

Aboriginal Children's Perceptions of their Urban Living Environments

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary research in the field of child and youth study continues to examine the experiences of children living within urban environments. This research has tended to examine challenges to child development present within city living, such as freedom of movement and mobility, use of built space, and safety concerns related to strangers. A recent trend within this research has been the increased inclusion of children's voices and perspectives in discussions related to the planning of urban environments, and of municipal programs and services for children and their families. Lacking within recent study, however, has been the inclusion of the perceptions of urban Aboriginal children related to their lived experiences within Canadian urban centres. Given the historical context in which this population exists, as well as the contemporary context including, a relatively young, growing population, increased urbanization and high birth rates, it is apparent that a consideration of the place and space available to Aboriginal children within cities is of growing concern and significance.

The present research, utilizing qualitative inquiry, elicited the views and perspectives of Aboriginal children currently residing within the Halifax Regional Municipality, for the purpose of exploring, discovering, and understanding their perceptions of their outdoor living environments. Individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven children of various First Nation affiliations, between the ages of 8-12 years. Children were given personal, single-use cameras to document their neighbourhoods and outdoor experiences over the course of one week.

Photographs were used during individual interviews as a resource for children to describe their thoughts, feelings, meanings and understandings related to their daily living experiences. Interviews were audio-taped and collected data were transcribed and analyzed using systematic, cross-comparative methods that resulted in the identification of four major organizing categories: Neighbourhood Characteristics; Neighbourhood Activities; Neighbourhood Safety; and Neighbourhood Mobility. Recommendations are presented for future research, parents and families, child and youth care providers, governments, and community planners and developers.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Canada's population is increasingly becoming urbanized. Each year the population of Canadian cities grow, making forces of urbanization increasingly apparent across Canada. In 2006, more than 80% (25 million) of Canadians were living in urban areas (Statistics Canada, 2006a). With this growth and change comes increasing concern regarding the effects of rapid industrialization and urbanization on the daily lives of children. As the environments of children are changing, so too are the geographies of their play spaces and their opportunities for play and exploration within their communities. Consideration of spatiality and children becomes essential as we focus on the everyday spaces which children occupy and through which their identities and social relationships are made.

Between 2001 and 2006, the vast majority of Canada's population growth took place in census metropolitan areas, including Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal (Statistics Canada, 2006b). This growing trend has placed Canada among the most urbanized nations in the world, while presenting challenges to urban centres across the country. These challenges impact local governments, services and residents, including both children and families.

In 2006, Canada's Aboriginal population surpassed the one million mark, reaching almost 1.2 million (Bailey, 2008). While traditionally Canada's Aboriginal people have resided on reservation lands, this appears to be changing rapidly, as 54

percent of Aboriginal people in Canada now live within urban areas. Whether on reserves or in urban centres, the Organization for Economic and Community Development (OECD) has reported this population as living “disadvantaged in comparison to the Canadian population as a whole” (OECD, 2004, p.22). While the fertility rate of Canadian women is currently at 1.53, the rate within Aboriginal communities is one and a half times higher than this national average (Statistics Canada, 2003a). Between 1996 and 2006, Canada’s Aboriginal population grew by 45 percent, nearly six times faster than the 8 percent rate of increase for non-Aboriginal populations (Statistics Canada, 2008). While the Aboriginal population accounts for only 3.8 percent of the Canadian population, Aboriginal children represent 5.6 percent of all children in Canada (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2003). These trends within the Aboriginal community make it apparent that a consideration of the place and space available to Aboriginal children within cities is of growing concern and significance.

Looking specifically at the city of Halifax, Nova Scotia, this mid-size urban municipality is the largest within the Atlantic Provinces on the east coast of Canada. The Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) was formed in 1996 by amalgamating the City of Halifax, the City of Dartmouth, the Town of Bedford and the municipality of the County of Halifax. As of 2006 the population of the HRM was 372,679 (Statistics Canada, 2007). Within the HRM, the urban core includes the concentration of residents within the Halifax Peninsula and neighbouring Dartmouth. This urban area constitutes the most populous urban core on Canada’s Atlantic coast and the second largest coastal population in the country, following Victoria, BC.

Accordingly, now would seem an opportune and appropriate time to examine communities and environments within the HRM from the perspectives of its youngest citizens. Recent media coverage, as well as public forums, have highlighted the projected growth and development for the HRM, however, absent from this coverage have been the voices of the city's youngest citizens. This absence of children's voices as city dwellers and as valued and developing members of society represents a critical absence of valuable information for general community planning and initiatives, as well as, efforts and designs for improving the overall health of communities and neighbourhoods.

Further, there is a need for investigation into the ways in which young people from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds relate to their surroundings. According to Dodman (2004) it is essential that the voices of young people are recognized as heterogeneous and complex, given that "different individuals and groups produce different physical and discursive constructions of the urban environment, different ways of organizing space and different ways of ascribing meaning to spaces and places" (p.186).

The present study looks to contribute to the ongoing scholarship and academic work of understanding the heterogeneity of children's experiences of their daily environments with emphasis on experiences within an urban context. The relative absence of research concerning the experiences and perspectives of Aboriginal children within urban contexts in Canada underlines the importance of including all children's voices in analysis of environments, communities, and neighbourhoods.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore, discover and understand the daily experiences of Aboriginal children currently living within the Halifax Regional Municipality. This study elicited children's expressed perspectives as they recounted their perceptions of their neighbourhoods and the opportunities for play within them. By employing qualitative research methods, the study engaged the voices of Aboriginal children in the Halifax Regional Municipality and allowed their perspectives, experiences and ideas to be a primary factor in developing recommendations for future research, community development and planning, and social cohesion.

While this study was designed to seek understanding of the perspectives of Aboriginal children residing in urban areas within the Halifax Regional Municipality, it is important to note that questions did not explicitly ask children to comment on their cultural identity or Aboriginal heritage. It was felt that the age of the children within the sample did not merit this type of questioning and that it may prove difficult for children to articulate their developing sense of cultural identity within this context. In addition, of interest to the study was if children would express or convey, either through their personal photographs or individual interviews, their cultural identity or First Nations affiliations.

Rationale for the Study

Contemporary research in the field of child and youth studies continues to examine the experiences of children living within urban environments. This research

has tended to examine obstacles to child development present within city living, such as, freedom of movement and mobility, use of built space and safety concerns related to strangers, as well as an increasing trend of including children and youth in the planning and creation of cities and services directly for them. Lacking within recent study has been the inclusion of urban Aboriginal children and their perceptions and experiences of living within Canadian cities. A fundamental premise of this study was that it is necessary to understand the heterogeneous ways in which children perceive their environments if effective means are to be developed to foster their inclusion in community and city life within an urban context. Children and youth are the current and future inhabitants of our cities and their accounts provide a critical source of information for those interested in community health and cohesion, as well as for those interested in the health and well-being of children living in cities across the country.

Research Questions

1. What types of contemporary urban environments and communities do Aboriginal children live within?
2. How do Aboriginal children describe or depict their daily living environments in terms of their daily living activities?
3. What particular meanings, significance, or needs do Aboriginal children associate with their daily living environments and activities?
4. How do Aboriginal children describe their desired or ideal daily living environments?

5. What overall similarities and differences exist in the perceptions of urban Aboriginal children regarding their neighbourhoods and outdoor experiences?

Personal Interest

Inspiration for this research came from my personal interest in the social and cultural contexts in which modern children are living, both within Canada and internationally. I am interested in the inclusion of children within public and social life, most notably through the concept of child friendly cities, as well as opportunities for play within the modern, urban landscape. Of particular interest is the notion of 'modern childhood' in contemporary Western cities which has, and continues, to change dramatically. This notion has become characterized by the changing nature and places for children's play, as well as an emphasis on safety, risk, protection and harm which seems to characterize many features of children's modern lives. Having had the opportunity to live in many urban centres around the world, I have experienced and witnessed differing social and cultural ways in which children are valued, seen, and included within their communities and neighbourhoods.

Within Canada, of particular interest to me is how children from vulnerable and marginalized populations experience their communities and neighbourhoods. Further, I wonder what types of relationships exist between children and their everyday living environments. What formal and informal spaces are available to children and what types of spaces do children respond to in modern cities? I have had the opportunity to work with individuals from the Aboriginal population within Halifax and have been

welcomed into a culture much different from my own. In this regard, I seek to understand the experiences that many of the children from this population have within Halifax, and how they feel about their own place within the city. From this, I hope to gain greater insight into how Aboriginal children are playing, living and learning within the city of Halifax, Nova Scotia.

DEFINTION OF TERMS

For the purpose of this research:

Child	A study participant between the ages of 8 -12 years
Aboriginal	Individuals of First Nation, Métis or Inuit ancestry
We'lalin	'Thank you' in Mi'kmaq
Neighbourhood	Geographically localized community within a larger city, town or suburb
Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM)	[pop. 372,679] Metropolitan region, referring to the amalgamated area including the City of Halifax, the City of Dartmouth, the Town of Bedford, and the County of Halifax (Statistics Canada, 2007)
Friendship Centre	Urban located community centres for Aboriginal peoples with the goal of improving the quality of life for Aboriginal peoples in an urban environment by supporting self determined activities which encourage equal access to, and participation in, Canadian society, and which respect and strengthen the increasing emphasis on Aboriginal cultural distinctiveness (National Association of Friendship Centres, 2006)
Smudge	A First Nation ceremony used for cleansing both physically and spiritually. Traditional herbs are burned together in a small bowl [sage, sweetgrass, cedar, tobacco] and the smoke is taken in one's hands and rubbed or brushed over the body. (University of Saskatchewan, 2003)

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Modern Children in the City

Recent literature has stated that the modern geographies of children have changed dramatically over the course of the past few decades (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Matthews, Limb, & Taylor, 2000; Christensen & O'Brien, 2003; Matthews, 2003; Rasmussen & Smidt, 2003; Zeiher, 2003; Blinkert, 2004; deConinck-Smith & Gutman, 2004; VanDerbeck & Dunkley, 2004). Changes have been observed in terms of the social environment, including a decreasing birth rate impacting family size, increases in household consumption, and an increase in the number of households with working parents. Physical changes have also been observed, among which is the increasing urbanization of cities across Canada. Combined, these contexts have greatly influenced the daily lives and experiences of children living within contemporary cities.

Holloway & Valentine (2000) have suggested a growing public concern regarding the presence of children within contemporary cities and public space, citing fears that children are both vulnerable to dangers, yet, conversely, are the perpetrators of unruly behaviour. Historically, urban public playgrounds were created to address concerns related to the safety and development of children in public space and as an approach to remove them from city streets. To this day, playgrounds remain one of the few public spaces available to children within contemporary cities.

Matthews et al. (2000) suggest the emergence of a growing, collective mentality within Western cities towards the presence of children in public places as a “polluting presence which challenges the hegemony of adult ownership of public space” (p.63). In accordance, Qvortrup (1994) contends that children and young people are increasingly and intentionally confined to acceptable ‘islands’ (as cited in Holloway & Valentine, 2000, p.63) within the city by adults, in which they are marginalized from society. O’Brien (2003) states that, the loss of the street as a place to play, as well as the loss of unstructured space free from regulation and supervision, are significant transformations in children’s modern lives.

Rasmussen (2004) refers to the environments of contemporary cities as highly regulated public landscapes. According to Rasmussen, cities generally maintain a significant demarcation of space between adults and children, the greatest proportion of which, allowing for certain overlap, is clearly designed for and dominated by adults. As a result of the diminishing space available to children within modern cities, the concept of “institutionalized childhood” (p.82.) has been developed as a way to describe the living conditions and urban experiences of modern children. A companion notion, the “institutionalized neighbourhood” (p.82), has also been employed to describe the experiences allowed to children within their urban environments. Such sources speak to how the daily activities of children are increasingly taking place in formal and organized settings, resulting in play having moved from the street into specially designed areas and physically confined spaces.

Zeihner (2003) argues that contemporary urban children additionally spend most of their time in child specific activities or institutions, which results in limited time available for simply playing in their neighbourhoods. In this context, children may be viewed as “ferried” by adults between “urban islands” (p.67) consisting of home, school, child care centres, recreation buildings, sports fields, and playgrounds. Zeihner (2003) suggests that the shaping of children’s lives is primarily organized by adults, who choose, arrange, and organize what is to be done, where and with whom. According to Zeihner and other contemporary authors (Christensen & O’Brien, 2003; Rasmussen, 2004), this adult-driven and adult-centric approach to children’s lives has a significant and prohibiting impact on children’s development of autonomy, problem-solving, independent decision-making, and independent mobility (Tandy, 1999; Nairn, Panelli & McCormack, 2003; Blinkert, 2004; Woolley, 2006).

Blinkert (2004) contends that the spatial conditions of modern childhood have changed to such an extent that, arguably, a markedly new type of childhood has emerged. As play has become highly standardized and regulated by rules of order, both physically and ideologically, modern cities have become characterized by an “increasing differentiation and standardization of urban space with an increasing number of rules” (p.105). Within these urban contexts, Blinkert summarizes that a growing number of children are living and playing in boring and un-stimulating public environments.

Adult Concerns and Children's Access to Public Spaces

O'Brien, Jones, Sloan, & Rustin (2000) state that contemporary children are faced with a hostile urban landscape, which increasingly restricts their access and independent movement within their communities and neighbourhoods. Karsten (2005) states that increased space available to children indoors, combined with decreased space outdoors and a decreasing number of children available for play within their neighbourhoods, have contributed to an overall absence of children from public space. Compounding factors affecting the presence and quality of experiences of children in cities include, considerable public space lost due to the prevalence of parked cars and traffic on city streets, as well as parental fears regarding strangers, drugs and bullying (Karsten, 2005). In this context, where children once had the opportunity to play with friends on the streets of their neighbourhoods, now has been greatly impacted due to the prevalence of danger inherent within this modern environment.

In this regard, Gaster (1991) states that contemporary children are disconnected from using and enjoying their neighbourhoods due to adult fears and concerns, both real and perceived. Matthews et al. (2000) refer to "moral panics" (p.63) prevalent in contemporary Western society that have created an image of public space as both dangerous and unsafe, and in which settings children are at a heightened vulnerability. As a result of these changes within the lives of modern urban children, Karsten (2005) argues the city is becoming increasingly inaccessible to children. Tandy (1999) expresses particular concern that the loss of children's independent spatial mobility within cities detrimentally affects children's ability to "investigate, navigate, explore, develop a sense

of identity and establish a role within the community” (p. 154). In this context, Blinkert (2004) states that children have the desire “to watch, to communicate, and, to meet others” (p. 105) and that cities inherently provide these opportunities, yet, the diminution of accessible space for children may adversely affect their opportunities to play, explore, find meaning and establish relationships.

Children and the Importance of the Street

As an advocate for the rightful place of children within contemporary cities, Jacobs (1961) argued that to learn the fundamentals of urban social life children need to be able to play and explore in the streets of their cities. She criticized the design and proliferation of playgrounds as spaces specifically for children, referring to them as “artificial havens” (p.86), managed by adults. Jacobs expressed apprehension that, ultimately, children are learning and navigating through spaces clearly designed and built for them by adult view points and Western philosophies of child development. Jacobs further felt that children are separated and removed from the fabric of urban life, resulting in a loss of exploration of streets, buildings, urban centres, and the daily navigation of streets and neighbourhoods.

Hart (1979) has similarly drawn attention to the deleterious effects of segmenting children’s experiences within urban environments, stating that the demise of street playing has entailed an “erosion of autonomous child culture” (as cited in Noschis, 1992, p.2). He emphasized “the freedom to move and act and to face the unpredictable events taking place in the world is the basis of adventure; an essential component of children’s

development” (p.2). Hart (1979) contends that when children’s environments are exceedingly manipulated by adults, children do not learn to navigate diverse environments or to deal with environmental hazards independently. Consequently, children are offered a limited opportunity for developing their “environmental competence” (p.339).

Child developmental theorist Friedrich Froebel (1826) believed that children have a desire to comprehend the extent and diversity of the world in order to better understand their own place within it (as cited in Hart, 1979). It is argued that, children’s mobility and access to their urban environments, and their restriction to generic and prescribed outdoor play spaces, contribute to a loss of vital experience within their environments. Katz (1998) states that, increasingly, young people are faced with fewer choices and opportunities regarding where they can go without adult interference, which is leading to the “eroding ecology of youth and childhood in modern cities” (as cited in Matthews et al., 2000, p.70).

Aboriginal Children in the City

Demographics

Significant demographic changes have been reported within Aboriginal populations across Canada, most notably that the Aboriginal population is relatively young, growing overall and becoming increasingly urbanized (Letkemann, 2004; Deane, 2006). As noted previously, the Aboriginal population in Canada has surpassed the one million mark (Statistics Canada, 2008). Almost half (48%) of the Aboriginal population

consists of children and youth aged 24 and under, compared with 31 percent of the non-Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada, 2008). In 2004, the birth rate among the Aboriginal population was one and a half times higher than the Canadian average of 1.53 children per woman (Statistics Canada, 2003a). Further, between 1996 and 2006 the Aboriginal population increased by 95 percent in Nova Scotia, with 24,175 individuals reporting Aboriginal identity (Statistics Canada, 2008). Of that number, 5,320 Aboriginal individuals reside within Halifax (Statistics Canada, 2008).

Aboriginal Colonization and Social Exclusion

Aboriginal peoples of Canada have a prolonged history of cultural oppression under policies and practices of cultural annihilation dating back to the time of first contact with European settlers (Paul, 2003). The forcible separation of children from parents, their subsequent enrolment in residential schools, along with the suppression of Aboriginal religions, cultures and languages, form part of the tragic history of Native peoples in Canada, the affects of which continue to the present day. There exists a broad consensus within the literature that social issues which currently beset Aboriginal communities across Canada are the product of the experiences and effects of colonization (Pidgeon & Hardy Cox, 2002; Kirmayer, Simpson, & Cargo, 2003; Paul, 2003; Letkemann, 2004; Deane, 2006; Silver, Hay, Klyne, Ghorayshi, Gorzen, Keeper, MacKenzie, & Simard, 2006).

Since first contact, Aboriginal peoples have been marginalized from mainstream Canadian life by their confinement to often remotely located reservation lands, far

removed from the settlements and institutions of the dominant European population. Silver et al. (2006) report that currently, many Aboriginal individuals feel that they are socially excluded from the dominant culture and societal institutions of Canadian life, establishing social exclusion as a reality for many urban Aboriginal people. Lingering effects of colonization and its associated ideology, which remain part of contemporary negative images often associated with urban Aboriginal individuals, have contributed to what Silver et. al refer to as a threatened sense of 'other' (Silver et al., 2006). Such xenophobic perceptions of Aboriginal peoples as removed and 'other' than the dominant population are evidenced in pervasive negative stereotypes and practices remaining across Canada, involving a lack of relatedness and 'attunement' (Hoskins, 1999) on the part of mainstream society to Canada's Aboriginal populations.

Social exclusion is defined by Duffy (1995) as, "a broad concept, encompassing not only low material means but the inability to participate effectively in economic, social, political, and cultural life, and, in some characterizations, alienation and distance from the mainstream society" (as cited in Vanderbeck & Dunkley, 2004, p.5). Silver et al. (2006) suggest that social exclusion is a common experience for Aboriginal individuals. Feelings of alienation, distance, and exclusion have been documented for both adults and youth, however, little has been reported on the experiences of children, especially within an urban context (Lobo & Peters, 2001; Deane, 2006)

Silver et al. (2006) suggest that for Aboriginal people living in the city, a greater degree of 'isolation, anomie and alienation' (p.14) exists, which can contribute to feelings of social exclusion. As a result, it is suggested that many Aboriginal people do not feel

fully included within their communities or a sense of belonging in their neighbourhoods. Further, Silver et al. (2006) suggest that social exclusion, historically facilitated by the reserve system in Canada, has been extended to social exclusion within urban centres, made apparent by the disproportion of urban Aboriginal individuals living in low income neighbourhoods, most noticeably within Canadian inner-cities. Silver et al. suggest that the urbanization process from reserve to city is “a move from one marginalized community to another” (p.17). It is further suggested that urban Aboriginal individuals are virtually “invisible” (p.17) to mainstream society. In this manner, residing in low income neighbourhoods, both geographically and socio-economically, separates Aboriginal peoples from much of the greater urban population and results in limited opportunity for socialization outside of their communities and neighbourhoods (Lobo & Peters, 2001; Silver et al., 2006).

Urbanization

According to a study published by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (Muscovitch, 1980), the main reasons cited by Aboriginal individuals for migrating from reservation areas to urban centres included, education, employment, economic opportunity, and health services. However, Frideres & Gadacz (2001) state that the effects of this migration to the city have not been adequately studied. These issues have significant importance for the adjustment and development of children, as it has been reported that Aboriginal individuals have the lowest standard of living of any group in Canada (Native Women’s Association of Canada, 2003).

Contemporary authors cite the importance of the urban context in understanding the lives of Aboriginal children and youth (Letkemann, 2004; Deane, 2006; Silver et al., 2006). Almost half (45%) of all Aboriginal people under the age of 25 in Canada live in non-reserve urban areas, 40 percent of this number live in cities with populations of 100,000 or more (Silver et al., 2006). Letkemann (2004) contends that although many Aboriginal individuals currently live in cities, he refers to many as living 'part-time' between reserves and the city, integrating rural and urban contexts between a pattern of mobility, stating that "this extensive relocation is common in the urbanization process of many Canadian First Nations people" (p.246). It is through this connection that cultural awareness and association is not diminished by relocation to urban cities. Through this gradual movement to the city it is made possible to slowly establish ties and connections to the city, which Letkemann (2004) refers to as 'clique formation' (p.247) leading to a more stable form of social organization in the city.

Current literature regarding urban Aboriginal individuals and families has documented and drawn attention to the largely negative experiences of this population within contemporary Canadian urban environments, including experiences of racism, poverty, substance abuse, lack of proper housing, social marginalization, and health and welfare concerns among other critical and pertinent issues (Lobo & Peters, 2001; Deane, 2006; Silver et al., 2006). Such conditions and treatment within urban environments has had significant negative impacts on many Aboriginal children and youth living within these environments and circumstances. Studies of Aboriginal young adults by Letkemann (2004) concluded that the process of adjustment to mainstream Canadian

society is often accompanied by such stressors, challenges, and potential barriers as poverty, racism and discrimination, loneliness and isolation. This poses a continuing social concern related to the environments and contexts in which Aboriginal children are living, including the impact these may have on their ongoing health, development, and socialization. In this regard, Silver et al. (2006) and Lobo & Peters (2001) state that there has been limited work conducted with Aboriginal children in cities and within their communities.

Dodman (2004) contends that there is a need for investigation into the ways in which young people and children from a variety of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds relate to their surroundings. Brown, Higgitt, Wingert, Miller, & Morrisette (2005) state that inner city Aboriginal youth face multiple issues associated with a history of colonization and racism, such as poverty, unemployment and institutionalization. These challenges critically hinder progress towards enhanced community health. These authors state that, “it is crucial to hear the voices of Aboriginal youth in order to understand their challenges and opportunities for social change in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods” (p.83). This point is further stressed given that the voices of the Aboriginal community as a whole have been excluded from the Canadian discussion by merit of colonization and social exclusion.

Identity and Community

Kirmayer et al. (2003) refer to the formation of Aboriginal youth identity as a complicated process owing to the impact of colonialism on cultural identity and current

tensions between Aboriginal peoples and members of mainstream society.

Notwithstanding, Kirmayer et al. (2003) emphasize the importance of youth participation, both in forging a sense of their identities and participation within their cultural communities and the broader Canadian society. In this regard, Brown et al. (2005) cite that Aboriginal youth recognize the need for self determination and opportunities which allow for “participation, inclusion and interdependence” (p.101). Within their research, Aboriginal youth reported experiences of exclusion within cities, leading to feelings of diminished self worth, meaning and cultural connection.

In this context, Silver et al. (2006) highlight how community development requires building social relationships, and suggest the concept of social capital (Putman, 2000, as cited in Silver et al., 2006) to facilitate urban Aboriginal community development. Social capital, in this regard, refers to the ways in which people connect, most notably, the establishment of social connections and building networks. Social capital speaks to Aboriginal community development in that these social networks, and the reciprocity associated with them, inherently have value. In this way, community development can assist in connecting individuals within a given neighbourhood. These social relationships, connections, and reciprocity are intrinsic to Aboriginal cultures and values. Deane (2006) suggests that Aboriginal identity is recognized through a “web of relationships and interconnectedness” (p. 154). The importance of experiencing feelings of belonging is highlighted as Silver et al. (2006) state that a sense of belonging generates involvement within communities, however, it is highlighted that in many urban neighbourhoods there is a strong absence of any connections or networks present. It is

further suggested that many current urban Aboriginal communities are “disconnected, disjointed and fragmented at the community level” (p.53).

Sibley (1998) speaks to the importance of including the perspectives of children with regard to social exclusion. In reference to, “exclusionary spaces” (p.121) which may be present within neighbourhoods and communities, children are likely to experience these spaces first hand as they are learning about their environments, boundaries and socio-spatial relationships. Deconstructing negative stereotypes and barriers to inclusion, and understanding the complexities of socio-spatial exclusions, may be facilitated by children’s involvement within their communities and neighbourhoods and by forging relationships with community members.

The Neighbourhood as a Context for Development

As the geographies of modern childhood are changing there is a need to explore the experiences and perceptions of diverse groups of children residing within Canadian cities. As children are removed physically and ideologically from the streets of cities and placed in demarcated spaces, designed *for* children, there is a concern about the disappearance of serendipitous experiences which allow children to discover the new and unknown (Rasmussen, 2004). Building community cohesion, which has been cited as an area of need within the HRM (Mendleson, 2007), may be impeded by a lack of opportunity for chance encounter and freedom and exploration within their neighbourhoods. Churchman (2003) states that the neighbourhood should be understood as a significant environment of children, as it is one which they have direct

access to and can gain familiarity with from an early age. Further, it is argued that the residential neighbourhood is the one part of the city that is most likely to have a place for children.

Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, & Sealand, (1993) refer to Bronfenbrenners' ecological systems theory when discussing the impact of neighbourhoods on child development. In this view, individuals are seen in the context of a series of environments in which they reside, including, but not exclusive to, family, peer group, neighbourhood, and community. Brooks-Gunn et al. (1993) contend that recent literature and focus has failed to acknowledge the context of neighbourhood in child development and state that urgent attention is required given the vast differences in socio-economic composition of neighbourhoods in contemporary cities.

Churchman (2003) states that the relatively heterogeneous populations within cities make it an ideal environment for children to learn about and embrace difference and diversity. Experiences with autonomy and independence allow children to comprehend that they are capable of functioning on their own, which can contribute to positive feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem (Hart, 1979; O'Brien et al., 2000; Silver et al., 2006; Woolley, 2006). By providing and allowing for independent spatial mobility, children have the opportunity to explore the freedom of choice, and to experience the advantages and risks associated with such freedoms. A variety of contact with diverse people, environments, activities, resources and stimulus, contribute to children's growing understandings of relationships, space, power, and self. Churchman (2003) and Blinkert (2004) contend that when children cannot function on their own,

when their mobility and accessibility to their environments are greatly restricted or under the constant supervision of adult surveillance, their everyday opportunities and advantages to meaningfully and positively engage with their urban environments are significantly compromised.

Muscovitch (1980) found that children residing within four urban neighbourhoods in Toronto, Ontario had limited access to challenging, stimulating environments which were free from the dangers of traffic. This was seen as an impediment to the development of friendships and opportunities for expanding growth experiences. Muscovitch (1980) states that there is a need for the planning and development of cities to be sensitive to the living environments for families and children residing there, as well as to the needs and perceptions of children, and that the environment be considered not only as a function for play but also as an “educational tool, where the neighbourhood is the setting in which children learn to use the city” (p.3).

It would seem imperative at this time to determine the needs and perceptions of urban Aboriginal children, as research has shown that traditionally this is an overlooked and underrepresented section of the population in modern Canadian cities.

Accordingly, Frideres & Gadarz (2001) state that, “few urban Aboriginals are fully participating members of modern industrial society; they are marginal in their own country” (p.162). Within this context, it is necessary that feelings of isolation and exclusion be addressed to ensure that these are not common experiences and characteristic of a new, younger generation of people. It is essential that Aboriginal

children be provided with support and opportunities to develop an enhanced sense of belonging, pride and community affiliation within their daily living environments. Fostering opportunities for inclusion and participation at a young age may further encourage participation and active involvement into adulthood, which can facilitate the process of overcoming the reported negative barriers which currently exist between Aboriginal communities and mainstream society.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Sample

The sample consisted of seven Aboriginal children (four males and three females) between the ages of 8-12 years, inclusive, currently residing within the Halifax Regional Municipality. Children identified a variety of First Nations heritages, including five children who were Mi'kmaq, one child who was Cree, and one child who was Soto. All children and their families were part of the urban Aboriginal community associated with and through the Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre in Halifax. Children attend a weekly youth group, the Kitpu Youth Group through the Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre and their parent organization, the Micmac Native Friendship Centre. Children were selected for the sample group on the basis of living in urban residence within the HRM, and their association with the Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre.

The Micmac Native Friendship Centre is a non-profit, board-governed organization that provides structured, social-based programming and support for urban Aboriginal people. It oversees the delivery of programs and services offered through the Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre, including a community-based day care centre, an Aboriginal Head Start program, and Community Action Programs (CAP-C). A sense of community and belonging is fostered and facilitated through these organizations for the Aboriginal population residing within the Halifax Regional Municipality.

The children in this sample were part of the Kitpu Youth group, funded by the Micmac Native Friendship Centre. They met weekly at the Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre, with this group providing Aboriginal children and youth opportunities to connect with other Aboriginal children, as well as engage in culturally relevant activities and programs, including a boys' drumming group (the Nokemaq drummers) and a girls' dance group (jingle dress and fancy shawl dancing).

The use of an out of school club to facilitate the involvement of children was utilized for a variety of reasons. Of most significance, these organizations are the sole source of support for urban Aboriginal families and children within the HRM and provide an environment in which children feel safe, secure, and comfortable. In this regard, the familiar and informal atmosphere of the Centre allowed children to engage more freely with the researcher than they may have within the more formal environment of a school setting.

Qualitative Method

Principles and Purposes

A qualitative approach was utilized in this study as the most appropriate method to explore Aboriginal children's perceptions of their outdoor living environments. Wiersma & Jurs (2005) state that qualitative research allows for a form of investigation open to multiple methodological approaches and is grounded in an interpretive, naturalistic understanding of human experience. Such approaches may include individual interviews and observational settings and situations. Both Bogdan & Biklen

(2007) and Shank (2006) emphasize that qualitative research allows the opportunity to derive meaning through the observation of everyday life and can assist in describing multiple realities. In this way, the features of qualitative research can include the utilization of the natural setting as the source of data, emphasizing process over outcome, an inductive (open) analysis of the data and a concern regarding the participants' descriptive data and perspectives. In the present study, the natural setting of children's neighbourhoods was utilized to gain understanding of how children perceive their outdoor living environments, as well as the range of experiences that they have within them. Utilizing an inductive approach, or 'naturalistic inquiry' (Patton, 1990) allows researchers to understand and discover personal meanings of the informants during the process of collecting data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In the present study, the personal meaning related to the perceptions of Aboriginal children with regard to their outdoor living experiences was explored during the process of collecting data, gradually leading towards an identification of general patterns and categories.

Indigenous Ways of Knowing

Given that the aim of the present research was to elicit the first hand perceptions and lived experiences of the study participants, this research recognizes the suggestions put forth by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996) which emphasized that collaborative research methodologies are essential when conducting research studies with Aboriginal populations. Collaboration is essential to ensure that researchers and participants are

able to reach an agreement regarding the nature and the purpose of the research and the ways in which the research should be conducted.

A participatory and naturalistic approach to research is suggested as an optimal methodology used when conducting research with Indigenous populations (Brown & Strega, 2005). In this way, consultation is at the core of the research process which honours the expertise of Indigenous individuals who will form the sample of the research study. An integral part of successful research includes the development of a partnership based on trust (Pidgeon & Hardy Cox, 2002). In this way, the researcher takes on the responsibility of sharing and co-developing research skills with the research participants (Faculty of Human and Social Development, 2003). In the present study this was addressed through the informal gathering of participants and the researcher at a site holding significant importance and familiarity to the participants. Further, relationships between the researcher and participants have been cultivated over the last three years, with the researcher volunteering at the Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre and having an active role in the weekly programming and scheduling of activities. In addition, children were given the active role of researchers of their own lives as they documented their neighbourhoods independently with their disposable cameras, provided by the researcher.

This qualitative approach honours Indigenous interests and research as it minimizes the researcher's manipulation of the environment and allows for an open and respectful setting which facilitates conversation and *deep listening* (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In this way, the researcher seeks to understand and document the daily reality of

the setting or settings under study. No attempt is made to manipulate, control or eliminate situational variables or program developments. The data of the study include whatever may emerge as important to understanding the setting or situation.

Rigor and Credibility

Shank (2006) and Bogden & Biklen (2007) emphasize that for qualitative research to be viewed as trustworthy, reliable, valid, and with minimum bias, the research must be seen as *dependable, confirmable, credible, and transferable*. *Dependability* and *confirmability* within the research was addressed through the use of two coders (the researcher and her thesis supervisor). *Credibility* and *trustworthiness* of the study was strengthened through the use of firsthand data, accompanied by the researcher's field-notes and memo writing. It is suggested that data collected in informal settings is more often trustworthy than data from more formal settings, as informal settings allow for information and behaviours to unfold more naturally from participants. In this sense, when data is collected one-on-one, the participants are more likely to be open and honest.

Shank (2006) and Bogden & Biklen (2007) suggest *triangulation* as an effective way of guarding against researcher bias. By drawing on other types and sources of data, observers gain a deeper and clearer understanding of the setting and the people being studied. The use of participants' first hand accounts, visual photographs and detailed explanations, as well as detailed field notes and memos were used to facilitate the process of *triangulation*.

Interviews

Given the purpose of the proposed study, individual interviews were utilized as a technique in exploring, discovering and understanding participants' experiences and perceptions about the research topic. It has been suggested that verbal and visual techniques be used when conducting research with children, allowing for a wide range and variety of data to be collected and which encourage children to engage individually with the research (Elsley, 2004). Further, qualitative interviews have been suggested as a method to be employed when working with samples which may include Aboriginal individuals (Oaks, Rieview, Wilde, Edmunds, & Dubois, 2003; Letkeman, 2004; Brown & Strega, 2005; Deanne, 2006).

In acknowledging and respecting Indigenous ways of knowing within the research process, the concept of 'deep listening' (Bogden & Biklen, 2007) was utilized, which emphasized listening carefully to what the respondent was saying, allowed for flexibility within the interview process and assisted in the goal of understanding how the participant thinks and feels (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). As Kitzinger (1999) suggests, in this way, the person being interviewed is treated as the 'expert' in the subject.

Photographs

In conducting research with children, Burke (2005) refers to children's specific "ways of seeing" (p.28) their worlds and environments which are not always clear or observable to adults. It is suggested that traditional, adult-driven research regarding children's experiences have failed to identify and often miss the opportunity to examine

the details of children's lived experiences. Burke (2005) suggests the inclusion of visual methodologies when working with children which encourages participation and active involvement within the research process, and further recognizes that children and young people are experts in their own worlds and have distinct experiences, often separate from adults. Research conducted by Rasmussen (2004) has included the use of photographs taken by child participants used to document their play spaces within their communities and neighbourhoods. It is suggested that utilizing this approach may reveal the meanings, feelings, and personal histories which are interwoven into the places and spaces which children inhabit.

Bogden & Biklen (2007) suggest that the use of photography is closely aligned with qualitative research and can provide descriptive data which may be used to comprehend the subjective perceptions of the participants. In this way, the use of visual images may encourage children to verbalize their experiences, thoughts and perceptions of their daily living environments.

Procedure and Data Gathering

Once approval of this research was granted by both the Thesis Committee and the University Research Ethics Board, the researcher began recruiting volunteers for participation in the study. The researcher made contact with the Directors of the Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre and provided them with Letters of Introduction (Appendix A) to the research. Following approval from the Directors, a date was established when the researcher could meet with the children in the youth group, and

their parents, at the Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre. At this weekly youth group, the researcher initially met with parents and explained the research purpose and process. At the end of this session, the researcher asked interested parents to complete the Letters of Informed Consent (Appendix B), in order to provide for their children's involvement in the study and the audio-taping of their children's individual interviews, should their children, in turn, be interested and willing to participate.

Once these forms were collected, the researcher met with the appropriate children as a group, within a classroom at the Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre. At this time, the researcher explained, with developmentally appropriate language, the purpose of the research study, the research process, and the children's role within the study, should they be interested in participating. The researcher informed the children that their parents had been contacted and had given approval for their involvement, if the children, themselves, were willing and wanting to be part of the study. All children eagerly expressed their interest in participating and completed their Letters of Informed Consent (Appendix B). The researcher explained the important role that the children had in the research process and that the researcher was interested in seeing and hearing about their neighbourhoods from their individual viewpoints. The children were asked to take photographs of the outdoor places in their neighbourhoods where they play, spend time, and are active with others, including family and playmates. In addition, the researcher asked for pictures which depicted places the children liked, disliked, were curious about, and otherwise were aware of and encountered on a daily basis in their neighbourhoods. At the end of the meeting, the researcher distributed personal, single-

use cameras and asked that the children return them the following week when they came to the centre.

The following week, the children returned the cameras to the researcher and times were scheduled for participants' individual interviews. These interviews were conducted over a four week period at the Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre.

Originally, the sample consisted of nine children, however, when the cameras were returned to the researcher the following week one of the children dropped out of the study due to personal circumstances, while a second child did not return to the Centre during the time frame of the research.

Audio-taped interviews, lasting approximately 20-35 minutes each, were conducted in a comfortable, child-friendly room provided by the Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre. The researcher made every effort to make each child feel valued and at ease. In addition to responding to a set of interview questions (Appendix C), children made regular reference to their personal photographs as they shared their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about their daily outdoor environments. At the conclusion of the individual interview, each child was thanked for his or her participation and informed that their photographs would be returned to them at the end of the study.

Data Analysis

In the present study, the audio-taped interviews were transcribed verbatim in order to obtain complete and accurate data prior to proceeding with analysis (Patton, 1990; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). While original, 'clean' copies of the transcripts were retained for reference, several working copies of the transcripts were made for the process of data analysis. This analysis was undertaken with the assistance of a second coder, utilizing a cross-comparative approach to the discovery of themes, patterns, and conceptual links within the data (Patton, 1990). Such shared and constant comparison of the data contributed to the 'trustworthiness' of the interpretations (Shank, 2006; Bodgen & Biklen, 2007).

The transcripts were first analyzed through *in vivo* coding that captured "important attitudes, perceptions, feelings, and processes continued in the participant's experiences, as well as the context in which they occurred" (Fitzgerald, 1994, p.467), by extracting participants' key words and phrases related to topics of discussion within the individual interviews. With ongoing cross-comparison of the data, initial codes were then clustered, collapsed, and thematically conceptualized through subsequent second and third level coding until the saturated data organized into major categories that organized and explained the data for purposes of discussion (Selected Sample of Coding, Figure1).

Ethical Considerations

Prior to participation in the study, all children and their parents were fully informed about the nature and the purpose of the research. The participants and their parents were also made aware of the approval of the research (see Appendix A) by the MSVU University Research Ethics Board (UREB) and were provided with contact information for the Thesis Supervisor and the Chairperson (UREB), should they have any further questions about the research.

Participation in the study was voluntary, with the right to freely withdraw from the study at any time. Informed consents, signed by both the children and their parents, were collected prior to the interviewing process. Participants' confidentiality was maintained throughout the research. Interview transcripts were coded, in order to protect the participants' identity, and all data regarding the participants was safely stored during the research. Participants and their parents were advised of the eventual destruction of the participant-related materials following the completion of the study. All materials were used for research and educational purposes only.

While there was no anticipated risk or harm related to the participation in the study, it was possible that the discussion regarding their experiences in their neighbourhoods, both positive and negative, may evoke uncomfortable feelings among some of the children, depending on their personal experiences. The participants were informed of the researcher's immediate availability to offer support in such cases. In addition, participants were told that both their parents and the Directors of the centre were on site should they be needed. In the conduct of the research, however, no

requirements were necessary, as none of the participants displayed or expressed uneasiness or discomfort within the interview process related to the research topic.

Photographs produced by the participants were used only during the individual interviews. Photographs were not shared or viewed by other participants or anyone other than the researcher and her advisor. Some parents asked to view their children's photographs after the interview and the researcher provided them with their children's collection of photographs for their viewing. Participants and parents were informed of the eventual return of the pictures to them upon the completion of the study.

Of particular significance to this study, Ellis & Early (2006) suggest the inclusion of an act of symbolic reciprocity between the researcher and participants as a measure of respect. In this way, researchers should attempt to employ culturally appropriate means when conducting research with Indigenous populations, such as presenting an offering to establish consent. Honouring this suggestion, the researcher presented the centre Directors with a pouch of tobacco during the initial meeting with both the Directors and the children's parents. The researcher was aware that tobacco was used at the centre on a regular basis for occasions such as gatherings, prayers and drumming, as well as in spiritual ceremonies such as smudging. Ellis & Early (2006) summarize, "tobacco is offered in every ceremony and in many other circumstances...in weddings, funerals, for praying over and offering food, for picking medicines, for hunting, for thanking people, asking for help, praying for information and sharing stories" (p.5).

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Child participants offered valuable perspectives concerning their experiences and understandings of their neighbourhoods as urban Aboriginal children living within the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). The views of these children, conveyed through personal photographs and individual discussions, provided insight and greater understanding of the experiences of this population within various neighbourhoods throughout the HRM. Children described what they considered both desirable and undesirable features of their neighbourhoods as well as a number of safety and mobility concerns which directly impact their daily experiences and opportunities for play. Overall, the children were forthcoming in sharing their urban experiences, although often brief in their responses. The following major descriptive and conceptual categories emerged from qualitative data analysis and serve to organize and report the research findings: *Neighbourhood Characteristics*; *Neighbourhood Activities*; *Neighbourhood Safety*; and *Neighbourhood Mobility*.

NEIGHBOURHOOD CHARACTERISTICS

Neighbourhood Features

Neighbourhood descriptions. Photographs taken by the children depicted many familiar landmarks and everyday sights that, for them, held personal meaning and significance (e.g., local roads, lakes, cars, their school, and home backyards). A principal

feature for most, however, were their family homes and those of their friends, “that’s my friend’s house; I go to her house everyday after school. That’s where I spend most of my time after school”. One older child proudly presented a particularly expansive and detailed view of his environment, containing several features of everyday importance in his life:

My house is over there...that’s Lake Banook...Lake Micmac...and the harbour. That’s the duck pond and the lake is behind us...there’s lots of cars, my school is just past those lights up there and the street goes up...that is the parking lot of the Superstore where we get our groceries.

Developing neighbourhood appreciation. While children were able to identify several key neighbourhood features they deemed to be important in their urban environments, they were less able to articulate the nature of those significant person’s, places, and things. Invited to expand on the particular significance of such local features as woods, lakes, and homes, two of the older children cited that their choices held appeal and meaning because they were “cool”. Younger children tended to simply repeat their choices as if to convey that their references held intrinsic or self-descriptive value.

Neighbourhood aesthetics. Children depicted in their photographs and described both personally appealing and unappealing characteristics of their neighbourhoods. For one child, graffiti constituted an unwelcome, even distressing, sight in her community, while beauty was found for another child in his natural surroundings:

There is where the cherry bushes grow...I like the woods and all the stuff that grows there, flowers grow all over the street in summer.

There's lots of thorn bushes ...I don't mind them anymore. We just made a little doorway and it looks so nice, it looks like an opening into another world. The flowers and grass... it smells good.

Neighbourhood Locations

Natural neighbourhood play locations. Many of the children described the natural, outdoor settings of their neighbourhoods as spaces where they often play, both close to their homes as well as within their broader communities. One child's photograph depicted a bare back yard with a large tree in it. As the child reflected, the tree offered a source of comfort and repose: "[the tree is in] our backyard, I like to climb up there ...it's like a chair and I sit there". Several of the children's photographs contained images of their own or other neighbourhood homes backing onto wooded areas. As one child commented, such places provided a regular outlet to roam and explore: "My best friend's woods...we play in it all the time".

Neighbourhood building locations. In addition to natural areas, children also mentioned (and displayed photographs) of a variety of buildings and developed areas throughout their neighbourhoods, including streets, driveways, school fields, and municipal parks close to their homes. Each was identified as a location of regular transit, play, or visual reference, serving as familiar and known elements of their daily environments.

Playgrounds/Play Structures. Most children did not photograph or mention the developed public playgrounds located in their neighbourhoods. When asked about such locations, children tended not to have ready memories of visiting or playing in these areas. As one child remarked, “oh yeah...there’s one by my house”. Only one child elaborated on time spent at the playground, happily recounting, “On the playground there’s a slide and we go on the monkey bars and we pretend we’re doing the ship...and there’s a pole and you can slide down the pole”.

Favourite neighbourhood locations. Children generally cited their own homes and those of their friends as favourite play locations, “my friends house... my basketball net, [our] street, and the trampoline out back”. They also spoke of their homes as bases from which to visit favourite community locations, including school yards, public fields, hills, local lakes, and retail outlets. Two children favoured visiting a nearby store for “treats”, another spoke of enjoying the access of his school allowing him to ride his bike to and from, while yet another child relished a favourite spot in which she was able to experience the beauty of nature (“a baseball field by the park...when [I’m] watching the sun go down”).

Unpleasant Neighbourhood Locations. Several of the children mentioned unpleasant neighbourhood locations that they tended to avoid over concern for their personal safety. Two of the children described neighbourhood structures or sites where older children and teenagers congregated. These included “the skate park” within one

neighbourhood, the junior high school within another, and a public housing complex within a third. For one child, the lack of upkeep of a local open area and the harsh disapproval of nearby residents served as a major deterrence to playing in that neighbourhood area:

This is a place that we really, really don't like to play...there's nails down there. We don't like to play here, there's compost down there and it stinks...there's someone old that lives there and the woman isn't nice and the old man always kicks us off.

Changing Neighbourhoods

Changed Environments/Changing Neighbourhoods. Many of the children photographed 'changes' which were taking place within their neighbourhoods, including construction work and structural changes to their streets and areas close to their homes. One child described how his neighbourhood was expanding and growing:

Before, we used to have a four-way stop going to my school and we used to sit there for, like, a half-hour, 'cause everybody was leaving to go to work and school... dropping kids off at school. Now, there's a light there, where there used to be a four way.

Another child mentioned the construction area at the end of her street where "new houses" were being built. These changes seemed as annoyances to the children, in terms of their noise and proximity to their homes. One child took a picture of the house where his friend used to live before moving away, saying, "she use to live there and that's [name] house now".

Desired Neighbourhood Changes. All of the children in the sample had ideas or suggestions for how they would change their neighbourhoods if they had the power to do so. These changes included both structural changes, such as the building of new playgrounds, “more playgrounds and take down the old ones and replace them with the new ones because sometimes in a couple of years they may break”, as well as social changes, such as how citizens are treated within their neighbourhoods, “everyone should be treated fairly and help the homeless people and make like shelters and stuff”. Children also mentioned litter and garbage as undesirable elements and needing improvement, as well as “smoking near kids...and people drinking on different streets”. Children expressed a desire to have more children within their neighbourhoods which would allow them more peers to play with. Traffic and cars were mentioned by two participants as an impediment to their daily playing and activities, with one child stating that, “I would change the street that I’m on, and like change it to a dead end street, so I could play road hockey”.

Neighbourhood Destinations

Neighbourhood Outings/Shopping Destinations. Several participants took photographs of commercial establishments within their neighbourhoods, including fast food restaurants, convenience stores, and gas stations, which they visit on a regular basis. Children spoke positively of these experiences as they involved time with parents and siblings, and the occasional treat or meal away from home:

This is a place we love to go...that's my mom and brother racing home...we bought a pool to bath the dog and that's my sister and me...the people there...they know us very well

We came here for our birthday stuff, invitations and stuff we always go there and we buy lots of candy
We were going to McDonalds...with my mom and my uncle...we love it there

Playmate Proximity

Proximity of Friends/Playmates. Many of the children took photographs of their friends' houses and, within discussion, each child conveyed they enjoyed relatively close access to playmates and friends in their local neighbourhoods. Children appeared proud and pleased to identify their friends' homes and proximity, one child speaking of a distinctive summoning noise made by a friend in order to gather himself and other friends together, "She has a call, like a howl and we come over there and talk to her and then she comes out to talk". Additional statements by children included,

My friend's house is just over there...

My friend lives kinda close to me...

She lives just one door away...

Composition of Neighbourhood Friends/Playmates. Only one child commented on the composition of the friends he regularly played with, stating that "they're mostly all girls, only two boys". Another child commented on the behaviour of a new child to the neighbourhood when describing her picture of a house, empathetically stating, "She lives just over there right next to him. She's really nice and stuff, but sometimes she just

tries [with limited success] to have some friends. Sometimes she takes away from people, but she's nice... she's just trying to find a friend".

NEIGHBOURHOOD ACTIVITIES

Exploring Nature

Playing with Nature/Natural Materials. The natural and 'wild' spaces existing in many of the children's neighbourhoods were cited as preferred places for play, as well as the source of many of their play materials/structures and activities, including trees, twigs and branches, nearby lakes, and rocks. In explaining his photograph of a wooded area, one child commented, "These are the twigs...we make all kinds of designs and we actually made a frog and a spider and a welcome one" [clubhouse sign constructed of natural materials]. Another child took many photographs of the lakes across the street from his home and explained that he and his friends go there to "build a dam".

Discovering Nature. One participant commented on his picture depicting a wooded area, drawing particular attention to "...fungus there. We let it dry out... fungus grows all around it". Another picture depicted a pile of fallen branches which the same child described as their, "clubhouse... we normally go in there and when you walk in it's not windy". Two children also described how they and their friends had built a "teeter-totter" in the woods out of fallen branches. Unfortunately, it had since "disappeared". They also commented on all of the "different kinds of worms in there", referring to the forest behind their house.

Play Activities

Neighbourhood Play Activities. Children mentioned a variety of activities which they engage in within their neighbourhoods, with one child listing, “we go sledding down there, we do skip tag and we draw chalk, we like playing on the swings, and we like playing tag and flashlight tag”. Another child enthusiastically described, “I climb trees! We pretend that we’re wolves...we play Survivor. We made a pretend fireplace and crushed rocks to look like ashes”. Common activities to interviewed children included roller-blading, hiking and fishing, playing ball, baseball, football, soccer, and flying kites. A few of the children mentioned the weather as an impediment to such outdoor play, noting that the summer provided more things that they could do and more opportunities to play outside.

Neighbourhood Animals/Wildlife. Several children mentioned animals in their neighbourhoods, with one child excitedly pointing to his photograph of what at first glance appeared to be solely a car parked in a driveway, “there’s three cats under that car, see their eyes?” Another child mentioned that her friend, “has fishies...she had two chickens and two cats and three fishes, and a couple more chickens and a bunny and a dog”. Another child spoke of her next door neighbour’s dog at some length, describing how she has a fear of “all dogs” except for her neighbours’, whom she perceives as kind and well-motivated: “she’s a good dog and she doesn’t go after people unless she has to, like to defend herself and everything”.

Personal Space

Desire for Privacy. Two children raised issues of personal space and a desire for increased privacy, with one child referring to the encroachment of new housing in his neighbourhood, “We’re all crammed in, like everybody is packed into one, like small [space]. All of the houses are really close together...I don’t like that because it’s like packed into one now”. Another child spoke of the freedom that he and his friends both sought and relished away from the watchful attention of their parents or other adults in more structured play experiences. In pointing to his photograph of a favourite hiding site, he remarked, “There’s a fence here, it’s all rusted and me and my friends wanted a secret [place] there. No-one really watches the kids here, like watches them play”.

NEIGHBOURHOOD SAFETY

Neighbourhood Safety Concerns

Sources of play discomfort and play restriction. A variety of safety concerns, both their own and their parents were identified by children with regard to their everyday comfort, security and play access in their communities. These included fears of older children and teenagers, traffic and cars, and specific neighbourhood locations, including, a wooded area close to one participant’s home, a pond in a neighbour’s backyard, and a local skate-boarding park for another. In this context several children cited restrictions

that their parents had placed on their play locations and activity, as well as their own personal concerns:

I don't really like the high school people because sometimes they are mean to the kids. That's the school where the junior high students go and it's kinda scary there because sometimes they beat up people and sometimes the police come

This is a place where I don't like to play. Those teenagers or kids ...they were fighting

The woods is right in our backyard but we're just not allowed in it because we could get hurt because there's a lot of glass in there now

We're not allowed in there, it's kind of deep [backyard pond]

We don't usually play on this street because there's cars coming

Well, teenagers go there [skate park] a lot and they like do drugs, I guess, from what I heard from my friends

People swarm you up on our road, they like huddle in a group of five

Sources of Comfort and Safety. Children also noted many sources of comfort and safety within their neighbourhoods. For most, their primary sources were their parents, families, and homes, "My mom", "My parents", "I have a nice house that will keep me safe and there's lots of people around". Children additionally mentioned a sense of personal safety based on their sense of their communities' law abiding and socially respectful members, "There's no people being mean to you", "...no robberies, no trouble with the law, we can bike and we don't have to be afraid, there's no wild animals, no teenagers come here". One child cited her next-door neighbour's dog as a source of felt

safety, while another child spoke of a forested area in which he found solace and comfort.

Desire for Stasis. All participants described features of their neighbourhoods which they would like to remain constant and intact. For all participants, the primary feature of their lives they would seek to continue unchanged, were their homes and families. One child characterized these important individuals as, "...the people that keep you safe". Children also identified the close proximity of their friends as a highly desirable feature of their neighbourhoods and one they would not wish to see altered.

Adult Roles

Significant/Important Neighbourhood Members. Children generally cited parents and family members as the most important figures within their daily lives and within their neighbourhood experiences. Two children took photographs of the staff at their local Dollar Store which they visited on a regular basis:

That's the other girl who works in the Dollar Store. They're the two people we know the best [and] they're smiling. We asked her where something was one day and she explained and she showed us. We always talk to her when we get there...she came out and helped us with what to do.

Neighbourhood Adult Roles and Behaviours. Several of the children commented on adult roles and occupations when describing their photographs. Related to an image of a front lawn and garden, one child identified her friends' mother as a "gardener". With

regard to a picture of a backyard shed with a sign on the door reading, “clubhouse”, another child stated, “her dad installed it, he’s like a carpenter”. A third child explained his picture of a field, by saying, “my friend’s dad plays basketball at this place...he helped me take this picture”, while a fourth child described the significance of her photograph of people walking across a parking lot in terms of the appeal for her of seeing parents and children spending enjoyable time and activity with one another, “what I like about this picture is like father and son are having time together...and the daughter and the father, too”. Finally, a child shared how she felt people should behave toward each other in her neighbourhood, “everyone should be treated fairly and help the homeless people and make shelters and stuff...being nice to people and sharing stuff with them”.

NEIGHBOURHOOD MOBILITY

Neighbourhood Transit and Mobility

Modes of Mobility. Most participants described their primary mode of daily mobility as walking (“I walk with my friends and my sister”), while other common modes and activities included riding their bicycles, roller- blading, and going for drives with their parents (e.g., to such sports games and practices as lacrosse and hockey). Some of the children relied on public transportation for community mobility and going to and from school. One child took photographs of the van at the Mi’kmaq Child Development Centre which they accessed for transportation to the centre once a week.

Mobility Safety Concerns. Children cited busy streets as impediments to their movement through their neighbourhoods, mentioning that they avoided certain streets due to the heavy traffic. One child who lives at the top of a hill expressed such concern related to riding his bicycle, “that big hill, when we try to stop on it, we could fall or if a car comes or something”.

Summary

In summary, children were able to describe and explain their outdoor living environments easily and provided great detail and intimate knowledge of their outdoor surroundings. Children recounted the play and recreational activities which they engaged in within their neighbourhoods and expressed their understandings and awareness of issues related to their personal safety. Children also commented on the ways in which they move throughout their neighbourhoods, both individually and with family and friends. Children spoke of their neighbourhoods and their experiences within them in great detail and were able to describe at length the geographic layout of their neighbourhoods and their own place within this layout.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion and Implications

The findings of this research provide a valuable addition to the existing, yet limited, research and knowledge regarding Aboriginal children's perceptions of their urban neighbourhoods. The children in this study voiced perspectives and feelings related to their personal experiences within their neighbourhoods throughout the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). Through the use of personal cameras, children were given the freedom to photograph and document their neighbourhoods from their own points of reference and perspective. Within the research interviews, participants shared their images with openness, thought, and enthusiasm, as they considered the spaces and places where they play and spend time within their neighbourhoods. The Discussion and Implications chapter is organized by the study's overall *Research Questions*.

Research Question 1.

What types of contemporary urban environments and communities do Aboriginal children live within?

Lobo & Peters (2001) state that research has been 'limited related to urban Native topics', while Frideres & Gadacz (2001) note that 'the effects of urbanization on Aboriginal Canadians has not been adequately studied', and Deane (2006) concurs further that 'very little has been written about urban Aboriginals'. These same authors report that even less has been written about the experiences and perspectives of

Aboriginal children living within Canadian cities. As a whole, the Canadian Aboriginal population, consisting of many native groups and 'nations', has attracted narrow and usually negative attention, leading to what Lobo & Peters (2001) characterize as an 'invisible' population within the larger landscape of urban Canadian centres.

Churchman (2003) refers to the residential neighbourhood as an important context for understanding child development. In this regard, the residential neighbourhoods of these children, and their opportunities for play within them, were explored to seek insight into their daily living experiences. Overall, it was found that the children from this sample are all living within suburban-residential neighbourhoods throughout the HRM. All of the children live a fair distance from the north end of Halifax, where the Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre is located, and where they meet as a group with their Aboriginal community. The neighbourhoods of these children vary in size, distance from the city centre and in their socio-economic composition. Through analysis, it became clear that the immediate neighbourhood is the major site of outdoor activity for these children, primarily consisting of the children's front and backyards, the streets on which they live and streets adjacent to their homes, and the homes of friends, most of whom live in close proximity. Some children mentioned peaceful and private wooded areas and fields within their neighbourhoods, as well as busy streets with heightened traffic and noise levels. There was limited mention of buildings, parks or playgrounds, with the exception of parking lots of commercial complexes as a place to meet, hang out, or accompany their parents on neighbourhood errands.

Rasmussen (2004), states that 'in suburban residential neighbourhoods, individual yards become key areas for children' (p. 64), and such was the case for children within this sample, with the exception of one participant, who resides in an apartment complex. Within this context, outdoor residential yards play a key role within children's daily lives, by providing easily accessible and safe play areas for themselves and their playmates. While home yards may not be available to all children, it would seem that children in the sample greatly valued these settings as places for fun play activity, perhaps one factor accounting for the indication of less time spent at local, public playgrounds.

Burke (2005) contends that the nature and availability of open spaces for play are largely shaped by the geography of children's neighbourhoods, primarily within their front and back yards attached to their homes. Open spaces photographed by the children included fields, school yards, driveways, and streets. The photographs also included many informal, 'natural' areas such as trees, bushes, and grassy areas. Further, Rasmussen (2004) refers to the concept of 'children's places' when discussing children's opportunities for outdoor play, exploration and activities. These settings refer to 'places that children relate to, point out and talk about, a place referring to a special, delimited setting, a space with specific meaning and attributes' (p.165). In this regard, children in the sample documented (through photographs) and spoke of their 'special' neighbourhood places, including backyard clubhouses, private areas within the woods where friends gather to play, secret meeting places at a local shopping complex, as well as various trees located throughout their neighbourhoods. The children's identification

of these locales within their communities speaks to the importance they hold for the participants in terms of their need for occasional peacefulness (woods), areas for exploration and discovery, and privacy away from the watchful eyes of parents or other adults.

Research Question 2.

How do urban Aboriginal children describe or depict their daily living environments in terms of their daily living activities?

Burke (2005) and Rasmussen (2004) suggest that photographs taken by children may reveal little to the adult-eye, however, the image becomes transformed through conversations with the child. For example, certain children's photographs of spaces featuring trees and 'natural' areas, while appearing relatively non-descript to the researcher, were highly important to the individual children and contained for them vital references and meanings. These photographs demonstrated rich examples of imaginative play, in the children's utilization of natural materials as shelters and meeting places. What to the eye of the researcher were, at times, merely collections of fallen tree branches, twigs and sticks, were, to the children involved, their 'clubhouses', signs, and configurations of secrets messages for playmates. In this regard, it is worth considering, as do Karsten (2005) and Blinkert (2004), the significance, and organization, of such settings and materials to the children, themselves, avoiding placing value on these from an adult-centric view.

As the children cited a wide variety of daily activities, including accompanying their parents on local errands and outings, playing in home yards, local fields and woods, and involvement in organized sports, it is worth noting that *all* children did not participate in *all* activities, owing perhaps to differences in ages, interests, or other socio-economic factors. Notwithstanding, children seemed to be generally active when provided with space and encouragement to be so from parents or playmates. They also seemed to be genuinely excited to talk of their play and other community activities, indicating their need to be outside and among others.

Burke (2005) states that meeting and talking with friends outside of the formal landscape of the school or home is important for children's play and development of their sense of identity. Spaces that are significant in this respect contain important objects, either material or natural, which are known as 'gathering points'. This was found through discussions with children in the sample who used their photographs of trees, driveways, and wooded areas to convey the meaning these held for them and other neighbourhood children as valued meeting places to gather, talk, and think.

Research Question 3.

What particular meanings, significance, or needs do urban Aboriginal children associate with their daily living environments?

Silver et al. (2006) suggest that many urban Aboriginal people residing within Canadian cities do not feel a sense of belonging in their neighbourhoods. Newhouse & Peters (2001) further state that Aboriginal peoples often form a small proportion of the

population in any given neighbourhood, thus making social connection and cultural ties difficult within the larger urban context. However, the experiences expressed by the children in this sample, suggest that they *do* feel a sense of belonging or attachment to where they live, as they each documented and verbally shared positive experiences within their neighbourhoods. While some children did cite certain concerns (their parents'/caregivers' and their own) related to matters of personal comfort and safety, overall, children appeared happy and content with regard to their neighbourhood environments and their opportunities for play. All participants expressed an understanding of the immediate geography of their neighbourhood and explained in detail where people lived, how they (the children and their families) navigated through their neighbourhoods and changes which had occurred or were currently taking place within their neighbourhoods. The accepting and untarnished perspectives of the children in this study toward their neighbourhood environments may reflect, among other factors, the positive quality of their relationships with their parents and families, and the relative stability and security these children expressed feeling within their lives and community involvements.

In identifying what was significant or personally *meaningful* to them with regard to their neighbourhoods (that is, what they 'liked' or 'disliked'), children commonly expressed that having nearby friends to play with was most important to them and each wished for additional children to play with. In this regard, Karsten (2005) notes that modern childhood is becoming characterized by a decreased amount of space to play outdoors and a decreasing number of children available for play within neighbourhood

communities. This trend seemed to be represented in the experiences of the interviewed children, as the majority of their outdoor activity time was spent in conveniently located yards and play spaces conducive to easy access and parental supervision. In this context, playing close to home and with a relatively small group of other children perhaps influenced perceptions by some that there were not 'enough' children to play with in their neighbourhoods.

Letkemann (2004), Deane (2006), and Silver et al., (2006) each emphasize the importance of direct contact between members of the Aboriginal community within urban centres to the development of strong cultural connection and identity. In this regard, Lobo & Peters (2001) express concern related to the limited opportunities available for socialization among Aboriginal peoples within Canadian cities, with the noted exception of Friendship Centres acting as sites for social support, cultural representation, and activity within Aboriginal communities. Within this study, children's homes tended to be located in areas where the vast majority of residents were/are non-Aboriginal, thereby limiting children's contact with other Native children to their weekly visits to the Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre. Accordingly, children's photographs and comments contained little reference or depiction of Native-related content, with the exception of several pictures of the Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre. These photographs and discussions attest to the importance of the Centre to these children, as a source of enjoyment and connection with other Native children (some children spoke of having come to the centre since they were infants), as well as providing culturally relevant programming. A need stemming from the findings

of this research involves, enhancing, where possible, opportunities for additional Native contact, as well as, providing opportunities for the formation of cultural identity within neighbourhoods and communities through out the HRM. It can be observed that neighbourhoods throughout the HRM do not provide for any recognition or inclusion of Aboriginal cultures within either the social or built landscape.

Research Question 4.

How do urban Aboriginal children describe their desired or ideal daily living environments?

Children provided various ideas and suggestions when describing their ideal neighbourhoods, primarily, the changes they would like to observe which would benefit themselves directly. Of most significance, were children's frustrations with traffic, noting that cars impacted their opportunities for play, their independent mobility, and their feelings of personal safety. Blinkert (2004) suggests that the quality of neighbourhoods for children can be linked to traffic concerns, suggesting a system of traffic regulations to favour pedestrians, indirectly allowing children increased opportunities for play within their neighbourhoods. As discussed in the Results Chapter, children conveyed their awareness and understanding of the negative impact of traffic and cars on both their play experiences and personal safety. In this regard, two of the children expressed a desire to live on dead-end streets, where the volume of cars would be limited. Children clearly had concerns related to the deleterious effects of traffic congestion and noise, while speaking more positively and enthusiastically about

the fun and adventures in quieter, more secluded and natural areas. The need for regular access to such play spaces is evident.

Although children in the sample did not document public playgrounds in their photographs, many suggested their desire to have more playgrounds available to them within their neighbourhoods. Through discussions, it was found that children did not spend a large amount of time playing at playgrounds, but that they were aware of the playgrounds within close proximity to their homes. Churchman (2003) states that the environmental characteristics important for outdoor play are largely found in the streets of neighbourhoods, as opposed to local, public playgrounds. Further, characteristics such as those mentioned by the children in this study, namely open spaces, natural materials, opportunities for exploration and privacy, cannot be found in the 'guise of playgrounds' (p. 108) that Churchman refers to as all too common solutions for children's play areas provided by adults. Research by both Blinkert (2004) and Rasmussen (2004) indicated that children often prefer the 'messiness' and 'disorder' of natural outdoor landscapes, thus questioning the design and function of modern public playgrounds, with their well-defined spaces, permanent, fixed structures, and static unnatural ground coverings. In this regard, findings of this study serve as confirmatory of earlier research and underline children's need and desire for less ordered, cultivated, and restrictive play settings within their neighbourhoods and communities. Given the children's enjoyment of such 'natural' play areas and their experience and 'knowledge' of these preferred settings, it would seem that children have much to offer adult discussions of urban land designation, design, and development, in order that due

consideration is given to the retention of such natural areas as valued and safe sources for exploration and play activities.

Research Question 5.

What overall similarities and differences exist in the perceptions of urban Aboriginal children regarding their neighbourhoods and outdoor experiences?

Similarities. Principle similarities among the children interviewed related to the shared importance their natural outdoor neighbourhood environments held for them (lakes, woods and trees were commonly depicted in children's photographs), their need to feel safe and protected in their communities (particularly with regard to fears of certain older children or adolescents), and their need and desire for accessible playmates. These similarities reflect research on children's development, as well as on the intrinsic nature and value of play to development (Huizinga, 1955), which has long identified children's basic need for security and protection (Maslow, 1998, as cited in Prince & Howard, 2002), a sense of love and acceptance, opportunity for positive social interaction with peers, and for spontaneous play and physical activity in their daily lives (Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). Such considerations are vital for parents and others invested in promoting and supporting the healthy growth and development of children through their provision of the conditions for the above needs to be effectively addressed.

Differences. Differences in children's perceptions of their outdoor neighbourhood environments primarily reflected the various ages of children within the study. Younger children tended to refer to the enjoyment and fun they experienced playing with friends and spending time in their respective backyards. The older children in the sample, however, seemed more prone to convey concern regarding changes occurring within their neighbourhoods. This difference may well reflect the younger children's relative sense of abandon and unawareness of larger, outside activities, as well as feelings of being protected and insulated by their parents, while the older children may possibly have developed broader knowledge of outside events and changing realities in their neighbourhoods, through, as Churchman (2003) describes, 'experiencing their neighbourhoods first hand' (p.103). This study speaks to the importance of including children in discussions regarding neighbourhood and community developments in a responsive and age appropriate manner, as such changes may ignite curiosity, unsettled feelings, and even fears of the novel or unknown in their experience. Whether wondering about and questioning the moving away of a close playmate or observing neighbourhood construction developments, children, need opportunities to discuss their awareness of changing features in their neighbourhood experiences with caring and informed others.

The children in this study have demonstrated their keen awareness and interest in their outdoor neighbourhood environments and have documented their opportunities for play within them. Overall, children appeared largely positive about where they live, their outdoor experiences there and the friends that they have to play with. This has

confirmed the literature (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Christensen & O'Brien, 2003; Matthews, 2003; deConinck-Smith & Gutman, 2004; Elsley, 2004; Burke, 2005) in terms of illustrating the importance that children place on matters related to their sense of safety, the availability of playmates, the direct access that they have to their neighbourhoods, as well as their developing awareness regarding their changing neighbourhoods. This further speaks to the importance of acknowledging the importance of play within child development, and the necessity of developing and providing child-friendly places and spaces conducive to children's developing needs within the larger landscape of our cities and environments.

The following recommendations are suggested for future research, for families and parents, for child and youth care programs and providers, for governments, and for community planners and developers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Future Research:

- The methodology of this study could be employed to study groups of urban Aboriginal children residing within larger urban centres across Canada, most notably those with higher populations of Aboriginal peoples than the municipality in which this research was conducted.
- Older groups of children or youth could also be engaged through this form of research in order to better understand issues related to Aboriginal identity, cultural heritage, and the lived experiences of these children and adolescents within their neighbourhoods and urban communities.
- Future research may benefit from a mixed-resources approach, utilizing, in addition to children's photographic depictions of their urban environments, such materials as area maps and historical pictures of local settings, technologies as video cameras and audio tape recorders, and accompanied walking tours of their neighbourhoods. These and other creative forms of data collection, such as visioning exercises and group brainstorming sessions, expand the versatility of the research study, by providing valuable sources of expanded data through approaches that engage the interests and involvement of children.
- Future research may also seek to include the perspectives of children's parents/caregivers, in order to gain greater understanding of the types of housing they are living in, parents' feelings and experiences of living in

the city, what contact parents maintain with their reserves, reasons for living in the city, how long children spend outdoors, and the degree of supervision they receive.

Parents & Families:

- Aboriginal parents and families are encouraged to continue to provide their children with culturally-related information and opportunities for cultural connection and social interaction, in order to promote the development of strong cultural identities and sense of community with others, within their daily cultural and urban contexts
- Parents are encouraged to acquaint themselves, and, as appropriate, to introduce their children to a variety of conventional (e.g., parks, open fields) and less conventional (e.g., spaces between buildings, undeveloped areas) neighbourhood outdoor settings that could serve as potential sources of expanded play, exploration, and leisure activities for their children. In this regard, less conventional and more adventure-based sources of play may yield unforeseen opportunities for the development of critical thinking skills (problem-solving and strategizing), within the context of novel settings and discovery-based experiences.
- Parents are encouraged to be attuned to their children's neighbourhood experiences, in order to provide understanding, comfort, and security, in times of neighbourhood change and transition. While parents often ask

their children how their day at school or another single setting was, they are less likely to inquire about their children's perceptions of everyday events and occurrences in the larger community. Through inviting and sharing impressions and perspectives on changes in their children's neighbourhoods, parents are able to model community awareness and interest, thus being responsive to their children's community experiences, while also promoting in their children a sense of community connection.

Child & Youth Care Programs and Providers:

- That pre and post-service educational programs provide curriculum and resources (derived, where possible, from Native sources) that enhances professional awareness, knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal history, customs, traditions, and contemporary experiences. Particularly, providers of care and support to Aboriginal children would benefit from guidance on appropriate practice with Native peoples offered by members of local Aboriginal groups.
- Child and Youth Care preparation programs are also encouraged to explore opportunities for partnership with Native communities, with the view of developing post-secondary educational training programs for Native early childhood educators. Such programs would incorporate Native philosophies (ways of knowing) and practices applied to self-identified Native needs and cultural contexts.

Governments:

- The government of the Halifax Regional Municipality should strongly consider supporting the development and placement of Native-related representations, cultural objects, and Native-created productions within the community in order to recognize the heritage and contemporary place of Aboriginal peoples within Canadian society. Such respectful situating and highlighting of Native culture within the general community, would serve not only as a source of pride among Aboriginal peoples (with positive influence upon the developing identities of Aboriginal children and youth), but as a source of information and cultural awareness within the larger population. Possible initiatives might include the creation of a Native monument within the city, a Native Arts, Culture, and Heritage Centre, and the organization of local cultural gatherings and events for all to participate within and enjoy.
- The provincial government might well utilize its capacity in this regard, on the model of other provinces and territories (e.g., British Columbia, Alberta, Nunavut) to partner with its provincial capital region and other urban centres throughout the province to recognize and feature Native peoples in the history and contemporary life of Nova Scotia.

Community Planners and Developers:

- As community visioning exercises and municipal planning workshops have direct implication for the urban environments in which children live and grow, that opportunities be developed for the participation and input of HRM's youngest citizens.

LIMITATIONS

- The current study was limited by the lack of a substantial pool of Aboriginal families and children from which to draw its sample. Within Nova Scotia, there does not exist a particular urban concentration of Aboriginal peoples (Nova Scotia; 24,175 [2%] of the population). As the present research utilized the perspectives of a relatively small group of children, living within several urban/suburban locations, the sample may not be representative of Aboriginal children living in closer proximity to one another in larger urban centres. The finding of this study should, therefore, not be generalized.
- The relatively young ages of the children in this sample precluded discussion of possible deeper themes worthy of consideration, involving issues and matters of personal identity, cultural affiliation, and lived experience (including societal attitude and behaviour toward Aboriginal peoples).
- Finally, for convenience, children were generally interviewed on a particular meeting night at the Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre, and time restrictions on their availability resulted in highly useful, yet somewhat curtailed discussions.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Letter of Information to the Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre

Letter of Information to Parent/Guardian

Letter of Information to Children (Participants)

Dear Yolanda Pennell and Lee Merrigan-Thomas,

I am proposing to conduct a supervised research study entitled, “**Aboriginal Children’s Perspectives of their Urban Living Environments**”. This proposed research is part of the requirements for my Master of Child and Youth Study Degree at Mount Saint Vincent University.

The purpose of this research is to provide urban Aboriginal children with the opportunity to discuss their urban communities and neighbourhoods within the HRM. It is hoped that this research will serve as a beneficial contribution to the current research concerned with the experiences of urban Aboriginal children and youth within Canadian cities.

I am proposing to recruit approximately eight to ten Aboriginal children between the ages of eight to twelve who are currently attending programs at either the Micmac Native Friendship Centre and/or the Mi’kmaq Child Development Centre. With your approval, I am asking to speak to parents at a weekly Parent Support Group at the MCDC where I will explain the research study and provide a Letter of Invitation to participate. Upon agreeing to participate in the study, a Consent Form will be signed by the child and their parent and/or guardian.

For my research study I will be supplying each child with a disposable camera and asking that they take outdoor photographs of their communities and neighbourhoods over the course of one week. Once I have the photographs developed I will have a one-on-one interview with each child which should last approximately forty five minutes. During this time I will ask the children about their pictures and they will have the opportunity to explain their neighbourhoods and communities to me.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me, Jillian Farris, at 835-6322 (email: jillianfarris@gmail.com), or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Michael Fitzgerald, at 457-6382 (email: michael.fitzgerald@msvu.ca). This research has met the ethical standards of the University Research Ethics Board at Mount Saint Vincent University. If you have any questions or concerns about this study and wish to speak to someone who is not directly involved with this study, please contact Dr. Elizabeth bowering, Acting Chair of the University Research Ethics Board, at 457-6536 (email: elizabeth.bowering@msvu.ca).

I appreciate and look forward to your support for my research and thank you for your time.

We’lalin,

Jillian Farris
Graduate Student

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Jillian Farris and I am a graduate student in the Child and Youth Studies program at Mount Saint Vincent University. I would like to do a research study with urban Aboriginal children who are currently attending programs at the Micmac Native Friendship Centre or the Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre. This research study is the final requirement for my degree of Master of Child and Youth Study.

The purpose of this research is to provide urban Aboriginal children with the opportunity to discuss their neighbourhoods, communities and outdoor daily living experiences within the Halifax Regional Municipality. It is hoped that this research will serve as a positive contribution to current research which is concerned with the experiences of urban Aboriginal children and youth living in cities across Canada.

I would appreciate hearing your child's perspectives about this topic. For my research study I will give each child a disposable camera and ask that they take pictures outdoors of their communities and neighbourhoods. Once I have the pictures developed I will meet one-on-one with each child to conduct an interview with them for approximately forty five minutes. During this time they will have the opportunity to explain their communities and neighbourhoods to me with the use of their own photographs. Your child's participation is voluntary and they may withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. In addition, confidentiality will be ensured and the research materials (audio-tapes of the interviews) will be safely stored and eventually disposed of at the end of the study.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me, Jillian Farris, at 835-6322 (email: jillianfarris@gmail.com) or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Michael Fitzgerald, at 457-6382 (michael.fitzgerald@msvu.ca). This research has met the ethical standards of the University Research Ethics Board at Mount Saint Vincent University. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, and wish to speak with someone outside of the study itself, please contact Dr. Elizabeth Bowering, Acting Chair of the University Research Ethics Board, at 457-6535 (email: elizabeth.bowering@msvu.ca).

Thank you for your time and I look forward to the possibility of your child's participation in this research.

We'lalin,

Jillian Farris

Hi,

My name is Jillian Farris and I am doing a research study for my university degree. I am looking for Aboriginal kids between the ages of 8 to 12 to talk to about the outdoor places that they spend time in and play in their neighbourhoods and communities.

I would like to know about the parks, playgrounds, buildings, streets, and other important things to you in your neighbourhood, as well as the places that you like to play and don't like to play. I will give you a camera to use for one week to take pictures of these places.

I would really like to hear what you have to say about this. You can ask your parents if you can take part in my project. After I get your pictures developed I will have an interview with you at the Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre so that I can ask you some questions about your pictures.

I look forward to hearing what you have to say.

We'lalin

Jillian Farris

Appendix B

Letter of Informed Consent for Interview (Parent/Guardian)

Letter of Informed Consent for Interview (Participants)

Letter of Informed Consent for Audiotape (Parent/Guardian)

Letter of Informed Consent for Audiotape (Participants)

I, _____, agree to permit my child,
[please print]

_____, to be a participant in the study
[please print]

entitled, "Aboriginal Children's Perceptions of their Urban Living Environments". The research purpose and process has been explained to me by the student researcher, Jillian Farris. I understand that my child will be taking pictures of their neighbourhood and community and that the researcher and my child will discuss these photos in an individual, one-on-one interview to be held at the Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre.

I agree to allow my child to be interviewed by Jillian Farris. I understand that this interview will be approximately forty five minutes long and will be tape-recorded. It has been explained to me that my child's photos will be seen only by the researcher, her thesis supervisor and my child. I understand that arrangements can be made with Jillian Farris if I wish to view my child's photos.

I understand that my child's participation in this study is voluntary and she/he does not have to answer questions that she/he do not want to, she/he is able to stop the interview entirely, and/or withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. I understand that should my child decide to withdraw from the study, all information they have supplied up until that point will be immediately destroyed. I understand that there is minimal risk associated with participation in this study and that there is not any foreseeable harm associated with participation in the study. I understand that my child's confidentiality will be maintained by confidential coding assigned to protect my child's identity. I have been told of the proper storage and eventual disposal of the research materials.

I understand that by signing below I have read the information provided above and agree to my child's participation in this research study.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact, Jillian Farris, at 835-6322 (email: jillianfarris@gmail.com) or the thesis supervisor, Dr. Michael Fitzgerald, at 457-6382 (email: michael.fitzgerald@msvu.ca). This research has met the ethical standards of the University Research Ethics Board at Mount Saint Vincent University. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, and wish to speak with someone outside of the study itself, please contact Dr. Elizabeth Bowering, Acting Chair of the University Research Ethics Board, at 457-6535 (email: elizabeth.bowering@msvu.ca).

Parent/Guardian

[please print]

Signature

Researcher

Date

I, _____, agree to take part in the
[please print your name]

study, "Aboriginal Children's Perceptions of their Urban Living Environments". I understand that the student researcher, Jillian Farris, want to learn about my experiences in my neighbourhood and community.

I understand that I will have a one-on-one interview with Jillian Farris at the Mi'kmaq Child Development Centre which will last about 45 minutes long and will be tape-recorded. I understand that I will be given a disposable camera to take outdoor pictures of my neighbourhood and community and that these pictures will be used during my interview.

I understand that doing this research project is my choice and that I do not have to answer questions that I do not want to, that I can stop the interview at any time, and/or end the project at any time without any consequences. I understand that if I choose to leave the research project that all of my information that I have given will be destroyed immediately.

I understand that only myself, Jillian Farris, and her supervisor will hear the tape recording of my interview and see the pictures that I have taken. I understand that my parents can contact Jillian Farris to see my pictures if they want to. I understand that Jillian Farris will keep all of my information safe until the project is over. I understand that after the project is over, all of my information from the interview and my pictures will be destroyed.

I understand that my parent and/or guardian has information to contact Jillian Farris if I have any questions.

Participant _____
[please print your first and last name]

Researcher _____

Date _____

I, _____, agree to permit
[please print]

my child, _____, to be
[please print]

audio-tape during their **individual interview** with the student researcher, Jillian Farris.

I understand that a confidential coding system will be used to ensure my child's protection and that all tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet at the home of the researcher until they have been fully transcribed and the research is complete.

I understand that within three months of the internal publication of this study, the audio tapes and all research materials will be put into a MSVU documents bin for disposal and destruction.

Parent/Guardian _____
[please print]

Signature _____

Researcher _____

Date _____

If you have any questions about this study, please contact, Jillian Farris, at 835-6322 (email: jillianfarris@gmail.com) or the thesis supervisor, Dr. Michael Fitzgerald, at 457-6382 (email: michael.fitzgerald@msvu.ca). This research has met the ethical standards of the University Research Ethics Board at Mount Saint Vincent University. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, and wish to speak with someone outside of the study itself, please contact Dr. Elizabeth Bowering, Acting Chair of the University Research Ethics Board, at 457-6535 (email: elizabeth.bowering@msvu.ca).

I, _____, agree to
[please print your name]

my interview with Jillian Farris being tape-recorded.

I understand that the tape of my interview will be kept safe and that no-one will be allowed to hear it except for Jillian Farris and her supervisor.

I understand that when the research project is finished the tape of my interview will be disposed of safely and destroyed.

Participant _____
[please print your first and last name]

Researcher _____

Date _____

Appendix C
Sample Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about the outdoor places that you walk, bike, and play in during the daytime hours in your neighbourhood.
2. Please tell me about as many of things that you can think of that you see in your neighbourhood during the day [buildings, parks, streets, vehicles, signs, trees, lights, people]
 - what types of people? Young, old, community helpers, strangers, friends
 - using photographs, please tell me about
3. What particular places, things, or people really stand out to you in your neighbourhood? Why do you think that is?
4. Please tell me about the ways that you get around in your neighbourhood. Who are you most likely to be with when you are traveling through your neighbourhood?
 - by bike?
 - by bus?
 - on foot?
 - in a car?
5. Please tell me where you most like to walk, to play, or to ride your bike in your neighbourhood.
6. Tell me about any places where you are not likely to go or visit and why that might be.
7. What makes you feel happy, safe and comfortable in your neighbourhood? Are there any things or places that make you feel unhappy, unsafe, or uncomfortable?
8. What do you find most beautiful about your neighbourhood? What do you find the least beautiful about your neighbourhood?
9. What is the most important part of your neighbourhood to you? Why?
10. If you were the Mayor of Halifax, what would be the first thing that you would do to make your neighbourhood a great place for kids to be?
11. Are there any things in your neighbourhood that you would change? Why?
12. What things in your neighbourhood should stay the same? Why?

Appendix D
Demographic Survey

Please answer the following questions:

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

1. Who are you?

Name: _____

Age: _____ years _____ months

I am: ☐ Female ☐ Male

2. Where do you live? [please check one only]

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Halifax | <input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Passage |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dartmouth | <input type="checkbox"/> Sackville |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spryfield | <input type="checkbox"/> Bedford |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cole Harbour | <input type="checkbox"/> Other [please name] _____ |

3. How would you best describe yourself? [please check all that apply]

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mi'kmaq | <input type="checkbox"/> Algonquin |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cree | <input type="checkbox"/> African Canadian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Maliseet | <input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inuit | <input type="checkbox"/> Asian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cherokee | <input type="checkbox"/> Other [please name] _____ |

4. How long have you lived in the Halifax Regional Municipality [HRM]?

_____ years _____ months

5. Are you involved in any teams, sports, or clubs outside of school? [please list them]

FIGURES

Figure 1
Selected Sample of Coding

First Level Code	Second Level Code	Category
natural neighbourhood play locations	Neighbourhood Locations	Neighbourhood Characteristics
neighbourhood play locations		
playground/play structures natural neighbourhood		
neighbourhood play activities		
favourite neighbourhood locations		
unpleasant neighbourhood locations	Neighbourhood Features	
important aspects of neighbourhood		
neighbourhood description		
neighbourhood features		
neighbourhood aesthetics		
changed environments/ changing neighbourhoods	Changing Neighbourhoods	
desired neighbourhood changes		
neighbourhood outings/ shopping destination	Neighbourhood Destinations	
proximity of friends/playmates	Playmate Proximity	
composition of neighbourhood friends/playmates		
gathering with friends/playmates		
empathy of children/playmates		
favourite neighbourhood locations		

Figure 2
Participants Photographs





