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The Role of Tribal Child Care Programs Serving Children from Birth to Age Five

by

Linda Mayo Willis

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Human Sciences

Specialization: Child, Youth, and Family Studies

Under the Supervision of Professor Carolyn Pope Edwards

Lincoln, Nebraska

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# The Role of Tribal Child Care Programs Serving Children from Birth to Age Five

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University of Nebraska, 2009

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This study investigated American Indian child care directors' perceptions of the reservation community's efforts to promote and preserve cultural integrity in the local transmission of cultural values to children aged birth to five who are enrolled in tribal child care programs on American Indian reservations. In addition, the study addressed the directors' perceptions of how statewide child care quality improvement systems are (or are not) assisting them in their efforts to promote continuity of cultural education and quality child care. Sixteen American Indian directors from child care centers in tribal communities participated in a multiple case study design. The program directors, each a member of a different tribe, represented sites located in diverse geographic regions including the Great Plains, Great Lakes, Appalachian Mountains, Rocky Mountains, southern Gulf coast, Piedmont woodlands, Southwestern desert, Northeastern maritime and Pacific Northwest. The participants were selected to provide variation among different stages in their professional careers and encountering different kinds and levels of challenges in their work (four equal groups defined by two factors: (a) leadership experience; and (b) tribal affiliation). The project builds on earlier research (Willis, 1999) which suggested the influence of these factors. A set of 32 semi-structured interview questions elicited the directors' views and the interviews were followed up by

inspection of child care facilities, artifacts, and documents to allow directors to clarify or elaborate. This national study, the first of its kind, examines the interface between the implementation of child care quality improvement systems cultural preservation and Native language education efforts in tribal child care programs. Key findings from this study revealed that tribal child care programs play an important role in facilitating cultural continuity and education for young children living in American Indian reservation communities.

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I especially want to thank my daughter, Amy Robena Meek and my granddaughter, Twyla Mayo Olinger for sharing this journey with me. Their love and willingness to occasionally travel to remote corners of Indian Country made the completion of this research project possible. It is my fervent prayer that Amy and Twyla will have opportunities to pursue their dreams and find many avenues of personal and professional accomplishment. As the years go by, I hope Amy and Twyla are able to see that this is my intentional legacy to them. It is a legacy coupled with the constant encouragement to each one of the two people I love most in this world to believe in themselves and seek what they so richly deserve from life.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Cultural communities are composed of generations of people in coordination with each other over time, with some common and continuing organization, values, understandings, history, and practices that transcend particular individuals. At the same time, individuals and their generational cohorts change community traditions, with changing times and changing conditions. (Rogoff & Angelillo, 2002, p. 211).

Changing times and conditions are clearly evident in American Indian/Alaska Native tribal child care programs. The complexity of providing culturally appropriate quality child care services is suggested by the number of cultures and multitude of languages that are found in tribal communities located on American Indian reservations (Willis, 1999). In 2009, 256 tribal grantees are receiving approximately \$96 million in Child Care Development Funds (CCDF). In addition, approximately 500 federally recognized American Indian Tribes and Alaska Native villages receive CCDF funding either directly or through consortia arrangements. Native Hawaiian children also receive CCDF services through a grant award to a private, non-profit community based human services organization in Honolulu, Hawaii (Stanton, email communication). A report commissioned by the Congress of American Indians, *Welfare, Work, and American Indians: The Impact of Welfare Reform*, states that the challenges facing American Indian families seeking care for their young children include a shortage of qualified child care providers and a need for culturally appropriate child care settings (Brown & Cornell, 2001).

Recent work by cultural psychologists and early childhood education researchers provides a framework for understanding early development and parenting across cultures

and contexts (e.g., Rogoff, 1990; Super & Harkness, 1986; Whiting & Edwards, 1988).

This work contributes a great deal to our understanding of the process of changing local values, traditions and the ways in which groups create within group differences.

Understanding differences in child rearing and child behaviors that stem from different cultures, sub-cultures, and parenting styles supports the advancement of the important and culturally competent work of early childhood researchers and practitioners (Rogoff & Angelillo, 2002). The importance of giving “the child a specific culture in which to mature” (Weisner, 1996, p. 305) is abundantly clear. It is also important to recognize that past European and American cultures have denied the worth of American Indian cultural practices and failed to support communities in raising healthy children. Indeed, over several centuries communities have been forced to concentrate much of their child rearing energy on helping children adapt to a hostile or oppressive environment, distorting their child rearing practices (Willis & Hornstein, 2003).

### ***The American Indian Tribal Child Care Programs***

Administered by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Family Assistance, the Child Care Bureau (CCB) is charged with the oversight of federally funded child care and after school programs for children from birth to age 12. The Bureau’s mission is to provide access to affordable child care for low-income working families. Created in 1996 as part of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, the Child Care Bureau administers the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), an 11 billion dollar federal matching grant program. As a state and federal partnership, CCDF is designed to “promote family economic self-

sufficiency and to help children succeed in school and life through affordable, high quality early care and afterschool programs” (USDHHS, 2000, p. 1). In addition to oversight for CCDF, the Bureau funds research projects to promote high quality early childhood care, provides technical assistance to grantees, establishes the implementation of early childhood programs and supports the development of child care policies for all 50 states, United States territories, and federally recognized American Indian tribes.

Administrators receiving grant support from the Child Care Bureau oversee programs that are designed to provide parents with a wide range of choices for child care. Parents can use vouchers for child care options ranging from center-based care to relative caregiving. To assist parents transitioning from welfare to work, the voucher based system can also be used by parents pursuing on-the-job training and educational goals.

Federal CCDF grants enable American Indian tribes and Native Alaska corporations and villages to provide child care subsidies to low-income Native American families. The subsidies help families work, attend training, or return to school. Tribes in 49 states receive CCDF grants directly from the federal government. The two federally recognized tribes in Connecticut refuse CCDF funding.

All federally recognized tribes are eligible to apply for a CCDF grant if they have at least 50 children under age 13. Tribes with fewer than 50 children can form consortia to qualify for funding. Unlike states, tribes do not apply for or receive matching CCDF funds. Tribal grantees must spend nearly 64% of their total CCDF per child on direct child care services (ACYF, 2003). The remaining 36% may be used for administrative costs, or quality improvement.



The CCDF program allows federally recognized tribes to determine and meet the child care needs of their particular community. Locally designed programs allow the tribal grantee to offer services which best meet the needs of the families living on American Indian reservations. Tribal child care programs include center-based programs, certificate systems and a combination of the two (ACYF, 2003). American Indian children are not limited to receiving child care from their own Tribe. They are also permitted to receive care from other Tribes, from a Tribal consortium, or the State where they reside (ACYF).

### *Statement of the Problem*

This research project examined tribal child care directors' perceptions of the cultural role their particular program plays in the tribal community. The primary focus of this study was concerned with learning about each director's belief regarding the preservation and promotion of continuity of cultural integrity within the framework of the implementation of the tribal child care program. Of specific research interest were the unique aspects of the tribal customs of child rearing and early childhood educational practices within each community. An examination of implementation of quality strategies to support optimal child development outcomes was explored to ascertain ways in which tribal child care directors are involved in statewide child care quality improvement strategies and whether these are perceived to be a support to their child care work in their respective tribal community.

Significant challenges face the directors of American Indian tribal child care programs. One of the problems, or issues of particular concern, is the provision of

developmentally appropriate practice that preserves tribal heritage. Embedded social problems, including alcoholism and other substance abuse, unemployment, adequate housing, diabetes and other health risks, teen pregnancy, and low-birth weight babies, create a myriad of issues for American Indian families with young children to successfully navigate. These social issues affect administrators who work with teachers, children, and families on a daily basis. To broaden our understanding of the significant role that tribal child care directors play in their respective communities, information should be obtained from administrators of programs that are implementing educational programs and providing linkages to an array of social service programs with American Indian populations.

One issue that American Indian child care programs face is the question of how best to provide developmentally appropriate educational practices that are respectful and supportive of the transmission of tribal culture. Another issue concerns how child care administrators implement and improve quality in their programs and make use of statewide quality improvement systems. These questions arise when the unique nature of individual American Indian child care programs and the variability among such programs are considered in regard to the impact of the director's role in implementation of quality services and cultural education.

### ***Definition of Terms***

In this proposal, I shall use several terms defined as follows:

*American Indian* is the term used to refer to all descendants of the indigenous people who inhabited North America prior to the arrival of the European settlers in what

now constitutes the United States. Many native people refer to themselves by the name of their Native nation (Iverson, 1998). In the research study the term American Indian is used although in much of the literature I draw upon other terms that are used interchangeable to describe people of indigenous origin in the United States (Iverson, 1998).

*American Indian culture* refers to cultural commonalties that are shared by the tribes represented in the study. It is essential to note that despite the presence of overarching commonalties, there are many sources of diversity between and within each tribe.

*American Indian child care program* is the term for child care programs serving predominantly American Indian children and located on tribal land, reservations, urban enclaves, or remote Alaskan villages, as recognized by the Child Care Bureau. Because of the nature of Child Care Bureau funding, child care services are provided to all children living on a reservation or in urban enclaves enrolled in child care programs where the tribe is the designated grantee. It must be noted that not all children enrolled in American Indian child care programs are members of a tribe.

*Cultural transmission* refers to the process by which specific aspect of local culture are taught or modeled to the youngest members of the tribal community.

*Elder* is defined as “the bodyguard of tradition that must insist that the traditions not be violated. The elders in the tribe are designated through their role in the community and age is a factor” (Miller, personal communication, February 1999).

*Educational level* is the self-reported formal schooling of the director.

*Program size* refers to the number of children enrolled in individual tribal child care programs.

*Tribe* refers to a specific group of American Indian people who share identification with other member of the same group sharing a common history and set of traditions, beliefs, and values.

### ***Purpose of the Study***

The purpose of the research was to describe the role of the American Indian child care program directors in tribal communities. Four primary research foci were identified: (a) the director's role as an advocate for children, families, and child care staff living in the tribal community serving as the grantee; (b) participant reports of the role their tribal community plays in providing a very particular sense of place; (c) an examination of the process by which tribal culture is transmitted and tribal language is preserved and promoted; and (d) the tribal specific ways in which child care directors implement quality initiatives into the child care program. Thirty-two semi-structured interview questions guided this study (Appendix A).

### ***Significance of the Study***

Scant research currently exists regarding the role of American Indian tribal child care directors in the implementation of service programming. One qualitative study examined the perceptions of ten American Indian Head Start directors administering programs located on American Indian reservations in the Great Plains. The purpose of the study was to determine role of Head Start programs in preserving and promoting cultural integrity in reservation communities (Willis, 1999). Describing a quality

improvement initiative, Willis and Hornstein documented the process of collaborating with American Indian Early Head Start directors to design and implement tribally specific training for the staff and community partners in eight American Indian reservation communities (2003).

The present study described the role that American Indian directors play in the implementation of child care programs in their tribal communities. This study considered issues of local transmission of culture, preservation of tribal language and the role of quality strategies in program implementation. The information derived from this study is useful in many ways. First, the findings shed light on the current state of cultural education and continuity efforts in tribal child care and delineate factors that are supports or obstacles for directors. Second, they reveal the tribally-specific ways in which quality improvement is being interpreted and implemented in different groups. Third, they highlight directors' strategies for developing strong linkages for collaboration with one another. Fourth, they reveal the kinds of knowledge and expertise that develop with greater experience over time with leadership in tribal child care.

As tribal groups continue in their efforts to preserve and promote the continuation of cultural integrity, it is helpful to know how programs have dealt with these issues. Findings from the present study support and strengthen the continuing collaborative activities between states and tribes (Kills Crow, 2002) to continue to define and implement best practices in child care programs serving American Indian children. Findings also support linkages between the Child Care Bureau regional offices and program specialists and tribal child care programs regarding best practices in

implementing culturally appropriate care. In addition, the findings provide social policy makers with low-cost strategies for utilizing the unique cultures and strengths of American Indian communities to support quality implementation and advance the optimal development of American Indian children enrolled in tribal child care programs across the country.

### *Assumptions and Limitations of the Study*

The assumption made in this study is that the tribal child care directors will answer the interview questions in a way that reflects their beliefs and values.

The following limitations are acknowledged:

1. The American Indian tribal child care director was a representative of one distinct child care program. Each program reflects the tribal beliefs unique to the culture of the specific reservation where it is located.
2. The researcher is not an American Indian and this may influence the nature of the responses to the semi-structured interview questions.
3. The length of time spent at each of the 16 American Indian tribal child care programs did not provide adequate opportunity to fully represent all aspects of the program.

### *Delimitations of the Study*

Three delimitations of the study existed. Only American Indian directors were interviewed. This study did not interview other members of the tribal community. The second delimitation was geographic area. This study focused on tribal communities located on American Indian reservations. Members of American Indian communities not

located on reservations were not included in the scope of the study. The third delimitation of the study was that study participants were limited to American Indian directors serving as the administrator of a federally recognized American Indian tribe. This is an important issue of access as only federally recognized tribes are eligible to receive funding from the Child Care Bureau.

### *Organization of the Study*

The dissertation is structured in five chapters. The first chapter introduces the study, defines the terms used, and explains the purpose and significance of the study. The second chapter provides a review of related literature on culture and American Indian children and their families, Native American studies and related literature on the characteristics of high quality programs for children. The third chapter explains the methodology used to investigate each research question. The fourth chapter presents the results of the study. The final chapter highlights future areas for study and the implications and conclusions of the study.

## Chapter 2

### Review of Selected Literature

#### *Characteristics of American Indian and Alaska Native Families*

Academic research on the status and needs of American Indian families continues to lag far behind research on other minority families. One conclusion with empirical support is that, as Red Horse (1980) has suggested, the family values of many American Indian/Alaska Native families are based *on interdependence* rather than on *individual independence* as typified by many families in the mainstream culture (Lynch and Hanson, 2004). Although the American Indian family structure varies from tribe to tribe, Pewewardy (2002) suggests that American Indian/Alaska Native children are reared “to see family as an extension of themselves.” Witherspoon (1975) provided extensive detail of the interdependent nature of traditional Navajo family economic and childrearing activities. Ryan (1981, p. 28) has characterized childrearing in traditionally based American Indian families as a “total family process” in which extended family members, rather than just the parents, provide guidance and instruction for young children. Pewewardy (1994) further elaborates this idea. He asserts that the extended family structure provides a sense of belonging and security that is the basis for the interdependent system. In one study, evidence suggests that American Indian children socialized in families valuing the preservation and promotion of cultural integrity experience a higher level of social integration and sense of self-esteem (Lefley, 1974, 1976).



### *American Indian Tribal Child Care Programs*

A rich diversity of languages, traditions and heritage exist in American Indian tribal child care programs. The programs vary greatly in size, locality and population of those they serve. Some reservation communities and villages are located in extremely isolated areas of the nation, while others are near urban centers. In 2006, the Child Care Bureau served approximately 18,300 American Indian/Alaska Native families and 32,851 children. Fiscal Year (FY) 2006 figures are based on approximately 75% of tribes reporting (Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACF, 2008).

### *What is Developmentally Appropriate Practice?*

Many challenges face educators in American Indian/Alaska Native child care programs as they attempt to promote and preserve cultural integrity while providing developmentally appropriate educational practices, the field-wide standard of best practice within the larger society. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) first published developmentally appropriate practices guidelines 18 years ago (Bredekamp, 1987). Bredekamp's original premise regarding developmentally appropriate practices was based on her identification of two key elements, *age appropriateness* (according to "universal, predictable sequences of growth and change," 1987) and *individual appropriateness* (according to behavioral patterns and inclinations that an individual child manifests).

A considerable debate ensued as to the consideration of the place of a child's home culture in Bredekamp's definition (New and Mallory, 1994). Philips (1994) identified *cultural appropriateness* as another basic component of developmentally

appropriate practice. Philips writes that “protecting the cultural/developmental integrity of children is insuring them the power to represent themselves in the school setting” and “children must be permitted to act upon their environment and use their expressive styles to solve problems”. She argues for early childhood practitioners to apply a sensitive awareness to expressive language components (verbal and non-verbal). Teachers must notice and appreciate differences in type and amount of verbal exchange and eye contact that are comfortable to children, gestural communication, and speech patterns stemming from intonation and rhythm. Likewise, Jipson (1991) asserted that the NAEYC guidelines, in regards to developmentally appropriate practices, emphasize a child’s autonomy and individuality in a way that is reflective of European and North American mainstream cultures. Williams (1994) noted that in many American Indian cultures, the cooperative nature of the child’s peer group takes precedence over the prominence of individual development. Pewewardy (2002) concurs, “American Indian children prefer harmony, unity and basic oneness. There is security in being a member of a group and students do not want to be shown to be either above or below the status of their peers.”

In 1997, Sue Bredekamp and Carol Copple presented a revised version of NAEYC guidelines, and incorporated the concept of cultural appropriateness into developmentally appropriate practices. The authors state that teachers, in addition to understanding how each individual child in a group develops and learns, must also have “knowledge of the social and cultural context in which those children live and learn” (Bredekamp and Copple, 1997). Yet despite the revisions to NAEYC guidelines regarding developmentally appropriate practice, concerns continue to be raised by some

early childhood experts as to whether these revisions adequately address issues regarding the diversity inherent in the wide array of cultural child rearing patterns and early education practices in the United States.

***The Challenge of Defining Culturally Appropriate Practice for Young American Indian/Native Alaskan Children and Families***

Although it is impossible to describe a common set of cultural values that encompass all American Indian tribes, most share common values of non-interference, time orientation, sharing, cooperation, coexistence with nature and extended family structure (Garrett & Wilbur, 1999; Yellow Bird, 2001). The complex task of providing culturally appropriate practices for American Indian children enrolled in tribal child care programs is evident when considering the diverse number of tribal cultures and the multitude of native languages that are found in tribal communities. At present, 289 tribes reside on tribal lands, in urban enclaves, or on one of the 286 reservations in the United States (Iverson, 1998). Each reservation has its own unique government and social system. These separate cultures vary significantly from one another in values, spiritual beliefs, kinship patterns, economics, levels of acculturation, and language groups (Whitbeck, Hoyt, Stubben, and LaFromboise, 2001). There are 207 American Indian languages. Some of these native languages do not have functional alphabets and are currently being preserved through tribal elders (Medicine Bow, 1980). Due to the reduction in the number of fluent native speakers, American Indian child care programs are responding to the priority some tribal families have identified to maintain the home language through native language education and preservation (Willis, 1999).

Pulitzer Prize winning author, N. Scott Momaday (1969), a member of the Kiowa tribe, expresses the importance of language to the Kiowas in this way:

A word has power in and of itself. It comes from nothing into sound and meaning; it gives origin to all things. By means of words can a man deal with the world on equal terms. And the word is sacred. A man's name is his own; he can keep it or give it away as he likes. Until recent times, the Kiowas would not speak the name of a dead man. To do so would be disrespectful and dishonest. The dead take their names with them out of the world. (p. 33)

Tribal child care programs on several reservations (e.g., the Eastern Band of Cherokee in North Carolina, Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewas in Wisconsin, and the Central Councils of Haida in Alaska) are among the many programs that encourage groups of elders to preserve the native languages for the next generations (T. Saunooke, Cherokee, NC, personal communication, October, 2001; D. Gokee, personal communications, November, 2006; N. Rinehart, paper presented at the Head Start Child Development Institute, December 2000). In many American Indian cultures, the risk of losing the original language can be interpreted by tribal members as equivalent to the loss of a way of thinking, a world view that has been handed down from one generation to the next through oral traditions since the origin of the race (E. Old Person, Chief of the Blackfeet Nation, Browning, MT, personal communication, February 1999).

In response to the crisis, many tribes are making efforts to promote the use of tribal language and preserve cultural traditions for young children. Dr. Dorothy Still Smoking and Leona Skunk Cap are the co-founders of the Blackfeet Culture and Learning Center in Browning, Montana. One of the hallmark accomplishments of the Culture and Learning Center is the creation of the first language immersion early childhood classrooms in a tribal community. Dr. Still Smoking also has collaborated

with other Blackfeet educators to create an early childhood curriculum (based on the Head Start performance standards) to be implemented on the Blackfeet Reservation (W. Kazee, personal communication, April 1998). Wanda Weldin and Dr. Ellen Burgess completed a curriculum project in 1999 designed for implementation in three language-immersion early childhood classrooms for the Eastern Band of Cherokee and four language immersion classrooms for the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma in Tahlequah, Oklahoma (Willis, 1999).

Alice Paul, Professor Emeritus of Education at the University of Arizona, was a member of the NAEYC steering committee that guided the development of Curriculum and Assessment Guidelines for the 1998 NAEYC position statement. According to Paul (1991), Alaska Natives and American Indians are the least academically successful non-majority group of children in the U.S., and she advocates for early childhood programs designed to reflect the American Indian child's home language, family and culture. Dr. Paul suggests that building tribal identity with American Indian children involves combining a teaching of traditions and history while maintaining the tribal language in the home and the classroom. She states,

As Native people within a large society we must also remember that our children must be able to live in two worlds and not caught in-between as has happened to too many of our tribal people. . . . Children need to know that knowing two languages gives them two ways to view the world. (1991, p. 3)

Similarly, Winona Sample (1993), an enrolled member of the Red Lake Band of Chippewa, recommends integrating the American Indian child's cultural heritage across all areas of curriculum programming and advocates for the inclusion of extended family members as well as immediate family members in developing each child's educational

plan. Sample also emphasizes the need for teachers of American Indian children to be willing to accept different cultural practices such as the use of traditional medicine and healers for health issues.

Lee Little Soldier, a professor of education at Texas Tech University, describes American Indian cultural values in education and advocates for a bicultural educational policy for American Indian children to ameliorate the discontinuity between the home and school environments. Little Soldier (1992, p. 18) writes, “[Native American children] need to learn to take the best of each world and to synthesize these components into a world view that is positive and personally satisfying.” Little Soldier contrasts the childhood experiences that shape the values of many American Indian children with the childrearing practices of the larger Euro-American dominated society. Little Soldier asserts that as early childhood educators attempt to understand any cultural differences that impact developmentally appropriate practices in American Indian classrooms, one must be aware of the vital differences that exist among tribes as well as the degree of assimilation of each individual American Indian family (Little Soldier, 1992).

### ***The Importance of High Quality Child Care***

The Child Care Bureau’s vision is to enhance quality affordability and availability of all families where quality services include safe and healthy learning environments for children (ACF, 2003). This research study aligns with the Child Care Bureau’s recognition of the need for high quality in child care settings. The importance of quality is consistently confirmed in the research literature; one of the most consistent findings is the positive correlation between quality of care and developmental outcomes (Currie,

2000; Lamb, 1998; Love et al., 2003; Love, Schochet, and Meckstroth, 1996; Scarr and Eisenberg 1993; Vandell and Wolfe, 2000). Higher quality care is especially associated with gains in the cognitive and language areas (Campbell, Pungello, Miller-Johnson, Burchinal, and Ramey, 2001). In fact, a recent evaluation of Oklahoma's state funded prekindergarten programs for four year old children shows the greatest gains in cognitive and language skills were made by minority and disadvantaged students (Gromley, Gayer, Phillips, and Dawson, 2004). This finding is significant as Oklahoma is home to the third largest number of American Indian families with young children living in the state (8%) relative to the total population (ACF, 2008).

Quality matters most particularly for low-income children (Love et al., 2003). Yet studies show that children from socio-economically disadvantaged homes are more likely to be enrolled in low quality care facilities (Currie, 2000; Peisner-Feinberg & Burchinal, 1997). Fuller and Kagan (2000) found that programs participating in their research sample serving low-income children were more likely to be low resource programs that is, programs that were less equipped to provide a rich variety of educational materials to support early literacy acquisition.

### *Child Care Quality Improvement Systems*

Recognizing the important role of quality in early childhood programs, many states have begun to implement ways to support the growth and development of quality of care. Some states, such as Oklahoma, have developed four discernible levels of quality in child care centers. Other states, such as North Carolina and California, have developed five levels of quality. Currently 36 states and the District of Columbia are

requiring a form of accreditation by a nationally recognized accrediting body such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2005). Still other states like South Dakota are actively engaged in participating in improvement systems such as the National Infant and Toddler Child Care Initiative (National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC), 2004c).

In a January 2005 policy brief, the National Child Care Information Center defines a quality rating system as “a method to assess and improve the level of quality in early care and education settings” (NCCIC, 2002). According to the NCCIC brief, quality rating systems are designed to promote the implementation of systematic adaptation of statewide standards. NCCIC specifies the following elements of quality rating systems as including: “(1) standards, (2) monitoring and accountability, (3) program and practitioner supports, (4) financing incentives specifically linked to compliance with quality standards, and (5) parent and practitioner outreach and education” (NCCIC, 2002).

### ***The Child Care Director's Role***

The critical importance of quality implementation falls primary on the shoulders of the child care center director. It is important to recognize that a dimension of quality that is rarely studied is the leadership skill of the of the field administrator (Blau, 1997, 2000). In the Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study, higher quality programs featured directors with more years of early childhood training, more experience, and longer tenure in their programs (Helbrun, 1995). The director makes an important contribution to staff retention (Whitebook & Sakai, 2004). The director can guide and direct the human and



social environment of the workplace to keep staff from feeling dissatisfied with their roles and responsibilities (Talsma, 2001; Willis, 1999). The purpose of the present study was to focus on the subtle and potentially powerful influence on quality that a child care director can exert on program administration.

***Changes in Native Lands: Characteristics of American Indian Reservations***

The selection of participants in this study was limited to directors of tribal child care programs located on American Indian reservations. The land base of the indigenous people who were the first inhabitants of North America has radically changed since their initial contact with European settlers. To support a better understanding of the history of American Indian tribal culture, it is important to briefly address the changes in tribal lands that resulted from treaties between the federal government and federally recognized tribes.

In the 1830s a series of Supreme Court cases began to establish the United States government's recognition of the sovereignty of tribal governments (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2003). Nonetheless, American Indian people have been subjected to enduring efforts to strip them of their land, their possessions and even their identities. As early American historians, Herdon and Sekatau assert, "Throughout the United States Native people were pressured to lose their 'Indianness', and become individuals with no ties beyond family and no claims to land or rights entered into by treaty with the federal government" (2000, p. 439). An example of this loss of land is found in an examination of the treatment the Cherokee tribe received from the federal government. Their land base, originally consisting of the entire states of present day Kentucky and Tennessee,

was stripped away under Andrew Jackson's administration and the tribe was forcibly removed to Oklahoma territory (McLoughlin, 2000). Only a small band of the tribe refused removal and took refuge in the remote mountains of Western North Carolina. This band is now federally recognized as the Eastern Band of Qualla Boundary Cherokee. The tribe's members reside in a highly reduced land base. Encompassing designated areas within the counties of Cherokee, Swain, and Jackson, North Carolina, the Cherokee reservation is now less than 1% of the original indigenous land base.

Today, the actual site of an American Indian reservation can take many forms. Some tribal communities are located on ancestral territorial grounds. Members of the tribe have never experienced a disruption of living on their land. Other tribal communities have been forced by the United States government to relocate, often numerous times, as indigenous lands became increasingly valuable to the European immigrants.

The magnitude of the tribal land lost to white settlers is staggering. Dr. Richard West describes the lost of communal tribal land in stark terms, "During a period of less than a half century beginning in the late 1700's, the land of Native Nations decreased by more than 70%" (personal communication, 2001). With the passage of the Dawes Severalty Act in 1887 (Iverson, 1998), reservations were carved up to impose the European concept of landownership on tribal families. The abysmal result of this social experiment was a further loss of tribal land. This type of reservation eventually came to be known as checkerboard landholdings. In this case, members of the tribal community

have non-native neighbors living on lands adjoining the reservation that were once part of a large communal land base historically maintained by all member of the tribal group.

### ***The Bioecological Model as a Conceptual Foundation***

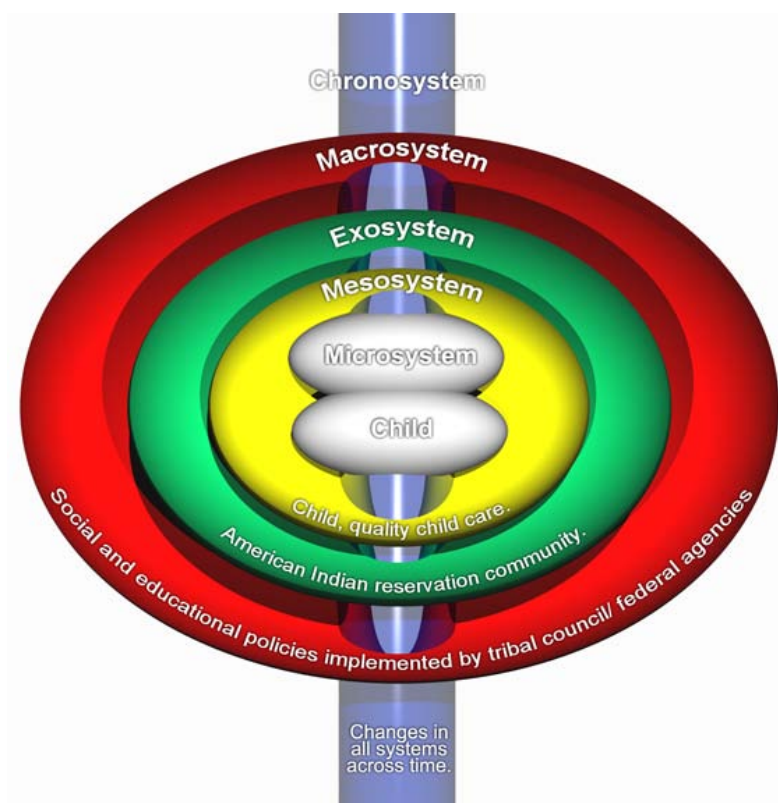
This study is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's (1975, 1993) bioecological model of human growth and development. Bioecological theory holds considerable promise for understanding cultural aspects of child rearing and early educational practices because it provides a framework for examining reciprocities in the complex transmission of cultural knowledge, values, and practices between children and their routine social partners (parents, extended families, peers, caregivers, and community members) in their early learning environments. Within the bioecological framework, the child is considered to be impacted by many levels of interaction that extend far beyond herself, and her own responses, interpretations, and perceptions of her environment significantly contribute to her developmental growth and change. Bronfenbrenner asserts that the multiple levels of bioecological systems and the interaction between them interact to influence all domains of child development.

Bronfenbrenner's (1975,1993) work focuses on children's interpretations of their environment using a level systems approach encompassing the *microsystem*, *mesosystem*, *exosystem*, *macrosystem*, and *chronosystem*. Every system level of the ecological framework has an important role in the implementation of this study and interpretation of the study's findings. The first level, the microsystem, is composed of the activities, roles and interpersonal relationships of the primary participants. In tribal community child care, many processes within the microsystem can affect the child's

cultural knowledge and cultural continuity either positively or negatively, for example, whether providers incorporate culturally appropriate artifacts, photographs, music, and language that model their high valuation of cultural heritage. The second level, the mesosystem, is the cradle where the linkages between two or more microsystems occur. In tribal community child care, for example, the mesosystem is the context for interactions between the child's family and the child care providers that influence the child's cultural knowledge and cultural continuity. Providers may draw the parents in as partners for events where tribal elders teach the children cultural lore and values. The third level, the exosystem, encompasses resources of the tribal community and the nature of the family employment opportunities of neighborhood. The child does not directly participate in interactions within the exosystem but is indirectly affected by them. In tribal community child care, for example, the social and economic impact of tribal child care services on the families with young children living in the tribal community may indirectly influence child development, as when the tribal council makes decisions that favorably impact the child care program or that recognize the contributions of the child care program to promoting cultural education and continuity. The fourth level, the macrosystem, is composed of societal-level policies, laws, institutions, and values that influence the developing child. For instance, the tribal child's cultural knowledge and continuity is indirectly affected by interactions at the macrosystem level as reflected in current local, state, and national social and early education policies. The federal policy, *Good Start, Grow Smart*, (White House, 2002) guides current social policy formation with its emphasis on improving the school readiness skills of young children. Finally, the fifth

level, the chronosystem, involves changes through time in all of the other system.

Understanding the effect of efforts to preserve and promote cultural continuity in relation to the unfolding implementation today of tiered quality strategies and other child care improvement systems is particularly important given the interest and investment of local, state, and federal agencies to enhance the field of early childhood education. For example, child care directors can use quality improvement systems to leverage changes over time in their centers' staffing patterns, classroom materials and environments, and staff trainings that promote cultural education for the adults and children associated with their program (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* Ecological model of the study.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979,1993) ecological model of child development lends itself to the examination of cultural continuity and child care quality improvement strategies in tribal child care programs. Given that Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model asserts that the environment initiates transactions (roles, relations, activities) with children that either promote or thwart development, the current study aims to understand, from the tribal child care directors' perceptions, specific ways that quality child care promotes cultural education and continuity for American Indian children and families. Research questions were formulated that involve all five levels of Bronfenbrenner's model.

### ***Primary Research Questions Guiding the Study***

Given the information provided on American Indian early childhood education, the implementation of child care quality strategies, and the important role of directors of child care programs, this study was designed to test three main hypotheses (listed below). They are listed below. The hypotheses were evaluated through qualitative analysis that color coded the interviews by themes (conceptual issues, discussed in the Methods chapter) as well as by levels revealed in the answers (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, chronosystem). Longer answers contain theme-units that have more words, and more elaborated answers contain more themes and sub-themes.

### ***Hypothesis 1***

Directors' tribal enrollment is related to promotion of cultural education. It was predicted that enrolled tribal members serving as directors would have longer and more elaborated answers relative to non-enrolled directors about local cultural aspects of child rearing and socialization in tribal child care. The rationale for this hypothesis is that

tribal enrollment (affiliation) provides a means for looking at the range of inter-tribal differences in child rearing practices and local transmission of culture (Joe, 1994). In this study, the director interview included questions intended to elicit directors' specific perceptions and nuanced knowledge of local community beliefs of child rearing in transmission of culture (Appendix A, Questions 13, 14, 15, 16, 20) as well as questions about less local American Indian/Alaska Native features concerning the significance of tribal elders, language, and extended family in preserving culture (Questions 18, 19, 21). According to Hypothesis 1, it was predicted that enrolled directors would have longer answers and more elaborated ideas than non-enrolled directors to the first set (local knowledge) but not the second set (less local knowledge). This hypothesis addresses the bridges between macro system and micro system.

### ***Hypothesis 2***

More and less experienced directors will not differ in their answers (length and elaboration) related to Hypothesis 1. However, they will differ in the length and elaboration of their answers to another second set of questions, eliciting responses about ecosystem and macro system processes beyond the child care center (Rigby & Neuman, 2005). In particular, the more experienced directors were expected to have longer and more elaborated responses relative to less experienced directors about actions they take to promote cultural education and continuity that involve wider networks such as other child care programs, community, state, and nation (addressed by Appendix A, Questions 7, 8, 17, 21, 23, 24, 26). These questions elicited perceptions about the pressing social and economic issues facing families and included comments about the child care subsidy

system, the implementation of federal child care policies such as *Good Start, Grow Smart*, and the economic value of tribal child care services in the community including the role of TANF and employment opportunities for women.

### ***Hypothesis 3***

More experienced directors will be more knowledgeable than less experienced directors about actions to promote child care quality that extend over a longer time period and that reach out beyond their individual center. Interview questions that address frustrations and challenges, staff development, staff retention, implementation of quality standards, and quality rating systems (Appendix A, Questions 9, 10, 22, 25 to 30) provided data for this hypothesis. It was expected that less experienced directors would have longer and more elaborated answers when they discussed their immediate child care environment and work with their own teachers (microsystem), while in contrast, more experienced directors would have longer and more elaborated answers, take a longer time horizon (chronosystem) and focus attention across all the levels (microsystem, exosystem, macrosystem).



## Chapter 3

### Procedures

#### *Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design*

Qualitative research is an important tradition of naturalistic inquiry. Qualitative research methods are often used by researchers to enhance the understanding of complex social phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Facilitating the exploration of new concepts that by their nature do not lend themselves to quantitative measurement, qualitative research is descriptive and emphasizes the importance of setting, context, and participant perceptions of their lives (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Morse, 1991). Qualitative research is also useful for examining new content areas that do not demonstrate evidence of supporting theory or previous research (Morse, 1991).

In the field of qualitative studies, researchers are primarily concerned with examining process rather than quantifiable outcomes. Qualitative researchers value the participants' lived experiences including their perspective of the meaning and values attached to such experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). All data derived from qualitative research are comprised of rich verbal descriptions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Schumacher & McMillan, 1993). The qualitative researcher is the instrument for data collection and analysis, working with each participant to gather data (Merriam, 1988). From the dual role of researcher and central instrument, the data are collected, evolving from personal experiences with the participants (Woolcott, 1994). In a qualitative study, the data are analyzed through deductive means and emerging themes are identified (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Creswell, 1994).

### *Multiple Case Study Methodology*

This dissertation research project was conducted as a multiple case study. The nature of a case study is to understand a single phenomenon (Creswell, 1994; Schumacher & McMillan, 1993). Detailed information is collected using a variety of data collection procedures (Merriam, 1988). Case study is designed to research naturally occurring behavior. This methodology does not manipulate any condition or experience (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993). The multiple case study is an example of qualitative research. A multiple case study is designed to involve investigations of more than one subject and more than one setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Qualitative research is an important tradition of naturalistic inquiry. Viewed as a type of research complementary to indigenous narrative cultural traditions, qualitative research is particularly appropriate for research partnerships with American Indians/Native Alaskans. In keeping with the ongoing practice and significance of oral traditions in the majority of American Indian tribal communities in the United States (Iverson, 1998), qualitative research provides a vehicle for participants to tell their stories in their own voice rather than take the role of “subjects” providing “data” in an unequal relationship (Smith, 2001).

The concept of the director’s role in American Indian tribal child care programs has not been researched. Many facets of the director’s role cannot be easily quantified and measured. This research study illustrates how tribal child care programs interact with the organizational and social functions of each American Indian community represented in the study. A qualitative study allows for an in-depth examination of the multiple roles

that tribal child care directors play in the life of their respective communities. This study illustrates how statewide quality improvement strategies (such as tiered quality strategies) can influence program service delivery, interact with cultural education and continuity, and affect opportunities for the tribal child care director's leadership and professional development.

### *Participants*

Sixteen American Indian directors from child care centers in tribal communities participated in the research study. All directors participating in the study were from states in which tribal child care services for children aged birth to five are available on American Indian reservations. The sample was selected so as to obtain the perspectives of directors at different stages in their professional careers and encountering different kinds and levels of challenges in their work. Therefore, the 16 directors were selected so that they divide into 4 equal groups, as defined by 2 factors: (a) leadership experience; and (b) tribal affiliation. The first factor of leadership experience was used to define a group of 8 directors who have at least 5 years of experience in their field and moreover have been recognized for distinguished service by their communities and statewide child care organizations and/or the National Child Care Bureau. The contrast group consists of 8 directors with 1- to 3-years of directing experience and no leadership awards. The second factor, crossed with the first, relates to tribal enrollment. Eight directors are enrolled members of the tribe serving as the grantee for tribal child care services, while the other 8 are enrolled members of tribes other than the grantee agencies where they serve as the child care director. Previous research (Willis, 1999) suggests that these two

factors may be important dimensions in the way relationships are formed between participating families and staff, service delivery plans are implemented, and advocacy efforts are supported by the tribal leadership of the reservation community.

The participant population was drawn from child care centers serving children birth to five located on American Indian reservations. The program directors, each a member of a different tribe, represented 16 sites located in diverse geographic regions including the Great Plains, Great Lakes, Appalachian Mountains, Rocky Mountains and Pacific Northwest. The selection of experienced participants was drawn from my contacts in the field. Recruitment and selection of the less experienced directors was conducted at the annual meeting of National American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start Directors, June 12-14, 2006, and the Child Care Bureau National Conference, August 7-9, 2006. Both meetings were held in Washington, D.C.

The study addressed the directors' views of how they use available child care quality improvement systems to meet their goals. Background information was obtained prior to interviews about the systems in place in each state to improve the quality of child care. These systems include various elements such as tiered quality systems, career lattices, and professional development supports. Many tribal reservation child care programs serving children birth to five are located in states also implementing or experimenting with tiered quality rating systems, for example, Colorado, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Washington, Montana, and Kansas (NCCIC, 2004; NAEYC, 2005).

The concept of the director's role in American Indian tribal child care programs has not been researched. Many facets of the director's role cannot be easily quantified

and measured. This research study sheds light on the ways tribal child care programs interact with the organizational and social functions of each American Indian community represented in the study. Employing qualitative research methods afforded an in-depth examination of the multiple roles that tribal child care directors play in the life of their respective communities. This study also illustrated how statewide quality improvement strategies (such as tiered quality strategies) influence program service delivery, interact with cultural education and continuity, and affect opportunities for the tribal child care director's leadership and professional development.

The *grand tour questions* are, first, do tribal child care directors perceive a role for child care services inside American Indian reservations in preserving cultural integrity and promoting cultural continuity, and if so, what is that role? Second, do directors believe that the processes of preserving cultural integrity and promoting cultural continuity are enhanced or impeded by statewide child care quality improvement strategies, and if so, how?

Although small in scale, the study has several strengths that will contribute to validity of the findings. Site visits will afford the project director an opportunity to delve more deeply into each director's frame of reference and allow the researcher to examine pertinent personal documents or artifacts related to specific interview questions. The use of multiple cases strengthens the study's reliability (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). The purposeful selection of participants provides small samples of highly descriptive cases of individuals, settings, and processes (Schumacher & McMillan 1993). Maximum variation in sampling enhances a study's ability to generalize to other settings (Marshall

& Rossman, 1989), and this study includes variations in tribal child care by geographical location, size of the service population, local resource support, and type of programs and services offered.

### *Data Collection*

The fundamental techniques used by qualitative researchers for gathering data are in-depth interviews and observation of participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Approval for the research was granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln on December 5, 2005. Data collection occurred during a two year period between April 2006 and March 2008. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face on the site of each director's tribal child care program. The 32 interview questions focused on the preservation of cultural continuity, strategies to improve quality, administrators' professional development, and child rearing practices and early childhood care and education (Appendix A). Initial interviews extended from 90 minutes to approximately 2 hours in length. The interviews were audiotape recorded and then transcribed verbatim. The semi-structured interview was designed to provide comparable data across all the participants. Encouraged to talk freely, participants discussed aspects of their work that related to their area of interest. Topics and issues that the participants initiated were probed to gain greater access to their thoughts and experiences related to the semi-structured interview questions. In this way I avoided controlling the content of responses too rigidly (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Flexibility is required in the qualitative approach. Research questions were refined as the data was collected and analyzed. To give the participants' the fullest opportunity possible to explain their points of view, several additional procedures were followed.

First, prior to the scheduled site visits to conduct the semi-structured interviews, participants were sent a copy of the interview protocol to assist them in preparing their responses to the research questions and reflecting on their experiences directing a tribal child care program.

Second, following the interview, the director was invited to show the researcher around the child care center, so that the director could show features of the child care program facility, tribal documents, and physical artifacts in the classrooms that might clarify points or provide examples of things discussed in the interview and pertinent to the interview questions. A field notebook and digital camera were used to record notes/visual examples from this phase of the meeting. During the site visit directors often identified examples of cultural education and/or quality implementation that they spoke about during the interview. These circumstances were analyzed as critical incidents. Critical incidents are those defined by participants as "important or crucial, and/or limited to an immediate setting" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 113). In this study, critical incidents included such items as: culturally specific curricular materials; calendars scheduling cultural activities such as native language education; evidence of the presence of community members with specific cultural skills, such as storytelling and tribal art and crafts; physical artifacts in the classroom depicting local culture, such as cradleboards, or

musical instruments; or evidence of adult professional development or program quality improvement, such as notebooks, rating forms, self-assessment documents, curriculum documentation. Physical artifacts are an important part of the evidence and presence of quality of an overall case or study (Yin, 1989).

Third, the site visits were followed up with a telephone call several days later to allow participants to expand upon anything from the initial interview. Wherever possible, electronic mail was used for clarification and expansion of views as well.

Participants were also given the opportunity to review interview transcripts and notes and were encouraged to make additions or corrections. At the end of the study, participants were invited to comment on the dissertation chapters and to correct or add to the conclusions.

### ***The Role of the Interviewer/Researcher***

All data were collected and analyzed by the researcher. Because issues of credibility and rapport are especially salient in research partnerships involving American Indians/Native Alaskans, it is necessary to describe my background to understand how I was able to recruit participants, establish a sense of openness and confidence in the interview process, and make meaning of the data. I have been involved in work with American Indian children and their families in child care settings since 1976. Prior to that, in the 1970's as a young adult I lived in a Lumbee Indian community for several years and graduated from a four-year institution of higher education that was originally founded by the Lumbee tribe as a normal school dedicated to teacher education. I started my teaching career in Robeson County, North Carolina, working with young Lumbee and



Tuscarora children in an early childhood setting. Robeson County, North Carolina is considered the homeland of the Lumbee Indian tribe. In 1998, I began working as an early childhood education consultant for the American Indian/Alaska Native Programs Branch of the Head Start Bureau. In 1999, I became the Early Head Start Coordinator for training and technical assistance for the American Indian Institute, University of Oklahoma's American Indian Alaska Native Quality Improvement Center. In this capacity I provided on-going consultation to 42 Early Head Start programs located in 19 different states across the country. In 2001, at the invitation of Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, I joined the faculty at the Brazelton Touchpoints Center, Childrens Hospital-Boston, Harvard Medical School. For two years, I served as the lead faculty and project director for the American Indian Touchpoints Initiative, a training program for selected American Indian programs designed to infuse Dr. Brazelton's work into the practice of child care providers and community partners. Through my work, I have been able to establish relationships with many dedicated people working in their respective communities under the auspices of Child Care and Head Start Bureaus. Nearly every person I have encountered in my travels has shared with me the important role tribal child care has played in their personal life and professional development.

My years as an early childhood educator and my long-term involvement with the American Indian educational community may contribute biases to this study which need to be acknowledged at the outset. I am a strong advocate for tribal child care programs. Based on my past experience in consultation, research, and training (Willis, 1999; Willis & Hornstein, 2003), I embarked on this study with the expectation that the findings

would identify an important role for tribal child care in preserving cultural continuity for young children and families living on American Indian reservations. I realize that research cannot be fully objective, but I did my utmost to prevent my biases from distorting the research. Personal and professional experiences can be a strength in providing a researcher with sensitivity, knowledge, and sources of insight that can aid in the investigation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Van Maanen, 1988). From the onset of the study, I was committed to collecting and analyzing the data carefully and completely. I endeavored to present findings with integrity, including information about the challenges and obstacles that the participants are facing. As I analyzed the data I remained constantly vigilant as I looked for counter examples and explored the full range of variation in the participating directors' ideas about educational practices and other aspects of program planning and implementation.

### *Data Analysis Procedures*

Qualitative analysis involves the simultaneous activities of data reviewing, interpreting, and narrative report writing (Creswell, 1994). The researcher systematically sifts through interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials to support the study's findings to others (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Qualitative research should be responsive to certain criteria whose purpose is to establish utility and authenticity (Creswell, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Any research will be influenced by many human elements: the participants, the settings, and individual differences in the researcher's philosophies. However, the qualitative researcher can enhance the generalizability of findings through stringent methods of data collection and analysis coupled with clear guidelines that

delineate the theoretical parameters and limitations of the research (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Data collection strategies designed to enhance data quality have already been described. These strategies included site visits, audiotaping of interviews, verbatim transcriptions, digital photographs of environments, artifacts, and supporting documents, and ample opportunities for participants to revise, elaborate, review, and correct their answers.

In order to begin to identify critical issues and themes perceived by the participants that are related to the preservation of cultural integrity in tribal communities and the implementation of quality strategies, preliminary data analysis began as soon as transcription of several interviews was complete (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Notes were made directly on the printed transcripts of the audio taped interviews.

Formal analysis began as soon as all interviews and site visits were completed. Creating manageable units of information drawn from the interviews and site visits, the units of information were color coded and clustered to identify recurring themes (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Tesch, 1990). All major themes were identified and coded on the transcripts using the process of de-contextualization and re-contextualization (Tesch, 1990). Portions of the data were separated from their original context. This separation then assisted the researcher in forming coded categories. The major themes emerging from the data were then categorized into sub-themes. The sub-themes were identified by short descriptions. To better understand the data, clustering techniques described by Miles and Huberman (1984) were utilized to further group data and aid in identifying

data clusters such as cultural education, and quality implementation. The data clusters were then examined to begin the process of final data analysis and interpretation.

### *Methods of Verification*

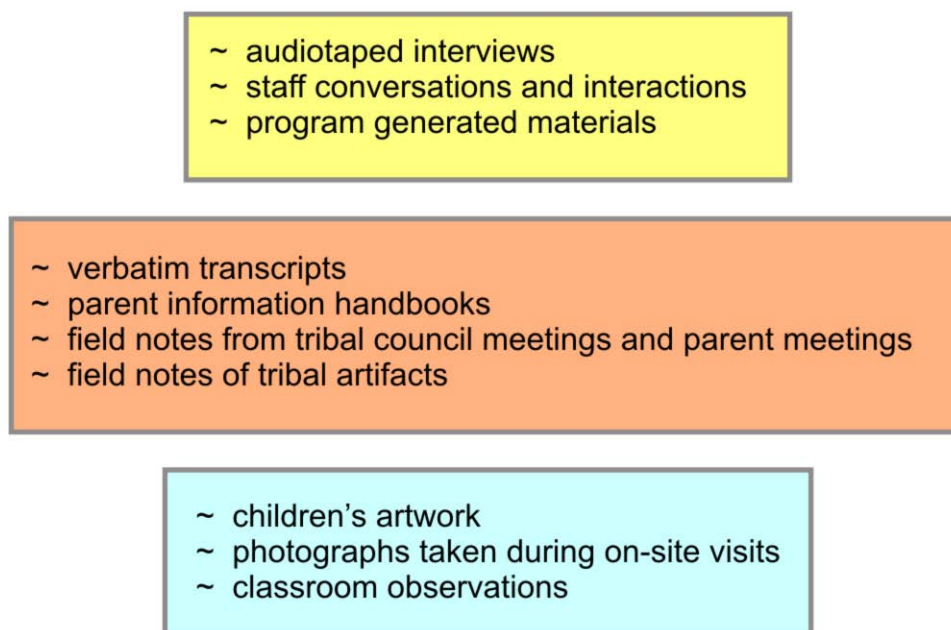
Qualitative research is responsive to certain criteria with the purpose to establish its utility and authenticity (Creswell, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). According to Creswell (1994) the strength of any qualitative study is in its validity. Validity is reflected in the descriptions of research that explore the complexities of data.

Qualitative research does not lend itself to duplication. It is influenced by many human elements such as the participants and individual differences in researcher's philosophies. Qualitative researchers can provide the means of generalization of their studies through stringent methods of data collection and analysis coupled with the clear guidelines that delineate the theoretical parameters of the research (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Triangulation is described by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 47) as "the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point." To provide triangulation in this study, data was collected from 16 participants purposely sampled to vary in their geographic region, administrative experience, and tribal affiliation. In addition, multiple sources of data are evident in my use of audiotaped interviews, verbatim transcripts, and digital photographs from sixteen tribal child care programs taken during the on-site visits. While on-site, I used field notes and photographs to document tribal artifacts, program documents, and I wrote field notes about staff interactions and conversations. I collected examples of children's artwork, different types

of program generated materials such as parent information handbooks, and took notes of classroom observations. When invited to participate in tribal child care and tribal government functions, I took field notes during proceedings if I deemed it culturally appropriate during attendance at tribal council meetings and parent meetings.

## Sources of Research Data



*Figure 2.* Sources of research data.

Table 1

*Professional Attributes of Directors Participating in the Research Study*

	Number
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	1
Female	15
<b>Geographic Location of Program by Region</b>	
Great Lakes	2
Rocky Mountains	3
Southern Gulf	1
Appalachian Mountains	1
Northeast Maritime	1
Southwestern Desert	2
Piedmont Woodlands	1
Pacific Northwest	2
Great Plains	3
<b>Recognition &amp; Awards</b>	
Community	8
State	3
National	9
<b>Background</b>	
Raised on Reservation Serving As Grantee*	7
Enrolled Member of Federally Recognized Tribe	15
State-wide Indigenous Group	1
<b>Length of Service</b>	
1-3 year	8
5or more years	8

Table 1 continues

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	Number
Education	
GED	1
High School	0
Associates	4
Bachelors	6
Masters	5
Prior Experience	
Teacher	4
Teaching Assistant	5
Program Size	
0-100	2
101-200	7
200+	7
Program Services	
Tribal Child Care	5
Tribal Child Care with Head Start	2
Tribal Child Care with Head Start and Early Head Start	9

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\*1 on reservation with international boundaries

### ***Ethical Considerations***

All of the participants in the study were fully informed of its purpose and procedures. All of the tribal child care directors interviewed for this study participated voluntarily. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time if they felt uncomfortable with the research process. The participants were provided with a summary of the research findings. Any publication resulting from the research findings will also be provided to study participants. Any publication or presentation resulting from the research will not identify study participants. The only exception to this safeguard would arise if in the future a participant explicitly desires, for example, to co-

present or co-publish any dissemination of the study's findings. All information derived from the interviews was held in strictest confidence. Participants were notified about audiotaping and digital photography in the informed consent form. The informed consent documents advised the study participants of their rights as research subjects.

The tapes, field notebooks, and photographic records were kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home office for a maximum of three years and then destroyed. Once transcribed, the original audiotapes were destroyed. Computer transcripts of interviews, field notes, and digital photographs were password-protected in the researcher's computer so that they could not be accessed by unauthorized persons. Furthermore, computerized data was tagged with numerical codes and pseudonyms used rather than original names of directors or tribal locations in these electronic files. When electronic files were exchanged between the researcher and the dissertation advisor, they did not contain identifying information of any kind. As part of the process of obtaining IRB approval, the researcher completed the CITI Course in the Protection of Human Subjects.



## Chapter 4

### Findings of the Study

This research study explored how 16 American Indian tribal child care center directors described their perception of the role that the tribal child care program plays in the preservation and promotion of cultural integrity in each respective reservation community. The participants were chosen from 16 sites in 12 different states. The geographic regions represented in the study are the Great Plains, Great Lakes, Pacific Northwest, Appalachian Mountains, Rocky Mountains, Southwestern desert, Southern Gulf coast, Piedmont woodlands, and North Atlantic maritime.

The grand tour question addressed in this study examines how the directors describe the role that the child care program plays in promoting and preserving cultural integrity within the tribal community. Analyzing the data resulted in the identification of six major themes: (a) the role of the tribal child care program in preserving and promoting cultural continuity; (b) on-going efforts to promote language preservation and education; (c) the role of elders in the tribal child care programs; (d) participation in local, state and national quality initiatives by the tribal child care program director and staff; (e) an examination of participants' perceptions of advocacy as an important component of their work; and (f) a sense of deep identification with the land described by the participants as a key experience associated with living and working on American Indian reservations.

This chapter introduces the participants and presents information about their professional and personal characteristics. Drawing from our discussions during the

interview and on-site visit, the directors' perceptions are organized according to the identified themes.

### *The Participants*

For the purpose of this study the participant population consisted of American Indian tribal child care directors. Each participant was a member of a different tribe. All the participants had a minimum of one year of experience as the director. All participants had also held the position of director during the period that data collection for the study occurred beginning in January, 2006 and continued through April, 2008. The tribal child care directors were drawn from two distinct groups. The participants of the study were selected so as to obtain the perspectives of directors at different stages in their professional careers and encountering different kinds and levels of challenges in their work. Therefore, the 16 directors were selected so that they divided into four equal groups, as defined by two factors: (a) leadership experience; and (b) tribal affiliation. The first factor of leadership experience was utilized to identify a group of 8 directors who have demonstrated service of at least 5 years of experience in their field and moreover have been recognized for distinguished service by their communities and statewide child care organizations and nationally, by the Child Care Bureau, or both. The contrast group consisted of 8 directors with 1- to 3-years of directing experience and no leadership awards. The second factor, crossed with the first, relates to tribal enrollment. Eight directors were enrolled members of the tribe serving as the grantee for tribal child care services, while the other 8 were enrolled members of tribes other than the grantee agencies where they served as the child care director. Previous research (Willis, 1999)

suggests that these two factors may be important dimensions in the way relationships are formed between participating families and staff, service delivery plans are implemented, and advocacy efforts are supported by the tribal leadership of the reservation community.

Justification for limiting the study participants to American Indians was based on the field of inquiry that this study examined. This study was specifically designed to explore how field administrators view the role of the tribal child care program in contributing to the continuation of cultural integrity in American Indian communities.

### *Personal Characteristics*

Fifteen of the participants were female. One male director participated in the study. Fourteen of the participants were parents and their children ranged in age from 18 months to 37 years. Four participants were foster parents. Eleven participants had at least 1 grandchild and 8 had multiple grandchildren. One participant was a great grandmother. Most of the study participants had children or grandchildren who had previously attended, or were currently attending, the early childhood program on the American Indian reservations where the participants served as the program's administrator.

Seven of the participants were born and spent most of their life, if not all, growing up on the American Indian reservations where they serve as tribal child care directors. All seven participants did leave their respective tribal communities to pursue opportunities for higher education and returned after completing their studies. One participant in the group of eight directors who are enrolled members of the tribe serving as the grantee for the child care program grew up in an international setting as a member of a native family frequently crossing the United States border to live in Canada. The

participant's family returned periodically to reside within the boundaries of the reservation located in the United States or to settle from time to time in an enclave of extended family members living in a large urban area within commuting distance of the American Indian reservation community.

Seven of the participants were enrolled members of a federally recognized tribe, other than the tribe serving as the grantee of the child care center. One participant was an enrolled member of a state recognized indigenous group not yet recognized by the federal government. In this case, all indigenous people whose ancestors were the first inhabitants of a Pacific archipelago and are now living within the boundaries of this state receive the state's designation as members of one distinct, inclusive group of tribal residents by the legislative, judicial, and executive branches of government.

### ***Professional Characteristics***

The participants' length of service ranged from 13 months to 27 years. The median length of time that field service extended was 6 years. By comparison, a recent evaluation of tribal Head Start programs found that the median length of service for American Indian Alaska Native Head Start directors is 5.8 years (ACF, 2005 available online:[http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/hs/aian/reports/aian\\_summary/aian\\_sum\\_title.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/hs/aian/reports/aian_summary/aian_sum_title.html)). The participants' level of educational attainment ranged from high school graduation to Master's degree. Four participants were enrolled in higher education programs pursuing bachelor level early childhood education degrees. Two participants were pursuing their master degrees in early childhood education. Two participants were

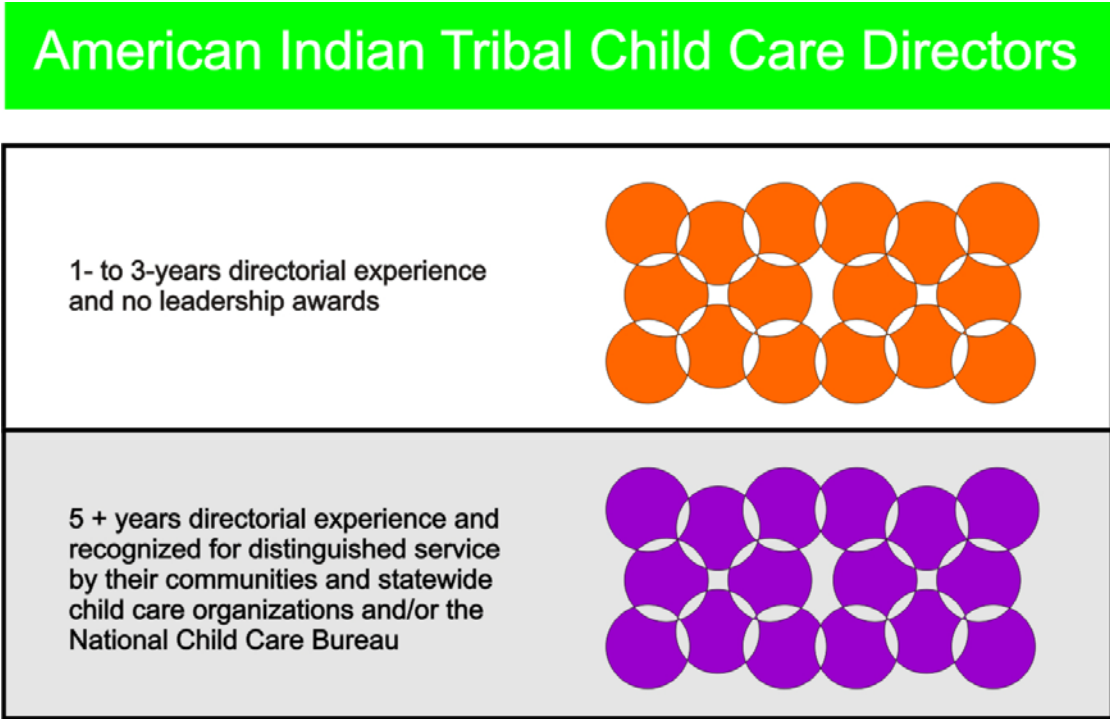


Figure 3. Tribal directors experience.

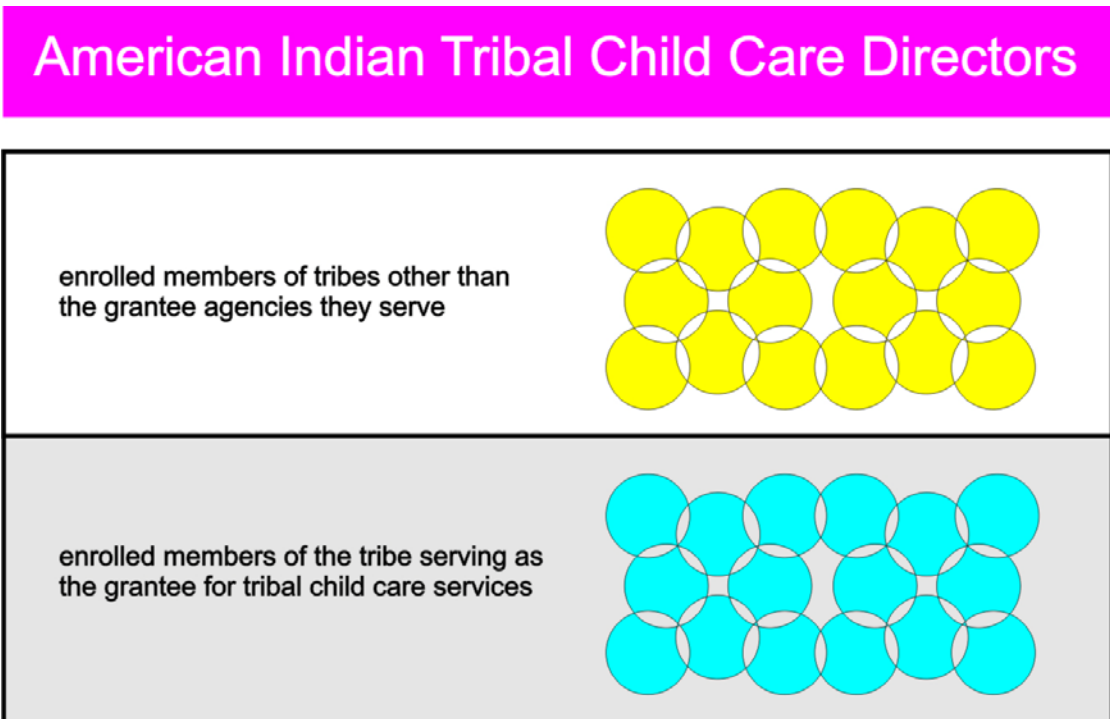


Figure 4. Tribal directors enrollment.

enrolled in doctoral programs in educational leadership and administration. Twelve participants held staff positions within the tribal child care program prior to assuming the director's position. Nine of the participants started their service to the program as either a teacher or teaching assistant. Participants administered programs ranging in enrollment size from 97 to 285 children, age birth to five.

### *The Sites*

The sites of the American Indian tribal child care programs were located in 12 states across the country representing 9 distinct geographic regions. The regions represented are the Great Plains, Great Lakes, Pacific Northwest, Appalachian Mountains, Rocky Mountains, Southwestern desert, Southern Gulf coast, Piedmont woodlands, and Northeastern maritime. All of the sites were located on American Indian reservation lands. All of the Tribal child care programs served children from infancy. In every program, parents had the option of enrolling their infant as early as 6 weeks old and each program's educational services for children extended to age five. Study participants reported very few incidents of attrition and most children attended tribal child care programs until they transitioned into a kindergarten classroom at the community's public or tribal school. Seven directors reported substantial waiting lists for enrollment in the early childhood programs, particularly for parents seeking infant and toddler services. Two sites reported full participation of their service population. At these two program sites every eligible family seeking enrollment for their children birth to age five was served.

The tribal child care administrators participating in the study represented three types of program services. These types of programs services are: (a) center-based tribal child care programs (TCC); (b) center-based tribal child care program combined with Head Start (TCC/HS); or (c) center-based tribal child care program combined with Head Start and Early Head Start services (TCC/HS/EHS). Five participants administered early childhood programs that provided tribal child care center-based services for children birth to five with funding from the Child Care Bureau. Nine participants administered early childhood programs combining tribal child care services, with Head Start and Early Head start programs birth to five. Two participants administered programs combining tribal child services birth to three with Head Start programs for children, ages three to five. These two types of combined programs received funding from the Office of Head Start and the Child Care Bureau.

Variation in program service delivery options included single site center-based services available on ten American Indian reservations. Six grantees delivered child care and early childhood care and education services on multiple sites within their service area. None of the participants administered programs where the grantee was a confederated tribe, that is two or more federally recognized tribes residing within the designated boundaries of one reservation. In addition, none of the directors administered a child care program where the grantee agreement was between a consortia of tribes and the Child Care Bureau.

### *Themes*

The major theme of this research was the examination of the directors' perceptions of the ways in which tribal child care programs preserve and promote cultural continuity. Every director participating in the study cited the importance of providing culturally appropriate and tribally specific educational experiences to the children in their programs.

#### *Theme One: Preservation and Promotion of Cultural Continuity*

The area of discussion that generated many points of view with study participants was the role of the reservation community's culture and how the tribal culture is reflected in the early childhood program. Although there was consensus among the directors about the importance of tribally specific cultural education, implementation within the cultural curriculum covered a broad range of educational activities and is representational of the diversity of practices within and among the tribal grantees.

During the process of data analysis, the most significant aspects of cultural education reported by study participants emerged. For example, 16 participants cited the transmission of tribal customs and traditions as a central element of the early childhood education program. Eleven participants identified steps that directors and staff take to support the development of tribal identity and cultural resiliency in young children. Seven directors discussed at length the role the young child plays within the context of the nuclear family, extended family, and wider community.



*Transmission of culture and tradition.*

I would like to say to the children, the young people, to learn about their people, about their culture, to be proud of who they are. The kids, I would like to see them carry themselves with respect, to have high morals. That is the way of our people. (L. Peltier in G. Cates, 2001, p.155).

Every interview discussion and site visit was steeped in the culture of the respective tribal community. According to all of the participants, the focal point for tribal child care program service delivery was grounded in the belief that it was not only desirable but necessary to reflect the home culture of the children and families enrolled in the early childhood program.

*Dynamics of cultural continuity.* During an interview with Loretta, a director with three years or less in her position and an enrolled member of the tribe serving as the grantee of the child care program, she often referred to the photographs of children and families lining the walls of her office and the hallways of the classroom building. With quiet pride, she told me that her husband was the artist responsible for documenting the beauty and joy apparent in the many intimate moments photographed between elders, staff, children, parents and extended family members. A little later in the interview, Loretta revealed that her husband, Charles, held another important role within the early childhood program. As the bus driver, he was the first staff person to greet the commuting children and their families in the morning and usually the last staff person to interact with family members as he dropped off children at their door at the end of the day. Considering the back and forth nature of his job, we discussed the potential for communicating important messages between the school and home regarding family childrearing beliefs and early educational practices. As she talked about the early

childhood program, Loretta revisited the image of the bus driver transporting children and messages between school and home several times. In its simplicity, this image powerfully conveys the bidirectional process of cultural transmission that every study participant referenced during the initial interview and on-site visits I conducted to tribal early childhood educational programs.

In a paper presented to the Child Care Policy Research Consortium Meeting sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation on July 31, 2008, Dr. Kathy Thornburg examined some emerging issues concerned with determining the degree of responsiveness exhibited by early childhood programs to a family's professed ideas surrounding child rearing and child development. In unpacking the data, Thornburg raised an important question for consideration. Inviting members of the research policy meeting to consider, the parameters of this perplexing issue, she asked:

Does our research effort demonstrate that early childhood programs are doing an adequate job of reflecting the values of a child's home? Or rather is it the case that the early childhood program, by ignoring or overriding a family's values, actually then exerts a strong influence on shaping the values and beliefs of the family in the image of the program's values? (Thornburg, 2008)

Reflecting on Thornburg's remarks, I was reminded of Loretta and Charles working together in service to the families with young American Indian children living in an extremely remote corner of the Great Plains. Their dedication and service to their community is a snapshot of the ways tribal early childhood programs affect the ebb and flow of cultural knowledge among community members. Loretta, the new director and a lifelong member of her tribal community, is firmly committed to setting the highest standards of quality and implementing this vision of early childhood education. Her

vision is informed by the state-of-the-science in the field and her commitment to listen and reflect the different voices of the stakeholders in her community. Her husband, Charles, is the school bus driver and the program archivist. His work supports the growth and development of family and community partnerships within the early childhood program. Each school day he provides important channels for transportation and communication for the program. Skillfully documenting the processes of child rearing and early education, the public displays of his photographs on the walls of the child care center and tribal office buildings create greater visibility for children and families within the entire reservation community. Embracing their work, Loretta and Charles exemplify the ongoing give and take processes of transmission of culture and childrearing practices that were reported by the 16 directors participating in this study. In describing the bidirectional process, the participants shed light on how providers and parents find mutually valuable ways to meet the needs of the community and the families to preserve and promote the distinct practices of cultural continuity.

*The importance of relationships.* Many study participants reported that they view cultural education as much more than the sum of the many different curricular activities taking place in the programs they administer. Grace, a director with less than three years of experience in her position, is an enrolled member of the tribe that serves as the lead agency for the child care program. She defines cultural education in this way, “[Cultural education] resides in the relationships that are developed, nurtured, and often tested between people dedicated to partnering with families in their home communities.”

Lorna, a director with less than three years of experience and a lifelong member of her tribal community, describes the opportunities for children and parents to learn about her tribe's culture in this way:

We have a full cultural immersion program with three preschool classrooms that are tribally-funded. Our chief is supportive. Our first [language immersion] classroom opened in 2004. Since starting the program we have made working with parents and extended family a priority, as well providing for the young children. Parents are required to attend monthly meetings and we provide classes in [name of native language] for them.

Lorna describes the importance of cementing relationships with family, community members, and staff as well as the children enrolled in the program. She states:

We have worked hard to gain the support of tribal representatives to secure funding. But the most important thing to happen is that every staff member has contributed to the effort by reaching out to community members to let them know that we value their involvement. As a result of all this work we will have sometime in the next year a full immersion school that reflects all aspects of our culture.

*Family practices reflected in community approaches.* Across the country there are a myriad of examples of cultural transmission of childrearing practices, tribal customs and programs offering culturally based services to children and their families living on American Indian reservations. In the Rocky Mountains, Bonnie, a highly experienced director and enrolled member of her community, described the combined Tribal Child Care/Head Start/Early Head Start program providing services to expectant mothers, "In our prenatal program, *Mothers to Be*, each expectant mother is taught by an elder how to make a cradleboard to greet the arrival of her baby." Many miles away in the Southwestern desert, Kathleen, an experienced director who is not an enrolled member of the tribe serving as the grantee for the child care program, talked about the mothers

bringing their tiny infants to the early childhood center in their cradleboards. Kathleen described how commonplace the practical use of cradleboards was in this community. She said, “Cradleboards are used by every family during the entire first year of the child’s life. So of course we use them with the children while they are here at the program with us.”

Another example of the blending of community and family practices is evident in the presence of powwows in early childhood programs across the country. During the interview discussions, 15 program directors reported that powwows were held for the children on a regular basis. Powwows are community events, opportunities of children to learn the special dances of their respective tribal community from their teachers, elders and other adults. In many communities grandparents and parents take time from work or chores to come to the early childhood center to watch or instruct the children in the dancing and the drumming. One study participant, Cindy, an enrolled tribal member and experienced program director, describes a community moccasin making tradition her program has supported for many years. She states, “Every year we purchase, for \$35 a pair, a new pair of moccasins for every child. And they wear those moccasins to our powwows. What is so great is that the mothers and people in the community make them for us.”

***Traditional practices instruct parents and children.*** Other traditional practices that were conveyed in discussions with the study participants illustrate different opportunities for children and their parents to learn about aspects of tribal culture and tradition. Twyla, an experienced director who is not an enrolled member of the tribe

serving as the lead agency, revealed how some of the program activities that their Head Start Fatherhood Demonstration Grant initiative provided brought some traditionally held tribal values about the role of fathers more clearly into focus for the participants in the fatherhood program. She described the process:

Because of the way are families have become structured in the last 20 years, our dads were often absent from many aspects of our program and more importantly from their children's lives. In our community it is not unusual for children to live with their mother and her parents. So our dads if they did not live with their kids, were not always included in the many decision that concern their child's development.

Twyla talks about program efforts to change the level of father involvement by teaching young men about the traditional roles of fathers, brothers, uncles, and grandfathers in the family and the clans. She explains:

To accomplish this goal, we held a weekly drumming circle for the men in the fatherhood program. My husband led it. His family is deeply rooted here. He knows that coming together to talk about their children and learn the historical roles of men in the tribe could make a difference in their presence in their children lives. We see the benefits for the kids at school. Their dads are here and are having a strong impact on the program and the design of the curriculum.

***Respecting differences: Community approaches.*** Social psychologist Meredith Small writes, "Every act by parents, every goal that molds that act, has a foundation in what is appropriate for that culture. In a sense, no parenting style is "right" and no style is "wrong." It is appropriate only according to that culture (Small, 1998, p. 108).

Discussions with two participants, Loretta and Kathleen, highlight Small's assertion regarding the cultural fit parents and caregivers forge within the context of accepted childrearing practices in any particular community. In talking about cultural appropriateness, these two study participants gave examples of two incidents of

disconfirming evidence. Loretta and Kathleen offered insight into the emphasis on family traditions, rather than community traditions. In both cases the discussion was carefully framed by the participant as an explanation of her respective family's tradition. Reticent to share a sense of a community-wide practice, Loretta was explicit in her remarks, stating that "every family has a different approach to imparting traditions." Kathleen, when discussing the intersection of child rearing beliefs and spiritual practices, also politely and firmly deflected several of the semi-structured interview questions. She was not willing to discuss, except in the most general terms, religious and spiritual practices. Kathleen stated:

We have to avoid any mention or talk of religion here because it is upsetting to families. We are a geographically isolated and intentionally closed community. Our ways are our own and do not concern outsiders, even people like you who have worked with us for a long, long time. Our concern is for our families and their privacy.

Participants in this study provided a great deal of information that demonstrated the cohesive and collaborative efforts of early childhood programs to reflect the cultural traditions and custom practiced in each respective tribal community. During interview discussions with several study participants, clear distinctions between differences in community practices and family practices were made. Loretta described community-based cultural practices within the context of her own family. For example, when asked to describe the role of the infant in the family, Loretta described the traditional ceremonies and customs that her family would participate in to prepare for the birth of the child in this way, "In our tribe the star quilt is a traditional gift, a way of honoring the

baby's birth. We always make a star quilt. The other day Mother and I realized that my cousin will soon have her baby and so we have to get busy.”

***The role of the infant and young child in the family.***

The whole world revolves around the baby. . . . They are the center of the family.  
(Study Participant, June, 2006)

The semi-structured interview questions asking the participants to describe the role of the infant in the family provided insight into the many ways that infants and young children are perceived to be important members of each respective tribal community. Responses from the participants to the semi-structured interview question were varied. Some participants contrasted recollection of their parent's childrearing practices with a nuanced description of current beliefs and practices within their respective communities. Other participants cited the important role of traditional beliefs and acknowledged changes in family practices occurring over time. Participants also shared observations solely focused on current parental and extended family practices. All 16 of the participants noted the importance of the extended family as an integral part of the support surrounding newborns and families with young children.

Melinda, an experienced director who is not an enrolled member of the tribe serving as grantee, described the essential role of the infant in the family and community. She cited changes from the relatively new economic growth on her reservation:

Brothers and sisters and mother-in-laws and grandparents, a baby brings the family together. We have very responsible intact families across the culture here. I mean mother, daddy, sisters, brothers, they are all helping. And we have some [children] that are raised by their grandparents most of the time because the parents are working in town. It has put a new twist on things. Because our children, their parents may work the night shift [at the casino] and they may come home in the middle of the night. And we have children that get up in the middle



of the night; it is the only way that they can see their parents. So they are staying up late in the day and we could not figure it out. After we communicated with the parents we realize that they wanted to see their daddy and this is their time to do it so we just said, “We will work with you.”

Lila, a great-grandmother describing the role of her great granddaughter in her family, shared this experience:

As far as creating a stronger tie, the family, when you get together, you know we spend a lot of time with the little ones. I keep one like maybe three, four days out of the week. I keep my great granddaughter and I try to teach her how to speak the Lakota language and I take her to powwows so she can watch the dancing and the singing. In the family, I am the living link to her history. She is my tie to the future.

Paul, a director with less than three years of experience in his position and an enrolled member of the tribe serving as grantee, describes the resurgence of traditional knowledge about the role of the relationship between the extended family and the newborn within the context of his community:

What they try to make very important, and I saw it, it lost for a while, but I see people coming back to understanding extended family. mean, that was lost for awhile and we became like it was do or die. People began to think wait a minute. I got family over here. These are cousins. The people I am talking about are people who just got to the point where they were just working. We were not following tradition. So they are starting to bring in the grandparents more, or, your aunts or uncles. As a community member, the other side I see is when children are born, it's a happy time, it's a good thing overall. I do believe that when a baby's is born, I know, the outside community doesn't do this, but those babies belong to everybody and—I mean, jeepers, when it came to my nieces and nephews it's nothing for them just to stay with me.

*A different view.* Several participants talked about their perceptions around the changes that have occurred in parental roles and responsibilities in the time that has elapsed since they were children raised by their own parents. Cindy, an experienced

director and enrolled member of the tribe serving as grantee, described her thoughts on changes within her community:

Yeah. Babies. Well, let me just tell you what I think. We work with many teen parents. We have one center totally dedicated to teen parents. And we serve the [name of ] School District and we also serve the [name of] Tribal School. And babies are, they're a status symbol. When the mother has someone, the mother is no longer alone. We have some high school students who have a couple of children, you know. Babies having babies. And the role that the child plays is very interesting to me. At the Christmas party—we have a huge Christmas party—all of us all get together. And all the Head Starts [3-5 years old] get to come and all the Earlies [infant and toddlers enrolled in Early Head Start] get to come and the whole community can come. For three days we decorate, we have Santa Claus there and we take a picture of every child with Santa Claus [during the party]. Lots of mothers will say to their daughters, “Go up there. Go up there and sit with him.” And the toddler will hang back. “Go on, go on.” So you have this young mother, expecting this toddler to be brave and she [the mother] won't go get close to Santa Claus. And that's a real interesting thing to me, you know? That's just real interesting to me because we [all these young mothers] have expectations of our children to be brave, to, you know, do those things that we're afraid of.

Cindy also talked about the growing number of teen parents in her tribal community. She said:

Some of the reasons for the importance of the infant can be seen if you look at it, where in lots of our families now, the teens will have babies. They don't leave for a really long time. They don't leave their homes. And it seems like this is just accepted for some folks. I know my mom said I had to leave home because there were too many kids to feed. I had to go, you know. And I think our role has really changed in terms of babies. [In the program] we feel lots of responsibility to provide as much parenting as possible and in a really subtle way. It has to be subtle or they don't want anything to do with it. You get a lot of rebellious, resistant behavior, because that's their age.

Lorna voiced her concern about the changes in her community regarding the role of the infant in the family. Sharing her story, she said:

Personally I have to be honest with you. I had a strict upbringing. None of my brothers or sisters ever did anything that would reflect badly on our family out of respect for our parents. Today I think we make it too easy for many of these young people. We take care of them so there are no consequences for unintended pregnancies. As soon as the baby is born we place them in all kinds of services,

Early Head Start takes care of prenatal health, center-based care, home visitation. What I want to know is where is the young person with this new baby learning that there are consequences for their actions or responsibilities that come with being a parent?

She continues,

I do know growing up in the community that back in the day parents took care of their own. Social Services from the white community had an unwelcome presence on this reservation. When Social Services approached my parents about us, someone told me that my dad had made a strong statement. When asked repeatedly by the white social workers “Did he want help?” His answer was “No! I brought them into the world and I will raise them.”

*The child as a source of family conflict.* The child was often cited as a source of conflict in the family as well as joy. Bonnie, an experienced director and enrolled member of the tribe serving as grantee, summed up the view of her community towards the welfare of children in this way, “We are tight-knit. We take care of our own children, regardless of family situation.” Lila describes a family experience:

And then as far as the roles and responsibilities of the family, we help my granddaughter get her application [from the tribal office administering funds from the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program] and every week I go somewhere I pick up her pants or something, or get this little one ready for school. We have another childcare provider that just opened up and I haven’t visited it yet, but it’s sponsored by the Tribe and I don’t know how many slots it has available, but, you know, childcare providers are needed so the single mothers can work. Otherwise, if they don’t get their grant, then they don’t get their bills paid and then they’ll be out on the street.

Lila continues,

Well, like I said, I guess the conflict part would be that lot of these mothers are single and they’re depending on their partner to you know, the father of the child to help take care of them while they’re working. But sometimes they don’t. My granddaughter, she’s married, and they’re separated. She has to go to GED classes before she’s eligible for a grant and she lives about three miles out of town. She has no transportation and no childcare provider, so she’s really having a rough time trying to get to all the way across town, which is about four miles, so she could get her GED classes so she could be eligible to get a grant. And her

husband won't help her. So, she's got two little ones. One's about three months old and for her to walk, all gravel road and cars are coming and going and you'd be surprised, nobody would give them a ride. So, I see a major problem there where the spouse or the significant other won't help them with their children.

Lila closes her story by sharing an insight that reflects many of the study participants' expressed views, "And it is the grandmothers that usually end up taking care of the children."

Paul describes a similar role in resolving conflict and likens it to the traditional role of uncles in childrearing within his community:

The uncle. It's just a part of our, our existence. My role and responsibility as an uncle is to discipline. The way that's thought of is that discipline is a hard thing and if you've got a close-knit family, say the mother, like my sister, comes to me and, says "The boys are doing this, or that, can you talk to them?" I would say, "Yes. I can." And some people ask, "Well, why doesn't the father?" But the reason why is because I would go in there and I would talk to them and I'd try to make them understand why this or that is important to my sister. I am able to go as far as to discipline them. I mean, I don't, I don't physically punish, but I'll take away their, their toys or whatever. I can ground them and stuff. And then they go home and people say, "Well, why do you do that?" And I say, "I don't have to live in that house." It's recognized that my word goes. So the children don't take it out on the parents and they get time to reflect and then they can ask their parents, "Well, why did uncle say this or that?" This way, mom and dad becomes your [the child's] sounding board. It creates discussion and it worked in my family because I knew that to be my role. I mean, I wasn't raised culturally, but I was told a lot of things and that's just the way it is. And when I moved out to non-native communities and I saw things that were different, I'm thinking are we wrong? Did we do it the wrong way?

***Forming cultural identity.***

When someone asks you who you are and where you come from are you going to be proud or are you going to look away? (L. Willis, Study Participant, 1999)

Many differing viewpoints were expressed about the formation of cultural identity and resilience. Sometimes there is conflict within families about the impact of infant-toddler services on the development of cultural identity. The sister of a traditional member of a

tribal community, an Ojibwe medicine man, was serving as the director of the tribe's early childhood services. He expressed his concern in this way:

I am not sure about having the babies in school and being influenced by people other than family members. Our traditions tell us the baby is sacred. That the baby is guided by the ancients during their first years of life. That is how they learn what it means to live the Ojibwe teachings. I question whether we really know what effect being with other people like the day care teachers, what effect that will have on our children being able to fully gain their strength, their spirit. (M. Gokee, personal communication, 2002)

Cindy administered a combined Head Start/Early Head Start and tribal child care program that counts representation of 63 tribes by the families enrolled in the program. Cindy, commenting on the surprising absence of cultural identity in the parents of the children attending the program said, "In a parent meeting we were asking parents for their input about what they would like us to teach the children about traditional ways of all these different tribes. Not one person stepped forward and identified themselves as Indian. I will never forget it."

*Cultural identity viewed as an enduring source of resiliency.* Tribal cultural identities were viewed as enduring even in the face of historically disruptive events where tribal identity has been forced to change with changing times and conditions. Consequently, participants passionately discussed their views surrounding the formation of cultural identity. Definitive ideas about the way a child's cultural identity is formed were expressed and the responses reflected unique aspects of each community's tradition. Paul shares a personal perspective about the path to cultural identity:

There was wisdom in the ancient ways. But, the problem is, now, how do we bring that into contemporary reality? That's the trick. I mean, I tell people when I started searching who I was and what I am, I thought I've got to have long hair, beads and braids and I'm an Indian and all this and that. And I went in search of

my spiritual calling. I went to synagogue. I went to church. I went everywhere. I even went to my own council, to the traditional long houses looking for answers. I finally found an answer without looking for it, I realized, some years after looking, about what it was to be native again, that's what I reflect back to children, is to have an understanding of who I am. My own pride. I don't have to shout out a mountaintop. Long as I do what is right and that is to respect the future in terms of what is it we're doing for our children. What legacy are we leaving them? And that's all I have to do. And that's what I've come to do. I don't apologize to people anymore about, "Oh, I don't know this." Hey, that's good for you. Ceremonies are important for some. That's what you like, that makes your life whole, that makes you happy, that's great. I respect it. But it may not be for me. I did try it and it wasn't for me. I felt that with all this education and learning I've been getting, I can't just turn my back on it. So, what I propose is that I'm not going to. I'll continue to do it. What my responsibility is to understand how I will use that education for the betterment of more people for the future. If I can do it on this front, then that's great. If you can do it from that front, that's great. But, it's all a circle of everybody contributing, one way or another, to make the whole thing whole again, rather than this factionalism all the time, you know. It's very disgusting to me.

Lila describes her beliefs:

I feel that it's important because that's our identity. Our identity is Lakota people and without our songs and dances, we'll lose our identity. And we'll just be a part of the melting pot of society. And we need to instill the pride in the children and let them be proud of who they are. I don't think the private day-care services teach the language and culture [on or near the reservation community] the way that we do.

Echoing the words of the participant is Lee, a director with less than three years experience and an enrolled member of another tribe serving as grantee of the program she administers. Lee, describing the importance of language and culture in the development of cultural identity relates the urgency the tribal community feels to preserve and protect language and culture. She states:

Now, what they've been doing in the community is putting their language on—that's how scared they're we're getting—is on videos and audios and writing it down and everything. And it's a big push to bring it back now, along with a lot of other things. The tribe has a cultural, spiritual advisor who is on staff and part of the ECDP [Early Childhood Development Program] program where they go and

teach the children ceremonies, spiritual practices and other essential parts of the community's heritage. Elders and parents alike worry at times that it may be too late.

***Resiliency in the face of racism.***

You know it was not that long ago that the sheriff of St. Mary's Parish used Indians for target practice. (C. Savage, Chitimacha tribal historian, personal communication, June, 2006)

Personal experiences encountering racism were used by the participants as examples of the importance role of the early childhood center in creating a strong sense of cultural identity and resilience. Paul, relating the sting of racism in his own life, struggles with the idea of forging an identity that could honor both tribal heritage and citizenship in the larger society. He explains his dilemma:

I was raised in a school system that pledges allegiance every morning, "God bless America" and all that, right or wrong. I was raised with all that. And I didn't know anything about it. I didn't know what an Indian meant, so, you know, as we move back to the reservation, I think, "Oh, I'm an Indian. Oh, okay." And then I felt the prejudice first hand. I didn't understand it. I was treated second-hand, different. And, as I went along, I started getting educated and I started reading and looking at things. And I started seeing I can't pledge an allegiance, not to the country that tried to destroy my people.

***Theme Two: The Role of Language Preservation and Education***

The language is my guide. . . . My father who was a Code Talker told me all the answers are within our language, our way of life. (J. DeSoto, in G. Cates, 2001)

In 1995, Albert Hale, President of the Navajo Nation, decreed the Navajo language to be the official language of the sovereign Navajo nation and the first language of instruction for all Navajo school children (Willis,1999). Fifteen of the tribal child care directors participating in this study reported administering native language education programs designed to promote acquisition of the tribal language spoken on their

respective American Indian reservations. Five of the participants administered programs with language immersion classrooms, yet none of the heads of tribal governments serving as the grantee for the child care programs had made a similar executive order as former Navajo Nation President Hale.

Many of the study participants compared the retention and promotion of their native language to an aspect of local empowerment, a necessary force in preserving culture on American Indian reservations. Directors referenced the role of fluent speakers, often elders, in preserving the native language of their respective community. During an onsite visit, one tribal historian, Carolyn Savage, related the story of the few remaining tribal elders engaged in work with a renowned linguist to preserve the tribal language. Carolyn said, “None of our elders spoke fluently but they did remember their parents speaking. Between them they could remember knowing just eight words [of the tribal language].” She explained the process the tribal council supported to regain the tribe’s language:

We hired a linguist in 1998 and assembled the elders. They went through 200 hours of wax recordings made in the 1930’s by another linguist from Florida. Initially the elders were not supportive. They would say things like “It is a bad thing to try to speak like this. English will make you fit in.” Then one day Aunt Ellen, Miss Pearl and Aunt Thelka came to the language classes. It must have brought back many memories. Aunt Ellen was washing dishes and remembered a word she had not heard since her childhood. She called her sister to ask her if she knew what it meant. Thelka told her to think about what she was doing when she remembered. And it has just taken off from there. (C. Savage, personal communication, July, 2006).

Language preservation and education were endeavors viewed as an essential component of ensuring the continuity of cultural education. On many of the American Indian reservations I visited over the course of the study, it was not unusual for me to be



in the midst of conversations spoken in tribal languages. The participants reported that native language preservation and education efforts were a source of pride. Leslie, an experienced director affiliated with a tribe other than the tribe serving as the grantee for the child care center, described how language efforts were affecting families. Leslie stated,

Children go home and teach their parents the words they learn from the elders [working in the child care center as language specialists]. So here we have a situation where grandparents and great-grandparents who refused to teach their own children [name of the tribal language] are helping the youngest kids in the community learn to speak the language, and the parents are going right along with it.

One tribal historian related during an on-site visit that her tribe had recently compiled a dictionary of 15,000 words and a grammar guide to the tribal language, a project that the community elders had worked on since 1998 (C. Savage, personal communication, June, 2006). In previous research, a study participant commented on the importance of teaching the youngest members of her tribe their native language in this way, “Our language is our culture. It is one and the same. If we ever lost our language then our traditions would be gone” (Willis, 1999).

***Teaching English language learners.*** Kathleen explained to me the extent of native language education and acquisition in her tribal community. “Everyone here speaks [the name of the language]. Throughout the day you will hear all of our teachers speak to the children in this language because that’s what they learn at home. It is their first language.” She relates a story about her beloved oldest granddaughter now enrolled in the tribal community’s elementary school:

When my granddaughter was going to school here in the center she was a smart, bright, little girl with language galore. You know, just talking up a storm. But it took awhile. Up to about four years old, she was in that receptive language stage where she was taking in all this information in English and [the native language]. And then she began to talk a little bit. Her mom would talk to her in [name of tribal language] and she would respond in [name of tribal language]. Sometimes she would repeat their conversation back to us in English.

On a site visit to a child care program located on another American Indian reservation, Nan revealed that most of the staff members of the tribal early childhood program had recently attended a professional development conference together for English language learners. Nan offered this explanation:

We had a very important reason for attending this conference on second language. The Cree heritage is so strong and there are so many native speakers in this community that many of our children learn Cree in their homes and struggle with English. We have to help them learn to speak a second language with fluency. We know how important it is to apply the same type of principles to our English language education curriculum that are used for other dual language learners.

The director continued to explain her view outlining the importance of retaining native language and providing the children with a strong foundation in English. She stated, “There can be no doubt that we are a bilingual community. Our children need skills for both ways of living and they are not necessarily exclusive ways, just different.”

Nan explained her approach by contrasting her perceptions of the two languages in cultural terms:

I would like for you to consider the difference in worldviews that are shaped by the language that we use. The English language as I know it and use it is very linear. The Cree language is circular and uses the pictures each word creates to convey meaning. One Cree word can describe a whole way of being. I do not know any one word in English that can do that.

***Community collaboration.*** Native language education was often cited by study participants as an opportunity for collaboration with other educational and community

organizations on their respective reservations. Loretta described the process she initiated with the elementary and high school administrators. “We teach Dakota here at the center. From infancy the children hear our language spoken. I learned early that with our emphasis on teaching our language there also comes a community responsibility.” She explains:

The Dakota language is taught in our program and in the tribal schools on the reservation all the way through to grade 12. We collaborate with all the other schools here to come together on pronunciations of Dakota words. This is important because oftentimes a community or a family may have a particular way of pronouncing a word and we are sensitive to that and want to be as accurate as possible. Our goal is to reflect back to the children what they recognize as the language of their home.

Twyla is affiliated with a tribe other than the one that is her employer. She concurred with this community approach by sharing some family history. Twyla said:

Out of the nearly 1000 people living on my home reservation and with more than 4000 enrolled members of the tribe living elsewhere, there are only a few native speakers that remain. My mother spoke only [name of native language] when she left for boarding school in elementary school. When she came back she spoke only English. Assimilation, when it comes to speaking our language is a dirty word. This is not what we want for our young people [at the tribal child care program] so we work hard to find avenues of collaboration within the community to keep putting opportunities together for everyone to learn. At the center we have a fluent [speaking] community member teaching native and non-native staff members as a part of their professional development plan. They get college credits for the course.

One participant, fluent in Lakota, talked about the role of the tribal council and all of the educational settings working together. Lila said:

As far as the Tribal childcare programs preserving and promoting continuity of the Tribe, our program specifically teaches the language and culture. And the Tribal Council passed Ordinance Sixty-Six where every school on the reservation from Head Start to college level have to teach the Lakota language and culture. Everything’s labeled in the classroom. They speak to them in Lakota. We have dances, powwows, songs, that we take them to and the parents are a part of it.

They help make the costumes, get them ready for their annual Head Start powwow.

According to several participants, this process of community collaboration did not always follow a smooth trajectory. Loretta shared her perspective:

Coming together with other facets of the community around language is really hard. What keeps me and all of us at the center going is that we believe that knowing the language helps the children with their identity. Now that we are able to go beyond mere vocabulary words in our program we are trying to get the elementary and middle school teachers to support it at the tribal school. That is not going so well. We have a resource library that is open to anyone. We are able to carry on conversations. We are teaching sentences and we want to teach the children to respond to us in [name of language]. We are still not at the point of full immersion but we are getting closer. Unfortunately, when the children leave us there is no unified system of instruction. It really depends on whether or not their teacher knows and is willing to speak the language in the tribal school classroom.

In Theme One, Cindy was introduced as the administrator of a tribal child care program that is combined with Head Start and Early Head Start services. In the program she serves families from 63 different American Indian tribes. She attributes the tolerance in her community for the diversity of child rearing practices and beliefs found in the multi-site program back to widely held value, the respect for tradition. She also underscores the desire by parents for their children to learn the original tribal languages in this way:

We have a fluent speaker in every classroom on our reservation. Because we are more than one tribe, that's a difficult feat. And some families, they would like their children to speak [the native language] regardless of whether or not it is the language of their tribe.

***Participant fluency.*** Fourteen study participants reported seeking ways to personally learn the language of their community. Francine, Lorna, Lila, and Kathleen identified themselves as fluent speakers of a native language. Francine, an experienced

director and an enrolled member of the tribe serving as grantee, and Lorna, a director with less than three years experience and an enrolled member of the tribe serving as grantee, grew up learning their tribal language from their grandparents and other extended family members. Kathleen, fluent in her adopted community's language, is not an enrolled member of the tribe where she serves as director. Growing up on an island archipelago in the Pacific Ocean, she has lived in her adopted community for more than 20 years. Learning to speak the native language because it is the first language of her chosen home, she elaborates:

I started teaching here, my first job right out of school. Early that first year I was so lost. But gradually I began to understand even while I made more than my share of mistakes. Now I think of myself as a member [of the tribe], I have been here so long.

Lila described her pride growing up fluent in Lakota language and culture. She reported:

The [Bureau of Indian Affairs tribal] schools have knowledge bowls and they compete against other Sioux tribes. I won a lot of trophies. One thing I am most proud of was the time in high school when I won first place in the knowledge bowl, the Lakota Language Knowledge Bowl!

*Family influences.* There were many examples of the influence of native language in the early home life of the study participants. Participants talked of experiences with learning their native language, especially growing up, often referring to their memories of different family members who spoke the native language fluently. Bonnie tells of her mother's reticence as a protective mechanism for her children. "My mother was a fluent speaker but she made a conscious decision not to teach us what she knew. I am sure it had to do with what she endured while she was in the boarding

school.” Paul describes the frustration he felt when he was young and eager to learn to speak the native language from his father:

Sometimes I can be frustrated with the community and how they're doing things, but I'm always cognizant of the fact that there are many different dimensions about our people. There are many different aspects of how our lives have been interrupted. And I look at something real simple. My dad was born a left-hand writer. The nuns, well, let me just say that he can write with both hands because they made him write with his right hand. And it's why? When he spoke his language, he was beaten for it. Then they wonder why they don't talk to their children in that language. Because it just became associated- talk in, use your language and you were physically punished. So, you know, because I used to want to learn I would ask my dad to teach me but he would refuse. I didn't understand. You know, I guess that's what humility is all about, you can say these things and hopefully somebody comes back and says, “This is why.”

Francine recalls that her parents, members of different neighboring tribes in a remote area of California, being able to converse in both tribal languages as well as English. She discusses the history of preserving language education in her community:

Our language has been taught in the schools since the 1950's, and the elders became certified so that they could teach the children. A well known linguist studied our language in the early 1900's so we have had a significant preservation effort for at least 100 years.

Lorna, describing her traditional upbringing during the research interview shared an incident that illustrated her mother's allegiance to her language of origin. She told the story this way:

My family spoke Cherokee. I am a fluent speaker. All of my brothers and sisters are too. My parents only spoke Cherokee in the home. My mother was a very quiet lady. She seldom spoke in public. I never heard my mother speak English until she spoke to my daughter. That is how closely she kept to her raising.

When relating stories during their responses to the interview questions, some participants were filled with emotion, especially pride. Paul related the emotional reaction he had to hearing his tribal language spoken for the first time, “When I first

heard my language I cried.” He goes on to describe the collaborative efforts of the program with community elders:

We realized we were losing our language at an amazing rate because it is the elders who have it. Now I direct a program that has language at the center of the curriculum. We have found that if you are teaching language to the children it is best to use the elders because they don’t speak much English anyway.

***Theme Three: The Role of Elders in Tribal Child Care Programs***

Our young children are taught by our elders to listen and remember and carry on our traditions. Even the youngest family members are taught as babies. (Study Participant, 2007)

The semi-structured interview questions examining the role of tribal elders in the early childhood programs elicited a wide range of responses. Thirteen program directors discussed the role of elders in the classroom and their involvement in the design of the culture and language curriculums. Although some program directors reported little success in involving the tribal elders, other study participants reported a strong elder component in their program. Directors administering programs in American Indian reservation communities perceived by the study participant to have a highly traditional orientation discussed the role of elders and their contributions to the early childhood program at length.

Paul, a director with less than three years of experience and an enrolled member of the tribe serving as the grantee for the program, describes the creation of the cultural education program for young children on his reservation: “We knew it would happen or not depending on how the elders got involved.” Describing participation of the elders Paul said:

We decided as a staff that we wanted to have the older community members involved in our process of culture and education. We were definitely starting from scratch. We knew we needed to backtrack and bring a historical perspective to what we do with the children. So we looked around and realized it was the grandparents. Then we began to remember what the elders' role was for us when we were young children.

Paul continues the story of the process:

We live in a society that passed lessons down through stories. It is the elders that always sat down with the children and told stories and these stories were designed to teach, to talk about the seven lessons, love, respect, honesty, loyalty, compassion, bravery and honor. If you take that component of teaching out then where are we? You hope to have the parents do the best that they can, but that is why an elder had this role in the first place. Parents have always been busy as far back in time as you want to go. The elder had a role to play in the whole family lineage, this is their responsibility. So we started to bring them into our community programs and now I am sure that they will never leave. We are trying to eventually build an intergenerational facility. On the Canadian side of our reservation they have a child care center and an old age home right next to each other and the children and the elders mingle with each other throughout the day, take meals together, and spend the day in all kinds of activities.

One director, Bonnie, tried to involve elders with little success. She discussed the lack of availability of community elders to volunteer with the children. Sharing her experiences working with elders in the infant toddler component of the child care program, Bonnie stated:

Any more they don't want to come in spend time with the children. They see it as work and they expect to be paid. We have tried to get the older people to come in but they are seldom reliable volunteers. It is hard to train them and even after you do, they have their own way of doing things. They don't want to change.

Cindy, addressing the differences in volunteer and paid work from elders in involved in her program described their involvement in this way:

We're starting an elderly program with the state and they're paying them so many dollars—I think it's \$200 per month and they can come and volunteer and read stories, and share their talents as far as beading or other traditional crafts. In our



program, elderly take part in the prayers and name-giving, honorings, and share their stories as a way of teaching traditions.

*Teaching the lessons: Elders mentoring adults and children.* Most of the study participants had positive experiences working with the elders in their communities. Six directors discussed their personal experiences of learning important lessons from the elder people in their community. Explaining the importance of the oral traditions, Nan shared this story:

I am not from this community; I grew up about 200 miles away. I moved here when I married into a family that has lived here for a long time. When I started working at the early childhood program here I knew that I had to rely on the elderlies to guide me, to show me how to get along. There is one grandmother that took me under her wing and shared the stories with me that are important to pass on to the children. It was the beginning of my way of thinking about how alike and yet how different two Native communities can be. I have lived here nearly all my adult life at this point and those stories taught me how to be with the children and their parents in a way that conveys a respect for family and community values.

Barbara is a director with less than three years of experience and is affiliated with a tribe not serving as the grantee for the early childhood program. She described a revered elder volunteering in the infant room:

Miss Elsie always says, “Shhh . . . the language is sleeping” then she goes into the baby room picks up a baby and puts that baby in her lap and sings in [the tribal language] all the songs that she has made up just for that little child.

Elaborating on the elder’s influence, Barbara continues:

One of my favorite stories is that one of Miss Elsie’s babies as a toddler went to another program for a little while. When her new caregivers asked the baby if she could sing any songs. Well you know that baby just sat right up and sang every single song that Elsie taught her. She would not stop. When she went through all the songs she knew, she started right over again. I think they [the new program] thought it was a nuisance after a while. But you know it was just how this little child knew to let out her grief. Her mother brought her back to us shortly after that. I believe she must have realized the bond her baby shared with Miss Elsie.

Paul relates an experience of on the job learning lessons from a community elder:

It's not outspoken, but it's understood that our nation is getting bigger. We're trying to reclaim our numbers. I mean, with the residential schools, how they impacted our people is, we're still reeling from the damage of that. The, there's a lot of things we're coming back from. And I remember a while back I was working on statistics and I wanted accurate numbers because I wanted to, I was writing grants and proposals and I was very positive about it. I was excited about it because my idea was, if I had these numbers, then I'd write these, these proposals, I'm looking for money for the community so that we can address certain issues. And I was having a hard time with it. And this elderly woman came up to me and she says, "Can I talk to you?" And I said, "Sure." And she says, "You know, I really appreciate what you're doing. It's great. Your heart is in the right place, your conscience." Mind you, she didn't speak good English, but she was telling me all this and I said, "Yeah, thank you." And she said, "You seem to be really frustrated." And I say, "Yeah, I am. Nobody wants to talk to me about their children and how many there are and this and that." And she says, "Can I share something with you?" I knew when she said that to me I was going to learn some kind of lesson. And I said, "Yeah, yeah, sure." She says, "It wasn't too long ago when the government would come to our communities and they would ask us how many children do you have? And we told them." She says, "The next thing you know, they came back and they took our children." I mean, that was just, just hit me right there because I knew what she was talking about and I looked at her and I wanted to cry and she says, "Don't be hard on them." She says, "We haven't forgotten yet. So, when you start asking about our children, our people, always remember that there's always alternative reasons for people wanting to know that type of information." And, you know, I was sitting there listening to her and it opened my eyes to say you have to be aware of a lot of things...A lot of these things I'm still learning.

Cindy explains the role of the elders in the life of the community's children. She describes the process of working with the elders mentoring her and the early childhood staff:

We have at least two classrooms for each age at every site. We usually have one Spanish speaking classroom and one [name of tribal language] speaking classroom. And the kids can move back and forth between classrooms as they like. We have worked on our curriculum, and it is a curriculum designed by grandparents. We take that [the curriculum] down to the elders' meeting and talk to them about what is going on with the children and the staff, and we ask for guidance with the curriculum and with what should we be teaching our children about respect and our other values. We always start every meeting with them by

asking, “What are the most important things and how can we do that?” We’re not anywhere close to having an immersion school yet but we have a commitment from our Tribal Council to move in that direction.

*Elders raising grandchildren.* Six study participants talked about the prevalence in their communities of the grandparents raising the grandchildren. Cindy shared this story about two generations of a family enrolled over the years at the tribal early childhood program:

I know one family where the grandmother raised the granddaughter. The mother [of the granddaughter] was not settled in her life yet and was doing lots of things [other than childrearing]. And then her daughter had daughters and she became a grandmother. So the mother became settled in her life and she raised the granddaughters.

Lila, a great grandmother, was born and raised in an American Indian reservation community widely recognized among American Indian communities for its long standing commitment to preserving tribal culture and language. Describing the cycle of shifting child rearing responsibilities she has observed in her many years of service she notes, “With so many of the grandparents now raising the young children it’s just like child development that they did a long time ago, the ancient ways of ancient times. It’s coming back. We’re really making a circle.”

In agreement with Lila, Melinda, an experienced director who is not an enrolled member of the tribe serving as the lead agency, reports:

It’s a big shift. And so we’ve got children sleeping in different beds because their parents were going, you know, to work at night. We, probably have a bigger population of grandparents, extended family raising the children. But I don’t think it’s anything different that’s not happening across the United States. Grandparents are raising their families, and then, for some reason, these children think they can bring their families back, and, and grandparents will raise them too. It’s a change that is affecting everything about how the young ones are raised. All these people are moving back in. Which, I mean, in our communities, a lot of

families have lived together a long time and live close by each other. The housing is changing some of it. The tribe has built a lot more housing, so we've got different families not in one house. They're moving into their own homes. Some stay in the same community. And some others, because they may marry someone from a different community, we have moving from community to community. We've got the different tribal communities, but they're all within their thirty-five to a hundred miles of each other. So, if you marry somebody from a different community, you've got to pick which one you're going to live in and that means for the couple's children they are living close to one of their grandparents. Proximity makes it easy for adult children to leave their kids with their parents.

Lorna contributed this insight:

In a lot of cases we see grandparents rather than the biological parents. I am one of those grandparents helping to raise the grandchild. My daughter and I were living in the same house with my first grandchild when she was born and my son-in-law lived there too. I can see that I probably took over. I don't see it as a negative thing. Young parents need help learning how to care for their children properly. Our grandparents did not do so much of the childrearing by trial and error like they do now. They didn't need to find their way. Our tribe had practices for rearing young children that were used successfully for thousands of years. Conquest and boarding schools changed all that. We are still healing.

#### ***Theme Four: The Role of Advocacy in Program Administration***

The participants' efforts to advocate for many different causes were a significant part of their work. Areas of advocacy included optimizing the rights of children, parents and teachers affiliated with the tribal child care center and undertaking advocacy roles to raise awareness within the tribal council and the Department of Health and Human Services, Child Care Bureau. Twelve participants identified the tribal council or tribal leadership as one important segment of their advocacy work. Three participants discussed their role advocating for the early childhood program with the federal government. Ten participants also discussed their advocacy efforts to benefit the children, families, and staff members in their local communities.

*Advocacy with tribal council.* Participants related their experiences working with the tribal council to illustrate the important role of the director as a program advocate within the community. Creating and maintaining supportive alliances with tribal council members was the advocacy topic most often discussed by the study participants. Commenting on their relationships with tribal council, participants acknowledged that this aspect of their work often had political ramifications.

Cindy told this story of her professional evolution as seen through the eyes of a well established member of her tribal council. She said:

One council member teased me recently and said, “I remember you as a shy girl coming in here to talk to us. If we asked you a question your face would turn bright red and you looked like you wanted to cry. It was sometimes hard to hear you, you seemed so unsure of yourself. Now you don’t have a bit of a problem. You come in here, look at us all and say what you need. Then you work with us until we get it right.

Francine, concurs and sharing her perspective, she states, “The tribal council members and directors are the biggest source of our support. We have to make sure that they understand the program and our families’ needs. I have been working with council for a long time and I believe now that the quality of my work is well accepted.”

Bonnie, responding to interview questions about sources of support highlighted the importance of good relations with the tribal council, “Council wasn’t always ready to do what is best for the children and families in the community. Our new tribal chairwoman’s children are enrolled in our program. She knows how hard we work and is very supportive of our needs.”

Twyla, describes the members of her adopted community and the alliances that are an accepted part of life in her village. She states:

You know this community is really made up of a small number of big, extended families. Unless, like me, you marry someone from the community, I married into the community, then you are related at least distantly to everyone here. So of course we have tribal council members' children and grandchildren in the program. This is a really good thing because parents and grandparents want to know what you need to give the best care to their little ones. When I go before [tribal] council to ask for support I know I am likely to get what I ask for if the money is there.

Twyla also shares her strategy for advocacy with tribal council members. She states,

“When I hear the program reduced to daycare or babysitting from Council, I start talking brain development. That gets everyone's attention. We all want our children to do well and grow up strong.”

Leslie talks about the importance of maintaining relationships with community members. She states:

Our former director ran for tribal council and has won every election since she left. She started as the program's bus driver, then became a teacher, and shortly after that, the director. She pushed council for this beautiful building we have. [name of council member] knows first hand what we need here to serve the parents and children in our community. You could not ask for a more informed and involved council leader than her.

Other participants described difficulties that can arise when competing with other tribal programs for local money and resources. Barbara states:

I have been the director of tribal child care since we got the program. I carry the history of our relationship with the Head Start and Early Head Start program (unlike the tribal child care program, the Head Start program has had a series of directors with short tenures on the job.) Tribal child care is the reason Head Start has such a great building—we paid for it. We didn't get much of anything in return and Council knows that. The politics between the two programs can get pretty bad, but I know I have to go before Council and keep working on building trust and communication, even when I am not able to succeed in getting my requests approved.

Several participants noted the need to improve their communication with tribal leaders. Lee shared her exasperation:

My brother is on Council. I talk to him all the time about what we are doing or what we need. I have got to find a better way. I feel like everything I say goes in one ear and out the other. I don't think they all [some council members] understand this is not just a babysitting service.

Barbara agrees, “We offer a vibrant educational program and our parents know that. I think elders and tribal leaders would give us more support if they understood how important early education is.”

***Advocacy with the federal government.*** Several study participants were members of the governing board of the National Indian Child Care Association (NICCA). In 2006, when NICCA board members learned that the former Head Start Bureau would be “elevated” to higher status as the newly appointed Office of Head Start, they became concerned. As more information began circulating in tribal communities, the NICCA board members also learned that the Child Care Bureau was to be moved to Office of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, and their concern mounted. Feeling a need to more fully understand the forecasted change, the NICCA board took action. Bonnie states:

We had a conference call [with all the NICCA board members] to develop a strategy for getting answers to our questions. There were so many rumors swirling around. We knew we had to find out for ourselves. After much discussion we decided to all fly to Washington and gather without notifying anyone at the [Child Care] Bureau. Our goal was to show up and get a meeting with Shannon Christian [former Child Care Bureau director]. Well, we got to Washington and Shannon was not in, but you can imagine the surprised reception we received from federal staff. We were able to meet with several people in [the Office of] Temporary Assistance [to Needy Families] and I have to say we were glad we made the trip. We gathered a lot of information we brought back to other tribes.

Another study participant, Nan, also made the trip to Washington, D.C. to meet with the NICCA board members. Her account sheds further light on the directors concerns:

I know I am known for asking the direct questions. It is not always the popular thing to do. A lot of Indian people don't like the spotlight. I came right out and said what was on my mind. I think it is the only way to get things done. We got some answers that day. I wasn't leaving until we did.

Lila, discussing the differences in lifestyles between Washington bureaucrats and tribal community leaders concurred. She states:

Politics between Indians and whites can get pretty bad. Even after all these years. I go see my senators and congressmen whenever I am in town. We [program directors] are supposed to do our best for Indian children. We know what is best for our families. Someone has got to give our concerns a voice, because even the most well-meaning bureaucrat usually knows very little about the life we lead on the reservation. And I can understand why. There is a world of difference between these two communities, and it is not big city versus small town. It is completely different cultures and it requires the ability to consider different types of outlook on life, different opportunities.

Grace talked about her experiences as an advocate for her community's early childhood program, her village, and her tribe. She said:

You know whenever I leave the reservation [to go to Washington] I think about my mom and dad and what they taught me, how they raised me and my brothers and sisters. From the moment I leave here to drive to the airport I know I am an ambassador for my family, my tribe. Traveling such a great distance can have its own set of problems, you know your flight is delayed, you miss your connection. I start to get a little upset and then I remember how my parents would act, what they would think and I remember the journey is for my people. To do the best I can for all of us.

***Advocacy within the local community.*** In addition to their national advocacy efforts, ten participants talked about their efforts to advocate for the early childhood program with members of their local community. Their advocacy efforts within the



community targeted several audiences, including parents, extended family members, elders and families with young children not participating in program services.

Kathleen describes her outreach:

I live in a very traditional community. Our families have many stresses. There aren't enough jobs, not enough money, transportation to health and social services in [name of town] are 70 miles away just from the road here. Imagine if you lived way out on one of the dirt roads. Our program can provide transportation help with access to Indian Health Services. We can provide the children with meals so they won't be hungry. It is a constant struggle to earn trust and provide a safe place for children. I have been here a while now [ten years], so I must be a hopeful optimistic kind of person. I keep sending the same message out from the very beginning. We are here and we will help you.

Melinda, another longtime director from outside the reservation community she serves shared her perspective:

I am not from here but I have lived here a long time. Chief [name] has taken this reservation from rags to riches. The mud roads, no jobs, and homes with no electricity and indoor plumbing, are gone, they no longer exist. Everyone has a job. Usually, both parents need to work. The chief will build as many child care centers as the community needs. My job is to let people know we can provide high quality services for your children. While you are at work, your children will receive the very best care available, no matter what shift you work at the plant or how late you work at the casino.

***Advocacy to benefit the child care staff.*** Bonnie shared her perspective on advocacy with the staff of the early childhood program. She said:

Our staff needed access to college courses and this reservation is not within commuting distance of any tribal college or state university. I tried to work something out with the professors at the Education department of [name of state] University but it didn't work out.

She explains how she solved the problem:

I was frustrated. We were required to meet educational goals for our teaching staff by the Office of Head Start. I wanted to work with a tribal college because I think Indian people helping each other out is crucial. The ECE [early childhood education] professor at Stone Child Tribal College in Box Elder, Montana was

great and the college administration very supportive. I am proud to say that I was the first Indian director to create an educational partnership that provides long distance education via satellite. We have been doing it for years now and the staff has been successful in meeting their educational goals.

Leslie feels that a large part of her job is to encourage staff through her advocacy efforts. “I want everyone on staff to know that there are no barriers here to getting your degree. I myself have decided to set an example and try for my masters.” She concentrates her efforts towards creating access to continuing education and providing equitable wages. Leslie states:

One of our greatest difficulties here is finding people who can work with our babies. I want to create classrooms with continuity of care. Healthy attachment is just too important. Often we hire people who love working with the infants. Before they join the staff I let them know that I will do everything I can to get them the training that they need and the money. The pay has to be there too to help them take care of their own families.

Leslie talks about wage competition among the tribal enterprises:

When people are struggling to put food on the table or pay their bills, I can't expect them to work here for less than they could make at the casino. Fortunately, tribal leadership agrees with me or I would have a problem filling positions.

Lee talks about the difference in status and pay that exists within her tribal child care program. She describes the inequity between full-time and part-time employees.

When I first started here I was learning about the community, and how everything works. The full-time teaching staff received a good salary with lots of benefits, health insurance, and paid vacation. These teachers all worked our school day from 7:30 to 2:30. The part-time people had no benefits, a low hourly wage and minimal input into programming.

Lee explaining her initial reluctance to make changes states,

I felt I had to move slowly. This job has a very public face and I wanted to gain the community respect and trust, but the situation was so unbalanced I decided to move quickly and live with the consequences. I had to keep my conscience clear.

I made a lot of changes so everyone could feel valued for their effort. And it has really paid off.

She talks about the initial reaction:

At first I was terrified I would lose my job, but when I realized I would never lose my integrity by trying to rectify a bad situation, I calmed down and built consensus. Change can be difficult, but it can also let in a lot of good things, too.

*Advocacy for children.* Advocacy for the children enrolled in tribal childcare programs took many forms. Some participants expressed a need to keep community members focused on providing services for children. Lila describes the difficulties in the tribal community faces in this way:

We [the tribe] have a lot of problems competing for our time and attention: Housing needs; no jobs; no ways to get ahead. It is tough to be a parent and live with so much economic uncertainty. Our children deserve a better future and I have got to keep focused on how I am helping that to happen. There is a lot you can do in this job.

Nan states, “As I said to you earlier, our children need skills for living in two worlds in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” Describing her goals, she said:

We have to provide them access to a good start in life. That means we work with their parents and families. It also means that children know that when they are here with us they are safe and they are nurtured. There can never be a moment of doubt about that.

Lila reflected on the children and families she has worked with in her many years as director stating:

I have never lost sight of why I am here. It is simply to help the children. They have such basic needs, food, shelter and clothing. Sometimes their family life is not stable. It is difficult to keep going at a job like this unless you have the faith to see it through.

A little later in our conversation she returned to her view of her commitment to the youngest members of her community:

Working with children is one way to preserve the past and prepare for the future. They are the ones that will carry us forward in the next generations. I know this for certain, I am a great-grandmother and one day these same children will need to help me.

***Theme Five: Enhancing Program Quality***

In discussions with participants about quality indicators in the early childhood education and care program they administered, all of the directors cited the importance of collaboration and opportunities to create and strengthen linkages with one another to enhance program quality. Fifteen directors commented on the importance of quality enhancement as part of the tribal child care center's continuing quest for excellence in implementing the best developmentally and culturally appropriate practices known in the field. Six participants discussed professional development partnerships they developed with the American Indian Higher Education Consortium of tribal colleges for staff members pursuing associate and bachelor degrees.

The participants cited a diverse range of involvement in national, state, and local quality enhancement activities. One administrator reported program participation in the statewide quality rating scale. One combined Tribal child care/Head Start/Early Head Start program received accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Another combined Tribal child care/Head Start program was in the process of seeking NAEYC accreditation. Two combined Tribal child care/ Head Start/Early Head Start programs were participating in a research partnership with the American Indian Alaska Native Head Start Research Center (AIANHSRC), University of Colorado-Denver. This partnership, funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, is national in scope.

Major activities supported by AIANHSRC include 12 local research partnerships between tribal Head Start programs and 4 universities ([http://aianp.uchsc.edu/headstart/headstart\\_overview.htm](http://aianp.uchsc.edu/headstart/headstart_overview.htm)).

*Program directors support collaboration and mentoring for quality*

*enhancement.* In discussions with study participants about steps they take to enhance quality indicators in the early childhood program they administered, all of the directors cited the importance of taking advantage of opportunities to create and strengthen linkages with other tribal child care directors. Cindy referred to many different types of professional development conferences designed to reach a wide range of American Indian professionals saying, “I learn best from the people working with other Indian programs. Tribes are unique, our communities and our people are all over the nation, but our connections are strong and make the distances seem small.” Leslie credits some of the successful program accomplishments to her supportive relationship with her friend and mentor, a director of another tribal child care program. She said:

It is so important to me to have a mentor that can give me advice and be a sounding board for concerns. I know that the technical help and friendship I receive from her helps me build the self confidence I need to meet the daily challenges of running a program.

In the preceding section of this chapter, Theme Four, two participants commented on the importance working together with the other directors serving as members of the board of the National Indian Child Care Association (NICCA). Bonnie, a NICCA board member, made this observation about planning the trip to visit program specialists at the Child Care Bureau, “We knew going forward that we can trust each other to give the

group our best thinking. We share the same goals, quality programming for our people.”

She elaborates:

I am part of the circle. I had a friend [name of tribal child care director] help me get started in this job years ago when the Head Start Bureau was going to shut the program down and make the tribe pay back all the money. Without her help, I would not be here today running a program that the people [community members] and I managed to turn around.

Participants discussed the importance of sharing ideas about ways to enhance quality with other tribal programs. Melinda commented on her experiences with other American Indian or Alaska Native program directors implementing developmentally and culturally appropriate practices in innovative ways. She said, “These are people that I find often share my passion for this field of work. The influence we have on one another, what we learn from one another is just phenomenal. And it is so important for Indian people to know about each other’s programs.” Lee shares her perspective, “Quality means so many different things. Some directors think it is a perfect score on the ITERS or the ECERS. I think it is about Native American families being entitled to opportunities to advance their quality of life and that is what we are all about.”

*Program participation in national quality initiatives.* Ten of the directors reported program participation in four national initiatives. These initiatives include: (a) the Program for Infant Toddler Care; (b) Indian Health Service Special Diabetes Program for Indians Diabetes Prevention Demonstration Project and Healthy Heart Demonstration Project; (c) Between the Lions Preschool Literacy Initiative; and (d) Brazelton Touchpoints American Indian Early Head Start Initiative.

The directors administering combined Tribal child care and Head Start/Early Head Start programs relied on the train-the-trainer model mandated by Office of Head Start, Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC). Developed by Dr. Ron Lally and Dr. Peter Manigone, the Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC) has become the most widely used system for training caregivers of infants and toddlers in the United States (WestED, <http://www.wested.org/cs/we/view/pj/249>, retrieved February 28, 2009).

Originally developed for the California Department of Public Instruction, PITC is used nationally as the primary source of training in infant and toddler care since the inception of Early Head Start services in 1995 (Ann Linehan, Director of Program Quality Assurance, Office of Head Start, personal communication, 1999). In recognition of its widespread influence and use, PITC was recently selected by the National Center for Children in Poverty as a model initiative to support infants, toddlers, and their families.

*Program for infant toddler caregivers.* During one on-site visit I was invited to accompany a PITC trained home visitor to a visit with a grandmother raising her infant grandson. During our visit, the grandmother related to the home visitor how tired she was from lack of sleep and the unceasing demands of raising a newborn. She explained to the case worker that in order to get enough sleep at night she had started filling her grandson's bottle of formula with cereal like she used to do with her own children. The grandmother believed that her solution worked well, the baby did not get hungry and she did not wake up hearing the infant crying. After listening intently, the home visitor

sensitively addressed the issue of proper infant feeding and arranged for support for the caregiver. Learning about the situation, Leslie, the program director responded:

So many of the elderlies have ideas about babies that are from what they learned growing up traditionally. And cereal in the bottle is an old, common practice around here. I think that what we are learning with elderlies and babies is where old meets new, not just old and new life but old and new ways. We have to meet the challenges that change brings to the ways of our community.

Bonnie talked about the difference between loving babies and knowing how to best care for them. She said:

We have staff that is baby struck. They have a gift for working with infants and they love it. I need to turn that passion into a qualified work force. I can do that by training everyone in infant toddler care. You have to do this because there are so many old wives tales about how to care for infants. WestEd [PITC] can help dispel some of these notions.

Francine concurs:

So many of our babies are in unregulated care. They spend their time with family, friends, and neighbors. Grandma is usually called on first. I plan to cross-train as many of our staff as possible about best practices in infant toddler care. [Name of EHS manager] is trained in WestED [PITC]. I am also considering opening up the training to parents and community members. The purpose of program monitoring is continuous improvement and it raises the bar for child care partners. We respond by embracing quality and embedding best practice in everything we do. PITC makes that possible in this community.

***Indian health service diabetes prevention.*** Indian Health Service is the federal health program for American Indians and Alaska Natives. In 2004, Congress directed the Indian Health Service to launch the Special Diabetes Program for Indians Diabetes Prevention Demonstration Project and Healthy Heart Demonstration Project. Thirty-six programs are focusing on diabetes prevention in American Indians and Alaska Natives (USDHHS, 2008, <http://www.ihs.gov/MedicalPrograms/diabetes>). Two directors from



early childhood programs that are part of this national initiative offered their perspectives on participating in the program.

Rhonda is a director with less than three years experience and not affiliated with the tribe serving as the grantee of the child care program she administers. Discussing the benefits from participation in the initiative for the entire community, she said:

As part of the classroom strategy there are specially designed curriculum supports for use in early childhood classrooms, including teaching outlines and lessons, visual aids, and other resources. We developed a calendar of activities to prevent diabetes in both adults and children. The child care center really is at the heart of the community so why not make part of the things that people in the community learn and do here result in improved health and quality of life?

Another director, Melinda concurs:

The IHS diabetes program serves between 140 and 170 children each year [in the local Tribal child care and Head Start Program]. We start prevention activities during toddlerhood. I HS actually follows the children through the eighth grade. We offer a variety of diabetes prevention activities, such as community outreach, youth sports, and cooking and gardening classes. It is working. We see that the BMI [mass body index] of children between 2 and 15 has decreased every year since 2003.

*Between the Lions preschool literacy initiative.* Three Tribal child care and Head Start/Early Head Start programs participated in the Between the Lions Preschool Literacy Initiative. This initiative was created in 2005 to improve early childhood education and build a strong literacy foundation among preschoolers. Participating child care centers receive curriculum materials drawn from the PBS kids' literacy development program, *Between the Lions*, along with professional development and mentoring. The production is a partnership between MPB, WGBH Boston, Sirius Thinking, Ltd., CPB, U.S. Department of Education, and Barksdale Reading Institute (<http://www.betweenlionsliteracy.org/index.html>). According to the lead investigator,

Deborah Linebarger, study findings indicate that the Between the Lions Preschool Literacy Initiative curriculum positively impacts vocabulary development, teacher behavior and literacy environments.

Echoing the comments of the other directors involved in this early reading project, Melinda, shared her perspective on the strength of the study. She stated:

So many of our parents struggle with basic literacy skills that it is no wonder that the children need help with school readiness. There is evidence that our children, many of whom may be at-risk for reading failure due to their economic and social status, are learning important early literacy skills. My hope is that this will lead to them experiencing greater success in school.

Grace's response to questions about the benefits to the Tribal child care program was pragmatic. During the on-site visit, she showed me a picture of the preschool children engaged in a Between the Lions story hour and said, "Look at this [photograph]. Every child is deeply and meaningfully engaged in listening to the story. The program worked. The children loved it, their early reading skills grew. The teachers can continue implementing the curriculum but they won't have the feedback from the evaluation to guide their efforts."

*Brazelton Touchpoints American Indian Early Head Start initiative.* A number of study participants administered programs that received supplemental one-time funding from the American Indian Alaska Native Programs Branch of the Office of Head Start for a special initiative, the Brazelton Touchpoints American Indian Early Head Start Initiative. Based on 60 years of Dr. T. Berry Brazelton's extensive clinical practice and research, the Touchpoints approach emphasizes the building of supportive alliances between parents and providers around key points in the development of young children

(<http://www.touchpoints.org/>). Brazelton defines his term, “Touchpoints” as predictable periods in a child’s development that can disrupt family relations. These are times of disorganization that providers can value as opportunities to support family strengths (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2001).

The funding supported Early Head Start programs to receive Community Level training in the Brazelton Touchpoints Approach. Each Early Head Start (EHS) team was made up of 5 to 7 staff members who attended a comprehensive training on the Touchpoints model. After each EHS team was trained in the Touchpoints approach, they returned to their respective community and provided at least 16 hours of training to the early childhood staff, local community health center staff, and other tribal service providers. In each community approximately 75 individuals were trained in the first year of the grant.

Grace describes the benefits to Early Head Start program practitioners in this way:

Our center based teachers and home visitors have opportunities for Touchpoints practices every day. Like Dr. Brazelton says, these are opportunities to form strong relationships with whole families, and partner with parents’ strength and vulnerability. We joined this initiative to partner with other American Indian Early Head Start programs and to build a shared understanding with our community partners working with the families enrolled in our program.

Nan provides a counter example of problems with implementation of the Touchpoints approach. She states, “Our program was not experiencing success in training local professionals to work as a community team. The Touchpoints team leader left the program for another job and no one was able to do all the coordinating.” She continues, “We were in our first year of operating Early Head Start services when the

program received funding for the special initiative.” Reporting that the EHS staff was not equipped to implement Touchpoints, Nan states:

I don't know what the former director was thinking [when she applied for funding]. At the time we were so busy with Early Head Start. I think we would have benefitted more from Touchpoints if we waited a year or two and gotten more experience with EHS program implementation. The thing about Indian Head Start is you have got to jump when the money comes because you may never see the opportunity again.

*Program participation in state quality initiatives.* Grace was the grant recipient for a state funded infant mental health initiative. In her grant submission, Grace proposed blending the Brazelton Touchpoints Approach with tribally specific early intervention methods as one of the components of her staff professional development strategy. Grace explains what she accomplished:

We put together a team of case workers, child care teachers, and community members with the cultural skills to address the persistent abuse some children suffer on this reservation. Domestic violence, substance abuse, children from these homes need our attention, they need to grow up strong so they can make a good life for themselves.

Another program director was proud to share her successful involvement in a state initiative designed to address the absence of culturally appropriate books for young American Indian children. Grant funds from the state paved the way for working in partnership with a state supported liberal arts college and the [state] Department of Public Instruction, Office of Indian Education. The staff from the tribal child care program formed a team with cultural specialists, curriculum developers, writers, and artists to work collaboratively. The primary responsibility of the working group was to create culturally appropriate stories for emergent readers that were published by the college. Tribal child care staff helped design three curriculum units on hunting and gathering, the

importance of the drum, and the role of the canoe in their tribal community. Lee, a director with less than three years experience and not affiliated with the tribe serving as the grantee of the early childhood program, described the importance of the project to the staff, “They created 22 stories reflecting the community’s culture and the water and land these children know so well. Different artists created the illustrations for the stories and the end result beautifully reflects the strengths of the tribe.”

Lorna talked about the tribal child care program’s participation in the statewide quality rating system. Lorna administered a child care program in the only state currently implementing a policy requiring all licensed early childhood programs to participate in the state’s five star rating system. She observed:

We exceed all of the requirements for five stars in every aspect of program service delivery. We were using the ITERS [Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale] and the ECERS [Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale] long before there was even a five star system.

No other study participant reported program participation in a state quality rating system despite the fact that the majority of the directors administered early childhood programs in states that had these systems in place. When asked why the program did not participate, Kathleen’s response echoed many of the other participants’ statements about their non-involvement in quality rating systems. Kathleen said:

It is not required. We do so many things that we feel are beneficial to our staff and families. Our activities are tailored to the needs of our community. With our emphasis on cultural education and language, you have to admit that our programs don’t look like those outside a reservation in some very important ways.

One participant declined to comment on the types of quality strategies the program used from collaboration on initiatives with the state’s Early Childhood

Education office. In her response, Nan reported that the tribe serving as the lead agency did not accept money from the state on the grounds that the tribal community had received too much unwanted and negative attention from the state's child support enforcement agency. She explained:

The state is not the middleman for program services and that is how it should be. We have had terrible problems in the past with our families' right to privacy being violated by aggressive enforcement of rules and regulations. We are taking steps to limit our exposure to unacceptable practices. One of the projects I am working on right now is developing tribal guidelines for licensing our center.

*Local participation in quality activities.* Study participants described their efforts to enhance program quality in two arenas, partnerships with tribal colleges and the implementation of the Italian model of early education from Reggio Emilia.

*Partnerships with tribal colleges.* Professional development opportunities for staff were cited by 10 participants as an essential component to program quality. Nan administers a program adjacent to the local tribal college campus. The teachers can walk from the early childhood building for their college classes. Nan talks about the staff's commitment to furthering their individual educational goals and how their partnership with the tribal college helps the staff meet their goals. She says:

So often we have young women apply for jobs here with a baby and a GED. I view our program as a place where everyone, children, families and staff, can come and grow. Not everyone has the confidence to walk in the front door of the tribal college by themselves. So we help them.

Six directors had professional development partnerships with tribal colleges. Five of the tribal colleges were located within the reservation boundaries; one tribal college provided long-distance education for the program staff pursuing associate degrees in a neighboring state. One program director sponsored professors from a historically

American Indian college to conduct classes on the campus of the early childhood center. Leslie explains this arrangement: "We could have also worked out an arrangement with [name of state university] that is a closer commute, but we wanted Indian people and professors with experience working with Indian people, to work with our staff and in our community." As Leslie discussed the benefits of this arrangement, she said, "Our teachers work a long day and have countless family obligations after the work day and work week are over. To help everyone be as successful as they can we provide release time from their job responsibilities so staff can go to school." Describing the ways she sees benefits to the children in the program, Leslie stated:

As staff gains core knowledge in child development, family-centered services and early childhood education, we see changes that range from more frequent and positive interactions with parents, better lesson planning and greater investment in their relationships with the children in their classroom.

Despite the partnerships with tribal colleges for professional development support, participants acknowledged other barriers to staff pursuing educational advancement. Twyla described the demands of balancing work, family, and school as "not enough hours in the day to do coursework outside of class." Other participants discussed the difficulty some staff experience in securing childcare arrangements to attend class. Lee elaborated her frustration:

With this particular barrier, our teachers care for other people's children the whole day long. It is just heartbreaking that many of our staff attending college have such difficulty getting family or friends to watch their kids so they can go to school. I am working on a plan to open the center after hours and make child care available here. I just have to figure out how to pay for it.

*The influence of educational practices from Reggio Emilia Italy.* Four participants administered programs incorporating elements of the educational practices

currently in use in the town of Reggio Emilia, Italy. The early childhood centers in Reggio Emilia are known throughout the world for their innovative teaching methods (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). Loretta expressed her belief that the practices Reggio educators employ can strengthen quality practices in tribal programs. She stated:

I believe that there are many areas of commonality between the Italian approach and our community's approach to educating young children. The belief in the natural competencies of children is very much a shared point of view between our cultures.

Lorna discussed the influence of the Reggio approach on the design of the new early childhood development center that houses Early Head Start, Head Start and tribal child care services under one roof. She stated:

We studied the [Reggio] approach and incorporated many design elements into our new building. We wanted to create a space that encourages the development of art, music, and a love of beauty in our youngest children. We also believe in the importance of reflecting our respect for the teachers and children by providing a beautiful environment that meets their needs.

***Barriers to achieving higher quality.*** Study participants cited access to high quality resources and personnel as a persistent challenge. The directors identified a variety of educational resources that included better school facilities, playgrounds and classrooms, and learning materials such as computers, art materials and books.

Participants also cited the need to attract, hire and retain qualified staff. Echoing concerns voiced by nine of the program administrators, Grace discussed the need for better classroom facilities. She observed:

Our community has a large early childhood program relative to our reservation population, but every component, Early Head Start, Head Start, and tribal child care could serve many more families if we had more space. Our parents with infants want and need center-based care. We have a waiting list for families wanting to bring their children to the Early Head Start classrooms. We provide



home-based services to families with infants, but right now every one of those moms need child care five days a week.

Although most of the programs I traveled to for on-site visits appeared adequately equipped, many directors perceived the need for better playgrounds and play equipment.

Nan talked about her vision for an outdoor classroom. She stated:

We live in a beautiful part of the natural world. I'd like to have the children outdoors most of the day learning to grow plants for kitchen gardens, making bread, and playing in the fresh air. For the play spaces, I'd like natural wood instead of all this plastic for their playground equipment, but there is no budget for such luxuries.

How to retain qualified personnel was a source of much thought with program administrators. Most of the directors participating in this study lived on geographically isolated reservations. In many of the communities I visited, directors reported that qualified teachers and other personnel were in short supply. Francine stated the program's need for retaining staff this way:

We have had trouble finding and keeping good people for as long as I can remember. You want people to get their education, but as soon as some of them do they leave for better paying work either with the tribe or they move into [large town two hours away]. I feel sometimes like a revolving door.

### ***Theme Six: Abiding in a Sense of Place***

We grew up knowing that we are part of something that is alive and has knowledge way beyond what we as humans can understand. (R. Goslin, personal communication, 2006)

The final theme that emerged from an analysis of the data regarding the lasting impact of land and its influence on the lives of the study participants can be defined as the personal geography of one's homeland and the influence this geography exerts on the human spirit (Norris, 2001). Fourteen of the study participants talked during the

semi-structured interviews and on-site visits about their connection to the physical landscape of the tribal community. All eight participants who are enrolled member of the tribe serving as the grantee for the child care center contributed compelling stories about their childhood on the reservation and their sense of permanence based on their family's ancestry and relationship to the land.

Six of the eight study participants affiliated with tribes other than the tribal community where they live and direct child care services also spoke of their attachment to the land. These participants discussed their sense of the goodness of fit between their present community of residence and the place where they spent their childhood.

Participants in both groups continually referenced the influences the natural landscape and the myriad of meanings they attached to the geography of their tribal community. An examination of this abiding sense of place is fitting when considering the tremendous impact of American Indian reservation life exerts on the types of culturally appropriate services and programs provided to the children enrolled in tribal early child care centers across the country.

*The landscape of open space.* Reservations are often experienced as open places in the American landscape, usually isolated and nearly always rural. The horizon and tribal land boundaries can extend as far as the eye can see. Many American Indian reservations seem so large that within their boundaries one experiences a vast embodiment of the natural world. American Indian reservation communities can be steeped in the lore of tribal history, ever mindful of preceding and prevailing beyond initial European contact and subsequent acts of aggression and domination. Grace, born

in the village where she resides in her childhood home, discussed her beliefs about the tribe's ancestral land. She said simply, "The earth we live on is part of us." Continuing her thoughts about living on the reservation, Grace describes a daily ritual in this way, "I look out the window where my mom and dad used to sit at the table drinking their coffee and watching the sun on the mesa and I feel how much I belong in this place. It lives in me even if I when I am not thinking about it."

Lorna, a study participant with less than three years of experience as the administrator of the tribal child care program, is a lifelong resident and enrolled member of the tribe serving as the grantee. Describing her attachment to the land that has rooted her community for thousands of years she said:

This reservation is my home. My family has always lived here. When I was a little girl I used to ask my grandmother why we did not move to [name of the state capitol in the state where the reservation is located]. I thought our life might be so much more exciting if we moved away. My grandmother always told me that this land is part of who I am. As a little girl I don't think that I quite understood all of what she meant. As a woman I am grateful to know that as I go through my life I walk in the very footsteps of my ancestors, my grandparents, my mother and my father. Each step is an honoring of my family, reaching into our past, constantly guiding me in the present and my purpose.

*Nature intertwines daily life.*

The elders tell us the earth is changing. The trees are different. Even the water is different. We want our children to experience nature; this is where our belief system is rooted, like the trees. (G. Cates, 2001, p. 142)

The essential presence of nature in framing one's sense of abiding place was often referred to in discussions with study participants. During the interviews and on-site visits, specific elements of nature present in the local flora and fauna were referenced multiple times as study participants talked about the role of a particular plant or animal in

the life of the tribal community. In analyzing this study's data a universal finding across sites is that specific plants or animals over time became so important to a respective tribe that they evolved into symbols used to communicate various multidimensional aspects of a tribal community's culture. Unique to the physical and spiritual terrain of each American Indian reservation I visited, the respective symbols of a community are elements of the natural world, connecting tribal customs from the past with the present.

For example, some groups of indigenous people of the Pacific Northwest view the Coho salmon as an ancient symbol of life and regeneration. Francine explains:

Salmon represent the rhythms of life through their patterns of migrating and spawning. Today, salmon provide livelihood for tribal families through earned income from fishing and sustained economic viability for the tribe. In the past, following the salmon was economic activity of a different sort as families set up camps in the summer to catch and dry the fish. Everybody, even the children, had different jobs as they prepared for the leaner food supply in the coming winter.

She continues to explain the importance of this fish as a timeless source of subsistence and a modern symbol of pride:

Now the Coho stand for our tribal sovereignty. We joined with other tribes in [name of her state and neighboring state] in resisting the federal and state dam building projects clogging the wild rivers where our salmon once swam upstream to reproduce. We accomplished this by building a successful coalition of local commercial fishermen, environmentalists and native people.

Her tribe's success story is well documented. In 2005, a federal appeals court in San Francisco rejected a federal plan to distribute water to farmers from the Klamath River region in Oregon and California. The ruling stated that more water must remain in the river for the Coho salmon, a threatened species (Murphy, 2005).

*Allegiance to the natural order of the physical world.*

If it were the last deer, I would die too. I would die with that deer (M. Dafoe, Ojibwe spiritual leader, in G. Cates, 2001)

The emotional attachment and spiritual ties to the unique characteristics of the physical landscape of an American Indian reservation are evident in the myriad of other examples of regional differences shared by study participants. This sense of uniqueness of and allegiance to a particular place serves as a means of cultural transmission and cultural education. During one site visit I observed teachers, elders, and parent volunteers engaged in a weekly activity. Together they were grinding corn with the young children and baking bread in traditional outdoor ovens. At another site, a study participant talked about the important resurgence of the buffalo on her tribal reservation in the Great Plains. While explaining her point of view, Barbara was actually looking out her office window at the tribe's expanding herd. Down the hallway, in the infant room of the center there were several rocking chairs draped with buffalo skins for the parents and staff to use as they rocked the babies asleep.

Barbara was thoughtful for a moment and then she said:

You know Linda, like our buffalo, your people took us to the brink of extinction and had the audacity to call us savages. . . . Your ancestors were not successful. Today, if you look at our birthrates we are multiplying faster than ever. This herd of buffalo is growing quickly too, all of them are strong and healthy. Our land supports our people and it supports our buffalo. This center cares for and educates our young children and it helps to keep the supports around our families strong.

*Intimate knowledge of community.* In the woodlands of the Great Lakes, childhood memories of berry gathering were shared by another participant. In the kitchen with program's cook, Lee tells a story from her childhood days growing up on a

neighboring reservation in the region. Watching as the cook, a community elder makes a fruit cobbler, Lee said:

Every summer, I remember there being a great time when the berries would come in. It was always close to the time of our tribe's summer celebration, our powwow where our relatives would come from all over the place. First we picked the raspberries, then came time for the blackberries. I loved being outdoors with my mother and my aunties picking berries and splashing in the lake. It really made an impression on me. Berry picking was when we spent precious time with our cousins, and between all of us we learned so much about the old ways. Now we keep this tradition going at the center during the summer. We take the children berry picking and if we gather enough for a feast, the grandmothers will make some traditional dishes to share with the children and their families.

In her comments, Lee links past customs with present culture, "As the children learn about our land, they come to know the fiber of our culture." Continuing to talk about the current bounty of berries and how the center will put them to good use she states:

Coming as it does so close to powwow there is an abundance of folks to feed and old stories to tell at our family celebration. Ours is an oral tradition and that is how our young children and our parents learn. Our land stretches out like a great table giving us berries and bread, humor and home. A place to be a family.

***Living in balance.***

Now modern life is so fast and growing all around us. We know who we are. We keep the traditional ways and we recognize and participate in modern life. It is a balance and I believe that it comes from knowing the land. (G. Cates, 2001, p. 74)

A final example of the constancy of this abiding sense of place is contributed by Rhonda, a director with less than three years of administrative experience and not enrolled as a member of the tribe serving as the grantee for the child care program. As a young woman Rhonda met and married a man from the tribal community where she now lives and works. Rhonda has taken time over many years to learn from the elders the

ways of her adopted community. While conducting a tour of the facility and the playground during my site visit, she pointed to the top of the nearest mountain not to far off in the distance, saying,

This is where the spiritual ceremonies take place for the whole community, on top of [name of] Mountain. We planned the location of our new early childhood building so that everyone connected to the program, parents, children, staff, community members, can look up any time of the day and remember, look up and feel connected to the healing and the memories from long ago.

Listening to her I looked up and saw the top of the mountain turn golden in the twilight as passing clouds cast shadows on its peak. At that moment I inwardly acknowledged that I could never know the experiences this participant referenced in her remarks. I did know that I could feel the mountain's magnetic presence. In my mind's eye, the mountain watched over the children as they played on the playground, the end of the school day approaching quickly as the twilight lengthened.

To conclude the examination of the role of tribal child care programs play in preserving the promoting cultural integrity is a story an elder shared about a community I visited during the course of the research study.

An angel decided to leave the beauty and serenity of [name of the tribal community]. He stopped to rest atop Bald Hill and looked down at the valley. The sunlight was reflecting like fireflies off the water. He said, "Why am I leaving this valley when it is so beautiful?" The angel came down from the hill and became medicine. (G. Blake, in G. Cates, 2001).

## Chapter 5

### Summary and Recommendations

#### *Summary*

This study investigated American Indian child care directors' perceptions of the reservation community's efforts to promote and preserve cultural integrity in the local transmission of cultural values to children, from birth to age five, who are enrolled in tribal child care programs on American Indian reservations. In addition, the study addressed the directors' perceptions of how statewide child care quality improvement systems are (or are not) assisting them in their efforts to promote continuity of cultural education and quality child care. Sixteen American Indian directors from child care centers in tribal communities participated in the qualitative research project. The program directors, each a member of a different tribe, represented sites located in diverse geographic regions across the country including the Great Plains, Great Lakes, Appalachian Mountains, Rocky Mountains, southern Gulf coast, Piedmont woodlands, Southwestern desert, Northeastern maritime, and Pacific Northwest. The participants were selected to provide variation among different stages in their professional careers and encountering different kinds and levels of challenges in their work (four equal groups defined by two factors: (1) leadership experience; and (2) tribal affiliation). The project builds on earlier research (Willis, 1999) which suggested the influence of these factors.

#### *Multiple Case Study*

This qualitative research project was conducted as a multiple case study. The grand tour question in the study addressed how participants described their perception of



the role of the tribal child care center in promoting and preserving cultural integrity in tribal communities located on American Indian reservations. The second grand tour question elicited the directors' perceptions on activities that improved the quality of program services. Interview questions explored the many aspects of the tribal child care director's role in the implementation of programming that supported the tribal community's cultural continuity. A set of 32 semi-structured interview questions elicited the directors' views and the interviews were followed up by inspection of child care facilities, artifacts, and documents to allow directors to clarify or elaborate on their responses in the interview. This national study, the first of its kind, examined the interface between the implementation of child care quality improvement systems and cultural preservation and Native language education efforts in tribal child care programs.

### *Themes*

Six major themes emerged from the process of data analysis. These themes included the director's perception of the role of the tribal child care program in preserving and promoting cultural continuity, the description of on-going efforts to promote language preservation and education in tribal communities, the role community elders play in the Native language and cultural education services of tribal child care programs, descriptions of participation in diverse local, state and national quality initiatives by the tribal child care program director and staff, an examination of directors' perceptions of advocacy as an important component of his or her work, and a sense of deep identification with the land described by the participants as a key experience associated with living and working on American Indian reservations.

### *Native Language*

One of the areas that generated a great deal of discussion from all the participants concerned the important role Native language plays in preserving and promoting tribal traditions. Two of the most important issues identified in the study were the efforts that are being undertaken to preserve the tribal languages and the use of tribal languages in the child care and early education settings.

Within all the tribal child care programs the directors were responsible for working with a constellation of constituents, primarily tribal council, parents and extended family members, tribal child care staff and the children enrolled in the program. As a result of this overarching web of relationships, the director of each tribal child care program was in a unique position that afforded her or him a multidimensional vantage point to assess the impact of the child care and education program in promoting cultural continuity and Native language education in the tribal community.

### *Role of Culture*

Directors shared many examples of the important role of culture in the tribal child care program curriculum development and implementation. The culture of each indigenous tribe is intricately woven in to every aspect of the tribal child care programs located on the sixteen American Indian reservations I visited. For example, educational services to children were cited as a product of the child's home culture and reflected in the early childhood education and development curriculum in ways that reflected unique aspects of each tribe's culture. Areas of commonality were numerous and included the teaching of Native language, the teachings of traditional ways of child rearing by tribal

elders, story telling and oral history, the important role of nature in tribal belief systems, and a wide variety of art forms such as beadwork, basketry, dance, drumming, woodcarving, and life skills such as hunting, fishing, the traditional use of plants and gardening. Of equal importance were the participants' descriptions of services to the parents and extended family members that reinforced cultural integrity. Several participants recounted experiences where the parents were involved in learning about traditional parenting practices and the tribal language as a result of services offered through the child care program.

All of the participants expressed their belief in the important role that the tribal child care programs play in providing information and support to parents involved in nurturing and raising their children. The children were described by many of the participants as the focal point of the community, and the transmission of cultural heritage was viewed to be of paramount importance in child rearing practices. All of the participants expected that the role of the tribal child care program in promoting and preserving the continuity of cultural integrity would continue to grow. Each participant indicated that he or she would continue to devote energy and attention to this endeavor with the support of parents and extended family members, program staff, community elders, and tribal council.

### ***Tribal Elders***

The role of tribal elders was a significant theme of the study. Participants discussed the myriad of contributions elders made to the cultural education and language preservation efforts in many tribal communities. Elders were consulted for their insight

and experience to enhance cultural curriculum development and implementation, Native language education, traditional parenting instruction and tribal arts, music, and dance. A significant number of directors discussed the role of elders in mentoring the adults associated with the tribal child care program. In addition to working with parents and extended family members, elders provided guidance to program administrators, management team members, teachers, and program support staff. Directors also reported the increased role of elders as grandparents involved in rearing their grandchildren.

### *Advocacy*

Advocacy efforts by the director on behalf of the children, parents, extended families members and program staff emerged as a major theme of the study. The directors' efforts to advocate for many different causes were a significant part of their work. Differences in the types and effectiveness of the advocacy efforts allowed a comparison between the seasoned directors with five years or more of experience and those with less than three years. The study showed that the tribal child care directors with the greatest number of years of field experience were also the most politically effective. Involved in the widest range of advocacy efforts, several directors served on the National Indian Child Care Association governing board and advocated regularly for all tribal child care programs at the national level, particularly with federal representatives at the Child Care Bureau and the Office of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, and the Office of Head Start.

The seasoned directors were nationally recognized for their achievements in the field, and locally recognized for their contributions to the child care programs in their

respective American Indian communities. The directors with less experience were more focused on enhancing the quality of the program they were administering and attending to the day-to-day issues of associated with the management of an early childhood center. These findings support research findings in my earlier study of ten American Indian Head Start directors administering programs located on American Indian reservations in the Great Plains region (1999).

### ***Program Quality Indicators***

Strategies that program administrators used to increase the quality indicators of the tribal child care program were an important theme in the study. Supportive, mentoring relationships with other tribal child care directors, tribal council members, and early childhood management team members were cited as critical elements for on-the-job success and program quality improvement. Program quality was enhanced in a variety of tribal and site specific ways including on-site technical assistance, access to higher educational opportunities, and attendance at professional conferences. In their responses, directors gave many examples of program participation in national, state and local initiatives. Directors also cited the valuable role of the tribal colleges in providing low cost, community driven opportunities for staff members pursuing professional development opportunities as well as associate and bachelor degrees.

### ***Abiding in a Sense of Place***

The final theme of the study was an examination of the participants' discussion about their personal attachment to the land of the American Indian reservation of their residence. Abiding in a sense of place, directors revealed eloquently described

perspectives of their life as they talked of their experiences living and working in tribal communities located on American Indian reservations across the country. All of the participants had spent some part of their childhood growing up on the American Indian reservation of their tribal enrollment. Eight of the directors were enrolled members of the tribe serving as the grantee for the tribal child care programs. These participants had spent most of their life on the reservation of their birth. Eight participants were affiliated with a tribe other than the one serving as the grantee of the child care program. These directors also spent a great deal of their life living on American Indian reservations.

Vine Deloria, noted American Indian scholar and former professor of history, law, religious studies, and political science at the University of Colorado-Boulder, asserts that the fundamental difference between indigenous and Western ways of life is “indigenous people experience and relate to a living universe, whereas Western people, especially scientists, reduce all things, living or not, to objects.”(Deloria, 2000, p.6). Deloria believes that being attuned to their environment and the knowledge that all things are related allows indigenous people choosing to live primarily in the natural world with the respect for the natural intelligence of life forms (Deloria, 1997). This assertion was reflected in many of the comments from directors describing the meaning they attached to living on the land of their respective tribal communities.

### ***Recommendations***

Based on the results of this study, several recommendations can be made for the directors of tribal child care programs and Child Care Bureau program specialists. This

section offers recommendations for the program directors and the Child Care Bureau officials.

***Recommendations for Tribal Child Care Directors***

Supportive, mentoring relationships with other tribal child care directors, tribal council members, and early childhood management team members were cited as critical elements for on-the-job success and longevity. This study highlights the importance of creating and maintaining collaborative relationships with individuals that offer time for reflection, guidance, and support to help directors advance the quality of care in their respective communities. Participants in this study devoted a considerable amount of energy and time toward the goal of developing and sustaining mutually beneficial mentoring relationships. Directors relied on trusted, experienced people within their community and within the network of regional and national tribal child care program administrators. Participants described various strategies that they used to develop strong linkages for collaboration with one another. Experienced directors discussed their willingness to assume the role of mentor for less experienced program directors and the efforts they made to provide mentoring for local program staff.

Strong linkages for collaboration between directors of different tribal child care programs were often found in joint participation in quality improvement initiatives. For example, the program administrators involved in the Brazelton Touchpoints American Indian Early Head Start Initiative met yearly for an annual retreat facilitated by the Brazelton Touchpoints faculty of the Child Development Unit, Childrens' Hospital-Boston. Gathering together in a small group setting within one of the participating tribal

communities allowed time for professional reflection, personal renewal, and expert consultation. Other examples of opportunities to create strong linkages for collaboration include the directors participating in the annual Northwest Head Start Directors Meeting, and the directors serving as governing board for the National Indian Child Care Association.

A second recommendation is drawn from the participants' vision of services for their respective communities. Tribal culture and tribal identity were consistently raised as areas for continued program development. The teaching of Native language and traditional life ways was a primary focus of the early childhood curriculum. To strengthen appreciation for and awareness of the diversity of practices that exist in tribal communities it would be helpful to dialogue with and plan on-site visits to other programs to learn more about their process of cultural education. Creating opportunities for program staff to visit and observe the early childhood practices of other tribal child care programs would create new linkages for communication and collaboration and new ideas for ways to transmit information to promote cultural continuity.

### ***Recommendations for Child Care Bureau Staff***

The most pressing issues reported by participants were community specific barriers to enhanced program quality and program ability to provide more families with access to services through increased enrollment. These barriers deserve ample consideration from the Child Care Bureau staff. The formation of social policy to increase sources of additional funding for tribal child care programs was a need discussed by every director participating in this study.



Participants discussed a variety of reasons for needing additional funding for tribal child care programs located on American Indian reservations. Participants asserted that increased funding would provide considerable benefits to many American Indian families with young and school-aged children. Of primary concern are the differences associated with the financial costs of providing services in geographically isolated, medically underserved areas of the country where tribal unemployment rates are considerably and consistently higher than the current dismal national average.

One of the most pressing areas identified by study participants is the need of additional funding for construction of new program centers and renovations to existing ones. The lack of adequate child care facilities in American Indian communities is a widespread problem particularly in American Indian reservations without the wealth generated from profitable casino operations, revenues from natural resources such as oil and gas, or large revenue streams from tourism.

The need for greater access to other types of educational resources was mentioned frequently by program directors. Participants cited the need for more educational programs and services especially for children with special cognitive and behavioral needs. One experienced director, reflecting the concerns of many participants, discussed the tremendous increase in the number of tribal children with challenging behaviors and cited the need for better educated and more experienced teaching staff to guide child and family development. Other participants noted the federal government's emphasis on literacy development and school readiness skills and suggested the need for sustained

technical assistance efforts in partnership with tribal colleges to increase benchmarks for early reading skills and school readiness.

The second recommendation is drawn from the participants' vision of program services for their respective communities. Many of the participants cited the need for greater tribal determination in the types of program services offered to families. One participant with 27 years of service as the director of a combined tribal child care/Head Start/Early Head Start program defined her community service area's needs in this way:

If I could design the types of programs offered in each village there would be three distinct types of community-based services. In one community there would be only Early Head Start services to prenatal moms and infants because that is what is needed there. In the second village I would offer Tribal child care services only because the families are over-income for Head Start services. In the third community I would offer Head Start and Early Head Start services. I would also plan for flexibility in staffing and facilities should we observe needs beginning to change in one or any of the communities over time.

As tribal communities identify and refine their needs for child care and education services it would be helpful to engage in local empowerment models so that the design of services reflected more accurately the needs American Indian families for high quality, culturally appropriate care that offers greater access to early childhood services for more qualifying constituents.

This study reveals that directors require years of experience to accrue the knowledge, expertise, and felt competence to implement cultural continuity and quality improvement systems. A third recommendation for the Child Care Bureau is to launch a national initiative to provide avenues of co-participation between experienced and new program administrators charged with the task of designing culturally appropriate models for reflective programming. Meaningful and accessible networks for mentoring could

serve to improve the retention rates for new directors with less than three years of experience at their position.

For example, in the initial phase of this study during January –June 2006, I was busy setting up appointments for interviews with directors with less than three years experience in their current position. The study design required eight directors with less than three years experience; four enrolled members of the tribe serving as the grantee, and four directors affiliated with tribes other than the grantee. Five of the directors with less than three years experience agreeing to participate in the study actually quit before I could travel to their program site during June 2006. Three directors notified me prior to travel, two did not. I later learned that one director with less than three years experience left her job two days after my on-site visit. During the interview this participant gave me no indication of her impending departure and actually talked at length and in great detail about future plans for quality improvement and staff professional development. Of the eight directors with less than three years of experience in their position at the time of their interview and on-site visit, only three were still serving as the tribal child care program administrator by the conclusion of data collection in 2008.

Given the evidence, the need for support from the Child Care Bureau for new directors is unmistakably clear. To provide sustained support to new directors, the Child Care Bureau and its technical assistance provider for American Indian Alaska Native programs, TriTac, could develop a model for effective leadership training that assists new directors in more than the necessary acquisition of program management skills. The three-year training model could be designed to assist first, second, and third year

directors as they progress in their work. An essential component of the training model would provide new directors with access to consistently available, supportive mentoring relationships with highly seasoned directors recognized by the Child Care Bureau for their contributions to the field. Based on the fundamentals of reflective supervision, implementation of a newly designed leadership program training model would serve as an important means for supplying new directors with the means to learn how to become effective leaders across time and model best practices to employ in interactions with program staff.

In sum, program administrators reported a focus on long-term goals for the children in their respective tribal programs to maintain the vibrancy of the tribal community. Greater assistance from the Child Care Bureau to achieve this goal was a consistent message from study participants in the field to the federal program officials in the agency.

### ***Recommendations for Future Research***

Study participants identified three areas for future research: a) Native language and its influence on the development of a child's sense of tribal identity; b) tribally specific ways for providing effective staff and professional development; and c) culturally appropriate means for evaluating and measuring the role of cultural education in school readiness outcomes for children enrolled in the tribal child care program.

Other possible areas for research are drawn from an examination of the three hypotheses guiding this study. The *grand tour questions* were, first, do tribal child care directors perceive a role for child care services inside American Indian reservations in

preserving cultural integrity and promoting cultural continuity, and if so, what is that role? Second, do directors believe that the processes of preserving cultural integrity and promoting cultural continuity are enhanced or impeded by statewide child care quality improvement strategies, and if so, how?

The first hypothesis of the research study was directors' tribal enrollment will relate to promotion of cultural education. In examining participants' responses to the interview questions, this hypothesis could not be confirmed by the existing data. In fact, all of the directors discussed the variety of ways that the child care programs they administered were engaged in diverse activities to promote cultural continuity.

However, during on-site visits, especially during the initial interview, I was instructed numerous times by directors affiliated with a tribe other than the one serving as grantee for the program, to either turn off the recording device or in the case of one participant that did not allow a taped recording of the interview, to "close my notebook and put down my pen." From this experience I surmised that had I done a better, more thoughtful job of refining semi-structured interview questions to address the issue of diversity of child rearing practices within communities and among tribes, I could have created an atmosphere that conveyed my commitment to developing more trust with study participants that I did not have an ongoing relationship with. If I had been more aware of the sensitive nature of these types of questions, I believe that participants would have been more comfortable in their responses to me and consequently, I would gain better insight into this area of inquiry.

Many differences existed between tribes in childrearing practices and transmission of culture and Native language education. This is a fertile area for future research into the role of the director in shaping these practices within the service community of the tribal child care program.

The second hypothesis of the study was more experienced directors were expected to have more elaborated responses relative to less experienced directors about actions they can take to promote cultural education and continuity that involve wider networks such as other child care programs and community, state, and national initiatives. The third hypothesis of the study was more experienced directors will be more knowledgeable than less experienced directors about actions to promote child care quality that extend over a longer time period and that reach out beyond their individual center. Hypotheses 2 and 3 were supported by the participants' responses to the interview questions and their comments during the on-site visit. Future research efforts to glean more information about both hypotheses would be helpful to advance the work of tribal child care program directors and Child Care Bureau staff.

### *Conclusion*

This national study, the first of its kind, examined efforts by tribal child care programs located on American Indian reservations to preserve culture and language and implement child care quality improvement systems. A qualitative design was used to learn about tribal child care directors' beliefs regarding the preservation and promotion of continuity of cultural education as implemented in the tribal child care program. The study examined tribal child care directors' perceptions of the cultural role their particular

program plays in the tribal community and explored the unique aspects of the tribal customs of child rearing and early childhood educational practices within each community. In addition, the study examined ways that quality strategies are used to support optimal child development outcomes.

The study employed a multiple case study design. Sixteen American Indian program directors participating in the study were all members of different tribes. Site visits were conducted to participating tribal child care facilities. Thirty-two semi-structured interview questions elicited the directors' views. The directors represented sites located in diverse geographic regions across the country. Participant selection reflected variation in leadership experience, tribal affiliation, and different stages in their professional careers.

Data collection strategies included site visits, audio taping of interviews, verbatim transcriptions, digital photographs of environments, artifacts, and supporting documents, and ample opportunities for participants to revisit, revise, and rewrite their answers. Triangulation was provided from data collected from 16 participants purposely sampled to vary in their geographic region, administrative experience, and tribal affiliation. In addition, multiple sources of data are evident in my use of audiotaped interviews, verbatim transcripts, and digital photographs from sixteen tribal child care programs taken during the on-site visits. While on-site, I used field notes and photographs to document tribal artifacts, and documents. I wrote field notes about staff interactions and conversations. I collected examples of children's artwork, different types of program generated materials such as parent information handbooks, and took notes of classroom

observations. When invited to participate in tribal child care and tribal government functions, I took field notes during proceedings if I deemed it culturally appropriate during attendance at tribal council meetings and parent meetings.

Key findings from this study reveal that tribal child care programs play an important role in facilitating cultural continuity and education for young children living in American Indian reservation communities. Tribal language and cultural knowledge are core elements of the early childhood curriculum. Participants viewed their advocacy efforts addressing the needs of the children, families, and staff as a primary role of their work. Advocacy efforts were focused on local, state, and national issues. Supportive, mentoring relationships with other tribal child care directors, tribal council members, and early childhood management team members were cited as critical elements for on-the-job success. Participants reported that program quality was enhanced in a variety of tribal and site specific ways including on-site technical assistance, access to higher educational opportunities, and attendance at professional conferences.

This study is the first to examine the views of American Indian tribal child care directors regarding the interface between child care quality enhancement and native language and cultural education. The significance of this study's findings are numerous. The study sheds light on the current state of cultural education and continuity efforts in tribal child care. Findings from the study also reveal that directors require years of experience to accrue the knowledge, expertise, and felt competence to implement cultural continuity and quality improvement systems. The study highlights strategies that directors use to develop strong linkages for collaboration with one another. Participants



reported that for program services to be as successful as possible, quality improvement efforts must take place in tribally specific ways.

All of the directors were clear in their belief that the tribal child care programs play an important role in supporting parents and extended family members involved in nurturing and raising their children. Children were considered the focal point of the community and the transmission of culture and Native language were viewed as essential components of child rearing practices.

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**APPENDIX A**

**Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

## Semi-Structured Interview Questions

:

## The Role of Birth to Five Child Care Services in Tribal Communities

1. Would you please share a little bit about your personal background as it is relevant to your role as director?
2. What is your relationship to the tribe?
3. What is your tribal heritage? As a child did you spend time in your tribal community?
4. What is your educational background? Please tell me about your educational philosophy.
5. How did you first get involved with the tribal child care services?
6. Are there particular aspects of your personal background that relate to your initial and continuing involvement in the tribal child care program?
7. What accomplishments are most meaningful to you? Would you describe these? Where did the inspiration for this idea originate?
8. How are you learning from other tribal child care programs? What are you doing to share information with other tribal programs?
9. What frustrations are you currently experiencing?
10. What was or is the greatest challenge you face as a director of this program?
11. Where do you find support? Is it enough?
12. What do you see as child care's role in supporting expectant mothers and tribal families with young children? How is this support implemented in the service delivery of your program?
13. When a baby is born, it becomes part of a family, and of a community. How do you see that, for your community? Do you think your community is different from other communities in any significant ways, or about the same as everywhere else you know about? Who takes care of the baby (or should take care of the baby)? Can you tell me any stories or specific instances that illustrate what you are saying? Can you give some examples of where the baby created conflict as well as where the baby created stronger ties within the family? As the child grows older, what happens then? What are the changes in roles and responsibilities to the

families and the community different for children as they become 6 or 7 and enter tribal or public school?

14. How are your community's ideas about babies reflected in the practices of the child care program? How do you think your child care program has affected the community's ideas about raising and educating indigenous children?

15. How do you see your tribal child care program preserving and promoting the cultural continuity of the tribe? Is this important? Why, or why not?

16. How has the introduction of child care services impacted the traditions and values in your community?

17. How do you involve the larger community in the life of your child care program?

18. What role do language education and preservation play in preserving your culture?

19. What role do the tribal elders play in the cultural transmission of the tribe's customs and traditions? Are elders involved in your program? (If yes) How?

20. What programs do you offer to parents and teachers that encourage cultural continuity?

21. Are you doing anything to promote father involvement? Or the extended family?

22. Do opportunities exist to increase the enrollment of more tribal children in your program? Please describe these. Are there any known barriers to enrollment?

23. What do you see as the most pressing issues for the families that you serve? For the children in your program? What are the most pressing issues for the tribal community? How have these issues changed in the last five years?

24. Do you think there are any economic impacts of your program? (If so, what?)

25. What is your view of the child care quality initiatives going on in your state? Are you or your program involved in any way?

26. How about quality initiatives that come from the federal level? Are you or your programs involved in any way?



27. (If the director's state is implementing some version of quality rating system) Has your program been rated yet? Tell me about that process, and if you find the system helpful or not.

28. Are parents or families involved in any quality improvement you are currently implementing? (If yes) How?

29. Are you getting any support for staff development from the local tribal college, or any other college? (If yes) Tell me about that process.

30. Tell me about your experiences with retaining qualified staff. What is your approach to staff absenteeism and turnover?

31. Since I am not of American Indian heritage, what limitations do you see as I gather this information and present it?

32. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about this matter?

**APPENDIX B**

**Informed Consent Form**

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM****IRB # 2005-04-296 EX****The Role of Tribal Child Care Programs in Serving Children Birth to Five**

The purpose of this study is to explore various aspects of American Indian child care directors' perceptions of the role their programs play in their respective tribal communities. You are invited to participate in the research because you are presently a director of an American Indian/Alaska Native child care program serving children birth to five.

The study will be conducted at your child care program or during your attendance at a national conference designed for American Indian child care directors. You are invited to select the location most suitable for you. If you choose to meet at a national conference the interview will be held in a neutral location to assure that your privacy and confidentiality are maintained. It will take about an hour and half to complete the interview. During the research session you will be asked to answer a series of semi-structured interview questions which are designed to elicit your perceptions on topics ranging from how the tribal culture is incorporated into the curriculum of the center to the pressing social issues of the tribal community served by the program. After the interview, a follow-up telephone interview will be conducted by the researcher to provide opportunities for clarification. If you decide to conduct the interview at your child care center, you will be invited to show the researcher around the child care center so that the you can show features of the child care program such as the classroom facility, any tribal documents pertaining to child care, and educational materials such as physical artifacts in the classrooms that might clarify points or provide examples of things previously discussed in the interview. The researcher will use a field notebook and digital camera to record notes from this phase of the meeting. The researcher will not require any copies of tribal documents for the purposes of this study.

The site visits will be followed up with a telephone call several days later to allow participants to expand upon anything from the initial interview. Wherever possible, electronic mail will be used for clarification and expansion of views as well. Participants will be given the opportunity to review interview transcripts and notes. The participants will also be encouraged to make additions or corrections. In addition, participants will be invited to co-author or give input on any publications derived from the research project. The interview will be audio taped with your consent. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Please initial the line below to indicate that you have read the first page of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_

Although the study is not designed to help you personally, the information gained from this project will contribute to our knowledge of American Indian/Alaska Native directors' perceptions

of the role of children's services in tribal communities. We will make the results of this study available to interested research participants if you call the researcher's telephone number (252-928-2666) after May 2006. This study is funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Child Care Bureau, as a National Research Scholar grant.

Any information that could identify you is kept strictly confidential. Audiotapes of each interview will be transcribed then immediately destroyed. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office and will be seen only by the investigators only during the study and for three years after the study is completed. After three years the data will be destroyed. When completed these data will be presented in journals in a manner that shows only summary results of findings, with any examples presented in disguised form. No individual programs or persons will be identified or described in an identifiable manner. The Child Care Bureau will have no access to the data or to any individual interview material, only to these summary findings.

You may ask questions about the research and have those questions answered at any time, either before agreeing to participate or during the research. Or you may call the researcher at any time, office phone, (252-928-3251) or after hours (252-928-2666). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator or to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board, telephone (402) 472-6965.

You are free to decide not to participate in this study at any time without affecting your relationship with the researchers, the University of Nebraska, or the U.S. funding agencies. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Please check the box if you are willing to be audiotaped.

Signature of the Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Linda Mayo Willis  
PhD student, Education and  
Human Sciences  
Principal Investigator  
252-928-3251

Carolyn Pope Edwards, EdD,  
Professor of Psychology and  
Family and Consumer Sciences  
Secondary Investigator  
402-472-1673

**APPENDIX C**

**Recruitment Letter to Participants**

Dear Director,

I am writing to ask that you consider being a participant in a research project that is examining the role of tribal Child Care and Head Start programs in serving American Indian families living on reservation lands. The primary focus of the study is concerned with learning about each director's beliefs regarding the preservation and promotion of continuity of cultural integrity with the framework of implementation of your program. Of specific interest in this study are the unique aspects of child rearing and early childhood educational practices that are considered traditional customs in your tribal community. I am contacting you as a possible participant in this study because I worked with you to create the service delivery plan for the early childhood program in your community. I know from my professional experiences with you the degree of commitment you bring to your work with the families and children in your community. You will receive \$50 compensation after you complete your interview process.

This research study builds on the original study I conducted in 1999 that was the first to examine the role of tribal administrators directing American Indian/Alaska Native Program Branch Head Start (AI/ANPB) programs. This study will be conducted at your program site or in conjunction with a national conference you are attending designed for administrators of tribal early care and education programs. You are invited to select the location most suitable for you. If you choose to meet at a national conference, the interview will be held in a neutral location to assure that your privacy and confidentiality are maintained.

During the research session, you will be asked to answer a series of semi-structured interview questions which are designed to elicit your perceptions on topics ranging from the incorporation of traditional practices into your tribal program curriculum to the pressing social issues facing families living in the reservation community. Any information that could identify you is kept strictly confidential. All written documents will be kept in a locked cabinet in the principal investigator's office for three years, and then destroyed. With your consent, an audiotape of the interview will be made to augment written notes. Audiotapes will be transcribed and then immediately destroyed.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in the study without affecting your relationship with the researcher, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or the Head Start or Child Care Bureaus. Your decision will not result in the loss of benefits to you or your child care program.

I will call you next week to see if you are willing to participate in the study. I look forward to talking with you.

Sincerely,

Linda Mayo Willis  
Principal Investigator  
50 British Cemetery Road  
Ocracoke Island, NC 27960  
252-928-2666