Formal Education

Formal education entailed introducing the educational system designed by the new Americans for the Blackfeet people to learn through indoctrinating ideas with concepts unfamiliar to them as a group of people. Formal education with Indian tribes is documented as early as 1819 when the United States Congress approved legislation for "the purpose of providing against the further decline and final extinction of the Indian tribes adjoining the frontier settlement of the United States, and for introducing among them the habits and arts of civilization" (Howard, 1965, p. 8) which amounted to an annual sum of \$10,000 to enable the

President to establish education among the Indians.

Some of the first dealings with education took place on October 17, 1855, at the junction of the mouth of the Missouri River and the Judith when the Blackfoot tribes were gathered with other tribes to discuss peace with Governor Stevens. The Governor declared, "We want your children to be taught, and we want you to send word to your Great Father, through us where you want your farms to be, and the schools" (Ewers, 1958, p. 219).

The treaty that resulted from this meeting was known as the Lame Bull Treaty of 1855. In return for land concessions by the Indian tribes, the United States agreed to expend \$20,000 annually upon useful goods and provisions for the four tribes of "The Blackfoot Nation" (p. 219) for a period of 10 years and to expend an additional sum of \$15,000 annually during the same period in establishing and instructing these Indians in agricultural and mechanical pursuits, in educating their children, and "in any other respect promoting their civilization and Christianization" (p. 219).

Intermittently, attempts were made to educate the Blackfeet in those early times by priest and religious orders. The Jesuit Order, or Black Robes introduced catechism work in the 1840's at the St. Peter's mission on Sun River (Howard, 1965, p. 54).

It was not until 1873 that a school was built at the

agency for white and Indian children. This school was later closed down due to attendance problems, and the teacher unable to complete the year (p. 10). At this time Agent Wood seemed to be an exception to other agents, who placed no faith in educational efforts with the Blackfeet. Wood established a curriculum for the school and then recommended a boarding school be built (p. 10). In his report, he stated, Agent Wood advocated for the boarding school system as being the method used to civilize the children.

The agency moved to Badger Creek in 1877, and a school was once again opened. The reports for that year indicated some marked success was made in teaching English. The curriculum broadened in 1878 to include arithmetic and sewing. Attendance was better. "Quite earthshaking at the time" was the reporting that two Indians learned to read that year (p. 11). The next 11 years shown rapid growth in educational efforts.

When a review of the "problem" was made, it was found in the early 1900's that only 11% of the school age children of the reservation were enrolled in school. In 1890 the Holy Family Mission opened its doors to 106 children. During this time, off-reservation boarding schools were also being established. Captain Henry Pratt, was credited with originating the idea of the boarding school concept by starting the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, where 90% of the original enrollees were full-blood Indians.

The idea behind the non-reservation boarding school was to immerse the children in a new setting and to totally civilize these children into the white culture. By removing the children away from their parental influence, it was hoped that their attitudes and beliefs could be changed. The schools used strict and regimented military-style discipline. In many cases, these were very young children who were removed from their homes.

Boarding Schools

In 1889, 45 Blackfeet students attended Carlisle Indian School. Other Indian schools were established in Chemawa, Oregon; Genoa, Nebraska; Flandreau, South Dakota; Chilocco, Oklahoma; Fort Sill, Oklahoma; Lawton, Oklahoma; Pierre, South Dakota; Riverside, Oklahoma; Wahpaton, North Dakota; and Concho, Oklahoma. Various other boarding schools were located on Indian reservations such as Busby Indian School on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation (Parsons, 1980, p. 35).

Boarding schools were built on the Blackfeet Reservation. The first of these was Willow Creek in 1892. It had with 101 students by end of the second quarter (Howard, 1965, p. 19). It was three miles west of the agency site of Browning. The administrator for this school showed some unique qualities in that he "judged the Indian child with perceptive acuity; he maintained that the children had great affection and strong attachments to the

family, and that the breaking of these ties cause spiritual depressions which takes time to overcome" (Howard, p. 19). A fire destroyed this school in 1893.

In 1904 the boarding school at Cut Bank Creek was completed, and 125 Blackfeet children were enrolled. In 1915 the Bureau of Indian Affairs started phasing out supervised instruction and turned these schools over to public school districts.

Rural Schools

The first of the rural school concepts were established at Heart Butte, Old Agency, and Starr School. It was not until the 1930's with the Public Works Administration that more rural schools were built. They were Croff, Coldfeet, Big Badger or Swimsunder, Chief All Over, Higgins, Durham, and Upper Birch Creek school. The Bureau of Indian Affairs originally operated these schools. As the public school system became able to provide instruction and buildings, the government signed them over to the districts (Parsons, p. 36).

Other rural schools were established at about the same time at Babb (new), Babb (old), Badger Fisher, Big Lake, Blackfoot, Burd, Camp #9, Carway, Cut Finger, DeWolfe, DuBray, Fisher Flats, Galbreath, Grandview, Hamby, Hamilton, Hilton, Heavy Breast, Heavy Runner, James Douglas, Kraft, Little Badger, Mad Plume, Malcolm Clark, McKelvey, Milk

River, Paisley, Peskan, Pontresina, Reeves, Samples, Seville, St. Mary and Van Selden schools. However, these schools were closed due to the weather, poor roads, finances, and teacher shortage. Some were family sponsored or referred to as one-room or home-schools but soon disappeared (p. 36).

During the school year 1940-1941, 24 schools were opened on the reservation. They enrolled 989 Indian children. Of these schools, 20 were rural schools enrolling 453 children; 13 of these schools were all-Indian. As Consolidation of services came about in the 1960's, rural schools, soon closed and children were bussed to the public schools. By 1964, only five rural schools still existed (p. 37).

A review of the curricula throughout the educational process of Blackfeet, reveals that no effort was made to incorporate Indian values and beliefs in the educational process. "The curriculums consist of Basic R's, home-making, vocational training, and preparation for higher education. Much time was spent on the work of civilizing Indian children [while] required much more than constant drill in the three R's. It required painstaking indoctrination in the basic fundamentals of the white man's culture" (Ewer, 1958, p. 309). Time and effort was paid to converting the attitudes, looks, and thinking of young Blackfeet minds. This trend continued even when education

became somewhat Indian-controlled.

Holy Family Mission

Long before the last battle between Indian and whites had been fought, long before the agency era, and long before the reservation era, the Black Robes worked among the Indians. The Black Robes were Catholic missionaries. Although the Blackfeet were assigned to the Methodist, the Catholics did not waste any time in Christianizing the Blackfeet.

The Holy Family Mission is worthy of some mention due to its approach in working with the Blackfeet. The first mission was called St. Peters and was established at Choteau, Montana, in 1859. "Here, at St. Peter's Mission, the priests and Brother V. Magri studied the language and taught a few Indian boys" (Parsons, 1980, p. 4). It has been documented by lengthy Blackfoot dictionaries that many other priests have studied the language in order to communicate with the people. The mission remained at Choteau but closed intermittently until 1879. Again, the school opened, but Brother Hamilton related difficulties in dispensing education due to "two facets of the Blackfeet culture: the nomadic and restless spirit of the Indian, and the dislike for being too far from loved ones" (Howard, 1965, p. 55).

In 1884 the Ursuline Order of Nuns arrived at St.

Peter's Mission to start initiating the girls into school. When the agency moved, plans for the Holy Family Mission were made, and the school was relocated to Two Medicine in 1890 since the agency at the time was at Old Agency.

One teacher at the Swimsunder school in the early 1930's stated that he went to the Holy Family Mission to learn the Blackfeet language. The paradoxical idea about the studying of the Blackfeet language is that Blackfeet children attending the Holy Family Mission were punished and "beat up" when using their native language. Yet, here were a group of religious people learning and studying the language, acquiring knowledge about the language. It was used by the priests as a means to accomplish "cultural invasion" (Freire, 1970).

The curriculum at the Holy Family Mission was patterned after other educational systems. It involved academics such as reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography; religious training; and moral guidance. Half a day was devoted to academics. The rest of the day and evenings was spent on practical training and chores. The mission school made every attempt to education all the children, but it still could not reach everyone. In one given year, more than 208 children were not receiving any formal education. The Holy Family Mission operated for 36 years among the Blackfeet.

Public School

The rural day schools were supported by the federal government, but at times some of the schools were supported by families to try and maintain education for their children. The federal government relinquished its responsibility to educate Indian people and shifted the teaching to the State. The growing number of white children in Browning associated with their parents having jobs at the agency center provided impetus for the public school system. Consequently, Blackfeet children were soon being integrated into the public school system.

In 1905 permission for the public school was approved in the county located at Choteau, Montana, which was the county seat. The public school started as a one-room school house with 21 students. The next year, a two-room school was needed. The curriculum at those times emphasized reading, writing, and spelling. Music and art were also taught. In 1918 a new 18-room brick building was constructed (Howard, 1965, p. 34).

The public school system progressively expanded to meet the needs of the Browning center area. Rural schools were closing due to lack of funds, of teachers, and of resources. The Cut Bank Boarding School functioned as a boarding dormitory for children needing to attend school in Browning. The public school system eventually did consolidate almost all the schools into big districts at Browning and Heart

Butte.

An interesting program was implemented in 1931 called Illiteracy Clinic, a phase of formal education that was carried around the reservation. The program was sponsored by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the National Illiteracy Crusade, Inc. This effort was directed at wiping out illiteracy in the United States. More than 240 adult Blackfeet Indians participated. The class schedule included a morning session, break for lunch, afternoon session, break for supper, and an evening session. The emphasis was on instruction of reading and writing with some craft work. A stipend was provided. As a result of the program, more than 200 Indian people learned to write their names. These classes were held at the public school (Howard, 1965, p. 30).

In all the dealings with educating the Blackfeet children, there is no mention of their cultural heritage of the importance of instilling their native language background, and of supporting family connections. This mentality is still evident today.

Community-Based Programs

There have been many informal education programs initiated on the Blackfeet Reservation over the course of time to supplement formal education and in some cases to fill gaps in the existing educational structure. Two of

these are the Blackfeet Head Start program and Moccasin Flat Immersion School. A third is Blackfeet Community College. These three community-based programs provide extensive Blackfeet language learning for the community.

Blackfeet Head Start Program

Head Start is a federal program for preschool age children from low-income families supported by the National Head Start Bureau. Project Head Start was conceived out of the War on Poverty in 1965. The Office of Economic Opportunity was given responsibility for administering 65 reservation Head Start programs. The major focus of Head Start was to break the cycle of poverty by providing comprehensive educational services in areas of education, nutrition, health, social services, parent involvement, and disabilities.

The overall flexibility of the Head Start program design further empowers families to determine how and what is relevant in their child's education. It provides a model for a comprehensive early childhood program, involving families and community members in all aspects of the program and offers technical support.

The Blackfeet Head Start program began in 1965 with one classroom in Heart Butte. Today there are five centers located in Browning, Heart Butte, Seville, Starr, and Babb with a total of 16 classrooms serving more than 300 children. Head Start also operates other services for

children ages 0-3 years in the Parent Child Center, where 60 families are supported. Child Care services for the community is operated as well. More than 500 children under the age of 5 years old are utilizing Head Start services.

The mission statement of the Blackfeet Head Start program is:

The Blackfeet Tribe Head Start program is located on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation is an early child development program designed to assist families by providing comprehensive developmental services to children and families. The Blackfeet Tribe recognizes the importance of resources and involvement of parents in an environment benefitting preschool-age Blackfeet children.

The Blackfeet Tribe Head Start program is mending the broken circle of the Blackfeet Indian language. If our children can once again speak and understand their own tongue, the beliefs and values our elders taught us will once again be transmitted to the young, and our language, beliefs, and values will survive. In order for this to happen, students and adults must first see that Blackfeet language has a place in Head Start and in the public schools. By doing this the language will gain renewed respect and students and adults will be proud to speak their language. Our native tongue is the quality which identifies us, as being of the Blackfeet Nation, or of native peoples of all tongues.

The concept of empowering families to make decisions on the lives of their children and to become the prime educators is unique among the providers of education on the reservation. Many services, skills development, and training are available for parents of Head Start children. Tribal elders are used as resources in the classrooms and as support for the children in nurturing their development.

Piegan Institute

The Piegan Institute is a private, non-profit organization which was chartered in the State of Montana and with the Blackfeet Tribe in October 1987. The organization researches, preserves, and promotes Native American languages with an emphasis on the Blackfoot language. The board of directors are enrolled members of the Blackfeet Tribe. The organization was designed to achieve self-support status because of the legacy of tribal programming failures based on governmental dependency and, more importantly, because the tribal language is the core of Blackfoot culture, uniqueness, and identity. Further, community surveys dating back to 1978 point out a strong desire by community members to keep the language alive.

The organization works directly with its own community, 11 Indian tribes, several regional and national organizations, and Native Hawaiians. The organization is recognized for research and development in language acquisition formats; these include tribal initiatives in language revival, pre-school curriculum development, and a wide range of initiatives for indigenous communities. In addition, the organization has illustrated clearly the capability of accomplishment its goals without the standard approach of funding common on Indian reservation.

During the last eight years, the institute has established a record of achievement and credibility. The

group is well known in regional native language pre-school training programs, and as a premier group in historical and contemporary educational research. The Piegan Institute has conducted 45 major week-long seminars on language research, preservation, and curriculum development with western tribes to develop in-depth approaches using tribal languages in a positive and modern context.

Early in the planning stages of the Piegan Institute, one function identified for the institute was the development of Blackfeet Language Immersion Schools. Such schools could support the major goal of preserving, researching and promoting the native language. As a result, Moccasin Flat Immersion School was opened October 1995 for the community.

In 1994, the Piegan Institute designed a model school, had it built in one year, and opened the doors for young Blackfeet children. Moccasin Flat Immersion school is located in an area of Browning, Montana, called Moccasin Flat. The idea behind the concept of the immersion school was the one-room school house in the rural areas in the 1930's. Building the new school in the middle of the Moccasin Flat community brings pride and ownership to the residents. The purpose of the model is to revitalize the Blackfoot language in a positive format ultimately changing a child's negative self-view into one of productive inclusion in an English-speaking country.

The second of the schools is being completed and is called Cuts Wood Immersion School. It is located in the heart of Browning, Montana. The schools form the basis of an economic model designed to combine an altruistic goal with program independence. Essentially, the program does not rely on government funding in order to avoid rigid guidelines that inhibit innovative development. Further, the model brings members of the tribal community into a format that provides long standing leadership development through a college degree program available to participants. Cuts Wood Immersion School will begin Blackfeet language immersion learning starting summer 1997.

Piegán Institute conducts extensive research on tribal teachings and learning strategies, tribal histories, tribal archival materials, photographic collections, music collections, and elder interviews. As a community-based organization, all funding is derived from Friends of Piegán, foundations, and corporations.

Blackfeet Community College

The Blackfeet Tribal Business Council chartered the Blackfeet Community College in 1974 to provide post-secondary and higher educational services. The impetus for this action grew from early tribal efforts to provide an educational opportunity to its residents in a physically, climatically, and culturally isolated area. The Blackfeet Tribe, in its relationship with the federal government as a

sovereign Indian nation, is recognized as a nation within a nation through treaties, laws, and executive orders.

Early efforts in adult education were supported by programs funded from health, education, and welfare departments at the federal level. The Office of Economic Opportunity and Indian Education Act provided resources for the tribe to promote self-sufficiency. In 1972 the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council completed a 10-year comprehensive plan for the reservation. The needs and goals were identified through needs assessments and studies done in conjunction with the implementation of federal programs. The plan identified the need for a community college or vocational and technical school, new facilities, and educational programs.

In December 1976, the Blackfeet Board of Regents, under the auspices of the Blackfeet Tribe, entered into an agreement with Flathead Valley Community College of Kalispell, Montana, to offer extension courses on the reservation. After the formalization of the Blackfeet Community College Charter and By-laws in 1976 the Extension Center started to gain interest and support. The college grew rapidly in student enrollment, and motivation toward the establishment of an independent institution evolved. In 1979 the Blackfeet Board of Regents went on record to become that unique tribal institution to begin offering courses and programs independently. During this time the college sought

candidacy status for accreditation from the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges. Candidacy status was granted in December 1979. In December of 1985, Blackfeet Community College received full accreditation status as a higher education institution.

The college has been offering courses and programs of study to benefit and meet the community needs. The mission statement is as follows:

The Blackfeet Tribe recognizes the need for quality education in its quest for survival in the future. The Blackfeet Community College, a tribally chartered institution of higher education, is a tribal effort to achieve a balance between educational advancement and cultural preservation.

The college, reflecting the needs of the tribe, will provide access to education for all members of the Blackfeet Tribe and all of those who wish to participate in the betterment of their future. The college will provide education where a significant number of enrolled members of the Blackfeet Tribe are located or a recognized need exists. The education will include the traditional areas of Blackfeet culture, including historical and geographical identity.

The Blackfeet Community College has made great strides in upholding the mission statement. A degree program in Blackfeet Language Studies is offered to the community. Many elders have supported the college in their teachings, designing of programs, and carrying out community cultural events. For example, the Blackfeet Days held each spring at the college provides cultural teaching and learning for everyone. This time of celebration provides an opportunity for families and community members to participate. This

event is followed closely by a huge tribal pow-wow. Ceremonial events are planned intermittently when the college needs the support of the elders who possess tribal knowledge.

Thus, despite a long history of attempts by educational agencies on the reservation to restrict the use and development of the Blackfoot language, three community-based organizations currently exist which include the promotion and preservation of the Blackfoot language. Each has a language program. As a result of their efforts to support the language, elders and cultural leaders have increasingly been supporting these agencies.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Design

This study was based on the Rowland (1994) study which was done with the Northern Cheyenne. Blackfeet Knowing was reviewed through the elders who are the keepers of traditional knowledge. While Rowland investigated the Cheyenne Way of Knowing from the perspective of the elders, this study included the additional element of focusing on the language as a means for transmitting knowledge and culture. In order to acknowledge the respect due to Rowland for his pioneer work in stimulating this study, he was consulted on the design for this study before the research was initiated.

The researcher is directly involved in pursuing data and information on native language issues, developing learning formats and designing community learning activities. She is co-founder of the Piegan Institute. This institute is a non-profit tribal organization which was founded in 1983 to promote, protect, and preserve the Blackfeet language. Along with eight years at the Blackfeet Community College, she has eight years of experience

administering the Blackfeet Tribe Head Start program. This combined experience has supported her notion of seeking out ways to include the teaching of tribal languages to benefit the Blackfeet tribe. Her focus has been developing community learning environments such as the Blackfeet immersion schools to support this effort.

This study utilized a case study design since it is compatible with the setting and subject. The interviews were conducted in the Blackfoot language to gain the richness, in-depth, and deep expressions of the interviewees. The information and data collected supported the efforts to include the Blackfeet elders in the development of learning formats for tribal knowledge. Consequently, the videotapes and transcripts of the interviews with the elders have been entered into the archives of the Piegan Institute.

Tribal elders are considered keepers of knowledge and information. The interviews were translated by an interpreter used throughout the study. The interviews were video taped and tape recorded, and the elders were photographed. A place for interviews was designated. Interviews were conducted in both public places and the homes of the elders.

Procedures

Interviews with Blackfeet elders were conducted. The

elders were contacted informally. However, a letter of introduction was sent to each individual prior to approaching them. This letter was designed to be read either by the elder or someone in the family. The researcher knew almost all of the elders or someone in the family from those who were interviewed. Therefore, the researcher knew that someone in the family would be able to explain the letter to them. A visit to each elder's home was made to explain the researcher's role in seeking information and knowledge about the Blackfeet Knowing. The initial group of elders made recommendations for other elders to be interviewed. This process worked well because the elders know best who possessed knowledge on the tribe.

In preparation of the interviews, the researcher took an extensive Blackfeet language class. More than 150 hours of Blackfeet language learning was completed so that the researcher could become more attuned to language interpretation and language recognition. This activity was vital to support the interview process.

After the interview protocol was developed, questions were translated in writing and on audio tape in the Blackfeet language. Each elder was interviewed in the Blackfeet language. An interpreter was hired by the researcher to assist in conducting the interview with each elder. The interviews were translated into English to gain the full description of the questions for data analysis.

Traditionally, a woman obtaining information from elders would have to be very careful in approaching elders. At times a mediator is needed. Most likely the mediator is a family member or spouse. However, this was not necessary for this study. The mediator was the language interpreter. A third person who video-filmed the interviews was present throughout the 20 interviews. This created a team of people conducting interviews, which worked effectively for this type of interview.

The interviews were done mostly in the homes of the elders. A central place without interference was set up for any elders wanting to relocate for their interview.

The interview questions were formulated to gain the most benefit from the sessions. The first question asked the elders about their Indian (Blackfeet) name. In the Blackfeet language, the elders were asked to say their Blackfeet given name. They were asked to describe how they got their name and if it was in the family or if it was obtained from someone else. The elders were also asked to describe their family and their background. This question in the beginning got the elder talking and gave the research team an introduction as to their views as they described themselves. This opening topic created a supportive atmosphere for the interview process.

The second question asked about the elder's background while growing up and about what Blackfeet events,

activities, and ceremonies they attended or participated in. This question allowed the elder to reflect on their past and childhood days. In the Blackfeet language certain religious ceremonies were discussed which provided insights related to the elders.

The third question asked about how Blackfeet beliefs or Blackfeet ways work into their daily lives. This question stimulated the elders to talk about Blackfeet philosophy and beliefs. The interpreter asked if they or their parents and grandparents owned any sacred items such as medicine pipes or bundles. The meaning of owning any religious items was also probed. The elders were asked if they attended any Blackfeet religious or spiritual events.

The fourth question inquired about the elder's "formal" schooling. The interpreter asked about where they went to school. Follow-up questions probed into their experiences and impressions from when they attended school. Was this an enjoyable time or what were their feelings on this particular time? In addition, the elders were asked to talk about their "informal" learning experience such as how did they learn Blackfeet. Finally, they were asked to talk about other Blackfeet traditional things that were learned in the home.

The fifth question investigated the elder's concerns about the Blackfeet language. Here, the elders expressed their feelings and concerns about the language. Usually

this is where the elders stated their strong feelings about younger people not knowing the language, losing their respect for each other, and having difficulty communicating with each other. There usually was a feeling of loss. The elders were also asked if the language was important enough to be learned. They were also questioned about whether they speak the language at home and if so how many of their children can speak the language. If their children do not speak or use the language, the elders were asked why they think the language is not being passed on or used.

The interview ended with a question about how the elders would feel if their grandchildren could speak the Blackfeet language. This was a very positive note during the interviews. Therefore, they were what they would recommend concerning how the language should be taught and who should be responsible for teaching the language. This question gave support and direction for the community.

Finally, the interview ended by asking the elders about what messages they have to take to the future for the Blackfeet people. This question was important because it provided an opportunity for the elders to feel their input and message was valued. The connection to the language which represents the cultural and spiritual meanings was valued again.

The Elders

Interviews were conducted with 20 elders of the Blackfeet community. The elders are the older people, who still retain the Blackfeet language, maintain the traditional way of viewing life, and have experiences to share. The major focus of each interview was to share the Blackfeet Way, native language concerns, and the importance of using the language. Education seemed equally important because it was through the education process that the language was greatly affected. There was some hesitation on the part of the elders in sharing the deepest knowledge of the tribe in an interview format due to the time limits. There was high regard among the elders for the language to continue and their eyes brightened when the elders spoke of the young children learning and speaking the Blackfeet language.

The concepts of Blackfeet Knowing were shared to a large degree by the elders. The elders spoke in ways that what they were shared their deepest concerns. Their opportunity to share this information gave hope since they are the last generation of true holders of the Blackfeet knowledge or the way of knowing. The elders talked about the importance of spirituality and everything that goes with it. The true meaning of the word needs to be supported by strictness. Some felt it was important to point out the analogy that the spirituality of the Blackfeet way can also

be practiced through the Christian way. It is through the prayers that made a difference in many situations of life experiences. They talked of the importance of education. Education was viewed highly.

A brief biography of the elders is important to support the context of their interviews. The selection of the elders started with a core group of those who were known for their Blackfeet knowledge. From this group recommendations for other elders to interview were made. The list built up to more than 40. However, due to amount of information obtained the 20 interviewed provided a good base to begin extracting information and findings.

George and Molly Kicking Woman are prominent elders in the community who have been called upon by many people to give their blessings and support in the Blackfeet way. They are the keepers of spiritual knowledge through their commitment and determination to continue to learn, practice and carry on the Blackfeet way of spirituality. Molly was raised by her grandparents. Her grandparents lived during the times when Blackfeet received their names through their various deeds, children were valued in a sense of knowing all their kinship, and their relatives were those Blackfeet who still lived the tradition ways. Molly's Blackfeet name is "Komihkini." Her name is translated to Round Head. She is 77 years old.

George Kicking Woman conducts many tribal ceremonies.

He has the gift to bestow Blackfeet names onto people for their outstanding efforts and deeds. George is a keeper of medicine bundles and pipes because of his knowledge in conducting the ceremonies. He knows many songs. George was given his grandparents Blackfeet name "Niookskain Amahka" or Three Guns and still carries it today. George Kicking Woman is 84 years old.

Willie Running Crane is an elder who lives in the Browning area of the reservation. His Blackfeet name is "Ma No Ose" translated to Cherry Willow; it was given to him by his father. He is known for his knowledge of the Blackfeet history and agency policies with the people dating back to early times. Many times he is called upon to interpret the treaties, land dealings, and federal relations of the past. This is his area of expertise. Willie Running Crane is 87 years old.

Mike Swims Under is an elder who lives in the Big Badger area near Heart Butte on the reservation. His Blackfeet name is "Bee doh oo nee stahs" or Eagle Calf. Mike is one of few elders who holds Blackfeet knowledge of the past and protocol of conducting ceremonies. He possesses many skills for doing things such as his unique ability to play musical instruments. Mike Swims Under is 76 years old. People all over the community call upon Mike to conduct and give his ceremonial blessing.

Probably the oldest elder on the reservation is Cecile

Horn who lives in Browning in the Moccasin Flat area. She is 92 years old. Cecile's family was considered wealthy in the Blackfeet Knowing, possessing many religious items and knowing the strictness of holding these items. Cecile yearns for the Two Medicine area of the reservation because this is where her and her family lived. Cecile dances Indian and participates in tribal events. Cecile's Blackfeet name is "Sah kah bee kah kee" translated to mean Shakes Woman in the Brush.

Joseph Old Chief was interviewed because of his ability to sing and remember many songs of the past. His Blackfeet name is "Nee Tsii Tah Nee Pii." His name is translated to mean Sitting Place First. Joseph experienced the way the medicine lodge was put up and all the songs, and he is the one who has this knowledge of the Blackfeet ways. He knows the songs to the police pipe, but this item belongs to someone else now. He was an owner of eight tepees in total and painted one of them. Having the right to paint a tepee is considered unique to an individual.

Chief Earl Old Person was interviewed not only because of his role as the Chief of the Blackfeet Tribe but also because Earl highly respects the Blackfeet way and knows many elders who were keepers of the spiritual ways. Earl eloquently speaks the Blackfeet language to the people, and those that hear him highly respect him; this includes the elders. Earl has two Blackfeet names: "Ee stoo soo poo"

meaning Cold Wind and "Kahp Fah Pee" meaning Charging Home. Earl is 68 years old. Many people in the community call upon Earl to sing the societal songs of the families in times of sorrow, in times of ceremony, and during cerebations.

John DeRoche is another elder in the community who was interviewed. John's Blackfeet name is "Ma Keena;" this name was given to him by his grandmother. John is 83 years old. He and his wife had beautiful traditional dress, and they dance during the cerebations. John sang in a group, and he knows many songs. His area of expertise was raising race horses.

Sometimes the language was a factor in finding people to interview. James Boy was chosen because he is a very articulate speaker of the language. His family background also reflects how he learned his language, which was through his mother and grandmother. His Blackfeet name is "Moh Dah Yah Sah Bee" interpreted as Medicine Plume; it was given to him because the name did not belong to anyone else. His grandfather was Bird Rattler, who was a prominent traditional Blackfeet leader. James witnessed many ceremonial events through his grandparents. James is 69 years old.

Margaret Running Crane is an elder who is 72 years old and who teaches in the Moccasin Flat Immersion School with young children. She was raised by her grandmother.

Margaret's Blackfeet name is "Piwai Pistsaakiiwa." Her name is translated to Ragged Woman. She was told in a joking manner that the reason she was given this name was because the cloth she was wrapped in as an infant was quite ragged. Her grandmother taught her many different religious ceremonies utilizing the Blackfeet language since English was not spoken in her family. Her grandmother was 82 years old when she died. Margaret was 10 years old at the time; this is when she went back to her mother and stepfather to live. Her parents continued to teach her the Blackfeet Way of Knowing through the language. Her folks arranged her marriage.

Another elder who is highly respected in the Heart Butte area is Joe Calf Boss Ribs. His Blackfeet name is "Nah Pee Mee Mah" or White Dog. After he attended his first celebration or dance, he received his name. Joe feels that you cannot get away from the Indian way because you grew up on it, meaning those experiences will always be with you. Joe's father has a Medicine Pipe, which was what he referred to in his description of Indian way. Joe is 85 years old and is in ill health, but he wanted to share some thoughts with the interviewers.

Francis Potts is 70 years old and an honorary council member for the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council. His role is to guide, support, and interpret history and policy for the tribe. His Blackfeet name is "Mee Nah Sah Poo" which

translates to mean Eagle Feather. He shared the religious aspect of the "akaipikani" (old people). He is very respectful of the Blackfeet Knowing because he lived it, experienced it, and his parents owned different medicine pipes. Francis is deeply concerned about the usage and maintenance of the Blackfeet language.

An elder lady who lives in Heart Butte, named Mae Calf Boss Ribs, was interviewed. She is 74 years old. She received her grandmothers Blackfeet name interpreted as Sitting On the Air or "Kah ee Pso Pii." Mae participates in many ceremonial events and is called upon when they are planned because of her knowledge of traditional ways of the Blackfeet. She learned the old ways by sitting and watching. The role of the child during this time of intense experience was to be respectful by assuming total quietness and observing. Mae and her husband, Dan, were keepers of the Police pipe.

Gene and Gertie Heavy Runner were interviewed together. Each had their own contributions. Gene's Blackfeet name is "Na Too Ta Moo" interpreted as Holy First Walker. Gertie received her name through her father when she was 5 years old. She accompanied a delegation to Minnesota, where they stood by a monument of a buffalo. Then her father (John Ground) gave her the name "Ee Nee To Kon Ah Kee wa" or Buffalo Head Woman. Both Gertie and Gene are 73 years old and grew up with the families in the times when life for the

Blackfeet was hard, when rules of behavior were strict, and when learning the Blackfeet ways was a part of life. Gertie is the daughter of the late Mary Ground who lived to be more than 107 years of age. Her father was a graduate from the Carisle Indian School and was a holder of the medicine pipe bundle. Gene's grandparents were the Heavy Runners. Gene was 3-years old when his father died. George Old Person was his stepfather, and he raised Gene as his own son. In his young days, Gene was raised by elder people who only talked Blackfeet. Gene experienced the traditional, holy, and sacred ways. He is very respectful of the Blackfeet way because this is why God put everyone on this earth. Churches were joined later, but Blackfeet Ways supersede everything. He feels singing and talking the language are very important to bringing back the old ways.

Cecile Doore is a Blackfeet Bilingual Aide at Head Start in Browning. Her Blackfeet name is "Ee Dah My Wah Kee" or First Strike. Cecile is 63 years old. She is a fluent Blackfeet language speaker and highly values the language. Her Indian name of First Strike was given to her by Old Lady Wolf Plume. Cecile lived in the Badger Creek Area of the reservation. She traveled with her grandmother who taught her many things; they picked roots, which were used for ailments and infections, and dug the Indian paint. She never lost contact with the Blackfeet ways and the use of the language because she kept in close touch with her

father.

Gene Ground is 70 years old. When he was 5- or 6-years old, his father gave him a name. He used to have a nick name, but his father felt like it was time for him to have a name. Gene's father did not see very well. Therefore, Gene was his father's eyes by helping him around especially when they were looking for their horses. His father gave him the name "Mah Dah Mee Dah Bee" or First Person. He was told that he will always be first and have no trouble in what he was going to do thereafter. He feels his name did help him in many ways. Gene experienced many of the Blackfeet traditional ways of religion and ceremonies. He learned them because he always wanted to participate in ceremonial dances. The elders let him participate. He gained the Blackfeet Knowing and highly respects this way because it was his first teachings from his family.

An interview was also conducted with Emma Fish. Her Blackfeet name is "Na Dah Akee wa" or Holy Pine Woman. Emma works at the Blackfeet Community College as an elder providing resource and technical assistance to the Spirit of the Circle, a program for young teenage mothers. She has many step relations through her mother's marriage. Her Blackfeet name is Holy Pine Woman. Emma is 73-years old. All of her children have Blackfeet names. With no living siblings, she is the only one living from her family. Emma knows the Blackfeet ways and has a concern as to what is

going to happen to the old ways. She values the way life used to be and how everyone lived. Emma had problems with her eyes which prevented her from attending school. In her youth she attended many ceremonial and religious events with her mother. She and her husband, Louis, were keepers of a pipe until most recently they transferred it on.

An interview was conducted in the Blackfeet Nursing Home with Margaret LaDeau. Margaret is an elder who recently recovered from an illness but wanted to do an interview. Her Blackfeet name is "Na Stah Ah Kee wa" or Last Singer, she is 80 years old. Her mother was Cecile Last Star, a Blackfeet informant on many topics especially on tepee designs and painting. Margaret is a fluent speaker of the Blackfeet language.

John Buster Yellow Kidney, 66 years old, was interviewed at his home since he has recently recovered from hospital stay. His Blackfeet name is "Nee Nah wa" or Man or Chief. Buster is called upon by many Blackfeet and people literally around the world to share his knowledge and understanding of the Blackfeet Knowing. His Blackfeet name was changed from his boyhood name to Bear Skin. He received this name through a dream his grandson had and shared with him. Then Buster took back his first name, Man. This name was also held by Joseph Horn. They talked about it. Joseph took the name Man, and Buster kept the name Chief. His grandfather was Yellow Kidney, a prominent Blackfeet leader

who kept sacred bundles and a member of the Horse Society in early Blackfeet history. His grandfather raised him from when he was a baby. Buster related that it is hard to talk of the old ways because of the medicine pipes and bundles. In the past the old people have held back in sharing their knowledge, but now the young people need to learn the ways. He emphasized that the right way needs to be stressed. Buster highly values the Blackfeet language and feels the children need to speak it.

An introduction of the elders gives a description of the people left on the Blackfeet reservation who still possess Blackfeet knowledge, experienced the past ceremonial ways, and are speakers of the language. It is through the language that the old ways will be transferred, revived, and put back into practice. Many of the elders have hopes in restoring rituals, ceremonies, and the traditional ways by the children learning the language. For this reason they felt comfortable in conducting an interview.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The 20 interviews conducted with the elders were computerized with codes attached to groups of information that described different concepts of Blackfeet people. These concepts describe Blackfeet life, family relationships, names, ceremonies, language, education, language, and transferring knowledge.

Blackfeet Life

Blackfeet life is viewed by the elders as the time when the language, culture, traditions, and ceremonies were known by everyone young and old. This was the Blackfeet way of life as the elders reflect upon it. The people spent much time relating and visiting with each other. This created a sense of community among everyone. One elder remembered an old man would come to their house to spend time "Gertie would start cooking hot cakes and cut them up for him. We'd tell him to sit up to the table and eat. When he would get through eating, he would say a prayer. Oh-kee, you will be an old man. You folks are really good people. I will always watch over you folks."

Sign language was also used by the old people to communicate with each other. In some cases, sign language was used to communicate with those who may not understand the language. Blackfeet people have always relied on using sign language in relating to each other. In conjunction with sign language, hand gestures were used a lot. "When those old people would be talking, they made signs. I wish you could see some of the old Indians when they start telling stories about how they shot, rode horses in sign language, and then they would start singing."

The elders viewed their experience as unique in that during their lifespan, these elders have faced much change on the reservation. Even the community areas have changed. This came out in an elders discussion when his only reference to communities on the reservation were those names in Blackfeet. "I was fortunate enough to have witnessed and been apart of this era where there was yet no automobiles as we have today, and our people were more self-sufficient then they are now. In those days we travelled by wagon and would get together at different places such as Naatokiokasin [Two Medicine], Moiskitsipoitapisko [Heart Butte], and Kaakato'sitaissksinima'tstohkio'p [Starr School] for dances." The various communities and locations were very special and important to the old people, and each had a name.

Dancing and singing were remembered as the times when

everyone gathered. There were many groups of singers then; for example, the White Shirt Society was one. They would gather at different people's homes and sing for many hours. The people liked to listen to the songs. The people knew where the group always gathered to do their singing. Certain individuals or families were noted for being affiliated with a singing group.

There were also different singers, like Henry Morning Gun. He was one of the White Shirts. I think they had three or four groups of singers. We would all be up there and sing maybe for about 2 or 3 hours. They only had my drum, and the White Shirts would go up there and sing. And they would have an Owl Dance.

Dances in the communities were a social event that the people looked forward to attending. As another elder related, "All these different communities did not rely on the government to build dance arbors for them. Instead they would get their own lumber from the mountains [miistakiistsii] and build their own dance arbors [o'taakoi]."

There were some social dances and games that seemed to have more of a ceremonial attachment to them and were enjoyed by the people. A dance of this nature was the Blacktail Deer Dance. The Feather game was played in different homes. These events kept the people preoccupied in a sense with socializing during the times when situations for the families were hard and tense due to new federal policies that the people lived under. An elder lady said,

"I play feather game, and I always use to beat them when I played in them years."

Blackfeet elders today still value the importance of spirituality in their daily lives. There are times of hardship such as when a family member becomes ill or more recently gets into an accident. Spirituality was important years ago and is still important in the elders daily lives. An elder stated "What helped the most was prayers." Just as spirituality is important, ceremonial events played an important part in the daily lives of Blackfeet people. "We believe in Indian religion and way of life, and because of this belief, we led a good life." Their reflection on the past created a sense of strong feelings about the past.

The power of the prayer cannot go unrecognized. Dreams and visions are just as powerful when experienced. The elders told of their experiences when stories of this nature seemed real. One of the elders faced a serious illness, and she shared the following:

I went through open heart surgery in 1973 up in Washington hospital. Before I left I told my kids don't worry. I stayed there, and on the sixth day they did the operation. It was June the sixth. That's when I went through my open heart surgery. I didn't know nothing, and when I was laying on my bed, I heard my husband's voice. He's been dead. He told me don't worry, and he was calling my name. He said "I am praying for you." In his words, he said you will be back home and see our kids.

As the elders thought about the past back to when they were growing up and living with their parents, a sense of

loneliness came about in their discussion. Today many elders become confused when they think of their children, when they do not totally understand what goes on socially, and when they think about the future of their families. There always seems to be some comparisons as to what is happening now and how they experience life. Life in modern times is fast paced, and people do not have the time to visit each other. As one elder shared, "I really miss them old days....Them days, we lived happy." While another elder shared, "In them days we used to use kerosene lamps. It was good for us it made the people very strong. Right now the children are all in a different world." To further support the feelings, one elder said, "Our people in the past lived a good simple life."

The elders valued the life of their past and reflected on the days when the people were strong, happy, and content. Their past reflected the times spent with their parents and grandparents when life for the Blackfeet was understood. The days when the people could not speak English were the times when stories were told and shared, and when relationships were strong among the people and all their relations.

Family Relationships

Another category of information from the elders was the family structures, makeup, and descriptions as connections

with each other were valued. The extended family concept comes into play here. There always seem to be a close relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. Grandparents will select a grandchild in many instances and "take them under their wing" as the saying goes. In Blackfeet there is term for these children. It is "Ki pi Ta Po Ka" or that grandchild raised by their grandparents. As an elder described this relationship, "What helped my kids is prayers...and my grandson start learning about all the holy things. He used to sit and watch them." The exposure to the different ceremonies in the homes brought each person deep understanding and respect for the particular events. The songs and dances were learned in this way.

"I was raised by my grandmother and my grandfather, Bird Rattler. I was six months old when my grandparents took me because my mother had to be in the hospital." Again this relationship to grandparents was not uncommon. There were strong ties and relationships formed with children and their parents or grandparents. These ties grew strong as the children got older. "I was quite young when my father and mother separated, and I went to live with my grandparents." The grandparents depended on the children for support as well. "They were very traditional in their ways. Because of this and the fact that they needed me at home to help out, I was encouraged not to attend school." All of these elders valued their relationship with the grandparents.

Step-parents were no different in developing the family relationships. Each family member contributed to the child rearing practices in different ways. Stepparents gained as much respect as a natural parent in many situations.

Children also had strong relationships with stepparents. As one elder shared, "At the age of 10 my grandmother, then 82-years old, passed away. I went back to live with my mother and stepfather....I have two half-brothers from this union. Victor who has since passed away, and Johnny who is still living. Johnny and I are very close."

Language in the family was touched upon numerous times as the elders reflected on their families. The elders grew up knowing and speaking the language; therefore, their thought process is still in the language. This became apparent in many of the interviews. "I have nine children, two have since passed away. Three of my children speak Blackfoot, but the other four do not. They can, however, understand me when I am speaking Blackfoot to them. One of my children, married off the reserve and has completely lost our language."

Names

Names gave true meaning to the purpose in life for individuals and gave designated power. The names given to various Blackfeet protect them and help power them throughout their lifetime in times of distress, hardship,

and need for support. "The name that was given to you always had to do with your life when you grow up. It was not given to you like they do today because the person don't know what it is about. All my sisters had Indian names." The elder describes how he obtained his name.

When I was about five or six years old, I used to help my father. He could not see very good. I was more or less his eyes. We use to go look for horses right on top of the hill. From the house was a big hill, and we use to call it "Look out." We would sit up there and look around, so he told me I am going to give you an Indian name. It was "First Person." The reason I am giving you this name is that you will always be first, so that way you will not have any trouble in what you do or talking. Why he gave me this name is for me to have good luck. He said a story to me. He said with this name "First Person," you will always be the first person to walk, and he said you don't have to worry. Go anywhere you want to go. This is why I gave this name to you.

This description gives meaning to why names were given and the significance and power of people's names throughout their lifetime. Many times the parents relied on the grandparent to give the name. At times the parents may call upon an elder in the community to name their child. Blackfeet children needed to be named so that when elders or parents prayed for support for them, then they could be called by their Blackfeet name. "This name will always help you and at that I really didn't think too much about it, but in the way I was glad to get this name. Right now I am 70-years old and that name is still helping me in a lot of ways, just like he said that it was going to do."

True Indian names have never really been understood by

the average non-Indian or non-Blackfeet. In many cases, there has been stereotyping and even ridicule upon seeing or hearing a true Blackfeet name. The true significance of the name, definitely, is not understood. To support this idea, just conjure the imagery that the Blackfeet names evoke. Are these the names of savages? A listing of Blackfeet names such as Buffalo Hide, Spotted Woman, Black Weasel, Old Good Gun, Morning Woman, Old Chief, Lone Charging Woman, Still Smoking, Holy Pine Woman, First Person, Sitting on the Air, Cold Wind, Bird Rattler, Three Calves, Big Tiger Woman, Otter Woman, Plume, Yellow Kidney, Bear Skin and Last Singer gives poetic meaning to each and every individual carrying a Blackfeet name.

It was not uncommon to have more than one name during a lifetime. Many children will receive a name as a child. When becoming an adolescent, another name can be given. As an adult, still an individual may acquire another name due to performing or accomplishing a deed.

I have two Indian names. One is the name I am was known as. It's the name, I gave to myself. They were having a dance at Starr School, it was the Christmas holiday. A man was invited to dance with the Blackfeet Indians. He was from Fort Belknap. I guess his Indian name was Cold Wind. Nobody knows how it was translated. Our people said that his Indian name was "Ee Stoo Soo poo." I went and said, "My name is going to be "Ee Stoo Soo poo." From that time on, they just started calling me Cold Wind. That's how I was known by that name.

Elders believed that names had power, especially, in a time of facing or confronting hardship or death and dying

situations. Invariably, through a dream or a ceremony, names provided the protection needed at the time. The names are transmitted in the language for the meaning to be understood. During the world wars, there were incidents of ceremonies being held before a soldier went to war. If this person did not have an Indian name, one would be given. These ceremonies were very important because they brought loved ones back home to their families. One such incident took place.

My grandfather gave me my Indian name, as a boy, which is Shoots At Night. When I went to war an elder, by the name of Bull Child, gave me the name Saapo'p or Plume. The elder who gave the name Saapo'p visited me in one of my dreams during the war. When I had this dream, I couldn't see who was talking to me but realized that the voice belonged to an elder. He spoke to me in Blackfoot, and told me that his name was Ninaisaapo'p. He was handing his name down to me. He told me I would survive the war, nothing would happen to me. What he said came true as I returned home from the war unscathed. I, later, handed this name that was given to me in my dream to my younger brother's grandson, so he will live a long life.

Indian names are usually given once. Rarely will two people have the same name. Therefore, the uniqueness of the name to oneself is important. The naming is a special time in ones life to reflect upon. Names were not given out freely. "My Indian name is Last Singer. My grandma Bird Rattler gave me the name. I am the only one given this Indian name, so no one else ever had this name."

Ceremonies

The Blackfeet held sacred the ceremonies that were conducted only in the presence of the Blackfeet because of the spiritual implications of knowledge and power. The Blackfeet believed all sacred knowledge was handed down by the Creator Sun. Therefore, there is strictness, protection, and protocol to every gesture and movement as described by the elders.

Information on the sacred is carefully discussed. The elders only shared what they wanted others to know and what was appropriate. This implies that there is a place for everything to be learned and that there is a process by which to learn the sacred knowledge. Invariably the transmission of knowledge needed to come through the language as the elders suggested. Writing of information is not considered revealing sacred information, but lessons need to be shared with the people. The time has come where the people and especially the younger generations of people need to realize what is in store for the Blackfeet people. A warning can come about as one elder related that in 1964 when a major flood occurred on the Blackfeet Reservation:

The first thing I thought about when it first hit is them old folk's word some time ahead of you that things will be pushed aside. Then your protections are gone, and the water will come and hurt a lot of people. My god, he was right! The old man died in 1956. He told all the people that were living. Some are gone. He told me, "You try hard with your family." So I remember what he said. Then when that flood came, it sure scared

the hell out of me just like them old people were talking about our protection was gone. In 1964, it sure took a lot of people's lives in that year. That's the things I think about. There was no more beaver bundle to protect us against the water.

Many of the ceremonial activities disappeared with the elders as they left this earth. Sacred items were sold to white people for money. Families were not in positions to take care of or take on the responsibilities of their sacred items due to hardships and to not knowing the songs and the rituals that go with them. "That is what's scary about the bundles because you got to do what is right even if it is 1997 and not 1897. You have to be careful about the bundles."

The elders or the keepers of sacred knowledge looked out for the people. The sacred knowledge provided protection in life for the people. The elders who had the power and communication through supernatural means seem to always know what was going to happen in the future years. It is not uncommon for elders to predict major catastrophes or events. The elders sense these things are going to happen. "The old men they used to get together. They used to sing about in February so the water would not hurt us. They also used to talk about it some day ahead of us that all the people's protection will be gone. A lot of people will be hurt by water."

"For myself, I seen power, but it never changes my life. I want to keep things going because the young people

need it." The few elders who possess spirituality are keepers of the sacred knowledge. They want to provide support to younger generations. The younger generation of people need to also come forward to make the commitment to take on these responsibilities. It is not an easy task to do, and it will take time and commitment. It can be done, but the language is important in taking on these responsibilities. Many of the elders feel the time is right for songs and dances to be learned by other tribal members.

I was still quite young when I received my medicine pipe. Some of the elders...used to tell me to listen to the old songs and try and learn them. They indicated that in the future the younger generation will 'stand there and hold their fingers' because they will have no one to go to for help to learn these songs and their meanings because all the elders with this knowledge will all be gone. Try hard to learn these songs. By listening, hearing, and thinking about these songs, I gradually learned them.

The O'kaan ceremony is very sacred among the Blackfeet. It is one of the most important ceremonies held by the Blackfeet people and was handed down to the people through metaphysical and metaspirtual means which is best described in one elders story:

There is a legend that explains how the O'kaan ceremony came to be. One day a young woman was in the woods gathering firewood. Looking up into the sky she spotted a star. She wished she was married to this star. When she was again in the woods gathering firewood, a man approached her. He told her that he had heard her wish and wanted her to go with him. She agreed. Upon agreeing she had to close her eyes, and when she opened them, she was with her new husband in the sky. He had one request, which was that she not pull out a turnip that was planted in the garden no matter if

it was in the way. Her curiosity got the best of her one day, and she pulled the turnip out of the ground leaving a gaping hole. When she looked through the hole, she saw her home and family and immediately started to cry. She wanted to go back home. Her husband granted her wish once more, and she returned home. Her people saw her coming down and approached her. She told them about the O'kaan ceremony that she learned while with her husband. In the Whiteman's religion everyone gets together in church to worship and during communion bread and wine are given to the people. Indian religion is similar as we all get together to worship and pray. Instead of receiving bread and wine, we use tongue as our host. Tongue was cut up in small pieces, and the girl as well as the people gathered there each ate a piece of tongue. While eating the tongue the girl confessed her sins and prayed for four days and four nights.

This ceremony is very significant in the Blackfeet way of knowing because of how the people received the ceremony. It was brought down through supernatural means to the people to conduct and use. "Akaipikani [The Old People] had complete faith in this ceremony. It was considered very sacred."

All ceremonial events are related. The right to do certain ceremonies must be given to a person from someone who already has the right. Prayers are important in transferring any rights or items to another. A ceremonial protocol is followed; the protocol is known by the one performing the ceremony. If a protocol is not followed, then things can go wrong for that person. An elder describes how he obtained the right to paint tepees:

Another custom that was handed down to me was painting tepee's. My wife and I wanted to have our own tepee so I approached Charlie Iron Breast, and he told me that he would hand down his tepee to me and requested that I make my own design. A special ceremony was performed at sunrise where

Charlie Iron Breast lit some sweetgrass. While I was holding a stick, Charlie held my hand, put the stick towards the smoke from the sweetgrass, and then in the paint [a'san] and on a piece of white cloth draws a design on the cloth and prayed for me. He did this four times. He prayed that I live a long and good life and that the "tsikkokaan" [tepee design] he was passing down to me would enable me to paint a tepee and that this tepee design help me from making mistakes in life.

The symbolism of the number four is important and evident in the ceremony described above. Four is significant in that it takes four days for a new moon to appear. The medicine woman holding a medicine lodge ceremony will fast four days and four nights. The four directions, starting with the east (where the sun arises) is significant and moving to the south, west, and north must be acknowledged in ceremonial doings.

The elders shared some of their knowledge to relate the essence of spirituality and to stress that every aspect of one's life entailed this support. Spirituality is the connection to the supernatural world of knowledge and being. Within spirituality comes power. Power is viewed as operating at a supernatural level. All life and non-life forms are important to existence. Blackfeet rely on a vision or a dream to acquire power. The symbolism of power that is acquired may come about in the form of an animal. Animals are viewed as very powerful; therefore, their power is sought. Humans are weak by themselves and need to rely on power from other forces. In Blackfeet prayers, one would hear the words of "have pity on us." There is not an event,

period in time, or celebration that does not need this blessing. Many elders have the acquired knowledge through the language to offer prayers, hold ceremonies, and conduct special rituals. Daily lives were lived in this manner when communication was done in the Blackfeet language.

This spirituality still exists today. "George and I are pipe holders and initiate Medicine Pipe Ceremonies. In the past our elders [women] believed in the ceremony we refer to as 'O'kaan' which is a ceremony where a woman will make a solemn promise to complete this ceremony in order to help someone who is ill." She continued, "The woman making this promise would stay in a lodge alone praying and fasting for four days and four nights. This ceremony is very sacred and holy." These two elders hold significant power and knowledge of the Blackfeet ways. They want to transfer it to those who would learn. Therefore, they have designated a grandson to inherit the knowledge by talking, singing, and showing him things.

One elder said she relies on prayers and spirituality for strength to keep her family safe from harm and sickness.

When I am home I always make smudge....Where I go is into my bedroom and start praying. I pray for everybody. My Catholic religion is the first one I say. Then [is] my Indian religion. Sometimes I tell my kids when I say my prayers I just about pull God down so nothing will happen. Prayers are very strong.

This is common practice for elders to utilize prayers daily.

Many elders know of the songs sung at different

ceremonies and for different purposes. Praying in a time of hardship is done. The burning of sweetgrass is done each day. Sweetgrass is used for many occasions by many people. The smudging or the use of prayers while burning sweetgrass is a form of cleansing or purifying. At times smudging will be done before a very important event or meeting along with prayers. There are many ways to gain spiritual support. Therefore, the importance of having and retaining Blackfeet knowledge of the sacred ways cannot be overemphasized.

The point here is at least we are trying to continue to practice, keep alive, and respect our Indian religion as it is true it was and still is apart of our culture. I myself burn sweetgrass and sing the old songs that I know. I feel that because I do this the Creator has blessed me as when I become ill, I somehow end up recovering my health.

The elders are concerned about the changes that have taken place and constantly reflect on how the younger generation does not care to learn the Blackfeet knowledge because they are too busy doing other things. Many times the elders referred to learning the Blackfeet language. The elders believe that by knowing the language, the younger people would gain the mores and respect that comes out of this knowledge. Space and time is needed for children to learn the tribal ways. As it is now in modern times, many elders are worried about what will happen in the future to Blackfeet knowledge, the language and the ceremonies. They also worry what will happen to the young people since time is moving them in an opposite direction. The Blackfeet ways

are changing rapidly with time. One elder relates his concerns about this change:

Our way of life in the past is on the verge of dying, and today's modern way of life is continuously changing. My grandfather used to tell me to sit down and listen to his stories. He would say that times were changing fast and that I would see this change. Today I am a part of the modern society and see all that is changing....We have grown accustomed to living like the Whiteman as well as speaking his language instead of our own. In the future, maybe the next fifty years our earth will change again. Just like the long rains that happened a long time ago. Our earth has been so badly damaged. The air we breathe, the food we eat, and the water we drink have all become polluted. Akaipikani [Old People] respected and worshipped mother earth. Today this respect is no longer there.

The Blackfeet Knowing is a concern with the elders. There is a constant comparing of their experiences with what goes on today. These elders know how a medicine lodge will be performed because they were exposed to the ceremony many times in their life. The spiritual support by the old people given to their children is never forgotten. It provided comfort and confidence to people even in the worst of times.

I would listen to old Last Star when he would put his Medicine Lodge up. Sometimes I think about when I was growing up and how my parents raised us like my other brother and sisters. A lot of times I think it was a life with no fear at all. You had a chance to be with your parents. I would also think about when I had to carry water and chop wood.

Language

The elders viewed their native language as very

important to their existence. The Blackfeet language was the only language used. Therefore, switching over to English was very difficult for many people. The reasons why Blackfeet people were required to make a complete switch to another English and never to speak their own language presented confusion to them also. The elders interviewed were all Blackfeet speakers only when they were children. The devaluing of the Blackfeet language by not being able to speak it affected many people. This is especially so because the language has so much meaning and importance on everyday existence. "I was raised in the Blackfoot language so when I did attend school, I found English very hard to learn."

There is a deep concern over the fact that the Blackfeet language is not being learned by the children. The language is not being taught to the children, in the home, or in school. This creates a major concern of the elders. The generation before the elders, which was made up of the elders' parents, literally had to protect the Blackfeet language and ceremonies by hiding this knowledge. Crucial punishment was rendered whenever anyone in school spoke the Blackfeet language. Punishment included such acts as kneeling on a broom stick and hands and knuckles being whipped, or it was through other punishable means such as going without food and standing in a corner for a long period of time. Speaking the language meant too many

negative experiences for many older Blackfeet; therefore, English prevailed. "Today our children all speak English but cannot speak or even understand their own language."

It can be said that Blackfeet people gave up speaking the language because they loved their children. They did not want their children to face or experience what they went through. The value of the English language became evident when formal education was more prevalent. The parents did not want their children to be beaten by authorities. Three generations later, people wonder why the Blackfeet language is disappearing. As one elder said, "I blame myself for not pushing my children to speak Blackfeet."

Failure to speak the native language has the elders worried about the future of tribal knowledge. The elders are letting their concerns be known to those who will listen. They are anxious to train or take on apprentices for the different ceremonial events that must be carried on. The elders realize that they may be the last generation with this knowledge which is embedded in the language. In some instance the elders are desperate. They are desperate in a sense that those who do not have a grasp of the language can be trained to take on these responsibilities because the language will come about in time. The elders are desperate in a sense that they want to leave this earth knowing the Blackfeet Knowing will continue. Otherwise, all their children will be lost, confused, and have no where to turn.

"In my opinion we began to lose our language when it was taken from us at the mission schools we were forced to attend. English was forced upon us in that we were severely punished if we spoke Blackfeet." The days at the Mission School located in the Two Medicine area were not reflected upon by the elders as memorable. The staff consisting of nuns and priests did not all have compassion for what the children were experiencing by leaving home at an early age, breaking ties and connections with the families, and most importantly not knowing how to speak English. The land on which the Mission School was built was donated by Chief White Calf because he advocated education. Nevertheless, the religious people who ran the Mission School were mean to the children as witnessed by all of them. Therefore, how could effective learning take place?

The language was targeted as a means to breakdown the tribal ways. Within the intricacies of the language is the blueprint for many of the Blackfeet ways. If one knows the language, it will speak back to you. This concept reveals the close connection between language and culture and indicates that the two are virtually inseparable. To deprive anyone of the right to speak and acquire knowledge will never be understood by the elders. Once the language is lost, a complete breakdown of the tribal ways, ceremonies, rituals, customs, values, and mores will occur, and these things will become nonexistent. New ways will

evolve to replace the old ways. "If you talk the language, don't talk it here....So we grew up that way. That was one of the first things that was taken away from us, the Indian language, and not only at Starr School, to the Boarding School, but everywhere."

"I strongly believe that one reason we began to lose our language was when our mother's quit breastfeeding their children. In the past our mother's breast fed their children, and our language remained intact." This observation by an elder was very profound. When children are born, the mother provides nurturing by warmth, and cuddling by breastfeeding. Many times lullabies and songs are sung to calm the baby. This calmness is very important because of the fact that many times tribal people were faced with confrontation by enemies. The crying of a baby could mean the ability to survive or not. The mother spends time talking calmly during breastfeeding. There is a connection between breastfeeding and the language. In this process, the children begin to learn language commands, and the patterning of the language is formulating in their minds early in the formative years. In comparison, today, children grow up not speaking the language and have to be taught in teaching-learning situations.

The elders realize the changing of times today in comparison to early historical times when Blackfeet life was true. There is no turning back because everyone lives in a

society that would not allow it. Exposure to modern times is eminent. Elders know this and have faced what change means to them. They are worried about what will happen to the Blackfeet way of life as they know it when it was happy and supportive. There is hope, though, and that is through the Blackfeet language. This is what the elders are counting on for saving Blackfeet knowledge. "Times have changed from the dog days to now. We cannot ever go back, but we can continue our way of life. We need to try hard to learn our language like we learned English. It is not good to give up."

Respect is one of those terms that seems to be self-explanatory, but different meaning for it to come about when describing respect through the language. Respect will come about in many forms because the language supports it. For example, elders are respected because they are keepers of sacred knowledge. One must not be in the same room with a mother-in-law because of the deep respect for that person. Respect exists for all animate and inanimate objects as described in giving thanks in prayers. Respect comes about in ceremonies because of the protocol required; failure to follow such protocol is disrespectful. The use of the language must be proper; anything other than proper is disrespectful. Speakers of the proper Blackfoot language feel injecting slang or other forms into Blackfeet conversation is degrading to the language. Language has

life. It is through the speakers that life becomes active. "Our Blackfoot language has also lost this respect. I sometimes wonder if we will ever gain it back the way we spoke our language in the past. The people that I have contact with that can speak Blackfoot mix English and Blackfoot together."

All of the elders highly valued the language because of its importance in transmitting knowledge, ceremonies, and customs. Elders do place deep value in the language because of its capabilities and responsibilities attached to the language. Losing the language is a big loss to the speakers. If a language is lost, it will take with it many Blackfeet teachings, lessons, knowledge, sacredness, and ways of behaving as people. It will take away a complete mindview in relationship to the environment and the world. A whole race will suffer because of the loss. For these reasons, elders support the learning of the language in a proper way.

Language revival is possible due to the fact that there are still elders to lift the language out of this depressed state of existence. Active use of the language through producing children speakers provides hope. When the children become adults, they will revert back to the ways as dictated in the language. "My grandfather used to tell me that our way of life in the future would change drastically, but what he didn't tell me was that we would lose our

language. Maybe he knew that our future generation would try and revive the language just like what's happening today."

Education

The elders were concerned about the education of themselves and the education for their children. During the times when the elders went to school, many of them attended school at the Holy Family Mission which is referred to as the Mission School. When the Mission School was closed in the early 1930's, other day schools evolved in communities all over the reservation. At one time, there were more than 30 day schools supported by the federal government, by contracts with public schools system, and in some cases support by a family. The off-reservation boarding schools were also attended.

The elders' experiences and observations in these schools were shared. The hardships of formal education were stressed.

When I started school, I think I missed one day. When I started school here in Big Badger, it was about three miles so it was pretty hard for me to get to school. I use to miss about seven days on account of the storms because I went horseback to school. This is why I used to miss a lot of days. Still I really tried hard for my schooling.

For some, the concept of formal education was not a positive image. Punishment was used on children who spoke their Blackfeet language publicly. Strict discipline

measures were used on children such as hard work. The school personnel were determined to make English speakers out of the children and to make them unable to communicate with their parents. "My grandparents use to talk about the Mission, how bad it was." An elderly lady referred to the same Mission school:

In the years I went to school, the sisters were really mean like I said in my story to you girls. There were things we couldn't even do in them years. All we used to do is stay in one room and do our school work. They tell us we cannot do this and that.

Some schools were more disciplined than others. In many ways the discipline used in schools could be termed a violent act. The children were not treated this way at home. The elders also shared what their parents remembered about attending school. The disciplinary practice of prohibiting children from talking their Blackfeet language and punishment if caught talking their language were all too common.

I grew up with the Blackfeet language. When I was small, where I went was Old Agency. No we could not talk Indian. If they hear us talking our language, we get our hands slapped or we would get a whipping and would have to clean the yard so many times. It's how the school was.

Another elder said, "They would talk about the Mission and they'd ask me if I wanted to go there in the summer for school. Didn't care to go cause I know they were mean to the students."

"In all the three years I spent at this mission school,

we were not allowed to go home. Our parents would visit the school at least twice a year--once at Easter and at Christmas." This time span created problems for children to maintain relations with their parents on a continual basis. Blackfeet parents loved their children enough to not make any matters or conditions worse for them at any price. Children were told that school was good for them and that they would learn many things that will help them. However, the connections were never broken although they were probably weakened by the separation.

"I was at the Mission for one year, and my grandpa came down and took me out. He did not like how they treated the kids at the Mission." Again, the experience the parents were dealing with made them worry about their children. Many refused to send their children either through hiding them or keeping them home to help with work.

"I found school very difficult because I did not speak English." Many elders attended one-room rural schools as well as the Mission School.

Akokitsi [Many Fingers] would bring us to school by a horse drawn wagon, and in winter we travelled by sled. He would get paid to bring us back and forth to school. We attended the day school at Durham [Ihpohsimaiksi] for two or three years before my family moved into town.

The parents tried their best to get their children who are the elders of today to school. School became very important to the parents. The elders would always tell children to try hard and never quit school. In their minds,

education would provide hope and support because the authorities (government) wanted it that way. To do anything different from what the authorities wanted, only resulted in punishment, separation, and hurt. "I attended school at a day school located down from Kiowa Camp called Heavy Breast School."

The curriculum used in the day schools was basically reading, writing, penmanship, spelling, geography, and math. The curriculum in the Mission School and in the boarding schools was made up of part of the day doing academics or the basics and the other part of the day doing chores, which meant learning discipline and learning how to do ranch and farm work or in some instances a trade. Girls learned how to iron clothes, cook, bake, and clean. The children's labor skills were needed in and around the school.

"Learning to read and write in English was very hard. When we went outside to play during school hours, we would speak Blackfoot to one another, and when we returned to class we continued learning English."

The switching of thinking created problems in learning. Mastering the English language was a primary goal at all the schools. English was synonymous to education.

Our time was split so that in the mornings we were taught how to cook, sew, can, and work in the bakery. Once a month, we were required to change the straw in our straw mattresses. We also had to gather feathers for our pillows. It took us a good month before we had enough feathers for two pillows. In the afternoon we spent time on arithmetic, spelling and geography.

The parents faced strict laws. Children were literally herded like animals to attend school away from home. Parents had to relinquish their children to the authorities or there would be consequences as a result. For example, the withholding of rations was not uncommon as punishment for not sending a child to school. Parents were threatened that they would never see their children if they did not cooperate. Children were even stolen and parents not even notified of their whereabouts. "When I went to live with my grandmother after my father's death, authorities from the Department of Indian Affairs came to my grandmothers home to pick me up for school." Since children were herded up, many parents hid their children. When the children were found by the authorities, the children had to attend the school year that had already started. Some children came in late, which put them behind in school. This experience was not conducive to learning. Relationships could not form with classmates and teachers because the children longed for their families. School for some was not a happy place to be: "I got so mad at the priest, the Father; sure he is an old man. I did not go to school after that."

Transfer of Knowledge

The relationship of the children to their parents was very strong and close. Frequent mention was made of how Indian parents loved their children and did not want them to

be taken away to be educated. Parents and grandparents are very concerned about the language not being passed down to the children. There has been a breakdown in the systems of learning because the children are not learning the Blackfeet language.

Our language is a hard language to learn, and it makes it even harder on our children because they are required to learn English as well. I believe that when you start teaching a young child it is very important that just straight Blackfoot is spoken rather than mixing Blackfoot and English together as so many speakers do today.

Many of the elders have witnessed the teachings of the Blackfeet language to preschool age children in Head Start and in the Immersion schools. Moccasin Flat school is located in the heart of Browning, Montana; where the old community of Moccasin Flat used to be. A state-of-the-art, one-room school room building was built to create positive learning environment for children from age 2 to 5 and beyond. The atmosphere in the school is caring and nurturing. No English is spoken; only Blackfoot is spoken in the school. This is the second year of operation for the school, and the children who attend are semi-fluent in the Blackfoot language. This means that currently the children can converse with the elders and with each other for at least an hour. For this reason, the elders of the community are totally impressed with the immersion school concept and its accomplishment.

In order to gain our language back, we need to teach our children from infancy to speak

Blackfoot. If we communicate with them in Blackfoot, they will gradually learn as I did. I was raised in the language from infancy on and spoke very little English. I have never forgotten how to speak Blackfoot.

The Blackfeet Tribe Head Start program has also implemented immersion techniques and has involved the elders in the teaching of the language. Elders are used as the third person or resource person of the language. The immersion approach to language training has gained the support of the elders because the children have demonstrated the ability to speak in the language in short conversations. The learning of the language by those who do not speak gives the elders hope that the Blackfeet ways will continue to survive. The people will survive.

"Our elders, Akaipikani [The Old People], use to say that in the future we should talk to our children so that they show respect to our elders." This respect cannot be taken lightly. From within the teachings of the Blackfoot language, the concept of respect is derived. The language will describe in detail kinship relationship. This relationship is based on respect for each other. The language will outline the protocol of ceremonial rituals, which cannot be comprehended in English. Therefore, respect in Blackfoot has more meaning than in English. Respect means that the children listen to their parents and elders. "In the past, life was simple and good. Today, children don't know how to listen. We need to talk to our children

more. Show them right from wrong."

One elder was especially concerned about the future of ceremonies. In the past, this was not a concern of the old people. As long as the Blackfoot language was spoken, there were tribal members to fulfill the roles of taking over responsibilities when the time came for the elders to transfer the right to different ceremonies. This same elder used the analogy of breastfeeding to describe language learning from childhood. Not too many parents today use breastfeeding practices or traditions child rearing practices. The people must have in place a way to pass on tribal knowledge.

The ceremonies such as O'kaan, Medicine Pipe, and the Crazy Dog Society must keep going. Our younger generation needs to learn all they can from the elders that are left. There are so few of us now. I am teaching my 9-year old grandson the old songs, and it is he that will inherit my pipe. I gave him his Indian name at a namegiving ceremony and named him "Awaatoyi." This is what we have to do. Pass our language and way of life down to our younger children.

Many elders think about why their children and grandchildren do not speak the language.

I often tell my children that they should try and learn Blackfeet, but they come back and tell me that it was my fault for not teaching them. I did not know then that in the future I would be teaching Blackfeet and that our language would be my livelihood.

Blackfeet Knowing is a concern of the elders and this was expressed in the interviews. "When we are gone, everything we know will leave with us. When Mike leaves

this earth everything, he knows about O'kaan ceremonies will leave with him. The same with myself. When I too leave this earth, the songs I know and the Medicine Pipe Ceremony [Ninaimskaan] will go with me." This thought or statement cannot be over-emphasized. There is an urgency for the people today to begin taking over or gaining Blackfeet Knowing. "So now, as far as you know, I try to help people if that's what they want. The only thing I would like to have them know about the Blackfeet Way. So they'll know what an Indian ceremony is. Some of the workers don't know much about the Blackfeet language or how to go about the Indian ways and its for their own good."

The many lessons from the elders need to be understood and accepted. "Our parents raised us to show respect to others and ourselves. They always stopped us when we were doing something wrong and always reminded us to behave when we were at someone else's home." As one elder shared:

They should try hard to follow our way of life [referring to his own children]. In order for us to retain our culture, the younger generation has to become involved. They need to ask our elders questions in regard to why and how different ceremonies and songs are performed and the meaning of the songs that are sung at these ceremonies. If we don't try and keep these ceremonies alive, we will surely lose our history, culture, and language.

The anxiousness of finding ways for transferring knowledge to the next generation is evident. "If these books are written, the future generation can learn from them and in this way gain the respect that our language and culture

deserve."

"As I mentioned before, there are only two elders left on this reserve, including myself, who know about our way of life, language, songs, and religious ceremonies. The other elder, Mike Swims Under, would be about 76-years old now. I myself am 84-years old." Many elders are offering their services and support to those who can take on the responsibilities of acquiring Blackfeet knowledge.

Sometimes I tell George that he should pass our way of life down to others, our children and grandchildren before he is too old to remember everything he knows of our culture. We have to spend time with our children and tell and show them how to speak our language in order for us to retain it.

Molly Kicking Woman shared her thoughts on the writing of Blackfeet knowledge. She has been interviewed many times by non-Indians whom she never sees again and much less gains access to what was written. She and her husband, George, are always getting called upon to perform a ceremony, to give a name, or to be present at an event. She said, "Books should be written about our past by our own people. White people approach our elders in order to write about our past and make a lot of money doing this. Why can't our own people write these books because while researching our history, they too are learning about our past way of life as well as earning money doing it." This analogy was made by an elder who wanted to stress the importance of tribal members researching, recording, and writing what might be

lost information. The documentation and recording of tribal knowledge is worthwhile because it is field-based knowledge. Adults need to do this because of time limit factor in learning the language, which is the keeper of knowledge. Seeking knowledge in the field gives the people an opportunity to create their own knowledge. This method of seeking knowledge is acceptable to Blackfeet Ways and is based on obtaining knowledge, reflecting on new knowledge obtained, and repeating the process again until knowledge is accepted.

The use of technology in today's society can be used to an advantage. For example, various songs can be recorded and learned. The computer can store huge amounts of information and can facilitate the grouping, retrieving, and accessing in a short period of time. The elders are realizing the need to use this technique for acquiring knowledge.

The elders are the keepers of knowledge and the teachers of the language, traditions, ceremonies, and customs of the Blackfeet way. The elders shared relationships in their families. It is through the language that knowledge comes about. Elders shared how they acquired knowledge. Furthermore, they described how knowledge and language should be transferred to others in the culture.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The elders of the community wanted to share their thoughts and knowledge with hopes of getting a message across to the community. The interviews were done in the Blackfeet language and translated back to English to give the elders every opportunity to feel comfortable in responding to a semi-structured interview process. A team approach to conducting the interview was used. The team included the researcher, a recorder to run the video camera, and the translator who was a speaker of the language. The researcher presented questions in English, and the translator repeated the questions in Blackfoot. The team approach worked well in this setting because to the interviews were conducted in the Blackfoot language only.

Data collecting grouped into categories of Blackfeet life, family relationships, names, ceremonies, language, education, and transferring of knowledge. The perceptions of the elders as described through the Blackfoot language revealed overwhelming, comprehensive, and rich reflections on families, schooling, and community.

Blackfeet Life

The elders reflected on their experiences, mostly when they were young and with their parents. The elders shared the socializing of long visits, singing, and dancing. The Blackfoot language was the bond because everyone spoke only the language. Elders today probably faced and experienced the most change of any generation of people. The fast pace of living has caught up to the Blackfeet as a group of people in areas where language loss is very evident. The elders are worried about it. The spirituality in the families used to be strong. To be able to reflect back in time provides comfort to many elders because they have carried forward their knowledge and want the next generations to take over. Storytelling among the people was a favorite form of visiting with each other.

Family Relationships

The elders valued the extended family concept of living. Their discussions reflect that the relatives took care of them as children. Constant praying for the well being of family members was done daily. Again, the Blackfoot language was held in high regard by the elders. They were proud of the family members that know and speak the Blackfoot language.

Names

Blackfeet names given to family members were carefully

chosen. These names had significant meaning and power to an individual throughout his lifetime. Many of the elders shared how their names were obtained. Their families have also all been named. People's names guide them through their journey in life. It is very important that every individual have in their possession a Blackfeet name.

Ceremonies

The elders hold knowledge sacred. This knowledge can only be obtained through the Blackfoot language. Ceremonial rites and rituals have been handed down by Creator Sun since the beginning of time and must continue to remain so. The elders only shared what they felt was appropriate and stressed the writing of information is not considered revealing of or disturbing to the sacredness. The time is coming when many ceremonial rites need to be transferred to new and younger people. Therefore, the urgency for reviving the teachings through the Blackfoot language is of utmost concern. Ceremonies must continue on to provide protection to the people.

Language

The elders have high regards for the Blackfoot language. The elders feel the language must be taught to the children. The children are going to bring back what was lost in language retention. Even though punishment was used to get rid of the language in the elders and generations

before them, it made everyone place a higher value on the language. The elders are willing and anxious to take on apprentices of the language. Failure to retain the language has weakened and is threatening the Blackfeet knowledge base. One elder felt strongly that when mothers quit breastfeeding their babies, the language started eroding away.

Education

The elders reflected on their educational experience in the formal school setting. Those times were not totally enjoyable for many of the elders while others knew that education was a means of survival. All formal education systems had one goal in mind when teaching Blackfeet children; that goal was to produce English speakers at any expense. The devaluing of the Blackfeet way of life by education affected many generations of people. The educational systems also dismantled the strong family structures of the Blackfeet people. The elders feel the people must have their ceremonies to provide support, their language to transmit culture, and the singing and dancing to promote to restore the Blackfeet lifestyles.

Transfer of Knowledge

The relationship between children and families is very strong. The elders have come to a realization that the language needs to be restored again. It is through the

children where hope lies. Some elders have advocated teaching children at infancy levels and breastfeeding will provide the nurturing and support all children need. The path must be paved for transferring tribal knowledge, which means more language speakers are needed. One elder advocated for a reflection and action process of seeking tribal knowledge by using tribal people to conduct field-base research.

Conclusions

Formal Education

Formal education has failed to include Blackfeet learning and teachings in its methodology.

The elders talked about their concerns on education and their experiences when they attended school. The formal education provided hardships on children to learn. Their Blackfoot language was never accepted within the walls of the school and was not accepted on the premises or grounds. Nevertheless, the elders still tried hard in school to complete each year in good standing. If the Blackfoot language was spoken, harsh punishment was imposed on the children. The mental connection of speaking the language and punishment was soon realized. It did not matter if the school was the mission school, day school or boarding school. All educators treated the Blackfeet children the same; it did not matter what kind of school it was.

The concept of education did become important to the

child, because the parents learned fast the consequences if they should disobey the authorities. The elders spoke of the punishment, separation, and hurt felt for the children by their parents. The parents during this time longed to be with their children. Education became a highly valued concept, even though the teaching was not relevant to the students.

The formal education process to which all Indian children and parents were subjected became a major influence on the lives of Blackfeet families. There was no way around it. This move toward formal schooling was a completely new approach to learning than how Blackfeet children were used to being taught at home.

In review of the Blackfeet people, historically, the federal government was the major influence on them. Directly, this was by policies implemented. Indirectly, it was by vesting the same power to entities such as the churches and schools to carry out federal policies. Again, the two major goals of this policy were "educating" and "Christianizing."

The Blackfeet people's historical experience has been the same as many other tribes in relation to education. The term generally accepted for this is "assimilation." This process has taken place over a period of five centuries dating back to Indian-white relations and contact. "Only in the Twentieth Century, the fifth century of Indian-white

contact, has serious consideration been given to allowing Indians to choose their own destiny" (Reyhner & Eder, 1989, p. 1.).

Howard Study. In 1965 a Blackfeet scholar, Robert E. Howard, completed a "Historical Survey of the Formation and Growth of Education on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, 1872-1964." This is the only known source of references completed by a Blackfeet Tribal member of the formal education process of Blackfeet children and families. Then in 1980, the Blackfeet Heritage Program published a series of booklets on Blackfeet written documents. This series included The Blackfeet, Five Viewpoint, Grass Woman, and The Educational Movement of the Blackfeet Indians, (1840-1979). The Educational Movement of the Blackfeet Indians (1840-1979) was authored by Jackie Parsons.

Howard completed his thesis by presenting the history of education on the Blackfeet Reservation. His secondary goal was to provide some insights into the changing patterns of education applied to Indian people over a span of nearly one hundred years. He gave his readers an overview of the Blackfeet Reservation and United States government education policy by using the two major sources of historian John C. Ewers and Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to Secretary of the Interior from the records of United States Bureau of Indian Affairs. Both of these provided descriptive information about the early formative years of

formal education. Charts were provided of enrollment.

In addition to these major sources, Howard used several other sources in describing the public school education of the Blackfeet. He utilized the county records, annual reports of the superintendent, newspapers, school board accounts, personal accounts by individuals, and documentation and school yearbooks. This era reflected the shift from rural schools to the consolidated public school system at Browning, Heart Butte, Starr School, Babb, and East Glacier. The review of the Holy Family Mission and the parochial efforts in educating Blackfeet was examined. Sources of information came from authors who wrote books on the Jesuit Order, Jesuit history, and related topics. Howard did a good objective review of the written records and documents available to develop his thesis which he ended with the following statement:

History has paved the way with its mistakes; to ignore the past is to fail again in the future. The children of the Blackfeet have proved their worth in the field of education; they will prove they are worthy of the time, effort and expense involved in providing high quality education. The proof that the Blackfeet can compete along side anyone else lies in the many degrees and diplomas that were earned by dedicated and not-to-be-denied Indians, who are among the great leaders in many communities, both on and off the reservation. The future of the Indian is brighter through sound planning, dedicated and informed educators, and a continuous, sympathetic and cooperative effort.

In review of the extensive historical review of formal education, there were two conclusions drawn. One was that there were no efforts made on the part of the government

boarding schools, public schools, and boarding schools to include and recognize the child's background--Blackfeet culture, language, and traditions as important in the educational process. The second was that elders were not included in this process as a resource to enhance learning for the Blackfeet children.

The Gold Study. In 1934 a non-Blackfeet, Douglas Gold, also completed a thesis for the fulfillment of a Master of Arts degree entitled "The Intelligence and Achievement of Blackfeet Indians." Gold came to the Blackfeet Reservation as a schoolteacher, and eventually he became the superintendent of schools. Over the years, he has enjoyed a solid reputation as friend and benefactor to the Blackfeet. More importantly, he was viewed as one of those insightful outsiders who upon living with the community for a suitable time had come to know and understand the tribe. In 1987, because of his career as a supposed enlightened educator, the Browning School System named one of its buildings for him.

Yet, in spite of the good will of the Blackfeet Indian community towards Gold and his obvious attachment to them, it is ironic, if not illustrative, that he wrote one of the most damaging studies ever done on them. Surely Gold carried no malice towards them. However, despite the inherent flaws in his research design, his study's conclusions clearly show that Gold was able to endow a

longstanding bias with academic support through "research techniques" and without a second thought that his conclusions, even in his day, might be dangerous to the future image of the Indian student.

What was the dangerous conclusion Gold so eloquently stated, based on his "solid" investigation? It was nothing less than the notion that Indian people were born less intelligent than white people.

His narrative listed traits and characteristics of early Blackfeet people as described by traders, trappers, and explorers through "selected testimony" of these accounts and concluded that Blackfeet were less intelligent than whites. His second listing included traits and characteristics as exhibited in the Early Indian Schools as reviewed through government documents recorded in the Report of the Department of the Interior. From this it was concluded that Blackfeet boys and girls can be disciplined, that they profited by industrial training, and that their achievements was in spurts and plateaus.

Gold's third conclusion on intelligence was provided by Estimates of Blackfeet Intelligence by White People who know them well. These were business-minded people in the community. A rating form which contained intelligent score groupings on a range of 140 (Genius or near genius) to Below 70 (Definitely feeble minded) was given to 27 white respondents. Their task was to rate the intelligence level

of Full Blood and Mixed Blood Blackfeet. Not one Blackfeet full blood was rated higher than "normal"; rather they were rated as "Very dull, almost feeble-minded."

The fourth rating of intelligence was done by Teachers Teaching Blackfeet Children. Estimates of Blackfeet intelligence by teachers of Blackfeet children contained yet more "data" supporting the premise that intelligence correlated with the amount of Indian blood a child possessed. Gold proclaimed that these teachers were accustomed to Blackfeet students and their parents and that they had taught more than one year on the Blackfeet Reservation. He solicited teacher's opinions by giving them information that a score of 100 represented the intelligence norm for white children. He then asked them to rate the intelligence of Full Blood and Mixed Blood Blackfeet children. He pulled out the mean score of each group and concluded that 100% of the 16 replies agreed that full bloods and mixed bloods are not as intelligent as white children, mixed bloods were more intelligent than full bloods, and that both business people and teachers came up with the same findings and were in perfect agreement.

Gold's fifth approach claimed to use a more scientific method for intelligence testing to measure the intelligence of the Blackfeet. This approach used achievement tests in spelling, arithmetic, art, reading, penmanship, and writing. Again, full blood Blackfeet children scored at the lower

levels of less intelligence ratings, and Blackfeet as a whole were always scored inferior in intelligence to white people.

Gold also included a section on Present Achievement Status of Adult Blackfeet based upon definite experiences and knowledge of the writer (Gold) and with white people's knowledge of the social and economic relations of Blackfeet Indians (i.e., local friends of Gold). Through this "research" process, statements of opinion became "fact" and were "proven" by the phenomenon that as of 1934 no full blood had ever completed high school on the Blackfeet Reservation. Gold claims no full blood Indian in his knowledge had ever successfully competed with white people in the more complex social organization of the white-dominated town. Gold quotes the Bureau of Indian Affairs branch office chief in Browning, who feels that one of the BIA's duties was the "protection of the full blood Indian in the management of his social and economic affairs, lest he become a victim of the superior adroitness of his white and mixed blood neighbors" (Gold, 1934, p. 69).

Gold's simple conclusion is the Blackfeet Indians are not as intelligent as white people. Also, their intelligence correlates negatively to the degree of Indian blood they carry. One of the most divesting results of Douglas Gold's study was the use made of it made by the superintendent and architect of the early Browning School

System, District Nine. Gold was influential and charismatic as a leader, and no doubt his study and his results became integral to his educational philosophy and direction. His influence still permeates the educational system. Browning Public School District still represents a desire to change all Indian children into "more intelligent" white children rather than enhancing their self-knowledge as Indian people and as Blackfeet. A review of the curricula of the system shows clearly the continued devaluation of Blackfeet historical or cultural elements. Little in the form of Blackfeet historical or cultural elements are ever present or presented.

Freire's Model of Learning. Support for the inclusion of Blackfeet knowledge in formal education is found in the works of Paulo Freire who says that learning should all lead to "being able to name the world" around us. There are many factors that effect how one learns. These factors are influenced by the family, surroundings, and environment (world view). The following excerpt supports the premise of what Blackfeet people faced:

Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection. (Freire, 1970, p. 69)

The ability to say the word is not a privilege of a few

people but is the right of everyone. This concept can be applied to the Blackfeet people as one reviews the historical policies and the imposing of different decision making by the federal government on the Blackfeet nation.

As outlined in the literature review, the Blackfeet had an extensive worldview starting with the creation of the world. This description was provided by a published Blackfeet elder author, Percy Bull Child, in his book The Sun Came Down. He eloquently described and gave details of the characters, reasons why things are the way they are, and the significance or meanings of all creation. The relationship of the animate to the inanimate was very important. The creation stories passed down in the Blackfeet tradition described the cosmology and all the connections of creation. Different beings were sent into this world to bring religious ceremonies and rituals. The Sun in its great powers cannot be faced because of its brightness, but this created great faith among the people. This faith is strong with constant praying to meet the Sun each day. Many rituals were used to carry the prayers to the Sun. Symbolic, metaphysical gestures on earth are used to carry through those ceremonial rituals such as the sweat lodges, the burning and smudging of sweet grass, and the formation of the pit in which heated rocks are placed. All of these describe the importance of creation.

Along with all the traditions, rituals, and ceremonies

the native language was brought forth as the medium for which everything was transmitted. It is through the language of the Blackfeet that true realities are present. To understand the world, the Blackfeet language describes it more far exactly and meaningfully than if it were translated into English. Native languages interpret existence for Indian people. Languages give the prayers each day. It gives thanks for the many living and non-living things needed in the world. It includes all beings in the worldview of thinking.

Freire states that learning should lead to people being able to name the world around them. When people become disenfranchised, they lose the right to define their world. When having to use another set of definitions that are not their own, they are unable to articulate their truths about themselves. If definition of self comes from the outside one's culture, a true identity coming from the culture is lost. This is the key if the Blackfeet people want to utilize formal and informal learning methods.

Restoring Blackfeet Knowledge

Indian education has not served as a tool for restoring Blackfeet Knowledge.

Many of the elders experienced the Reservation Era, the Indian Allotment Era, The Indian Reorganization Act, land claims, The New Deal, the Termination Act, the Johnson-O'Malley Act, the Self-Determination and Indian Education

Acts, the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act, and Native American Language Acts. These include most of the major federal policies affecting Indian people. By name, these terms are familiar to the elders.

The elders are currently worried that many of these federal policies and especially those affecting education do not support the tribes in their efforts to restore tribal knowledge, transfer tribal knowledge to younger generations, or learn tribal knowledge by teaching the language in school settings. Their faith in the formal school setup is diminishing, and many of the elders are recommending community-based programs to teach Blackfeet knowledge. Some elders advocated for Blackfeet members to begin writing books on Blackfeet people so that these could be used in the schools. There are no books, curriculums, or resources directly related to the Blackfeet in the schools currently available.

The federal relationship with Indian Tribes had a major impact on the education of Indian children. This relationship has been documented through many sources non-Indian and Indian alike. A prominent Indian author of American Indian Policy, Vine Deloria, Jr., poses very interesting questions on federal Indian policy from the beginning of the relationship. "Policy seems no worse today than it did earlier eras of American history" (p. 3.). This relationship is complicated, political, and comprehensive in

nature. However, today Indian people have a better sense of what is appropriate for their communities than they did in the past. Indian people also now have programmatic options available to them to fit particular needs. All the early attempts of federal Indian policy were efforts to bring Indians within the scope and operations of the dominant social order so that Indian people would socially and culturally embrace the American society. Deloria analyzes the federal Indian policy in a "linear fashion" and observes that this policy "rarely accounts for the important changes in the configuration of Indian country." This analogy supports the notion that federal Indian policy and relationships have had a major impact on all Indian people.

Although historical data shows that there were many efforts focusing on educating the Indian people, there were still no evidence of improved methods, of quality education, and of accomplished efforts documented among the Indian people to say that changes in learning were coming about. In spite of the early 1930's when Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier (1933-1945) advocated for Indian relevancy in curriculum and learning, changes still did not come about. Collier based his reformed policy on the Meriam Report findings. During this time, the results of the famous Meriam Report were produced and published in "The Problem of Indian Administration." The content of the report condemned the allotment policy related to Indian land

and the poor quality of services provided by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, urged protection of Indian property, and recommended that Indian people have more control and input into their affairs (Reyner & Eder, 1995, p. 102). This report contained philosophical perspective from the Progressive Educational Movement based on the teachings of John Dewey. The shocking boarding school experiences were revealed and focused on such things as young children being sent far away places to attend school. It marked the beginning of the day school era. During this time, the recommendations were radical because of the nature of the findings in the report.

Other federal policies were later implemented to try to improve conditions for Indian people. The Indian New Deal policy during the Great Depression days was implemented. The elders reflected on these times as when they were able to attend the day schools. No longer were children required to attend Indian boarding schools which were hundreds of miles away from home. There were evening classes for adults to learn to read, write, and sign their names. During this time, the Johnson-O'Malley Act was passed for the contracting with states to provide educational services to Indians. This could have been an ideal means of implementing cultural relevancy in the curriculum, instruction, and resources. However, it was later discovered that the monies were going into the general fund

of school districts with no accountable benefits to Indian children.

In 1934, the Indian Reorganization (Wheeler-Howard) Act was passed. This ended the Allotment Act and provided for Indian religious freedom leading toward tribal self-determination. The significance of these major policies were to benefit the education of Indian children through improved efforts, curriculum, and instruction. The newly formed Office of Indian Education was getting Progressive Education Association members to reform learning. Some of the first bilingual education with Indians in recognizing English as a second language came about with the Navajo tribe during this time.

Two federal policies affecting the education of Indian people apply to the education of Blackfeet children. The 1970's was the era when it became quite evident that Indian people were beginning to reverse decision making at the federal level. Indian leadership opposed and prevented the termination of this relationship and moved forward. The Indian people held the federal government accountable in living up to its obligation of "trust" interest for tribes. The Indian Self-Determination and Assistance Act was passed in 1975. Forty years after the Meriam Report, another report was issued; it was entitled "Indian Education: A National Tragedy--A National Challenge." The findings in this report received extensive publicity for analyzing

problems with educating Indian children.

This shocking report produced yet another federal policy of support to combat problems in educating Indian children. The Indian Education Act later amended gave parents opportunities for involvement in their children's education through planning special programs, establishing community-run schools, and stressing culturally relevant and bilingual curriculum materials. Parent committees were required for expending some funds supporting the education of Indian children.

The Indian Self-Determination Act of 1975 provided opportunities for tribes to contract services from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. This law is commonly referred to as PL-638. Many Tribes were in a position to contract the Bureau of Indian Affairs schools through the law and make decisions in administering these services.

Knowledge and Language

Blackfeet knowledge must come from and through the language as an accepted methodology.

The elders clearly stated that language is the vehicle for transmitting the culture. As the elders reflect back in time, they are regretful that their parents did not see to it that the language was taught in all the grades of school. Many of the elders admit that not all their children were taught the language at home. This dilemma has caused a major concern as to who is going to teach the language.

One elder related that she would be happy if the children knew and learned the language which would support the Blackfeet way. The schools have taken away the language, and it must be taught again through whatever means. The elders feel teaching small children the language from infancy would be the best methodology. Other feels another methodology is just to begin speaking the language all the time to children.

Several elders feel the language needs to be taught at Head Start. Two of the elders do teach the language to Head Start children and know that the preschool age is very receptive for children in learning the language. One elder stated if the children are going to learn the Blackfeet ways, then their teacher must be Blackfeet with proper language skills.

The Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, D.C., provides unpublished reflections on language retention. This reflection on language support is very much appropriate for examining a native language as the vehicle for acquiring knowledge. Languages have often been compared to living things. When speaking of one's language, one can talk about the language's health, decline, death, or growth. The language takes on its life from the people who use it. Languages can only be used at different times for specific purposes such as at ceremonies, for game playing, or for doctoring.

The health of the language has to do with the number of speakers in a concentrated population and, most importantly, how many children speakers there are. This is the most important indicator in assessing the future of a language. Then the question arises concerning if the language will survive and what kind of shape is it in because steps may need to be taken to assure its survival. Healthy languages are not only used by a majority of the population but are used for most or all situations requiring communication. Therefore, languages must be self-sufficient or capable of expressing anything that the people want to communicate.

The Center for Applied Linguistics maintains that no American Indian languages today are fully self-sufficient. Language self-sufficiency would be evident in monolingual areas, which are those who know only their native language. This characteristic is rare in any tribe. A generalization was made by the center that the more situations in which the Indian language is used, the greater will be the probability of its continued survival alongside English. Another gauge of self-sufficiency is the extent the group has enlarged its native vocabulary to handle the concepts flowing in from the majority culture because languages are extremely adaptable and flexible and can accommodate situations.

Many Indian languages have resisted taking on English words and meanings. The language can become frozen. Other strategies which were used for coping with the European-

based culture included using English when speaking about introduced concepts and using their own language when speaking about Indian matters. As the English culture and language prevailed and their own language changed, there were fewer occasions when the Indian languages seemed appropriate. Parents sensing the discrepancy convinced themselves--certainly with the encouragement of educators in early Indian schools--that the Indian language was not just worthless but was actually harmful in that it prevented a child from learning English.

The Center for Excellence in Education at Northern Arizona University supported two symposiums in November of 1994 and May of 1995 on stabilizing indigenous languages. A special issue of the monograph series was published in 1996. This book contained resourceful and insightful presentations on native language.

The concepts of language loss needs to be discussed. A speaker, Joshua Fishman, at the Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Conference held in Arizona last year spoke articulately on this topic.

There is a kind of lexical or...an indexical relationship between language and culture. A language long associated with the culture is best able to express most easily, most exactly, most richly, with more appropriate overtones, the concerns, artifacts, values, and interests of that culture. That is an important characteristic of the relationship between language and culture, the indexical relationship. (Fishman, 1996, p. 80)

The culture is in the language and is expressed in the

language. Take the language away from the culture and "you take away its greetings, its curses, its praises, its laws, its literature, its songs, its riddles, its proverbs, its cures, its wisdom, its prayers" (p. 81). Most of what the language is describing is culture. The essential things vital to the way of life, the way of thinking, the way of valuing and tribal reality are being lost with the decline of language usage.

Fishman supports the symbolic relationship between language and culture. Language stands for the whole culture. It represents the culture in the minds of the speakers. Factors such as health, economy, religion, and philosophy are represented in the language. The holiness in the culture will be lost with the loss of the language. It is through the language that this component is best understood. The languages were created when the earth was created, when the worlds were created, and when Mother Earth was created. This could mean that before the world was created, the language was created. Morality was instilled in the language as truths and lessons to guide life. The language is the soul of the people who speak it.

Respecting the Language

Education can transmit Blackfeet knowledge only if the language is valued and respected.

The elders certainly stressed the urgency for the language to be used more often. The elders who already

value the language, want others to do the same. The elders have faced and dealt with many of the federal policies that have had a major impact on Indian people's lives.

Therefore, they are aware of the tools and policies that can assist in transmitting knowledge. Elders feel educators can do almost anything. Therefore, some concepts, ideas, and existing tools will be explored. The one recommendation that did come from the elders was the need for books, curriculum, and language texts to be written by Blackfeet people and used by Blackfeet people. If any money is gained from this, it would benefit a Blackfeet person or author.

A brief listing of pertinent legislation supporting the development and preservation of native languages is provided to demonstrate the available resources. School systems and tribal programs have access to financial and technical support if efforts toward implementing native language retention programs are made.

Two pieces of legislation deal specifically with Native American language. The Native American Language Act of 1990 is:

A federal law declaring that Native Americans have a right to use their own languages and that it is U.S. government policy to preserve, protect and promote the development of Native American languages. Further, the Act calls upon federal agencies, states and other institutions to take appropriate steps to carry out this policy.
(Cantoni, 1996, p. 44)

The Native American Language Act of 1992 is:

A federal law establishing a program of grants to

tribes and other Native American organizations to support a wide range of activities aimed at ensuring the survival and continued vitality of Native American languages. (p. 44)

Another piece of legislation which supports the promotion of native languages is the Bilingual Education Act as reauthorized by Title VII of Improving American Schools Act of 1994.

A federal law whose provisions recognize the special situation of endangered Native American languages and give wide latitude to schools and tribal organizations in planning and carrying out bilingual education programs funded under the Act. It further authorizes priority consideration for development and production of high-quality instructional materials for Native American students. (p. 44)

American Indian languages are remarkably well attuned to Indian ways of life and Indian value systems. English cannot be used to describe these concepts and thoughts. English is incapable of expressing these values because the connotations would not be the same. Indian languages handle descriptions and concepts easily, cleanly, and efficiently. The term respect can best be described in native languages in reference to an in-law; in some language when addressing the mother in-law one is really addressing two people. Asking questions of someone may be a sign of impoliteness in some languages.

Weakened Family Role

The family role of transmitting tribal knowledge has been severely weakened.

The elders reflected on the damaging effect of

education on the Blackfeet language. Harsh punishment was carried out when children in the schools spoke the language. The children came home from attending school speaking only English. English also became the children's primary language in the home as well. Many elders said that they taught some of their children the language but not all of them. Some of their children can only understand the language. Elders also realized as much as they spoke the language in the home, the family ties have already weakened where the language was not valued or important any more.

As parents, some elders also questioned what use the language would be to their educated children. However, in the next breath, they stated how important it is for the children to learn the language, especially the grandchildren of these elders. Many elders spoke only to their spouse in the language and spoke English to their children. The switching into English has weakened the family role in transmitting knowledge.

The most important area of the language is the kinship. Families spoke the language for many generations. Your loved ones spoke to you in the language and taught you the language. As you learned the language, you learned all the morals and teachings that go with it. Family groups and the community all spoke the language; therefore, it had high value and status. "All the endearments, all the nurturing, that is kinship is tied into a living organism of a

community by people who know each other, and they know they belong together" (Fishman, 1996,p. 83).

In Head Start, the parent is viewed as the prime educator or their child. This concept is very encouraging to families who want their children to learn the Blackfeet language. Out of more than 500 Blackfeet families served by Blackfeet Tribe Head Start through its Head Start center, parent child center, child care center, and the maternal child health program, 94% highly value and support the teaching and learning of the Blackfeet language for the children according to the Family Needs Assessment for the current year. Since parent involvement is active in Head Start, parents want instruction in the language and will support their children in the home by learning with them through different formats.

Adult Education programs in the community can be developed to promote the nests of learning for families in the community. Adults highly value the education of their children and want what is best for their children. This concept supports the need to get parents involved in learning along with their children. Organizations according to Myles Horton (1990) have more power than individuals. Therefore, groups of adults who are concerned about the positive development of their children are increasing in their support for implementing Blackfeet language programs in the community and in the public schools. To further

clarify, organizations of people can put pressure on the tribal government for making decisions to prioritize the language as important. Adults actively in circles of learning can organize and bring about change.

Immersion Schools

The immersion school concept is an excellent approach for learning a language.

The elders highly supported the immersion method of teaching the Blackfoot language because the program speaks for itself. The elders have witnessed the capabilities of the children in mastering the language. Several of the children attending the immersion school are grandchildren of the elders. At least four of the elders reflected on their ability to communicate with these grandchildren in the Blackfoot language. A sense of pride and hope gleamed from the elders who shared this experience.

The immersion school concept of teaching Blackfeet language to preschool age children is highly acceptable to parents and elders in the community. This concept has been successfully used by many indigenous groups such as the native Hawaiians. One school, Moccasin Flat Immersion School, has been in operation for two years. A second school, Cuts Wood Immersion School, is scheduled to be opened in 1997. The schools operate under the auspices of Piegan Institute, a non-profit Indian-owned organization. The goal of the immersion schools is to produce 1,000

children speakers in the next 10 years. New state-of-the-art school buildings are built to serve as a model for other tribes to do the same. New comfortable buildings are conducive to positive learning. The one-room rural schools in the 1930's provided the most positive experience for the Blackfeet children. This concept was re-introduced in the immersion schools. However, this time the Blackfeet language was the medium for instruction rather than English.

Role of Elders

While the role of the elder in relationship to Blackfeet knowledge has been embraced by community-based agencies, it has not been accepted or adequately utilized by formal educational institutions.

The elders can best support this conclusion by reflecting back on their statements, concerns, and recommendations to the people of the Blackfeet community. The findings of the study reflect elder involvement and participation in the educational process has virtually been non-existent. The elders identified other elders who acquired knowledge in the Blackfeet Knowing. There was a strong sense of the elders wanting to be called upon by the people because of the urgency of time. It is time for key people on each reservation such as the elders to be looked upon as a means to begin a process of reviving tribal knowledge.

All the elders want their children to become educated and recognize that education is a crucial part of our lives

today. At times education was compared to survival by the elders. Education entails being able to speak the language. The true knowledge of the Blackfeet people rests in the language. Elders want their children to speak the language.

Recommendations

The goal of this research was to present challenging designs for transmitting tribal knowledge for future generations by incorporating the Blackfeet language learning formats with children and families. Examining the elder's perceptions was most rewarding in trying to move forward with action. Therefore, three approaches were identified as areas to strengthen through educational efforts.

1. Formal Education Systems. Public schools, boarding schools, and parochial schools have all failed to value the Blackfeet student's language, culture, and traditions as important to learning. It is time for these institutions to admit what they have done to Indian people through education and to then move on to positive actions rather than denying what has happened in the past and trying to implement other things. Their denial to accept diversity in teaching is evident; nevertheless, Indian people are going to move forward with progressive learning policies.

- a. Bilingual (curriculum): K-12 Curriculum in Blackfeet language must be developed and supported with competent Blackfeet speaking teachers.
- b. Parent involvement and decision making must be evident at all levels. Parents need to feel

totally welcome and assured their children are important to the school systems. There are tools in place for this process.

- c. Elders of the community need to be included as resource personnel and given meaningful roles to support learning from a cultural perspective.
- d. Immersion Track K-12. The Blackfeet Immersion schools are here to stay. The public school system needs to start developing K-12 tracks of Blackfeet Language Immersion to support the parents who want their children to continue beyond the early childhood level. Once these sins of omission are recognized and accepted as faults, then the formal education systems can begin to development and implement strategies to implement programs to educate Blackfeet children in the language.

2. Community-Based Programs. There are three existing community-based education program that have already implemented Blackfeet language learning strategies in the community. These should serve as a model to others who wish to implement a native language program.

- a. Piegan Institute. This tribal non-profit organization has started the Blackfeet Language Immersion Schools in the community. They are Moccasin Flat and Cuts Wood. Both children and parents have opportunities to participate in Blackfeet language learning formats that are unique. Elders will continue to be included as classroom teachers and resource personnel.
- b. Blackfeet Tribe Head Start Program. An Early Childhood Education program, Head Start continues to enhance Blackfeet Language learning through the hiring of Bilingual Aides (elders), developing of language story books, training of all staff, and giving value to language in the new revised mission statement.
- c. Blackfeet Community College. A 2-year degree program is in place at BCC on Blackfeet Language Studies. Continued efforts to expand and teach through the language, culture, traditions, and ceremonial events are in place for the community.

Elders need to be included as faculty and resource.

3. Family Structures and Roles. The Blackfeet family unit that exists as the extended family structure must be included in learning. In the past education of Blackfeet children, it was evident the family units has been severely weakened.

- a. Parent as Prime Educator of their children's development. This concept is evident in Head Start and must be evident in other areas of the community as well.
- b. Adult Education in Community. Opportunities for adult learning must be available in all places of the community. Parents and adults need to become participatory learners. Nests of learning in the Blackfeet language need to be available for adults and parents.
- c. Role of Elder. Elders are the keepers of sacred knowledge and must be recognized as such. This recognition must go one step further by including the elders at every level of learning in the community.

Summary

Now that the elders were given the opportunity to voice concerns, to give comments and recommendations on the Blackfeet language, and to reflect on the culture and way of life, their input cannot be overlooked by anyone. The elders are too precious to take lightly.

The structures of learning must accommodate the elders voice as expressed in this narrative or what may be expressed in future forums. The connection between the very young and the very old is being made once again through the Blackfeet language; therefore, respect for each other can be

restored. The elders have endured many struggles without losing sight of their own tribal strengths. All have valued the language and voiced their concern to protect it.

The children need support, nurturing, and unconditional love to become strong tribal members. The teaching of the Blackfeet language to children can prove challenging, exciting and breathtaking when one witnesses a young child conversing in the language.

The adult or parent of the Blackfeet community have given all the support needed for implementing Blackfeet language into schools, homes, and communities. Opportunities for learning must be available for parents to make informed decisions on their children's future success as a Blackfeet tribal member.

The future is promising to one witnessing the embracing of the Blackfeet language in open forums by many tribal members and not behind doors. This connection will make a strong nation of people.

The formal education process on the reservation has not supported the transfer of Blackfeet Knowledge of language, history, and cultural elements as part of the learning process. After a review of this formal education took place, in time Indian people gained support through Indian Self-Determination and Indian Education Acts to gain input into the control of the learning and education of Indian children. For whatever reason, these acts did not become

tools for restoring Blackfeet knowledge.

Blackfeet knowledge must come from and through the language, but the study or the learning of the language was never accepted as a methodology in education. The language was not valued and respected to a degree where importance was place on it. As a result, the eroding of the number of speakers has greatly weakened the tribal knowledge base.

The family role of transmitting tribal knowledge to generations have been severely weakened. The relationship of parents to their children was affected by the separation of children at a young age. The elders were never given the proper respect in sharing and transferring the wealth of their knowledge as well.

The goal of this research was to present challenging designs for transmitting tribal culture for future generations by incorporating the Blackfeet language learning formats with children and families. Examining the elder's perceptions was most rewarding in trying to move forward with recommendations. Therefore, three approaches were identified as areas to strengthen through educational efforts: (a) Formal education systems, (b) community programs, and (c) family structures and roles.

As the elders talked and reflected on the happy times of their lives, their thoughts were memorable to them. They have witnessed many differences and changes because of the fast pace of the times they have lived through. They have

witnessed the transition from wagons to automobiles, from chopping wood for heat to turning up thermostats, and from the tepee to houses. As a result of the many changes, the Blackfeet way of knowing had been affected.

The songs and dances were social events that everyone looked forward to participating in. Socializing also meant the people had the time to greet, visit, and spend time with each other. In spite of the distance and means of travel, communication among family members was often. Gatherings for different functions was done. Singing groups formulated to allow songs to continue to be important and to be remembered. Story telling went well into the nights during the winter months in various homes.

The constant praying for loved ones and family members gave strength and support. The praying in the early morning hours to greet the rising of the sun, during the day to give thanks for everything in existence, and at sun set in the evening to end another day provided conformity to human existence and all creations.

As the Blackfeet people faced change, the dismantling of the support system slowly took place. One of the major dilemmas faced by the Blackfeet in the late 1800's following the destruction of their support system was how could they best survive in view of the overwhelming forces facing them. Dominated and forced into a state of almost total helplessness, they could only hope to endure as a people

regardless of the onslaughts already suffered and of those yet to come. Following the Blackfeet being settled on a reservation, the government of the United States set about trying to replace the Blackfeet's earlier warrior lifestyle with a more compatible farming and ranching support system.

Throughout this forced transition, which was often incompetently handled by the government, one element became more and more clear to the Blackfeet. This was the fact that assimilation was both a means of salvation and a pox. Education and assimilation began to mean the same thing. Those members of the tribe that subscribed to the educational systems often were in a better position to survive in the new emerging society of the "reservation Indian."

Unfortunately, one of the prices that the Blackfeet paid when subscribing to the forces of education was to lose the connection with the group. At first the loss was of the obvious trappings such as long hair, life styles, and language. Later this extended to psychological factors such as loss of respect for acknowledgement of tribal mores. Of all the elements of transition placed upon the Blackfeet, education may have had the most devastating effect in terms of changing their life style. The elders interviewed were caught up in this dilemma as were their parents.

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