

**THE BEGINNING STEPS TO CREATING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING
IN AN ABORIGINAL CHOICE SCHOOL MODEL**

by

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Abstract

Yukon is comprised of intricately connected rural and urban First Nation communities. New educators to Yukon are challenged to develop relationships across cultural borders and establish connections to First Nation communities that benefit the students learning. In this research project, a handbook for educators in Yukon is proposed as a positive support for educators returning and entering Yukon's public school system. The handbook will provide educators with a concise resource of what they would need to know in order to work effectively with First Nations students in an Aboriginal choice public school environment. The four directions of spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical of the Medicine Wheel are used to divide the chapters and focus the concepts of learning into a universally-understood and -accepted indigenous framework.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Tables	iv
List of Figures	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Chapter 1	Introduction, Significance, Background and Overview of the Project
	Significance of the Project
	Background of the Project
	Overview of the Project
Chapter 2	Literature Review - Introduction
	Bringing the First Nation Perspective and DOE Perspective of
	Inclusive Public Education Together
	Change
	A Sense of Belonging
	Traditional First Nation Education
	Summary
Chapter 3	Research Methods – Introduction
	Aboriginal Choice Schools
	Summary
Chapter 4	Handbook – Introduction
	Spiritual
	Emotional
	Mental
	Physical
	Example of a Yukon First Nation Spring Culture Camp
Chapter 5	Reflections
References	
Appendices	
	Appendix A - Definition of terms
	Appendix B - Additional Resources

List of Tables

Table 1.	2010 Yukon Achievement Test Percentages of First Nation Students compared to Non-First Nation Students in Language Arts and Math	7
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List of Figures

Figure 1.	Charleston's (1994) Theoretical Framework	17
Figure 2.	Medicine Wheel model created by Melanie Bennett, in consultation with Yukon First Nation Elders, 2010.	47
Figure 3.	R.P.C. Joseph's RESPECT Model of Communication	54

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Chapter 1

Yukon boasts a vastness and uniqueness that celebrates closely-interconnected communities. Within its geographical area are 14 First Nations that comprise 25.9% of the Yukon population (Yukon Bureau of Statistics Population Report, 2010). The public schools in Yukon are intricately linked to the community and the people they serve. Yukon is rich in resources and has the lowest student-teacher ratio in Canada (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2009).

Furthermore, the Statistics Canada Summary Public School Indicators Report for 2005–2006 shows that Yukon has the lowest student-educator ratio in Canada, with one educator for every eleven students. Based on this report, our calculations show that Yukon also has the lowest five-year average ratio in Canada of 11.7 to one. The average student-educator ratio for Canada over the past five years has been 15.5 to one. (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2009, p. 9)

One would expect with smaller class sizes and more teachers per student, the academic graduation rates of the First Nation students in Yukon would be high. According to the 2009 Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Yukon Legislative Assembly, the graduation rates of Yukon First Nation students are the third lowest across Canada.

For example, data from Statistics Canada shows that for the period ended 2005–06, Yukon had the third lowest five-year average graduation rate in Canada, and the Department's own data indicates there is a large gap in graduation rates between First Nations students and other Yukon students. (Auditor General Report to the Yukon Legislative, 2009, p. 1)

In consideration of the above facts, the Department of Education in Yukon has made cultural inclusion an integral part of its recent strategic plan and has committed to provide cultural inclusion dollars to all schools that are, in part, targeted toward First Nation programming to enhance and provide culturally-inclusive environments for First Nation students

(Yukon Department of Education, 2010; hereinafter, YDE). These Yukon Department of Education monies are targeted for cultural activities within the schools. Cultural activities may include any culture so stipends are not fully designated toward First Nations cultural activities. The spending of the allotted amounts is the decision of the school and is dependent on the focus of the school on a year-by-year basis. In recent years, the concept of First Nation cultural inclusion in Yukon public schools has been a Department of Education-wide focus with little direction and understanding from the administrative personnel responsible for designing the process and delivery of programs. This fact alone warrants a deeper look into the effectiveness of First Nations cultural inclusion within Yukon Public schools.

The current cultural inclusion of First Nations into schools breeds an automatic assumption of an inclusive First Nation culture to the current western model of schools and as a First Nation person I believe the time has come for educators to look at changing the model of education to one that is better suited to meet First Nations students' needs. A model that is relevant to First Nations and a model that would sustain cultural pluralism for both the educators and the students.

This research project consisted of a handbook of teaching protocols and guidelines as the beginning steps for educators entering into an Aboriginal choice model of public school. It is based on the understanding that protocols are the ethical guide of proper interactions, ways of doing, and codes of conduct that respects others' ontology, epistemology, and methodology. The handbook provides educators with a concise resource of information an educator needs to know in order to work effectively with Yukon First Nations students in a public school environment. With the guidance of Yukon First Nation Elders from the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation, Teslin Tlingit Council, and Selkirk First Nation, the project identified which effective First

Nation learning environments can be created within a public school; which values these Yukon First Nations expect for their children; and, what these Yukon First Nations expect their children to be learning in a public school.

Although the Elders providing guidance for the project did not represent all 14 Yukon First Nations, the initial steps in developing the handbook were intended to be a beginning with opportunities for further development. According to Battiste (2008), Indigenous knowledge does not come from just reading text but requires long-term relationships and experiences with Elders, peoples, and places. The handbook provides the educator with the information to work in an Aboriginal choice public school environment and with a starting point to engage in the development of building relationships with the First Nation students and their Indigenous ancestral teachings.

Significance of the Project

The Yukon Department of Education currently publishes two handbooks entitled, *The handbook for Yukon teachers* and *A handbook of Yukon First Nations Education resources for public schools*; each for the use of educators within the Yukon public school system.

The handbook for Yukon teachers (YDE, 2011) is a resource which provides a compilation of programs and services available in the Yukon Department of Education and within this handbook there is a single page entitled, “First Nation teaching essentials and information strategies to help become part of a First Nations community”(p. 31). This page provides 21 points of what a teacher should do in order to build and establish relationships with First Nations. In my opinion, the lack of sociocultural consciousness is evident from the minimal suggestions and the minimalism of the suggestions. As a First Nation person I can read the 21 proposed

strategies and intuitively understand that there has been little or no consultation with the First Nations in writing these points of thought and the lack of respect or deep understanding of our Yukon First Nation culture is evident. The suggestions “get to know the parents, tell parents how you can be reached and tell parents about your teaching style” imply an ontology attempting to inform another how they can be part of the majority’s ideal worldview (YDE, 2011, p. 31). There is no information in the 21 points that indicates the educator should attempt to understand the Aboriginal worldview. This would also lead me to believe that a person with little understanding of Yukon First Nations would not be able to view these points of suggestion with as critical an eye as I.

In my view, the second of the two handbooks, produced by the First Nations Programs and Partnerships Unit, Yukon Department of Education (2011) entitled *The handbook of Yukon First Nations Education resources for public schools* shows a more culturally-sensitive and productive approach. The differences that lie between the handbook and its counterpart are that it provides more details of locality, more resources, and a greater access to Yukon First Nation information within the Yukon Department of Education. This handbook includes information provided by the Yukon Department of Education and inadequately addresses the Aboriginal worldview.

Although each handbook has an important and specific purpose of providing information to educators about programs and services in Yukon public schools, neither of these guides provides an educator with the satisfactory or in-depth means to respond to and respectfully work with First Nation students within the respected boundaries of their culture. Both handbooks were produced by the Yukon Department of Education and, in my opinion, maintain a Eurocentric view of education that encompasses fitting the Aboriginal worldview into the Western

worldview. Neither of the handbooks proposes the thoughts of immersing into the Aboriginal ontology of Yukon First Nations and developing the teaching from our Aboriginal perspective.

Williams (2011) argued that “if an educational institution does not indigenise its practice and structure, it will continue to carry out the assimilationist policies of a colonising government” (p. 15). First Nations in Canada now have a generation of scholars who have delved into First Nations education and methodologies to incorporate their worldview into Eurocentric learning.

The Yukon is no exception to the scholarly research and reports. The handbook that I have written was based on our Yukon Indigenous worldview and challenges the educator’s mindset to look at their teaching through our First Nation lens. Unlike the other handbooks, this one, as our Elders had asked, was not written in academic, educational jargon. The handbook is a resource written in a perspective that honours the Indigenous culture of Yukon First Nations and speaks to the direction given by our Elders. Battiste (2002) argued that “by animating the voices and experiences of the cognitive ‘other’ and integrating them into the educational process, it creates a new, balanced center and a fresh vantage point from which to analyze Eurocentric education and its pedagogies” (p. 5). It is from Battiste’s perspective that I have presented an option to bring understanding from our Yukon First Nation Elders and their perspective of what education should be for our students.

Background of the Project

This research project was a preliminary study into the benefits and operations of Aboriginal choice schools and their methodologies across Canada. The researcher is working as an educator in an elementary school that encompasses a Western European model of learning with a First

Nation student population of 60 percent, which provided the researcher some insight into the implementation of cultural inclusion dollars and methods within a Yukon public school.

Currently there is no formal Aboriginal learning model being used in any of the Yukon schools (YDE, 2010). In the Yukon, little is known about an Aboriginal choice school model and there is a general public perspective of creating an advantageous school for First Nation students. From the researcher's perspective there is a gap between the Indigenous and Eurocentric understanding of education.

All Yukon schools are provided cultural inclusion funding through the Department of Education on an annual basis. The Department of Education provides little guidance to the public schools for the use of the cultural inclusion monies other than suggesting strongly the funds be used for First Nation activities and maintaining the multicultural perspective of Canada. The tracking of cultural inclusion revenue may be maintained by either the First Nation of which the traditional territory the school resides within or by the school's administration. There is a general perception that the cultural inclusion funds are to support educators in creating relevant, meaningful learning opportunities for First Nation students, enabling students to develop a sense of belonging and cultural attachment to the school.

The most recent performance data of the Yukon's schools indicates that the academic achievement gap between First Nation students and Non-First Nation students is growing (YDE, 2011). The Yukon Achievement Tests (YAT) is Language Arts and Mathematics standardized tests delivered to students in grades 3, 6, and 9 in all Yukon public schools. According to the 2010 YAT in Language Arts 56% of Grade 3 First Nation students scored a standard of acceptable or excellence, compared to the Grade 3 Non-First Nation students of which 70%

scored a standard of acceptable or excellence. This shows the First Nation students having a 14% lower achievement level in Language Arts. The decrease in achievement levels for First Nation

Table 1

2010 Yukon Achievement Test Percentages of First Nation Students compared to Non-First Nation Students in Language Arts and Math

Grade	Excellence	Acceptable	Below	Did Not Write
3 First Nation Language Arts	4	52	15	29
3 Non-First Nation Language Arts	10	60	16	14
3 First Nation Math	19	29	24	28
3 Non-First Nation Math	29	45	15	11
6 First Nation Language Arts	1	44	37	18
6 Non-First Nation Language Arts	11	62	17	10
6 First Nation Math	6	19	61	14
6 Non-First Nation Math	19	39	29	13
9 First Nation Language Arts	3	33	32	32
9 Non-First Nation Language Arts	12	64	16	8
9 First Nation Math	6	25	29	40
9 Non-First Nation Math	22	43	27	8

Source: Yukon Department of Education

students grows as the students' progress in their school years. By Grade 6 First Nation students have a 28% lower achievement rate than the Non-First Nation students and by Grade 9 the First Nation students have a 40% lower achievement rate than the Non-First Nation students. The

decreasing pattern in achievement levels is also demonstrated in the 2010 YAT in Mathematics with 74% of the Grade 3 Non-First Nation students scoring a standard of excellence or acceptable whereas, only 48% of the Grade 3 First Nation students score a standard of excellence or acceptable. Again the achievement levels negatively intensify with Grade 6 First Nation students attaining a 33% lower achievement rate than the Non-First Nation students and by Grade 9 the First Nation students have a 34% lower achievement rate than the Non-First Nation students.

In consideration of the recent YAT performance data of Yukon schools this research project endeavours to provide an option of support to educators in their work to close the academic achievement gap between First Nation students and Non-First Nation students. In my opinion, there is more to providing a culturally-responsive learning environment than just providing the access to monies for cultural events to happen in the schools. It is my opinion that my enclosed handbook can be an important tool in closing the achievement gap between First Nations and Non-First Nations youth.

Understanding the educational needs of First Nations from their perspective is necessary in order to know how to effectively allocate the funds to activities, resources, and creating learning opportunities for students. The handbook from this research project would be a start to providing a resource that would convey knowledge of the requirements of First Nations in their words to the Yukon's school system and demonstrate a model from their cultural identity and worldview.

The researcher is aware of her First Nation ancestry and her worldview as a product of her ancestry and experiences, and will be, as she must be, cautious about making bias judgements.

Through this research project I will provide an option and resource to help educators close the achievement gap between First Nations and Non-First Nations students and staff.

Overview

Using an Aboriginal qualitative epistemological approach, I worked closely with four Yukon First Nation Elders to seek the answers to the central research questions of: *which cultural inclusion methods would be effective for First Nation students in Yukon public schools using an Indigenous model of learning and what is the culture of education that Yukon First Nations want to foster for their children?*

According to Creswell (2007), an epistemological approach is one in which the researcher conducts his or her studies in the “field” and gets as close as possible to the participants in order to bring context and understanding of what the participants know (p.18). Using an epistemological approach allowed me to lessen the distance between me and the field of research, and become the insider to our Yukon First Nations Indigenous worldview of education (Creswell, 2007). In Eurocentric thought, epistemology is the philosophical branch that deals with knowledge and how persons learn. Specifically I am speaking of how children come to learn, know, understand, and comprehend as understood by a Eurocentric perspective as opposed to an Aboriginal epistemological perspective. Aboriginal epistemology is found in the theories, philosophies, histories, ceremonies, and stories as ways of knowing (Battiste, 2002; Wilson, 2008). Aboriginal pedagogy is found in participant observations, experiential learning, modeling, meditation, prayer, ceremonies, story-telling, or talking or sharing circles and dialogues their ways of knowing (Hill, 2002). Although the documentation of learning for the purpose of this research project was for a short four month period, it must be noted that, as the researcher, I have

been acquiring my traditional knowledge and have experienced a lifelong relationship with the Elders involved in the study.

The purpose of this research project was to provide a succinct handbook for educators. The handbook is a starting point for the educator, toward his or her learning of how to provide culturally-responsive and effective learning environments for First Nation students in a public school system. The present cultural inclusion of First Nations in Yukon public schools is currently following the “add and stir” model (Battiste, 2008, p. 498) and, in this researcher’s opinion, a model that is not meeting the needs of the First Nation students in Yukon.

The handbook was chosen to be written following the format of the medicine wheel for three reasons. Firstly, the medicine wheel is a universally-understood and accepted Indigenous framework. The medicine wheel is an ancient symbol used by almost all the Native people of North and South America (Lane, Bopp & Brown, 1984). There are many different ways that the basic concept of the medicine wheel is expressed: the four grandfathers, the four winds, the four cardinal directions, and many other relationships that can be expressed in sets of four. The concept of the four directions of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual is the framework for the handbook. Secondly, the Elders clearly stated that to date, they feel all past and current documents are written in educational jargon and never in the clear understandable words that they want it to be. Using the medicine wheel and the Elders words would be one small form of trust and relationship building in a system that is historically built on mistrust. Finally, the Elders insisted it be written with the focus of the Indigenous model as being inclusive of the Western culture, rather than the Western model as being inclusive of the Indigenous culture.

The main expected outcome from the researcher's perspective is to provide a Yukon First Nations culturally-responsive resource for educators to begin his or her work within an Aboriginal choice school model in Yukon. The secondary expected outcome is to put forth the idea and possibility of further research in the future to begin implementing an Aboriginal choice school in Yukon. In my Hän language it would be, putting the *tät sra häte'a* (new moon) of information to our *hätrünohtän zho* (schoolhouse).

In the next chapter, I will provide a detailed discussion of the professional literature of First Nations education in Yukon, different educational change theories, examine what traditional First Nations education is and the need for developing a sense of belonging for Aboriginal students. Chapter 3 will then outline the research methods used in this study. Chapter 4 will provide the actual handbook. The final chapter will outline my reflections of the learning process in completing this research project.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Chapter 1 provided a background as to why there is a need for this type of research project, explained a general overview of the project, and clarified the direction which this form of endeavour took. In this literature review, I will examine from a historical perspective that Yukon First Nations have always expressed their interests and importance of an integrated culturally-inclusive education system. Further, in order to understand the complexity of First Nations education and cultural inclusion I review the historical acknowledgement from governments including the Department of Education. Each group has a perspective of First Nations education and cultural inclusion in Yukon public schools, an examination of each perspective will set the stage of query into the research questions.

The literature review will also examine some of the more recent change theories and the use of change knowledge in education. There is a plethora of research from the larger Canadian provinces about Aboriginal education and the issues of the gap of learning between First Nation students and their Non-First Nation counterparts. Unfortunately, the research information from Yukon is limited, therefore, for the purpose of this literature review, I will look at some of the more recent research and information related to proposed changes and possible theories for success and “true” Indigenous learning. The chapter ends with a brief summary of the literature review and an introduction into the methodology used in the research project.

Bringing the First Nation Perspective and Department of Education Perspective of Inclusive Public Education Together

The Yukon Native Brotherhood (1973) presented the document *Together Today for our Children Tomorrow* to the Government of Canada which was a statement of grievances and an

approach to settlement by the Yukon First Nations and represented all of the 14 First Nations in Yukon. A position paper within the article, “Education of Yukon Indian”, comprised two-thirds of the entire writing. This record showed that Yukon First Nations believe education to be of utmost importance for their people.

We believe that our children should be educated in public schools, but we also believe consideration should be given to the special problems, the preservation of the language, and factual representation of the culture of a group comprising nearly one-third of the Yukon’s population.

In order that improvements can be made, the Yukon Native Brotherhood requests that the Government of Canada and the Yukon Territory co-operate in the immediate implementation of recommendations contained in this Position Paper. (Yukon Native Brotherhood, 1973, p. 50)

The education position paper within the document by the Yukon Native Brotherhood made 12 recommendations to the Government of Canada (see pp. 54-59 for a full discussion). Each of the recommendations focused on areas within public education that were considered to be an acknowledgement of a mindset for the necessary environments that Yukon First Nations considered to be inclusive of their people. In particular, Recommendation Four stated, “That education programs be changed to allow for revival and re-establishment of Indian languages and for a true picture of Indian history, culture, and contribution to the modern world” (p. 56). Adding emphasis to Recommendation Four is Recommendation Eight, “That education of native students be made more meaningful and relevant to our needs” (p. 57). Public education from the First Nation perspective at this time was considered racially tensile and ineffective for First Nation students.

The result of the Yukon Native Brotherhood (1973) publication has been 11 Yukon First Nations signing self-governing agreements with the Government of Canada and most Yukon First Nations stating that few gains have been made in Yukon public education (Yukon First

Nation Education Advisory Committee, 2008). The 2009 Auditor General Report reported that the Yukon Department of Education data showed negative performance gaps on standardized Yukon Achievement Test average test scores between First Nations students and other students in Yukon and these gaps ranged from 11 to 21 percent (OAG, 2009). The Report also stated the significant gap in graduation rates of First Nation students in Yukon. The 2007/ 2008 First Nation graduation rates in Yukon were 40 percent whereas other Yukon students showed a graduation rate of 65 percent.

In more recent times, the *Education Reform Project* was completed in 2006 to once again address the concerns of Yukon First Nations in regards to public education. “The purpose of the project is to engage First Nations governments, citizens and other partners in education to effect positive, sustainable change in the education system in the Yukon for the benefit of all Yukoners” (Education Reform Project, 2006, p. 1).

The *Education Reform Project* put forth 207 recommendations from Yukon First Nations and education partners to the Department of Education. Throughout the recommendations is an underlying theme of the need to better the educational opportunities for Aboriginal students and to continue the growth of First Nation culturally-inclusive education. There were two major changes with the development of the *Education Reform Project* document. The first is that although the document was developed in consultation with Yukon First Nations and partners in education, it was funded by the Government of Canada and not the Yukon First Nations. The second is that the *Education Reform Project* focused solely on education. These two factors alone lead me to believe that inclusion of Yukon First Nations in the public education system has progressed since the 1973 document.

In 1987, the Minister of Education, Government of Yukon in a joint partnership with the Vice-Chair of Social Programs, Council of Yukon Indians (CYI) sponsored a Joint Commission on Indian Education and Training to investigate and report on all aspects of Indian education in Yukon. CYI was the governing body that represented eleven of the fourteen Yukon First Nations. The final report of the Commission on Indian Education and Training formally became known as *Kwiya*, which translates to, “toward a new partnership”. The Vice-Chair of Social Programs, Mary-Jane Jim, was the representative for the Council of Yukon Indians at the time and responsible for writing the final submission of *Kwiya*. *Kwiya* resulted in four recommendations to the Yukon Government, equal opportunity in education for Yukon Indian people; formal recognition of Yukon Indian culture; representation of the interests of Yukon Indian people and government initiation of specific legislation; and policy and structural reforms of Yukon’s educational system (Jim, 1987).

One Vision Multiple Pathways: Secondary Schools Programming Process Summary Report (Yukon Secondary School Report) was initiated by the Yukon Department of Education to examine the Yukon’s current secondary schools as all the buildings are aging and the building of a new high school was mandated by the Territorial Government (Lee, Bremner, & Belanger, 2008). The project was guided by a Secondary School Programming Advisory Committee that was comprised of 15 Yukon Department of Education representatives, 17 high school educators, two First Nation Elders and three Yukon First Nation partners (Lee et al., 2008). An appreciative inquiry process was used to examine the secondary school programming and to ask stakeholders questions of what was working and what could be improved in Yukon secondary schools. Although, Lee et al.’s (2008) report was an examination into the overall Yukon secondary school programming, the two key findings were that the secondary school systems were not meeting the

needs of Yukon First Nation students and that there was a strong need to embed Yukon First Nation culture, history, and language in all Yukon secondary schools programming.

Helping Students Succeed was a document created by the Yukon First Nation Education Advisory Committee (Lewis & Halladay, 2008). The Yukon First Nation Education Advisory Committee (YFNEAC) is a Yukon Department of Education-funded committee with representation from all 14 First Nations in Yukon. The mandate of the YFNEAC is to provide technical advice, guidance, support, and recommendations to the Yukon Department of Education's Public Schools Branch and its programming staff in relation to Yukon First Nations education in the Kindergarten to Grade 12 systems (Lewis & Halladay, 2008). In the document, the YFNEAC set out six goals and priorities for student achievement and success; culture and language programs; curriculum and resources development, implementation, and, evaluation; parent participation; partnership; and resources for First Nations education in public schools. There is a plethora of information, recommendations, and advice provided to the Yukon Government, Department of Education Public Schools Branch in regards to the educational needs of Yukon First Nations but very little implementation into Yukon schools.

The documentation of inclusion of First Nations in the education system has been long and continual since the original document (Yukon Native Brotherhood, 1973). *Kwiya* (1987), *Education Reform Project Final Report* (2006), *One Vision Multiple Pathways Secondary Schools Programming Process Summary Report* (2008), *Helping Students Succeed* (2008) and the *Report of the Auditor General Canada* all comprise the long list of reports, position papers and reform analysis to ask the questions of how to provide an inclusion of Yukon First Nation culture and values for First Nation students in public schools. None of the reports ever looked into changing the model and providing an Aboriginal choice model with a framework based on

Aboriginal philosophies and methodologies that would be inclusive of Western European philosophies. Charleston (1994) described the first model of *Pseudo* Native education as a schooling process that teaches standardized curriculum of English language and European American interpretations of history and culture. *Pseudo* education focuses on deficiencies in the minority culture and attempts to assimilate students in to the cultural norms of the dominant society.

The following chart by Charleston (1994, Figure 1. p. 27) demonstrates a model of *Pseudo*, *Quasi* and *True* Native Education.

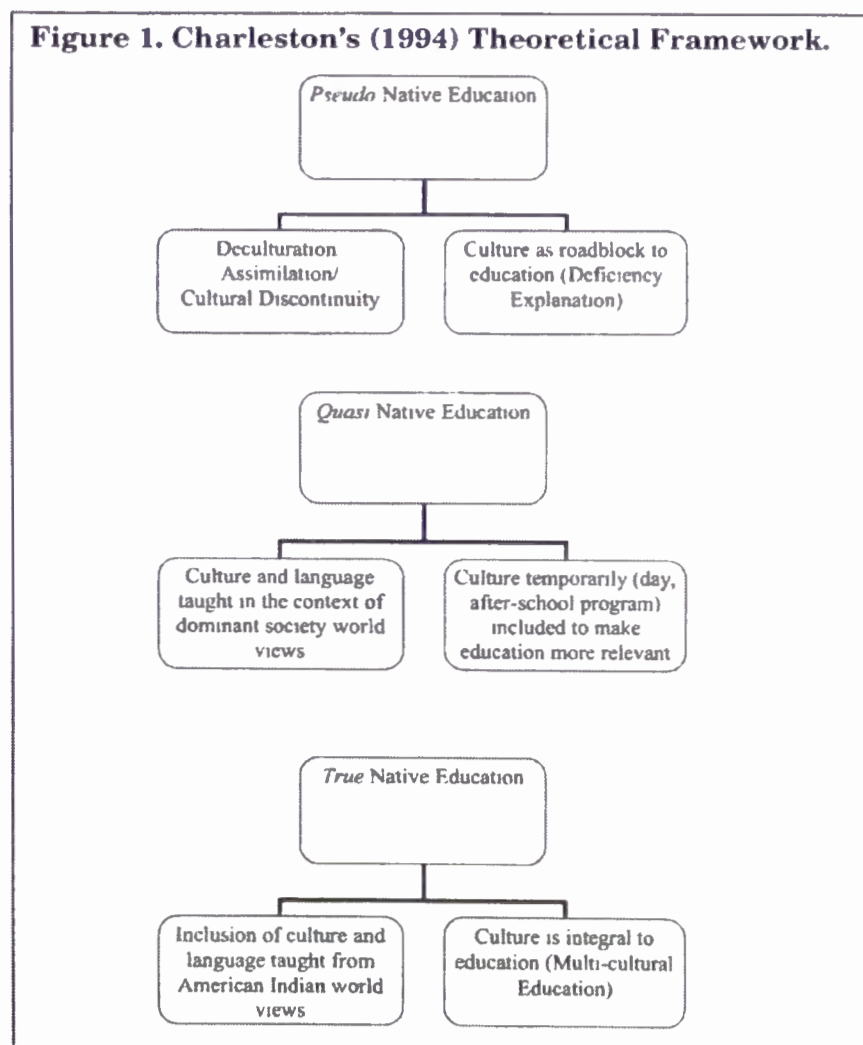


Figure 1. A copy of Charleston's (1994) theoretical framework (cited in Freng, Freng, & Moore 2006).

In Charleston's second model of *Quasi* Native education he described as a "reformist approach" (1994, p. 60). The *Quasi* Native education in-which cultural inclusion plans are structured as add-on, pull-out or afterschool programs that provide activities of Native culture. It is in Charleston's (1994) model of *True* Native education that the Aboriginal philosophies and worldview to support an Aboriginal choice school model are reflected. He described his *True* Native education model as one that reflects traditional ways and relies on schools to bring together community, parents, Elders, Tribes or Bands and a commitment of all people to the learning and teaching. A model of *True* Native education would provide the enriched curricula based in Aboriginal philosophies and worldview. The current Western model of education is a form of forced assimilation that is federally funded to all the public schools across Canada. Article 8 of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples condemns forced integration in these terms:

1. Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture.
 2. States shall provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for:
 - a) Any action which has the aim or effect of depriving them of their integrity as distinct peoples, or of their cultural values or ethnic identities.
- (United Nations. (2011). Retrieved from United Nations: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights website:
<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#a9>).

When considering the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the recommendations from the Yukon Native Brotherhood and the long list of related documents on providing First Nation inclusion in Yukon, Yukon Public education appears to be in the stage of *Quasi* Native Education or *Quasi* First Nation inclusion.

Change

Learning another viewpoint in education, such as Aboriginal education, requires engagement in change. Learning about a worldview other than your own is also acknowledging engagement in change from what is the person's norm (Hill, 2002, p. 19). Change theory or change knowledge can be very powerful in informing education reform strategies and, in turn, getting results if those involved have a deep knowledge of the dynamics of how the factors in question operate to get particular results (Fullan, 2006, p. 3). Fullan proposed that the three broad phases in educational change process are initiation, implementation, and continuation (2007). The initiation phase is affected by the existence, quality, and access to innovations, level of support from administration, teacher advocacy, external agents and motivation or desire to adopt or proceed with the change. The implementation phase is affected by the characteristics of the change the stakeholders in the change and the characteristics of the stakeholders. The continuation phase is the incorporation of the change and is dependent on the critical mass of the teachers, administrators and stakeholders involved in the change. Fullan argued further that having a change "theory in use" is not good enough and in order for it to be a "theory in action," it requires seven core premises of focused motivation, capacity building with a focus on results, learning in context, changing context, bias for reflective action and tri-level engagement all underpinned with people involved to push to the next level, to make their theory of action explicit. Fullan's proposed change process looks at educational change as an organization and makes the argument to move from a top down leadership of educational change model toward a bottom-up shared leadership of educational change model and create more meaning and reflective action for those involved in bringing about the change. Fullan (2007) contended that change is not just about doing, it involves thinking about doing and educational change depends

on what teachers do and think. More importantly, change is about teachers' actions. Knowledge is one element of change but teachers actually implementing change, whether small or large, is what makes a difference in the lives of their students.

Waks (2007) proposed that fundamental educational change takes place not at an organizational level, but rather at an institutional level. According to him, the focus of the educational change literature had, to that point, been upon organizations and organizational change (Waks, 2007). He defined institutions as the social arrangements establishing, ordaining, or authorizing the ideas, norms, organizations, and frameworks that regulate the processes of human interaction in the primary areas of human life.

His fundamental institutional change process involved seven stages that progressed through misalignment, protest, ad hoc alternatives, entrepreneurship, responsible innovation, institutional, and reorganization (Waks, 2007). *Misalignment* occurs when the institution recognizes that it is out of alignment with other institutions; *Protest*, where stakeholders experience dissatisfaction, but more powerful agents are still entrenched and deny the change to occur; *Ad hoc alternatives*, where innovations come forward and stakeholders begin to put forth new ideas; *Entrepreneurship*, where the bringing of new ideas and developing notions toward the stakeholders becomes more significant in the change progression; *Accountability*, where *Responsible innovations* are brought into existence by responsible agents, who can then be held accountable to the success or failure of the innovation; *Social construction*, where in some of the innovative ideas are rewarded and others are rejected depending on the various stakeholders beliefs and values; *Institutionalization*, wherefore the change becomes accepted and entrenched with feedback and adjustment occurs regularly; and finally, *Reorganization*, in which older organizations either adapt to assert a role in the change or remain unchanged and thus disappear.

Waks concluded that fundamental educational change means the readjustment of an existing organization, or school, to new institutional ideas and norms; so that the organization, or school, is once again ordained within the institutional order. The exact change is dependent on the social system, new ideas, values, beliefs, and norms of the stakeholders involved (Waks, 2007).

According to Hargreaves and Fink (2006), “Educational change is rarely easy to make, always hard to justify and almost impossible to sustain” (p. 1) and “the long term impact of educational change is that standardized reform is destroying the diversity, and seriously endangering the lives and futures of the weakest members of the school system, those who are poor, who are learning through a new language or have special educational needs” (p. 4). Hargreaves and Fink (2003) combined the themes of Fullan and Waks and argued that in order for educational change to be effective it must move through implementation and institutionalization to sustainability, showcasing sustainable improvement that builds long term capacity and cultivates educational environments that are continually improving. They explained that sustainability is comprised of five key interrelated characteristics of improvements and change that sustain learning, endure over time, can be supported by available or achievable resources, doesn’t impact negatively on other schools and systems, and promotes diversity and capacity throughout the educational community. Hargreaves and Fink (2003) furthered the discussion on educational change requiring a leadership-for-learning mindset and that the prime responsibility of all school leaders is to sustain learning. School leaders that are a distributed leadership, ensuring that someone is there after you to sustain the change and perpetuate the planned innovations, ideologies and growth are the key to sustainable educational change. In a leadership-for-learning mindset, one must recognize that distributed leadership is “working with reflective partners in a shared and distributed way to become a collective rather than an

individual force” (Kaser & Halbert, 2009, p. 142). If this model of leadership is applied to educational change; the leadership is embedded in the hearts and minds of all, the leadership is viewed as a vertical system over time, and the leadership creates cultures of distributed leadership throughout, then according to Hargreaves and Fink, the change will be sustainable.

Blackstock (2010) proposed a different form of change theory that takes into account the social constructs of the individual and supports a belief about what First Nation children need and what strategies will meet those needs while following the core values of child centred, family focussed, and community based. Blackstock’s (2010) Breath of Life theory (BOL) purported that when relational worldviews are acknowledged and addressed, balance can be created for the Aboriginal child in everything: educational, social and cultural. Although Blackstock’s BOL theory was developed in response to the social welfare of First Nation children, she stressed that it should be considered beyond the boundaries of the social welfare realm of influence.

Although the Breath of Life theory was developed in response to the structural risks related to the First Nation child welfare, the assumptions and structure of Breath of Life do not implicitly bind it to child welfare application and considerations should be given to other areas and cultures such as in educational jurisdiction. (Blackstock, 2010, p. 2)

Blackstock (2010) acknowledged Cross’s (1997, 2007) relational worldview model and the principles within as the foundation of her BOL theory. Terry Cross (1997, 2007) developed the relational worldview model in 1980 while working with the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA). Cross’s relational worldview model is the reflection of the Indigenous thought process and concept of balance as the basis for health, whether that is an individual, family, or in organization such as schools and the educational field. The relational worldview

model follows the principles of the four domains: cognitive, physical, spiritual, and emotional. The cognitive domain encompasses the self and community actualization, role identity, service, self-esteem and education. The physical domain includes food, water, housing, safety and security. The spiritual domain embraces spirituality and life purpose. The emotional domain involves education, belonging and relationship. Blackstock's BOL theory embodies four layers that she describes as nesting on the relational worldview principles. The four layers as explained by Blackstock are that culture and context shape the manifestation of the relational worldview principles; that the entire model is situated within an expansive paradigm of time called the seven generations concept; that multiple realities are acknowledged and utilized to inform optimal values for the worldview principles and strategies to restore balance among the principles; and, fourthly, individuals are viewed within the context of their relationships to the world and others (see pp. 6-8 for further discussion). Blackstock's BOL theory proposes change that incorporates an Indigenous worldview in time, culture, and context. Time acknowledging the First Nations ontology as having expansive concepts of time wherein past, present, and future are mutually reinforcing. The First Nations seven generations concept is the contemplation that everyone's actions are thought of in terms of being influenced by the previous seven generations and each current action will have affects unto the next seven generations (Assembly of First Nations, 1993). Culture and context are taken into account in the shaping of the worldview principles, the principles must be set within the seven generations concept of time and appreciation for multiple realities; culture and context are the shaping factors for the principles and are dependent on the individual's cultural norms (Blackstock, 2010). Blackstock's BOL theory addresses change from an individual perspective rather than an organizational or

institutional perspective. Blackstock's BOL theory accounts as a child centred change that meets the needs of each individual who in turn will then form a collective.

In Branson's (2010) *Leading Educational Change Wisely*, he stated that educational change has been the focus of scholars for some time over the past fifty years and that educational change has evolved from innovation; implementation; and into a phase known as meaning making, and capacity building. Following the educational change evolution, Branson argued that the innovation stage is the time in which the development of singularly-controlled ideas came from educators to try in the field on their own; the implementation phase was a continuation of controlling top down leadership models that impose the change on those the leaders as managers see as needing change; the meaning making phase moved from an individual in comparison to the collective perspective to an individual as a part of the collective perspective that progressed the change process to a bottom-up model incorporating the ideas of all involved in the change; and the capacity building phase, which maintains a collaborative approach towards modification, but also includes the most vital person, those who will be most affected by the change in question. Branson placed educational alteration now in a phase of an ethical dimension whilst also maintaining its original managerial dimension. He proposed that leading change in education is as much about acting so as to not produce harm, but rather to produce positive results, to honour others, to take stands that enhance the process, and to behave in ways that clearly show that their own self interests are not the driving motivation behind their leadership as it is about achieving desirable change.

Branson further argued that in order for effective change to happen in an educational setting, there must be an understanding of educational leadership that acknowledges phenomenology, emotion, wisdom, and self-reflection. Phenomenology is important as it deal

with gaining the appropriate relational knowledge and capacity to maximize the engagement of those being led. Emotion occurs when the leader recognizes change as an emotional process for all the stakeholders involved with the transformations. Wisdom guides the leadership through the challenges, ambiguities, uncertainties, and paradoxes, all associated with successfully implementing change. Self-reflection is the principle of the school being viewed as the one gaining the essential knowledge about its own external reality, so the members can lead their school community through change. Branson stated that when taking into account the educational leadership factors and the technological, socio-political, and structural perspectives, the process of leading change can be done wisely. The leaders need to be aware of the diverse forces or pressures causing the need to bring about change and that as the leader they cannot achieve the outcome of change by themselves. Change cannot happen without some plan or strategy and the transformation implies some movement away from a current state to some improved state (Hargreaves, 2006).

According to Hill (2002), in order to address change for First Nations in educational systems, educators must help facilitate change, not impose solutions. Although there are specific objectives in regards to change theory in reference to First Nations students, the literature on the subject is sparse outside of Hill's paper. If change theory is applied, must be in consultation with a single First Nation community to avoid a top-down administrative philosophy which would be anathema to the First Nations perspective on bringing about change. That is, a theory that would be based on consultation and discussion and derived from experiences rather than theory.

A Sense of Belonging

When discussing Yukon First Nations and creating a culturally-responsive education system, one must be aware of the need for a sense of belonging for First Nation students. Yukon First Nations identify their learning through culture, language, and a sense of belonging to land and place. A sense of belonging is intricately connected to First Nations, but can be difficult to measure. Development and research of the factors that create a “belonging” environment are subject to individual opinions or feelings (Auld, 2007). According to Auld belonging is tied to social relationships and academic success of a student. If an Aboriginal student is isolated from his or her culture, he or she is more likely to drop out of school and have a “negative sense” of pride in his or her indigenous ancestry (Auld, 2007). Cairns (2000) described his most basic premise of developing a sense of common belonging between two cultures as the recognition of their commonalities and their differences. Cairns argued that if we only achieve knowledge of our differences then “our triumph would be pyrrhic” (2000, p. 80). Maslow (1971) believed that most maladjustment and emotional illness in our society could be traced to the failure to gratify the basic human need for belonging. Students who exhaust their energies attempting to meet this deficiency have no reserves left for higher level connotative and cognitive functions.

Adler (1939) also believed that failure in school usually stemmed from feeling unconnected to the teacher, other students, or the school community. In examining Adler’s theory of “belongingness,” Crandall (1981) found that when students felt they belonged, they had an enhanced sense of worth and increased self-confidence. On the other hand, if they did not feel they belonged, they felt helpless and had no sense of control over their environment. Goodenow (1993) found that when children felt they belonged, they were more motivated, had higher expectations of success, and believed in the value of their academic work. Glasser (1986)

asserted that the need for belonging is one of the five basic needs written into the human genetic structure.

Maslow, Cairns, Auld, Glasser, and Crandall all argued that creating a bond and sense of belonging among the student, school, and educators is the most significant factor to creating a productive learning environment for all. If we used the above mentioned perspectives into one narrative argument, then it would be that it is the educator's responsibility to take the leadership role to effectively build the relationship and sense of belonging for the student within the school system.

First Nations Traditional Education

It is necessary to explain what First Nations traditional education looked like and how it differs from the current Eurocentric education. For the most part, the education system in Canada has been constructed using Western worldviews (Cajete, 1994). Long before Europeans came to North America, Indigenous peoples had a highly developed system of education. It was the duty and responsibility of the parents, Elders and members of the community as a whole to teach younger people and ensure they led a good life. For example, this was done by sharing experiences with children rather than isolating them in a non-active environment such as closed classrooms. So, children participated in the daily activities of adults. According to Brenda Lafrance, in Aboriginal culture and education each skill has a social, economic, spiritual and historical context (Lafrance, 2000). As Lafrance noted, knowledge about fish spawning is acquired not by studying biology but through participating in fishing, storytelling, art and other related activities. Children's development was emphasized through sharing. For example, when a hunt was completed all the meat was distributed and shared throughout the community

(Lafrance, 2000). Traditional Aboriginal education had links to economic conditions. Learning was for living and survival. Leavitt (1993) pointed out that, by the age of five, Aboriginal children were already taught to respect the environment through observation and practice. This included learning the arts of trapping, hunting, fishing, food gathering, and preparation.

Traditional education of Aboriginal children was mainly an informal, experiential process. It provided young people with the specific skills, attitudes and knowledge they needed to function in everyday life. Education was a natural process occurring while doing everyday activities.

Lafrance argues that this type of learning ensured cultural continuity and survival of the mental, spiritual, emotional and physical well-being of each individual (Lafrance, 2000).

For Aboriginal children, life values were learned through the extended family. Kirkness (1993) noted that education by the extended family was best exemplified by the grandmother and her teachings through legends, family patience and love. Grandmothers played a major role in the education of children. Young children played, but at the same time the contributions of even the littlest child to the work of the household was encouraged. The duty of learning began first by observing and later by doing. According to one Aboriginal man, "I learned how to chop wood after observing my father, my grandmother and my mother chopping wood and how safety conscious they were in ensuring that no harm will be done" (Kirkness, 1993, p. 146). This learning by observing, their connection to the natural world, the grandmother's teachings and the fact that children are full-fledged contributing members of the household were all-important factors in Aboriginal culture that contributed to the education and the lives of Aboriginal children (Kirkness, 1993). Before Eurocentric schooling there was a system of positive learning for Aboriginal children. Aboriginal people stressed an approach to education that relied on looking, listening, doing and learning (Cajete, 1994). According to Leavitt (1993), it is due to

their education that Aboriginals shared a common philosophical or spiritual orientation. For them, education was suffused with deeply ingrained spirituality. The significance of home life to the education of Aboriginal children could not be understated. In Aboriginal communities, behaviour was shaped by positive actions in the home. In childhood, proper behaviour was instilled by indirect and non-coercive means. First Nations traditional education was connected to the community and fostering the individual strengths of the child through mentoring, observation and experiential work in daily life.

Currently, the majority of public schools are founded on the principles associated with European philosophy of education (Michel, 2005). According to Demmert (2001), research has demonstrated that the physical, social and cultural environment in which learning takes place significantly affects the learning and well-being of Aboriginal children.

The preponderance of research evidence in this review shows a positive relationship between academic performance and the presence of Native language and cultural programs, outweighing research that shows little or no influence. Consequently, schools should seriously consider amending their curricula to support this Native American priority, which researchers should continue to study factors that increase or decrease the effectiveness of these programs. (p. 12)

Demmert argued that Aboriginal children who took part in school programs that emphasized their local knowledge and culture within the curriculum showed improvement in their attendance, academic achievement and behaviour.

Summary

The educators of Yukon Aboriginal students have gradually understood, over the last 40 years, the differences between First Nations students and non-Aboriginal students. Although

there has been much documentation on the subject, there have been many suggestions on how to improve on the current realities on the subject, there has been very little, to no actual integration of these views, concepts, and suggestions. The involvement of First Nations within the territory of the Yukon began in a documented, administrative way from the formation of the *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow* document in 1973 and changing any organization from the outside-in is a slow process, particularly when they believe that their current structure is the superior structure, and thus must be enforced upon the minority. Even when First Nations structure is incorporated, it was not incorporated in a meaningful way, rather in a *Quasi* First Nations way. Rather when *True* First Nations educational reform is enacted, it must be from a First Nations to Educational department and incorporate their own philosophies, background, and ways of learning.

Incorporating change theory into the broader process of First Nations education must mean that each First Nations community has to understand change theory as it applied to First Nations, and has to understand change theory in regards to educational systems, and thus must be combined in each First Nations' community. Change theory is an important part of transforming any sociological structure, but it must be incorporated without influence from other communities, by the specific communities.

If we understand the importance of the sense of belonging from an individual's student perspective as important to his or her own development within an institution such as a school, then we must incorporate the individual to a distinct sense of belonging as a way forward to his or her own life within a school structure.

Since the arrival of Europeans, and the submission of First Nations' cultures under the new dominant culture, it can be proven, to the point of unwritten fact, that they enforced their own theories, philosophies, backgrounds, and sociological structures upon the educational system in much the same way as any other Aboriginal social structure. Despite the facts that the First Nations education system was complex, thorough throughout their lives, community organized, and non-authoritative, it was assumed to be lesser in comparison to Eurocentric model. If we believe that this was wrong, then it ought to be obvious to return to the Aboriginal model.

The first chapter laid out the importance of this handbook and this chapter has surveyed the extant literature. In Chapter 3, I will explain the project plan and processes I underwent in order to create the handbook and complete this research project. Chapter 4 will consist of the actual handbook and Chapter 5 will be a final summary of my reflections on the entire process of the research project.

Chapter 3 - Research Methods

Chapter 1 provided a contextual view as to why there is a need for this type of research project. It also explained a general synopsis of the project, and clarified the direction in which this form of endeavour took place. Chapter 2 started with an examination of literature from a historical perspective of Yukon First Nations and in particular considered Charleston's model of *True* native education. Chapter 2 also explored educational change theories from a few well-known leaders of change and narrowed the focus to an Aboriginal educational change theory. Chapter 2 also provided an explanation of the need for Aboriginal students to have a sense of belonging in the school and looked into what traditional First Nation education was.

Chapter 3 will explain the research methodologies used in the undertaking of the research project and will also, examine some Aboriginal choice schools that are currently operating in Canada that were visited by the researcher to gain an in-depth knowledge of how the schools Indigenous philosophies operated within the school. The final section of Chapter 3 clarifies the process used in the development of the handbook.

The overarching concept of this qualitative research project was an epistemological approach involving me as the researcher and the development of a close relationship with the Elders and conducting field research with first-hand information coming from the Elders. For example, one session with the Elders involved sewing a pair of moccasins in a traditional First Nations learning experience. Analysis and information gathering from three currently operating Aboriginal choice schools was incorporated with the knowledge gained from working closely with the Elders and content analysis of recent literature of First Nations education. The three Canadian Aboriginal schools discussed further in the methodology section of this paper, Niji

Mahkwa Elementary in Manitoba, Amiskwaciy Academy in Alberta, and Carney Hill Elementary in British Columbia, were visited to observe the daily operations of the school and enable me as the researcher, to develop an understanding of each school's Indigenous philosophy. These two experiences contextualized the previous body of work in First Nations education in Yukon and formed the foundation to the creation of this research project.

The final product of this research project is an informative handbook. The process to creating the handbook required a long-term relationship with Elders from three Yukon First Nations. The relationship that I, as the researcher, have with the Elders began when I was a child and is in continual development in our living years. Each Elder was informed of my interview protocols and signed a consent form before our sessions began. Each of the Elders was informed of what the research project end product would be and that they each had individual contributions which did not mean they were representing their perspective First Nation as a whole. Each Elder's input was representative of his or her individual Indigenous knowledge as a Yukon First Nation Elder.

For the purpose of this research project, the first part of this journey was to obtain permission from my Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation Elders to complete this research and put their "ways of knowing" on paper. Although, Elder Sam Johnston and Elder Lizzie Hall are not of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in ancestry, both Elders have been mentors throughout my life and both acknowledged that initial permission to learn protocols must come from the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation. To my understanding during the sessions, all of the Elders expressed that they had seen enough papers written in what they expressed as "the white man's words". Keeping in mind the personal history of the Elders in question, it can be understood why they are concerned for obfuscating language; however, these concerns also show the distrust between the two parties:

their First Nation community and the government. Although I, as a researcher, do not encourage such language, it is important to note the racist diction comes from this historical distrust. It is my intent that this handbooks will help to end this suspicion. This is a challenge as the cultural difference in perception of the words from the Elders and the academic world is vast.

My learning from the Elders took place over several months in the form of circle meetings, sweats, conversations over tea, and the breaking of bread, conversations during outdoor-experiential and on-the-land sessions to pass on our traditional Indigenous knowledge. I attended formal learning sessions and received direction from four Yukon Elders for a period of four months. In those months we had 32 days comprising of 264 hours of formal lesson time.

It is from these experiences that I created a handbook for educators. I used the Medicine Wheel model, separated into the four directions of the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical perspectives. It will be a resource that would be a start to bridging the cultural gap in mindsets and hopefully be the beginning to the educator's journey of understanding the relational pluralism needed to work with Yukon First Nations in a public school. In Elder Lizzie Hall's words, "Tell them, they need to go in my steps first" (personal communication, January 8, 2012), and it is my hope that they will use this as a guide for their own educational and teaching journey.

During the experiences with the Elders, I was not permitted to take notes, pictures, audio or video recordings of our time learning together. If I required clarification, I was expected to return to the Elders and gain clarity through our traditional oral passing of knowledge. The only documentation I was permitted to keep was a reflexive journal after the meetings with the Elders. According to Creswell (2007) a reflexive journal is a type of diary where the researcher makes

regular entries during the research process. In my journal entries, I recorded methodological decisions and reasons for them, the logistics of the study, and reflection upon what is happening in terms of my own values and interests. Reflexivity requires that the writer is conscious of the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to the qualitative research study (Creswell, 2007). My reflexive journal entries described in what activity I was participating, the date, and which Elder was present (coded according to their title and names), and my thoughts on to which quadrant of the medicine wheel I would attach the lesson: mental (m), emotional (e), spiritual (s), and physical (s). A specific example of a journal entry is:

ELH:01/07/2012 Sewing Moccasins. (p) ELH explained that the movement of sewing and the act of cutting out the pattern is our way of doing the hands-on-learning we talk about.(s) ELH talked about prayer and meditation during our session. We are to think (praying) of the person we are making the moccasins for and sewing is quieter activity that allows you to reflect (meditation) on your work and your own thoughts. (e) ELH explained that the design and style we choose to put on the moccasin is our emotions and feelings shown in colour and shape with the beadwork.(m) ELH clarified that the counting, measuring and ensuring the symmetry of the pair of moccasins is where we use our math and art skills;counting the beads, drawing the design, making sure the designs are symmetrical.

Throughout the sessions with the Elders the learning was not all sit and talk. Lessons were taught in traditional ways and there were many times I was completing hands-on-tasks and had to learn what the Elders meant by teaching me how to complete the tasks. One example of a traditional lesson was sewing a pair of moccasins with one of the Elders. When we sew, we are learning much more than an art form or a simple math lesson in counting. We are also experiencing a spirituality in the form of prayer and meditation; we pray for the animal that has given its life for the supplies we are using to make the moccasins; we pray for the moose and the beaver; we pray for the person for whom we are making the moccasins and that we are skilled in our work; and we pray for the Elders that have taught us the skills to make the moccasins. Another example of a lesson was an on-the-land day by participating in ice fishing. This day of

traditional learning included physical lessons of hiking to the lake, packing supplies, and cutting holes in the ice; mental lessons of how long to make the fish line, knot tying for the net, length of net between the two holes, what supplies were necessary for the day, and organization of safety precautions needed to undertake the endeavour; spiritual lessons of honoring the fish we caught and the sustenance the fish would be providing; and, emotional lessons of listening to the Elders stories as we sat near the fishing hole and as we pulled up the net between the two fishing holes, and instructions from the Elders on how to perform the fishing expedition in a traditional manner.

Because it was agreed that, through this research project, I would be developing a handbook structured to the four directions of the medicine wheel, it was up to me to ascertain to which quadrant of the medicine wheel I would attach the learning. As I learned from the Elders and would make entries in my reflexive journal I would code my learning as physical (p), mental (m), emotional (e), or spiritual (s) with date of session and which Elder participated in the session. Member checking for which Elders were present at the time of teaching was in the form of their initials. Some of the sessions had all of the Elders present, or there were times it was on a one-to-one basis with me and the Elder, or me and two of the Elders. Because of distance and ability to travel, there was only one time where all five of us met and it was in the community of Whitehorse, Yukon. As there was a ceremonial part to this session, and because it was outside of the traditional territories of all four Elders, there was a requirement to attain permission from Kwanlin Dun First Nation and Ta'an Kwach'an Council, the two residing First Nations traditional territory in which we met to complete a weekend of learning.

As a member of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation, when I am passed knowledge from an Elder, it is considered a sacred act and it is expected that I understand and accept the

Indigenous knowledge to be passed on as it has been for a millennia. Traditionally, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in passed our knowledge orally. The change of passing our traditional knowledge in written text has only happened in the past century, with the increased access to scribes, technology, and the ease of communication in a post-computer world. The process I undertook with the Elders for this research project is one steeped in tradition and our ways of knowing. It is through this research project that I will provide a resource that bridges our traditional oral Indigenous knowledge to the written text.

Aboriginal Choice Schools

The concept and term, *Aboriginal Choice School* is relatively new in the Canadian context of public education. Currently, the majority of public schools are founded on the principles associated with a European philosophy of education (Michel, 2005). That is, the school's vision, goals, objectives, expectations of behaviour, and curriculum are all delivered and grounded within a viewpoint that uses Eurocentric cultures as the foundation and all subjects are delivered to the students using European perspectives. This educational approach is based on a White, Eurocentric model of knowing and leaves out Indigenous knowledges. Michel (2005) described an Aboriginal choice school model as one that establishes a different educational philosophy and has the school's vision, goals, and objectives, expectations of behaviour, curriculum, and pedagogical design based on an Indigenous worldview. Any student can attend an Aboriginal choice model of school, as it is no different than a community-based school, or a French Immersion school within the public school system. The only difference between an Aboriginal choice school and a traditional public school is that a choice school is structured around a foundation of an Indigenous worldview. In order to understand how an Aboriginal educational philosophy is put to practice, I have provided three recent examples of Aboriginal

choice schools: Niji Mahkwa School, Amiskwaciy Academy and Carney Hill Elementary. These three successfully-operating Aboriginal choice schools are excellent examples of Aboriginal choice school models that could work well within the Yukon's school system.

Niji Mahkwa School is an Aboriginal choice school that has been operating in Winnipeg, Manitoba since 1994. "The Niji Mahkwa School and Community upholds the belief that all children have an inherent right to the highest quality of holistic education. The integration of traditional, cultural teaching in supportive learning environment will provide students with strengths and skills to meet the challenges of life" (Niji Mahkwa School Website, 2010).

The school follows an Indigenous framework of *The Four Directions* guiding the educator's teaching and the child's learning. The Niji Mahkwa education is one that focuses on the cultural values and beliefs of the Cree and Ojibew Nations while operating in a public school format. All students are welcome and a student does not have to be of First Nation ancestry to attend Niji Mahkwa School. The current principal of Niji Mahkwa School, Rob Riel, describes the Niji Mahkwa education experience as "one steeped in the Cree and Ojibew culture. Allowing the students the opportunities to remain connected to their First Nation ancestry, culture, language and pride" (R. Riel, personal communication March 23, 2011).

Niji Mahkwa School has been operating for 17 years and is viewed as a strong Aboriginal choice model (K. Richardson, personal communication November 21, 2010; R. Riel, personal communication March 23, 2011). The more recent examples of Aboriginal choice schools, Amiskwaciy Academy and Carney Hill looked to Niji Mahkwa School as a guide to begin their journeys of opening an Aboriginal choice school in their district.

Amiskwaciy Academy began in 1999 as an idea brought to life by educators who wished to see more opportunities for Aboriginal students. “Amiskwaciy is an Aboriginal high school that incorporates traditional native values as its core philosophy, have students identify with their Cree culture and still prepare the students with skills for the 21st century” (Amiskwaciy Academy School Website, 2010).

The genesis for Amiskwaciy came from the Edmonton Board Public Schools encouraging schools to look at their school community needs and address them with a niche model perspective. Amiskwaciy Academy was the first school of its kind, meeting the needs of the urban Aboriginal youth in Edmonton, Alberta. The school district recognized that the major student population of their district was students of First Nation ancestry and that a high percentage of these students were dropping out of high school. This information set the wheel in motion to begin Amiskwaciy Academy. The site of an old airport terminal was selected and renovated to meet the needs of an aboriginal choice high school with a focus on the Cree culture and language.

According to principal, Fred Hines, “Amiskwaciy Academy operates under the vision statement of ‘Our path, our life, our spirit’. (F. Hines, personal communication, May 17, 2011). On the school website the school defines their purpose and daily work as, “This vision of Amiskwaciy Academy is to honour the Aboriginal community and reflect its cultures, values, ancestral knowledge and traditions in achieving excellence in education.” After a school visitation, conversations with staff and Principal Hines, in this researcher’s opinion it is evident that the Cree Nations cultural pride is interwoven with the daily operation systems, norms and cultural fabric of Amiskwaciy Academy. Amiskwaciy is now an Aboriginal choice school that

other districts are looking toward for information and models to starting an aboriginal choice school of their own.

British Columbia's first Aboriginal choice school, formally known as Carney Hill Elementary School, is a school that took direction from both Amiskwaciy Academy and Niji Mahkwa schools as models to begin their process of becoming an Aboriginal choice school. (K. Richardson, personal communication, November 21, 2010)

The Aboriginal choice School is located in Prince George, B.C. and is currently in their second year of operation. The process to start the school began when the Provincial Aboriginal Branch in the 2003/2004 school year put forth for a Provincial Aboriginal choice School in Prince George. (Michel, 2005) The process lost momentum until the Aboriginal Education Board commissioned Robert Malatest to complete a second assessment of Aboriginal education in School District 57, Prince George.

As a result of this Report, the Board of Education struck a Task Force on Aboriginal Education which began its work in September 2007. The consultation process for the Aboriginal Choice School in School District 57, is the resulting action of Recommendation 10 of the Aboriginal Education Task Force Report¹, That the Board of Education, School District No. 57 (Prince George) enter into immediate community consultation with the intent of designating an existing elementary school as an Aboriginal K-7 choice elementary school, effective as early as September 1, 2008. (C. Corrigan, 2009, p. 3)

Within these recommendations, it was suggested that the B.C. Aboriginal Choice School look to Amiskwaciy Academy in Edmonton, Alberta and Mother Earth School in Winnipeg, Manitoba for curriculum examples (Michel, 2005).

After a few more years of research and consultation, a site school of Carney Hill was selected and British Columbia's first Aboriginal choice School opened for the 2010/2011 school year. The school is currently operating under the title of Aboriginal Choice School until the community consultation for a *Dakelh* name is completed.

According to interim principal, Kathy Richardson, the school is in their infancy and it is a time of transition. The B.C. Aboriginal Choice School is building healthy relationships to support student success with integrated Aboriginal education initiatives, including; Aboriginal Choice School Advisory Council; Aboriginal content and perspective across the curriculum; *Dakelh* language nests in the Strong Start program; Elder-in-Residence Program; Restorative Practice; Traditional land-based education program; After school programs; Multi-age family groupings in a cycle of learning and collaborative work with families, community agencies and organizations to maximize opportunities for our students. (K. Richardson, personal communication, November 21, 2010)

All three of these Aboriginal choice model schools are demonstrating the success of providing an indigenous based philosophy of teaching to students. In all the site visitations I felt there was an overwhelming sense of pride and belonging to the school community and Indigenous worldview.

The creating of the handbook took into account the information gathered from site visitations to the three Aboriginal choice schools, both historical and current literature of First Nations education, factors from different change theories, and most importantly, the knowledge gained from working with the Yukon First Nation Elders.

Summary

As introduced previously in Chapter 1, the importance of an Aboriginal choice school model within the territory is necessary for the well-being of the First Nation students within the current Yukon school system. It is my hope that the preliminary methodological research as explained in Chapter 3, the Elders' teachings and the pioneering Aboriginal choice school systems in Alberta, British Columbia, and Manitoba, will all provide ample supporting research for the structural blueprints for an Aboriginal choice school system in Yukon.

In the next chapter, I will provide the actual handbook that details and designs the way ahead for an Aboriginal choice school model within the school system of the Yukon Territory. Chapter 4, the handbook, takes into account the preliminary literature that is useful for the creation of an Aboriginal choice school model, the teachings from the First Nations Elders, and the research that I have done on Aboriginal choice schools in British Columbia, Alberta, and Manitoba. I will combine the philosophies to create an Aboriginal choice school model for Yukon, with the continued guidance that was given to me by the Elder's teachings. This handbook will create a balanced, student-focussed Yukon First Nation school standard. Finally, in Chapter 5, I will elucidate my personal reflections from the research project and the process of the development of the handbook.

Chapter 4 – The Handbook

Chapter 1 provided a contextual view as to why there is a need for this type of research project, a general synopsis of the project, and clarified the direction in which this form of research project followed. Chapter 2 started with an examination of literature from a historical perspective of Yukon First Nations and in particular considered Charleston's model of *True* native education. Chapter 2 also explored educational change theories from a few well known leaders of change and narrowed the focus to an Aboriginal educational change theory. The literature review in chapter 2 provided an explanation of the need for Aboriginal students to have a sense of belonging in the school and looked into what traditional First Nation education was. Chapter 3 explained the research methodologies used in the undertaking of the research project and examined some Aboriginal choice schools that are currently operating in Canada that were visited by the researcher to gain an in-depth knowledge of how the schools Indigenous philosophies operated within the school. The final section of chapter 3 clarifies the process used in the development of the handbook. Chapter 4 is the handbook, a resource for educators to begin their learning of an Indigenous worldview and Aboriginal culture of Yukon First Nations. Chapter 5 will conclude the research project with my personal reflections of the process.

Introduction

As an educator, how can you enter into and learn about a First Nation community/school in a way that will maximize your chances of making a positive contribution to the educational experiences of the First Nation students with whom you will work? There are no simple prescriptions in response to that question, but there are some strategies you can draw upon to

guide you into a new teaching situation and help you to adapt your teaching practices to better serve the unique educational needs of the First Nation cultural community.

Relational pluralism skills can be established by both educator and student when opportunities of building relationships are sustained over time, usually much longer than the ten month school year calendar. Culturally-based education is the platform in which the educator can develop the necessary long-term relationships with First Nations students and achieve success. Since learning a culture is a lifetime undertaking, where do you as a newcomer start, and what are the most important aspects to be considered? One of the first things to recognize is that the more you learn about another culture, the more you will find out about yourself. We all carry around our own sub-conscious culturally conditioned mindsets and filters for making sense out of the world around us, and it isn't until we encounter people with a substantially different set of mindsets and filters that we have to confront the assumptions, predispositions and beliefs that we take for granted and which make us who we are. To illustrate how those differences can come into play, the following chart summarizes some of the characteristics that tend to distinguish the view of the world as exhibited in many Indigenous societies from that represented in Western custom.

Indigenous Worldview

Spirituality is imbedded in all elements of the cosmos

Humans have a responsibility for maintaining harmonious relationship with the natural world

Need for reciprocity between human and natural world; resources are viewed as gifts

Nature is honoured routinely through daily spiritual practice

Wisdom and ethics are derived from direct experience with the natural world

Universe is made up of dynamic, ever-changing natural forces

Universe is viewed as a holistic, integrative system with a unifying life force

Time is circular with natural cycles that sustain all life

Nature will always possess unfathomable mysteries

Human thought, feelings and words are inextricably bound to all other aspects of the universe

Human role is to participate in the orderly designs of nature

Respect for Elders is based on their compassion and reconciliation of outer and inner direct knowledge

Sense of empathy and kinship with other forms of life

View proper human relationship with nature as a continuous two-way, transactional dialogue

(Adapted from Knudston and Suzuki, 1992)

Western Worldview

Spirituality is centered on a single Supreme Being

Humans exercise domination over nature to use it for personal and economic gain

Natural resources are available for unilateral human exploitation

Spiritual practices are intermittent and set apart from daily life

Human reason transcends the natural world and can produce insights independently

Universe is made up of an array of static physical objects

Universe is compartmentalized in dualistic forms and reduces to progressively smaller conceptual parts

Time is a linear chronology of “human progress and development”

Nature is decipherable to the rational human mind

Human thought, feeling and words are formed apart from the surrounding world

Human role is to dissect, analyze and manipulate nature for own ends

Respect for others is based on material achievement and chronological old age

Sense of separate/superiority over other forms of life

View relationship of humans to nature as a one-way hierarchical imperative

The following handbook will provide information that will enable the educator to work toward First Nation culturally-responsive teaching while also encompassing an Aboriginal

choice model philosophy. The handbook is divided into the four directions of the medicine wheel; spiritual, emotional, mental and physical. Each section provides information to guide the educators thinking toward understanding how to develop a First Nations culturally-based classroom and strength-based learning¹ environment with the student's best interest in mind. It is my hope that this handbook will be the start to the educator's knowledge of how to provide a culturally-responsive learning environment for First Nations students in Yukon schools. Keeping Yukon First Nations culturally-relevant education in mind, I will end the handbook with an example of how to organize a Yukon First Nation Culture Camp in an educational setting. All educators' need a start point and it can be challenging to begin if you as the educator are unaware of what best practices looks like in a different cultural norm. The Culture Camp unit is one small example of an event that can be done in a school setting and will incorporate the spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical aspects required in First Nations students learning.

¹ Strength-based learning is the process of acquiring knowledge or skills by applying what makes you strong and building on the individual's past successes.

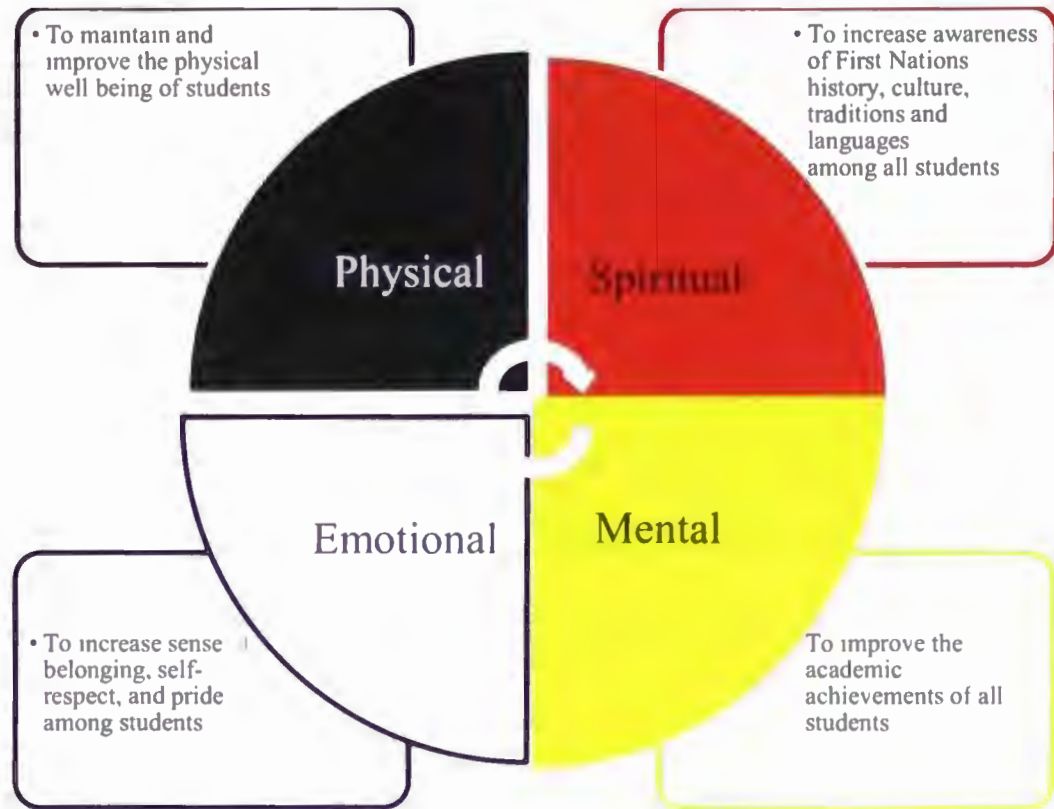


Figure 2. Medicine Wheel model created by Melanie Bennett, in consultation with Yukon First Nation Elders, 2010.

Spiritual

“At its heart indigenous education is a spiritual endeavour” (Cajete, 1998).

The *Spiritual* chapter provides the current foundational beliefs and learning qualities of Yukon First Nations that would create a start for a responsive Indigenous culturally and spiritually-based curriculum. Understanding First Nations spirituality requires a brief explanation of the difference between a First Nation perspective of spirituality and the Anglophone ideal of religion. Linking the importance of spirituality to First Nations learning is an integral part of a culturally responsive teaching and learning.

Although Yukon First Nations are diverse from region to region, Aboriginal cultures share values, beliefs, and views on learning that represent or create or contribute to a cultural philosophy of learning.

Prior to contact, it is known that Aboriginal societies had their own unique form of social organization, spiritual practice and systems of government. Aboriginal peoples developed their social systems so they could function in a manner, which supported their beliefs in a Creator and their understandings of “Natural Law”. Their cultural belief systems about kinship ties encompassed a wide range of both human and spiritual relationships. The Aboriginal vision of the world was both holistic and universal and it was the view of life that made it possible for Aboriginal people to be truly respectful and humanistic in their daily interactions with people and in their co-existence and interdependence with the environment in which they lived. (Hill, 2002, p. 8)

First Nation spiritual beliefs are often confused with religion (Lane, Bopp & Brown, 1984). From the First Nation perspective the spiritual dimension of human development is to first have the capacity to respond to your dreams, second to accept those realities as an opportunity for reflection, third to express these realities in speech, art, science or mathematics, and fourth to use the first three dimensions to guide your future decision making (Lane, Bopp & Brown, 1984). All educators must ensure that students of Aboriginal ancestry are knowledgeable of the world

“beyond” their home community in ways that expand their horizons while strengthening their own identity and this will not happen if they do not know the ancestors who guide them (Tlingit Elder Sam Johnston, 2011). The main difference of worldview between the two cultures of First Nations and the Western world is the Indigenous worldview of spirituality being imbedded in all elements of the cosmos rather than the Western worldview of spirituality being centered on a single Supreme Being.

Yukon First Nations possess a strong spirituality based on an ancient oral tradition and an inherent respect for the land, the forces of nature and the animals and plants they share them with. Spirits are sensed throughout the natural world, in the land, the water, the plants and the animals. It is of great importance to maintain a balanced relationship between all these forces. Native spirituality teaches how to heal people who are sick, how to live off the land in harmony and how to develop spiritual power. Native spirituality is a lifestyle. According to ancient beliefs each person on Earth is given a special gift by the Creator and has a lifelong responsibility to develop that gift for the benefit of the whole community.

Yukon First Nations spiritual foundational beliefs include oral tradition, communication, and self-direction. Through these three foundational beliefs Yukon First Nations acknowledge and celebrate a connection to all things of creation; from the Earth, from the Air, from the Water and from the Fire within all.

Oral tradition plays a significant role in Aboriginal identity. Oral traditions and skills supersede written skills in Aboriginal cultures as it is and always has been the method of all teaching and learning. Teachings or legends, as they may be called today, provide important information on origins, beliefs, values, practices, and social customs. They also recount valuable

lessons about survival, describe the landscape, or convey the deeper spiritual connections. Oral tradition to Yukon First Nations is a way of learning, carrying the history of people, transmitting a living culture, and conveying values, humour, and truth, all while helping to bridge the past with the present. “We tell stories, we talk, it is the way we pass all our knowledge, all our teaching, everything that is important to us” (Selkirk First Nation Elder Lizzie Hall, Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nation Elder Edward Roberts, 2011).

The ability to communicate is highly valued by Aboriginal cultures. Educators need to be aware of their own communication skills with First Nations as well as developing the communication skills of the First Nation students. It must be noted that communication is not only oral in form. A person’s body language and facial expressions can be more important than words in some situations. “We don’t just talk with our words, we talk with our whole body, our face and our actions, what we do is also what we say” (Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nation Elder Percy Henry, 2011). Many First Nations people speak more slowly and use cultural pauses that are longer than those who communicate entirely in English. This pause in the English language is not only a reflection of the pacing of their traditional language and culture, but also relates to the fact that they may not be working and thinking in their mother tongue. Also, First Nations people often take their time to fully consider and respond to a question before answering. It is therefore important to provide adequate time for First Nations people and students to respond when asking questions. North American mainstream culture accepts crosstalk and occasional interruptions in conversation. This can be interpreted as rude and aggressive behaviour by some First Nations people. In Yukon First Nation culture no one has the right to interrupt Elders or talk over and above them when they are speaking. An effective educator is well skilled in the combination of verbal and non-verbal communication when working with First Nation students.

Storytelling, public speaking, presentations, and sharing circles are common cultural forms of communication. Taking part in such activities encourages students to develop better verbal skills and to model the value of sharing and listening. Aboriginal learners must be able to communicate who they are and where they come from in order to know where they are going. Although the concept of knowing who you are and where you come from sounds simplistic, in actuality it is a very complex skill that is developed throughout a First Nation person's life. A skill that begins at birth and continually develops throughout the person's life. Knowing who you are and where you come from involves matrilineal lineage, language, culture of place, traditions, and knowledge of place and region. First Nations learn as they grow about their matrilineal identity with recurrent opportunities of reflective learning in order to develop their identity knowledge and gain direction to where they want to grow to.

Self-direction is widely respected in Aboriginal cultures. Practices such as using insight, having respect for yourself and others, and taking responsibility for your actions are desired life skills for First Nations. This reflects a common cultural understanding; before any action is taken consideration has been given to both the ancestors and future generations. Self-direction of values help students create a positive attitude toward personal growth, learning, and change; developing their own personal ethics, honesty and integrity which are essential values of self-direction.

Aboriginal cultures view all things as having a spirit, having a force and cause of life and interconnection with all things. Understanding the discrepancy in the Indigenous worldview of spirituality being imbedded in all elements of the cosmos rather than the Western worldview of spirituality being centered on a single Supreme Being is the start point for an educator to develop their knowledge of the Indigenous ontology. It is also essential that education practitioners

responsible for designing culturally based curriculum possess an understanding of the foundational beliefs and importance of spirituality to Aboriginal cultures.

Emotional

“In order to teach responsively, you need to examine how students experience learning. It is important to know the symbolic significance students ascribe to your actions. For students, your choice of exercises, materials, and assignments evokes meanings you may not have intended. . . Knowing how they react to criticism, how they deal with failure, and how they move out of frustrating period of being stalled or blocked is crucial to your practice”.

Stephen D. Brookfield, *The Skillful Teacher - On Technique, Trust, and Responsibilities in the Classroom*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 1990

The *Emotional* chapter provides the beginning steps for an educator to building relationships and effective communication with First Nations in a school environment. Learning in all its forms is an emotional experience. Robert P.C. Joseph’s training model of RESPECT is the framework used to narrow educators thinking of how to build effective relationships with First Nation people. The training model is a continuous cyclical process beginning with Research and moving through stages of Evaluation, Strategizing, Presenting, Evaluation, Customizing, and Transforming. Joseph’s RESPECT model is used as a business model of how to engage First Nation governments. For the purpose of this handbook and with the guidance from Yukon First Nation Elders I have adapted the model to fit an educational mindset with the educator in the center of the learning process. Joseph’s model in the business field is viewed as a template that enables people to build cross-cultural awareness and provide the background on what to do and what not to do in developing effective-long term relationships with First Nation people. Joseph has also delivered training courses using his RESPECT model in the educational field as the concepts are easily adaptable and viewed as informative to those who are not aware of Aboriginal peoples’ issues and challenges, especially with respect to schools and education (Joseph, 2007).

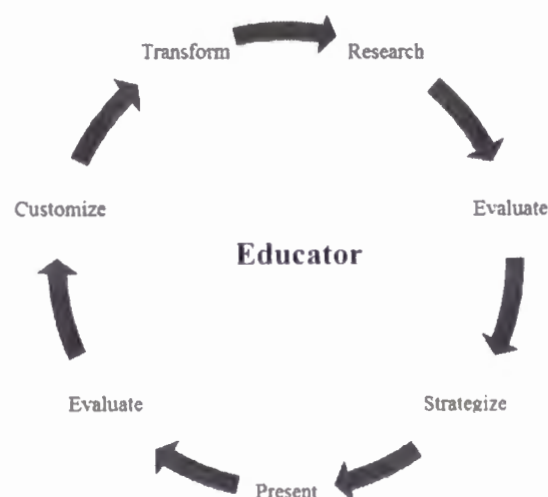


Figure 3. R.P.C. Joseph's RESPECT Model of Communication (2007)

The initial stage of *Research* is the beginning of the educator to discover his or her own beliefs of working with First Nations. A first point of self-reflection and asking questions such as: Am I comfortable working with First Nations?; What ideals, values and beliefs do I bring that influence my decision making when interacting with First Nations?; and What assumptions do I bring to the classroom when engaging with First Nation students and community members?. The Research stage is also the initial point of discovery to ask the questions about the First Nation student: What are the important influences in the student's life?; What is the matrilineal family name they follow?; What are the names of the students Elders, grandparents, aunts, uncles and family?; Does the student follow a clan or moiety?; and, What cultural activities does the student participate in outside of the school?. It is at this stage of questioning that the educator is acknowledging their lack of knowledge and putting themselves in the learner position. The educator is gathering the necessary background knowledge and information to inform their journey of developing a strong relationship with First Nation students and their community.

The next stage in the RESPECT process is to *Evaluate* the information you have gathered in your research of the student. To then spread out all the information and find where it fits best for you as an educator and the student and enable an educator to create an effective learning environment in which the students' Aboriginal worldview will be acknowledged and understood. This is also the stage in which the educator is asking the question of how I can utilize the information gathered in my teaching to create a best practice with the students' interest in mind. Recognizing that you as the educator are in the beginning process of learning another worldview and must be cognisant of not placing your own personal values and beliefs on the information you have gathered.

Following the Evaluate stage is the *Strategize* practice. The educator will put together a strategy of how they can approach students learning and maintain a culturally responsive learning atmosphere in the classroom and school. The educator will want to consider individual and organizational approaches that meet the cultural needs of the students. This is the stage in the process where the educator will begin to build an informed plan of action to provide First Nations culturally-responsive education with strength-based learning and the student's best interest in mind. The educator will be strategizing how they will lay out their plan for the year; incorporating Elders, First Nation community members, cultural activities, and culturally-relevant lessons into the daily learning. It is also necessary to strategize what the starting point will be for the educator as they begin to communicate with First Nations and learn to build their culturally responsive education environment. The *Strategize* practice is a form of backwards design, in-which the educator is beginning with the end in mind and then gathering the information to achieve the end goal of cultural and relational pluralism for both the educator and the students.

During the *Present* stage the educator is now engaging with the First Nations and developing an understanding of cultural protocols and uses in context when working with First Nations. Cultural protocols are a set of guidelines that outline the traditional practices that are to be respected and adhered to at all times. Protocols strengthen relationships based upon trust, acknowledgement and recognition. This all begins by asking questions and the educator becoming a learner themselves. An engagement with the First Nation community is necessary at this point to gain the perspective of the cultural protocols and connectivity of families and extended families to the students. Engaging with First Nations in Yukon can happen in many different ways or places; potlatches, hand game tournaments, feasts, celebrations, gatherings, seasonal camps, weddings and funerals are all opportunities for the educator to be a respectful, empathic, observant person or participant. Community members understand that you may not be fully aware of their First Nation culture and will unknowingly make mistakes. However, any efforts you make to be respectful and to learn the culture will go a long way toward making yourself more at home in the community. It will take time to learn about the community and build relationships. When people recognize that you are open, sincere and respectful, they will value your interest and effort. According to Joseph (2007), it is at this stage of *Present* that the educator will identify their own cultural biases and begin to develop the skills to manoeuvre between the two cultures.

After the *Present* stage the educator must then move on to the *Evaluate* stage. Once the educator has developed his or her knowledge of the First Nation community, learned protocols and made a connection to the community then it is time to evaluate how things went. A secondary point of self-reflection and analysis to gauge how things progressed in the community and how the educator's learning is developing. The educator would be asking himself or herself

questions such as: How did interactions with community members go?; What questions did community members ask of me?; and, What did I learn about First Nations, their community and how will and how can I use the information gathered to benefit our teaching and learning environment at school?. The educator should use the opportunity of self-reflection to narrow their focus and drive their purpose of what they are gathering the information for; building relationships and creating a culturally-responsive teaching environment that bridges cross-cultural boundaries. Again recognizing that you must be mindful of not placing your own personal values and beliefs on the information you have gathered.

During the *Customize* stage the educator is then taking the information they have learned, incorporating their personal feedback from the *Present* stage and returning to the community to ensure your communication is accurate and will meet best practices in the school environment. This is the checks and balance stage that ensures the educator is prepared to effectively communicate with First Nations and the development of understanding is occurring from both cultures. It is here the educator is ensuring the information they have learned is accurate and they are comfortable to begin using it in their teaching. Relationships have begun to evolve between the educator and the First Nations, and resources have been acquired for the educator to bring into their daily teaching. A final check to confirm the educator is informed and prepared to move into delivering a culturally-based education.

The final stage of *Transform* is the point at which if the educator has followed the cultural protocols and processes they will be able to transform their relationship with the Aboriginal community in and out of the school. The educator will have developed a cultural pluralism and have a full understanding of the cultural norms of the First Nations. Transformation is an on-

going process that takes continual commitment from the educator to sustain and deepen the mutual long-term relationship between the educator and First Nation students.

In my opinion as an experienced teacher, the RESPECT training model is a simplistic framework for educators to follow and begin the process of building relationships with their students, parents, Elders and community members involved in the school and educational setting. The RESPECT model is cyclical and continuous process with no end point. For the educator there will be constant development in the learning of a new culture. In the models simplicity, it is my belief that if an educator follows the structure of the framework they will be able to begin the important step toward building relationships with First Nation students and their families.

Mental

“We want education to provide the setting in which our children can develop the fundamental attitudes and values which have an honoured place in Indian tradition and culture. The values which we want to pass on to our children, values which make our people a great race, are not written in any book. They are found in our history, in our legends and in the culture. We believe that if an Indian child is fully aware of the important Indian values he will have reason to be proud of our race and of himself as an Indian.”

National Indian Brotherhood policy paper entitled *Indian Control of Indian Education*, presented to Indian Affairs Minister Jean Chretien in December, 1972.

The *Mental* chapter identifies the importance of student achievement and how it is linked to the student's sense of belonging and Aboriginal cultural identity in the school. It is in the mental aspect that Indigenous societies believe all intellectual capacity is captured (Lane, Bopp, & Brown, 1984). An educational framework of a ten month whole school vision with a Yukon First Nation perspective is provided. Each month of the framework includes a theme, whole school goals and traditional medicine/ceremony. The framework can be used to guide the educator's thinking for the planning of daily activities within the school as well as connecting to performance standards and curricular outcomes. The framework has been created with the guidance of Yukon First Nation Elders Sam Johnston, Lizzie Hall, Edward Roberts and Percy Henry.

The following framework is a succinct guide to set the whole school vision in an Aboriginal philosophy of learning. The framework is the beginning for the educators' thinking when planning classroom lessons and unit themes throughout the year. The framework does not provide the individual lessons, but it does provide the theme for the educator to direct their thinking and planning for the students' learning. It is incumbent for the educator to use the Indigenous language in the classroom whenever possible, incorporate local community practices into lessons, utilize culturally relevant material, work with Elders in the school and classroom,

bring role models into the classroom, and use a variety of classroom instruction and management styles that model traditional teachings. Cadwallader (2004) found that when Indigenous knowledge was systemically and holistically included into schools, student achievement improved. He says, “One of the most important learning’s for many teachers is how influential culture is in helping Aboriginal students be successful in school” (p.101). Building strong relationships with Aboriginal students and families assists in including Indigenous knowledge in the classroom in a meaningful way that leads to positive learning outcomes. The importance of building a relationship and involving the parents, families, and communities of your students in their education cannot be emphasized enough.

Educational Framework Whole School Vision

Month	September	October	November	December	January
Theme	Gathering and harvesting time: What is the work?	Hunting time: Preparing and learning to work	Winter hunting, trapping and storytelling: To cherish knowledge is to know wisdom	Winter hunting, trapping and storytelling: To know love is to find peace	Winter hunting, trapping and storytelling: To honour all of creation is to have respect
Whole School Goals	Establishing a positive learning environment and secure climate of care. A time to gather and prepare for the work of winter.	To focus the development of active participation in creating positive relationships of all participants aimed at fulfilling the school vision.	Recognition through learning opportunities made available, that the knowledge gained will provide the strength and wisdom required to meet life's challenges.	Recognizing love is unconditional by promoting family unity through storytelling and sharing in the celebration of relationships	Developing the understanding of respect by honouring the individual uniqueness and gifts of difference and how those gifts relate with other's gifts
Medicine	Smudge/cleansing ceremony Sage/Tobacco Tea	Spruce/Sage Tobacco/Tea	Protection Justice Healing ways	Smudge Tobacco/Tea Sharing of food and gifts.	Mother Earth relationships Smudge Tobacco/Tea Sharing of food and gifts.
Month	February	March	April	May	June
Theme	Hunting, trapping and preparing for summer work time: Courage and integrity	Medicine gathering and preparing for summer work time: Honesty in facing a situation is to be brave	Medicine gathering time: Humility is to be yourself as a sacred part of creation	Truth is to know all of these things	Honour all and celebrate each of our gifts
Whole School Goals	Development of individual strengths	To help all to understand personal/communal responsibilities and gain self-confidence in practising smudge, medicine and speaking with truth and respect	To develop the understanding of the value in all living things by promoting strong self-identity, equality and purpose	Developing understanding of the relationship with the Circle of Life and that cycles create change and change is constant	Honouring accomplishments of everyone throughout the year
Medicine	Sage/Tobacco Tea Personal power and vision Individual gifts	Tobacco/Balsam Tea	Water/Fire Women's teachings and Mother Earth's medicine	Circle of Life Stages of relationship and stages of life	Accomplishment Respecting and celebrating Creator's wish of personal fulfillment

The month of September in Yukon is one of the busiest times where we, as Yukon First Nations, are hunting, gathering and preparing for the winter months to come. In the school realm it is the time of preparing for the year of work to come. There can be challenges in setting the stage of learning and preparing for the work of the school year within the school when First Nation students are out on the land with their parents hunting, gathering and preparing for their winter. Instead of viewing these two important times as opposing one another, it is more effective to bring the learning together and acknowledge both.

The start of the school year is a time to smudge and accept the blessings our Creator gives to each and every child, each and every educator, and the place in which their learning will occur. It is also necessary to identify the strengths of each child and what work will have to be done in order to create a positive learning environment for the students. All including; parents, grandparents, families, students, teachers and supporting community members must know what the school vision is and know their role in achieving their goals and success for the school year. ‘Beginnings’ are always acknowledged with blessings and a feast to bring everyone together.

The month of October is a time of continuing the work for the long winter; hunting, gathering and preparing. Some students may still be supporting their family in their hunting season and provisions for winter. September offered the preparation for the year’s work within the school; October is the phase of acknowledging the relationships between all and continuing to construct the foundation for the year. The students learning will focus on reinforcing the goals and parameters for all in the year of learning in the school.

November is the onset of the winter months when Yukon First Nations participate in the season of trapping and story-telling. The stories from Elders who provide the wisdom of

experiences are shared to guide us in our knowledge and ways of knowing. As we gain wisdom we gain the strength to deal with life's challenges. The students learning will focus on how the knowledge gained will provide the strength and wisdom students require and meet all of life's challenges.

December continues with the winter work of trapping. The story-telling involves family, relationships and honouring each other with understanding the selflessness of love. The school year will bring the holiday break in this month with times for celebrations to deepen relationships with the school community and bring families together. The students learning will be focused on recognizing love is unconditional by promoting family unity through storytelling and sharing in the celebration of relationships

January is the month of reinforcing relationships and developing inner strengths of the students. The students learning will focus on cultivating an understanding of respect and their role of respecting themselves and others. Yukon First Nations develop respect through honouring each individual's gifts and acknowledging them in the community. Respect is taught through reciprocal relationships with everyone in the community. The concept of earning, teaching and sharing respect is the same within the school environment; teaching, giving and receiving respect have equal value among all.

February continues the winter and can be one of the coldest months of the year. Traditionally Yukon First Nations participated in a variety of games that were tests of strength, courage and skill. Dene games such as snow snake, pole push, finger pull, stick pull and hand games were all competitions that demonstrated individual strength's, courage and integrity. Currently these games are still used in Arctic Winter Games competitions and gathering of many

Yukon First Nations. The students learning will be focused on development of individual strengths. February is the time to continue building upon the advancement of each person's individual strength's, courage and integrity.

March brings spring, rejuvenation and medicines gathering. The plants are beginning their process toward the summer growth and First Nations honour them with the collection of spring medicines, preparation and preservation of the medicines for future use. When gathering medicines from Mother Earth, First Nations are teaching what our roles and responsibilities in the world are through how we gather the medicines respectfully. The students learning will focus on building and understanding personal and communal responsibilities in order to gain self-confidence in practising smudge, medicine and speaking with truth and respect.

April is the connection of spring medicines and Mother Earth's provisions and growing students' knowledge of their bond to all things created. The students' learning is focused on developing an understanding of the value in all living things by promoting strong self-identity, equality and purpose. In First Nation beliefs everything is connected and there is spirituality in all things including plants and trees. When we gather medicines it is our connection to the medicines that drives the teaching of being honest, respectful and responsible for the plants for giving their spirituality and medicines to heal and nurture us.

May is the month to focus on the acknowledgement of our relationship and roles in the circle of life. First Nations live a deep connection and have a strong recognition that we are all tied together as beings and part of the continuous changes in life. The students learning is focused on the enhancement of understanding of the relationship with the Circle of Life and how those cycles create change and that change is constant in our world.

June brings the summer months with traditional celebrations, gatherings and connecting communities in the festivities. Many Yukon First Nations participate in annual or bi-annual celebrations and gatherings. During these celebrations and gatherings First Nations participate in traditional dancing, singing, games and cultural ceremonies. Most of the traditional celebrations and gatherings occur over a number of days and celebrate the individual First Nation's culture and strengths. Within the school, the celebrations of culture and strengths of each student is the focus for the end of the school year.

The philosophy behind this framework and whole school vision is to provide the platform of Indigenous concepts for the educator as the leader and role model. This will assist the educator to develop their cultural curricula, activities, lessons, incorporation of local community practices into lessons, utilizing culturally-relevant material, and use a variety of classroom instruction and management styles that model traditional teachings. Creating a learning environment that understands, acknowledges and celebrates the culture of Indigenous ways of knowing will deliver the sense of belonging needed for the Aboriginal students.

Physical

“If a child can’t learn the way we teach, maybe we should teach the way they learn”
(Estrada).

The *Physical* chapter is a representation of Yukon culturally-based knowledge and skills for the educator to use as information and a stepping off point when teaching. It is a holistic approach to what steps are involved in developing hands-on land-based culturally responsive curriculum for both in and out of the classroom. In this section, I will also explain why there is an importance in having a land-based perspective for First Nations and the connectivity to physical aspects. First Nations believe the physical aspect is where a person demonstrates their power and leadership through their own volition (Lane, Bopp & Brown, 1984). Through a person’s power they can develop their physical abilities of the body (1984). The final part of this section will provide an example of how to organize a Yukon First Nation Culture Camp in an educational setting.

There is a common misperception of the term, *hands-on-learning*, and what it means to a First Nation person. Hands-on-learning is not just the act of a person doing or creating something involving the use of their hands. Hands-on-learning would be better described as learning that happens as the person experiences it, which can take many forms. The more recent trends in teaching of hands-on-learning, use of manipulatives and interactive learning are not recent at all. Traditionally, once children had observed skills, tasks, and ceremonies in their younger stages they further their learning by actually working alongside their older relatives. “When I tell a story, the child is learning by experience of my story and my sharing it” (Tlingit Elder Sam Johnston, 2011). Experiential learning is making a significant impact in education and youth

development. Challenge and adventure activities create powerful learning environments which fully engage youth and foster the development of courage, resilience, and responsibility.

The most important factor to creating a physical connection for First Nation students in a school is to use the traditional Native language. “Our culture is our language; you can’t just hear it; you have to speak it, feel it, and experience it” (Selkirk First Nation Elder Lizzie Hall, 2011). Language is a vital part of Yukon First Nations culture. Yukon First Nations language has many layers of meaning that do not translate into English. There are eight language groups in Yukon and each language contains an immense system of cultural knowledge including philosophy and spirituality, oral history, songs and dances, art, environmental systems and biodiversity, technical skills for survival, fishing, hunting and plant use, medical expertise, and significant cultural practices. To not use the language is the loss of an enormous wealth of knowledge. Through the oral tradition, lessons, stories and songs were handed down to the next generation. In this way, traditions and culture were maintained. Teaching through oral tradition requires learners to develop strong listening and retelling skills as well as developing a physical relationship with all their surroundings. Educators can invite speakers of First Nations languages into the classroom to encourage students to learn, hear and experience their languages. They can facilitate language-speaking events such as speeches, songs and dances and invite parents and grandparents into the classroom to participate in these events. Incorporating First Nations languages in lessons and unit plans by consulting and collaborating with First Nations Language teachers offers endless opportunities to enhance the experiential learning environment of the students.

Seasonal camps are opportunities to deepen the culturally-based education and have the students participate in on-the-land activities. Fall camps can incorporate the harvesting with activities such as berry picking, birch basket making, fish camps, and moose and caribou

hunting; winter camps can integrate trapping and skinning skills and Dene games; spring camps can combine medicines collecting, ceremonies and rejuvenation; summer camps include celebrations, gatherings and reconnecting with family and friends. Providing culture camp opportunities for students has endless possibilities to include Elders in all the learning. The Elders presence ensures protocols and traditional knowledge are adhered to. If the educator participates in the organization of a culture camp, it will afford the educator prospects of engaging with the community and build lasting relationships with community members.

Learning a worldview other than your own takes willingness from the learner as well as practice, practice and practice. With that in mind I want to finish the handbook with an example of how to organize a First Nation Culture Camp and incorporate the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical into the students' learning, and provide a succinct list of resources in Yukon Education. Any teaching has a start point, but it is difficult to begin if you as the educator are unfamiliar with the norms of people you are working for and with. Always remember that the outcome of any difficult task is determined by the person's readiness and dedication toward its success in each and every step; in my Grandmother's words "small steps will take you on a long journey".

“Any” School Yukon First Nation Spring Culture Camp

Rationale

The purpose of the spring culture camp is to provide the students with the opportunity to be immersed in First Nation cultural activities that focus on traditional hunting and gathering, traditional food and traditional games. All activities will be presented in a hands on approach, learning from our Elders and be linked to how First Nations utilized everything so as to create as little impact on the environment as possible.

Some activities will be provided to intermediate students only as a certain skill level is required. The primary students will be included in other activities during class time so as not to feel "excluded" from these other activities that require a higher skill level.

This particular spring culture camp format was used in an urban elementary school, kindergarten through to Grade 7, with limited access to outdoor land resources.

Explanation of Activities

Atlatls: The intermediate classes (Grade 4 through 7) will participate in a session that will allow the students to build traditional atlatls. The students will be guided by an artisan who will provide many examples for the students to see. The students will also be assisted by the Sun Dog Carvers when they create their atlatls. The Sun Dog Carvers are a group of First Nation carvers who will provide a role model method of teaching. At the same time the students will be able to see the traditional works of art the carvers have created themselves. All of the atlatl building will occur on one day. On the second day all of the classes will participate in an atlatl throwing contest during the regularly scheduled gym classes. An extra class set of atlatls has been made

ahead of time in order to accommodate the primary grades who did not participate in the atlatl building sessions.

Archery: During one day of the culture camp the intermediate students (grade five through seven) will participate in learning the traditional skill of archery. The students will go outside to the school field and learn this skill from an experienced Elder. Each class group will spend approximately one hour learning this activity. For fun and a little motivation a five dollar bill is pinned to the targets and if a student hits the bill they get it.

Inuit Sport: During one day of the culture camp the intermediate students (grade four through seven) will participate in traditional Inuit sport. The students will learn Inuit sports such as the One Foot High Kick, Two Foot High Kick, Elbow Pull, Musk Ox Push and Alaskan Toe Kick.

Tent Activities: There will be a large wall tent set up in the trees near the soccer field. The tent activities will include three different activities. The class groups will split into two or three groups and spend half an hour at each activity. The dividing of groups will depend on each class size. The larger classes can split into three groups and the smaller classes into two groups so long as the classes spend half an hour at each activity. The three activities are bannock making, traditional tool demonstration with an Elder and Hand Games with two Elders. Both the bannock making and Hand Games will be outside the tent but within the proximity to provide ease of transition when groups change activities. (Note: Put the Hand Games far enough away from the tent so the drumming will not interrupt with the Elder speaking about the traditional tools in the tent).

Button Blankets: The Grade 1 and Grade 3 classes will create a small version of a Button Blanket under the guidance of two Elders. The Elders will first tell the students a story about

Button Blankets and then explain the Button Blankets uses as well as purpose in First Nation culture. Both classes will show their works of art and do a small Button Blanket poem at the culminating assembly. (Note: The music teacher has been preparing and practising ahead of time with the two classes to perform the poem.) The Button Blankets are started with the classes at the beginning of the week so the classes will have enough time to finish them. The lesson plan for this activity states one to two hours but every primary teacher knows it will take more time than this. The one to two hour lesson plan is to accommodate the participation of the Elders.

Rattles: The Grade 2 class has previously made traditional rattles out of caribou skin and antler. An Elder will be coming to the class to talk to the students about the importance of the caribou to First Nations in the Yukon. The Elder will have a variety of samples for the students to see and touch. (e.g., Antlers, hides, hooves, jaw bones.) The class will also be performing a caribou chant at the culminating assembly with their rattles. Again the music teacher has been preparing ahead of time and practising with the students during music.

Culminating Assembly and Feast: The week of activities will end with an assembly and stew and bannock feast in the school gym. The parents and all participating members of the culture camp will be invited to the assembly and feast. The pre-planning for the feast is that each class will be designated to bring items for the stew (e.g., Each Grade 7 student will bring three potatoes and each Grade 2 student will bring three carrots). Also the local First Nation Liaison (CELC) has acquired a supply of wild meat ahead of time from a number of local First Nation members. The food will be collected and prepared on the Thursday of the week. The assembly will take place and then the feast will follow.

Schedule of Events Day One

Activity: Traditional Atlatl building in art room with intermediate classes, instructor and Sun Dog Carvers.

8:30 am to 10:10 am – Grade 4 and grade 5

10:30 am to 11:55 am – Grade 4 and grade 6/7

1:00 pm to 2:30 pm – Grade 7

Activity: Tent – Bannock, Traditional Tools, Hand Games

8:30 am to 10:10 am – Grade 2

10:30 am to 11:55 am – Grade 5

1:00 pm to 2:30 pm – Grade 1

Activity: Inuit Sport

8:34 am to 9:40 am – Grade 4

9:40 am to 10:10 am/10:25am to 11:00 – Grade 7

11:00 am to 11:55 am – Grade 4/5

12:50 pm to 1:50 pm – Grade 5

1:50 pm to 3:00 pm – Grade 6/7

Activity: Button Blankets

8:30 am to 10:10 – Grade 1

12:50 pm to 2:30 pm – Grade 3

Schedule of Events Day Two

Activity: Atlatl throwing competition on the school soccer field. Each class will follow the regular gym schedule and attend the soccer field. The schedule is as follows:

8:34 am to 9:10 am – Grade 4
9:10 am to 9:40 am – Kindergarten
9:40 am to 10:10 am – Grade 3
10:25 am to 11:20 am – Grade 7
11:20 am to 11:55 am – Grade 1
12:50 pm to 1:20 pm – Grade 4/5
1:20 pm to 1:50 pm – Grade 2
1:50 pm to 2:20 pm – Grade 5
2:20 pm to 3:00 pm – Grade 6/7

Activity: Tent – Bannock, Traditional Tools, Hand Games

8:30 am to 10:10 am – Grade 4
10:30 am to 11:55 am – Grade 6/7
1:00 pm to 2:30 pm – Grade 4/5

Activity: Rattles: Interactive caribou show and tell

12:50 pm to 1:20 pm/2:30 pm to 3:00 – Grade 2

Schedule of Events Day Three

Activity: Archery on the soccer field.

8:30 am to 10:10 am – Grade 5

10:30 am to 11:55 am – Grade 6/7

1:00 pm to 2:30 pm – Grade 7

Activity: Tent – Bannock, Traditional Tools, Hand Games

8:30 am to 10:10 am – Grade 7

10:30 am to 11:55 am – Grade 3

1:00 pm to 2:30 pm – Grade K

Schedule of Events Day Four

Culminating Assembly Agenda

Start time 10:30 am

- Opening prayer by Elder
- Welcome speech by Grand Chief
- Entrance of Traditional School Dancers with the ‘Flag Song’
- Singing of ‘O Canada’ in Southern Tutchone by Traditional School Dancers (and any other school members that can sing along)
- Grade 5 poetry presentation “And My Heart Soars”
- Grade 2 rattle presentation “Caribou chant”
- Grades 1 & 3 Button Blanket presentation
- Grade 6/7 presentation
- “Any” School Beading Club presentation of school quilt. (This is a quilt made of leather squares that have beadwork on them completed by students in the school.) This quilt will be hung in the school hall and squares will be continually added to it over the years.
- Expressions of thanks and gift giving to contributors of the Spring Culture Camp.
- Exit of the Traditional School Dancers with the “Flag Song”

Feast

Start time is approximately 11:30 am. An Elder must be invited to say a prayer either in their traditional language or in English. Elders and parents will be served first by the grade seven helpers. Then the students will line up by class (buffet style) and be served stew and bannock. Everyone eats in the gymnasium. As the students finish they will go outside for lunch recess. This usually takes about thirty minutes. Grade seven helpers will stay to help clean up the gym after everyone has completed eating.

Budget

Atlatls

Honorarium for presenter x two days @ \$150.00 per day	\$300.00
Honorarium to Sun Dog Carvers school	\$150.00
Lunch for Sun Dog Carvers (5 pizzas)	\$100.00
Gift to Sun Dog Carvers	\$25.00
Extra supplies (ie. Exacto knives)	\$25.00

Archery

Honorarium for Elder	\$150.00
Overnight stay in hotel for Elder	\$200.00
Estimated cost of broken arrows	\$140.00

Inuit Sport

Lunch for presenters (2 pizzas)	\$40.00
Gift	\$25.00

Tent Activities

Honorarium for 3 Elders x 3 days @ \$150.00 each	\$1350.00
Honorarium for 1 Elder x 4 days @ \$150.00	\$600.00
Supplies for bannock making	\$150.00
Propane for barbeque	\$25.00

Button Blankets

Supplies for two classes to build individual blankets	\$53.00
Honorarium for 1 Elder x one day	\$150.00

Culminating Assembly and Feast

Elder honorarium for opening/dinner prayer & school after	\$150.00
Meal Supplies (cutlery, bowls, jam, etc)	\$100.00
Gifts for various participants	\$100.00

Total costs	\$3833.00
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Lesson Plans

Lesson A: Atlatls

Purpose: To allow students the opportunity to create their own atlatl from a piece of willow. The students will be taught carving techniques by First Nation carvers. The atlatl throwing competition will allow the students to demonstrate the use of their atlatl and provide the opportunity for the students to celebrate their newly learned knowledge.

Rationale: To provide the students with the opportunity to learn about a traditional First Nation tool and its uses. The students will be learning using a hands on approach and a First Nations mentoring model.

Time: 1 ½ hours

Supplies needed:

Lengths of willow approximately a foot and half with a “hook” branch

Exacto knives

Large clippers to cut lengths of willow if necessary

Elastoplast bandaids (to cover thumb and forefinger **before** the students begin to carve)

Black permanent marker

Introduction (10 minutes):

During this time the instructor will explain what the atlatl is and what it was traditionally used for by First Nations in the Yukon. Facts such as the age of the atlatl and significance of the atlatl will be explained. The instructor will have lots of sample atlatls to show as well.

Demonstration (10 minutes):

The instructor will explain how to measure and carve the atlatl. Safety instructions and explanation of method to carve the atlatl will be given.

Carving (1hour):

Using Exacto knives the students will carve atlatls under the guidance of the Sun Dog Carvers and the instructor.

Close (10 minutes):

Make sure all the students have labelled their atlatl with their name and grade.

The instructor will end the session with a short demonstration of throwing the atlatl. This will be a lead up to the next day’s throwing competition. The instructor will also give out the information of the atlatl and how is thought by some that it was one of the significant factors in the demise of Buffalo in the Yukon! The students will be ensured that their atlatls will be saved for tomorrow’s throwing competition and after that they will be able to take it home.

Lesson B: Archery

Purpose: To allow students the opportunity to learn about the bow and arrow as one of the traditional hunting tools of First Nations in the Yukon.

Rationale: To provide the students with the opportunity to learn about a traditional First Nation tool and its uses. The students will be learning using a hands on approach and a First Nations mentoring model.

Time: 1 ½ hours

Supplies needed:

Kevlar net (This will be hung on the backstop of the baseball diamond and is to catch any arrows that miss the targets)

Bows (as many as possible)

Arrows (as many as possible)

Target papers

Target stands

3D targets if available

\$5.00 bills to tape to the center of each target

Introduction (10 minutes):

During this time the instructor will explain the use of the bow to First Nations. Important fact that will be discussed is that the bow came after the atlatl. Safety instructions will be given at this time.

Demonstration (10 minutes):

The instructor will explain how to properly hold the bow. Safety instructions and explanation of method to shoot and retrieve arrows will be given. The instructor will then group students according to size of bow they will be able to draw back and pull.

Shooting (1 hour):

Under the guidance of the Elder and his assistant the students will take turns in small groups shooting arrows at a target.

Close (10 minutes):

The instructor will demonstrate his skill by shoot five targets in a row! The instructor will also give a little pitch to the students about joining archery and how they would be able to do that in Whitehorse.

Resources:

Tuktu and the Magic Bow – VT 2893

(Can be acquired through resource services)

Lesson C: Rattles

Purpose: To allow students the opportunity to learn about the bow and arrow as one of the traditional hunting tools of First Nations in the Yukon.

Rationale: To provide the students with the opportunity to learn about a traditional First Nation tool and its uses. The students will be learning using a hands on approach and a First Nations mentoring model.

Time: 2 hours on day one and 1 hour on day two

Supplies needed:

Raw caribou skin cut into small circles and previously soaked in water to make pliable

Caribou horns (tips cut to be used as the handles of the rattle)

Leather punch to put holes in caribou

Sinew to sew together

Sand

Popcorn

Pattern for rattle top

Introduction (10 minutes):

During this time the instructor will show samples of the rattles the students will be creating. A short discussion of what the rattles were used for and what they are made of will be done at this time. An Elder can be brought in to tell a story or sing a chant using the rattles.

Demonstration (10 minutes):

An explanation and demonstration of how the two pieces of wet caribou skin are to be sewn together will be given at this time. No needles are required as the holes punched are large enough for the sinew to be threaded through by hand. Once the two pieces of caribou have been sewn together it will be filled with sand and hung to dry overnight. On the second day the rattle top will be emptied of sand and the neck will be re-soaked to make it pliable again. The bowl of the rattle will be filled with a few popcorn seeds. The neck of the rattle top (when pliable enough) will be wrapped around the tip of the caribou horn and secured with sinew. Once the rattle dries a second time it will be ready for use.

Sewing (1 hour):

The teacher and Elder will assist the students with sewing, stuffing with sand, hanging and to dry and any other things to complete the task.

Close (10 minutes):

This is another opportunity for the Elder to tell a story or perform a song or chant with the rattle.

Extension: The students can learn a song, poem or chant in music and use the rattles. A performance can be arranged in an assembly to allow the students to celebrate their accomplishments. (See assembly agenda on page 8)

Resources:

The Potlatch – VT 4678

Traditional drum making, rattle making and drum care – VT 5254

(Both of these resources can be acquired from resource services)

Lesson D: Button Blankets

Purpose: To allow students the opportunity to learn about traditional regalia of some First Nations in the Yukon. To allow the students to participate in a hand's on activity while learning from Elders. Provide the students with an opportunity to engage in storytelling with an Elder on the topic of Button Blankets.

Rationale: To provide the students with the opportunity to learn about one of the traditional First Nation regalia and its uses. The students will be learning using a hand's on approach and a First Nations mentoring model.

Time: 1 ½ to 2 hours

Supplies needed:

8 ½ x 11 inch swatches of felt (black, red or blue)
 Pre made squares with contrasting borders
 Pre-cut patterns of Skookum (the sun)
 Variety of small white buttons
 Either white glue or a glue gun

Introduction (15 minutes):

A short story and discussion about Button Blankets will be given at this time. The two Elders will explain where the Button Blanket comes from and what it was used for.

Demonstration (15 minutes):

The instructor will explain how the pattern will be glued to the square of felt. (Hint: for primary grades have the borders pre-glued on the square.) The students will glue on the pattern (for this group they will be doing the Skookum, the sun. Once their main pattern is glued on the students will be able to glue on the buttons. All of this will be done with the guidance of the teacher and the Elders.

Blanket Construction (1hour):

During the construction stage the Elders will focus on mini discussions with the students and helping the students put their blankets together. The Elders presence and small discussions with the students incorporates the model of mentoring and learning from our Elders.

Close (10 minutes):

The Elders will perform a short dance while wearing their Button Blanket.

Resources:

Button Blanket, McNutt, Nan. 646.4MCM
 Northwest Coast People – Theme box 0046
 (These can both be acquired through resource services.)

Lesson E: Inuit and Dene Sports

Purpose: To allow students the opportunity to learn about a variety of Inuit and Dene sports and hopefully inspire the students to join extracurricular activities in this sport.

Rationale: To provide the students with the opportunity to learn about a traditional Inuit and Dene games. Learning the Inuit and Dene games will expose students to another form of sporting activities and demonstrate the cultural importance of these activities.

Time: 1 hour

Supplies needed:

Poles and seal for one foot and two foot high kick
Sticks and grease for stick pull
Straps for head pull
Gym mats
Tape measure

Introduction (10 minutes):

The instructor will explain the cultural importance of the Inuit and Dene Games. Focussing on how the games were used to develop the First Nations and Inuit's hunting and survival skills.

Demonstration and Lesson (45 minutes):

The instructor will have two assistants. The instructor will explain the activity while the two assistants demonstrate each activity. This will be done for each activity. After the students have seen the demonstration they will then be allowed to try the activity. Each activity will be explained individually, bringing the group back each time. The students will spend approximately 10 minutes per activity. The instructor may choose to teach only one or two activities per class so the students have enough practice time. This will be at the instructor's discretion as well as how the class dynamics pan out.

Close (10 minutes):

The instructor will reiterate what the Inuit and Dene Games were traditionally used for and explain their cultural importance for hunting and gathering skills. The two assistants will then wow the students with their skills of kicking a target nine feet above their heads!

Resources:

Arctic Winter Games Technical Package (This is updated every year)
Aboriginal Sport Yukon
Skookum Jim Recreation Department

Chapter 5 - Reflections

Chapter 1 provided the background as to why there is a need for this type of research project, explained a general outline of the project, and clarified the direction in which this project would take. Chapter 2 started with an examination of literature from a historical perspective of Yukon First Nations and in particular considered Charleston's model of *True* native education. Chapter 2 also explored educational change theories from a few well known leaders of change and narrowed the focus to an Aboriginal educational change theory. Chapter 2 also provided an explanation of the need for Aboriginal students to have a sense of belonging in the school and looked into what traditional First Nation education was. Chapter 3 explained the research methodologies used in the undertaking of the research project. Chapter 3 also examined some Aboriginal choice schools that are currently operating in Canada and were visited by the researcher to gain an in-depth knowledge of how the schools Indigenous philosophies operated within the public school system. Chapter 3 concluded in clarifying the process used in the development of the handbook. Chapter 4, the handbook, is a resource for educators' which describes an Indigenous framework rooted in Yukon First Nations philosophies. The handbook in Chapter 4 was separated into the four quadrants of spiritual, emotional, mental and physical of the medicine wheel and follows a universally-known Indigenous model. In this chapter, I will provide my personal reflections on the process of completing the research project and end with a summation of a few future recommendations.

The inspiration to complete this handbook came from my Mother, Hilda Titus and my Grandmother, Alice Titus; both strong women who instilled in me the tenacity to be an educator and not be afraid to blaze a trail, instead of following a path. As a First Nation educator in a Eurocentric education system I have developed strong skills of relational and cultural pluralism. I

started this process with my Mother at my side encouraging me that “it is a good idea” and am now ending this process with my Mother as an ancestor and I can still hear her encouraging me “anä (go)” and do it! I hope that the handbook will be the start to the educator’s building the same relational and cultural pluralism skills and continue to do so, as it is a life-long journey.

At the start of this research project, my hope was that a resource such as the handbook would lessen the gap in perspective and understanding between First Nations and the Eurocentric worldviews within the Yukon educational realm. I now know I was naïve in the sense that there is much more than a “gap” in perspective and understanding and it could be better described as a “chasm”. The beginning process of this research project involved a Research Ethics Board approval as a requirement to meet university standards and complete the epistemological study. This posed the first challenge as it required the six Elders, with whom I intended to work, to sign a consent form. Although the Elders were all well informed of what the consent form was for, and what the purpose of my study was, unfortunately, because I was asking the Elders to sign a document, two of the six Elders refused to sign and could not partake in the study. The two Elders’ refusals to sign came from a long-term mistrust of the education system and the deep-rooted effects of residential schools. The loss of the two Elders’ participation was a deep lesson for me, as well as encouragement to continue with the project because it further demonstrated the need for such a resource.

Bringing together the oral language of the Elders words and the academic written language standard became a rather large challenge for me in the writing of the handbook. The acknowledgement of First Nations oral traditions as a research method is in its infancy in the academic world. What the Elders view as strong, viable language can be viewed as poor English in the Western system of academia. As academia have their own jargon, diction, and specific

grammar and syntax systems, the difference lies under the assumed, and often times accurate, comprehension of being understood by people who have similar background. Often the two differences in the way they structure how to communicate can be quite vast.

As I reflect upon this project, I realized that it became overwhelming to encompass all of the aspects of Yukon Indigenous ontology in a few short pages of a handbook. I originally wanted to create a bridge for educators to start their personal journey of learning another culture and I had to keep the focus narrow. Although there is much more I could be adding to the handbook, I decided it would have to be for a separate document in order for me to do justice to the succinctness of the handbook and not overwhelm the person who would be reading it. The handbook is designed to set the seed for the educator to begin a long process and I encourage anyone to just anä (go) and try; and again in my Grandmother's words, small steps will take you on a long journey.

I know that this document is the beginning and, just like the education profession, it is my hope it will be forever evolving. I have learned a great deal about myself, about my First Nation, about interpersonal interactions, and about conducting research when I have one foot in the research world and one foot in my own community. This project, I believe, represents so much knowledge and will benefit many others beyond the university walls. If I could give one final recommendation it would be to update this document on a yearly basis and grow with it.

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Appendix A – Definition of Terms

Aboriginal:	Legal term used in Canada and in the Canadian Constitution which refers to the Indigenous peoples of this country.
Cultural inclusion:	An environment where equity exists for all to experience personal success and contribute to the organization's success.
Culture:	A system of ideas and beliefs that can be seen in peoples' creations and activities, which over time, comes to characterize the people who share in the system.
Elder:	A term referring to an Indigenous person who has acquired the status of traditional knowledge keeper.
Educator:	A person trained in teaching, can also include Elder, administrator, paraprofessional, educational assistant, or person working within a school teaching environment.
First Nation:	A term used in reference to individual and collective identity of Indigenous governments and peoples.
Indigenous:	Originating or occurring naturally in a particular place; native.
Indigenous knowledge:	Knowledge that is Indigenous to language, peoples and places which is knowledge specific and narratively practiced.
Oral History:	The history of a people who share their knowledge orally either through storytelling methods, narrative forms or metaphoric expressions. This documentation process involves methods of data gathering such as interviews to gain insight into the social realities of peoples and their respective cultures.
Oral Tradition:	The method in which a culture communicates its worldview through narrative forms of storytelling, oral histories, songs, dances, performances and ceremonial practices which is considered an integral part of Indigenous knowledge and languages.
Protocols:	Codes of etiquette that articulate appropriate behaviour for working with Aboriginal communities. Protocols are community specific, and include informal ways of behaving. Using proper protocols means following the custom of the people of a community.

Sacred Knowledge: Knowledge pertaining to traditional practices, such as sweat lodges, sacred sites, spiritual traditional practices (tobacco offerings; burning sage)

Secret Knowledge: Clans cannot convey or share this knowledge; knowledge held by specific clans.

Self-Government: Self-government agreements are negotiated arrangements between a First Nation, the Canadian Government, and a provincial and/or territorial government, which provides powers and authority to enact laws and regulations of a local nature for the governance of lands, resources, citizens, and the general welfare and development of the First Nation.

Traditional knowledge: Knowledge that a people traditionally practiced as a worldview (ontology), knowledge (epistemology), and practices (methodology), and holds value.

Yukon First Nation: Collective term (collective noun) used for Indigenous peoples living in the Yukon.

Appendix B – Additional Resources

Further Readings

Culture camps for language learning: An immersion handbook. (2010). Brentwood Bay, BC, Canada: First Peoples' Heritage, Language & Culture Council.

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Yukon First Nations Five, Teacher's guide. (2008). Whitehorse: First Nations Programs and Partnerships Unit, Yukon Department of Education.

Websites

Alaska Native Knowledge Network: <http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/>

Assembly of First Nations - Assemblée des Premières Nations: <http://www.afn.ca/>

Council of Yukon First Nations: <http://www.cyfn.ca/>

First Nations Education Steering Committee: <http://www.fnesc.ca/>

First Nations Schools Association: <http://www.fnsa.ca/>

First Peoples Heritage and Language Cultural Council: <http://www.fphlcc.ca/>

First Voices: www.firstvoices.com

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC): <http://www.trc.ca/>

Western and Northern Canadian Protocol: <http://www.wncp.ca>

Yukon First Nations Programs & Partnerships Unit:
<http://www.yesnet.yk.ca/firstnations/index.html>

Yukon Native Language Centre: <http://www.ynlc.ca/>