

**COURAGE STRENGTH WISDOM – A FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITY'S
POST-SECONDARY EXPERIENCE**

by

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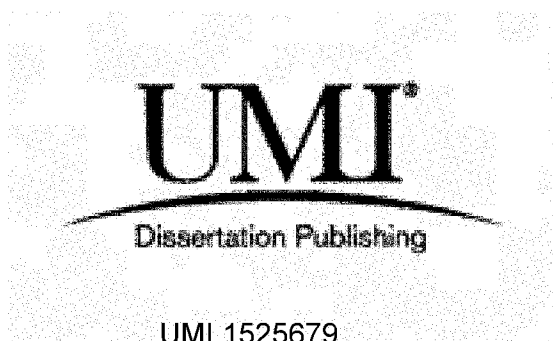
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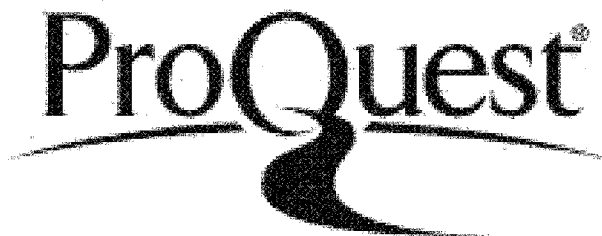


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ABSTRACT

This thesis is about a number of First Nations community members that pursued a post-secondary education. The purpose of the research was to investigate their post-secondary educational experience including motivating factors and importance of the process in their lives and the community they represent. The researcher used a qualitative methodology for the study in the form of focus groups. A traditional talking circle method was used to collect data. Three talking circles took place on-reserve and two questions were asked. Sixteen community members that attended post-secondary education participated. They received emotional support and encouragement from a visionary Sister, peers, family and community members. All the participants spoke of how difficult it was to pursue post-secondary and their fulfilling experience. The participants have found meaningful employment on and off-reserve impacting their community culturally and academically. All of them are playing a vital role encouraging others in their communities to further their education.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

First Nations Post-Secondary Education Overview

For the most part throughout Canadian history, First Nations people received schooling so that they could be trained to be servants, labourers and farm hands (Adams, 1989). Only within the last fifty years have First Nations started taking control of their education so that there is less of an education gap between First Nations peoples graduation success rate to that of non-First Nations individuals. Much has been written about Aboriginal Education in Canada (Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000; Canada, 1996; Stonechild, 2006) and will continue to be written about Aboriginal Education as the Federal Government and the various provinces write numerous reports on the state of K-12 and post-secondary Aboriginal education. Thus, Aboriginal people of Canada may begin to feel optimistic that Aboriginal control of their education is in sight. A lot of the press about Aboriginal education is negative reflecting a predominantly detrimental residential school experience and its effects upon Aboriginal people; a good example of this is seen in Harold Cardinal's book *The Unjust Society, The Tragedy of Canada's Indians* (1969). The imposed residential school legacy was a blatant attempt to subjugate, assimilate, indoctrinate, discriminate and integrate. Residential school facts and actual accounts have created a dark shadow over many generations of Aboriginal people. Even though we are now starting to live in a different generational time, the hardship, pain and alienation that many Aboriginal people experienced in residential schools should not be forgotten as many Aboriginal people are still living out its effects. What better way for Canada to repair the wrong that was done then by creating a legacy to all who have endured this dark part of Canadian history than to recognize the need to enter into dialogue with Aboriginal leaders to

promote, monitor and stimulate a learning environment that addresses the evident disparity in high school graduation and post-secondary degree completion rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. The focus of this study is to look at the reasons why a number of First Nations adults from a First Nations community in Central British Columbia pursued a post-secondary education and how they found the courage, strength and wisdom they needed to walk such a difficult path.

A major reform of post-secondary education for First Nations began in the late 1960's. In 1967, the Native Education College (NEC) opened its doors and was one of the first institutions to recognize the need to further support First Nations adult education. It is the largest private Aboriginal College in British Columbia. The Native Education College is a non-profit society and is governed by leaders from various First Nations communities in British Columbia. The college provides a culturally appropriate and supportive learning environment. In 1969, the federal government began to rethink its policy on Aboriginal education and brought forth a proposal for a new policy. The proposal came to be known as the White Paper. The basic premise of the White Paper was to have provincial governments play a much larger role in implementing Aboriginal education; the intention in its design was to facilitate Aboriginal peoples being absorbed into main stream society. Many Aboriginal people were bothered by the government's new approach and therefore responded by putting out their own policy paper called *Citizens Plus* (known as the "Red Paper"). The Red Paper established the necessary framework and perspective of Indian Control of Indian Education (Native Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations, 1972). The Red Paper had an impact leading to the federal government changing their focus so that Aboriginal people could take ownership and responsibility for Aboriginal education in Canada. To implement this new policy of Indian

Control of Indian Education the federal government created regional Indian cultural centres and Indian education training centres. Thus, an effort was well underway to establish a foundation to improve Aboriginal education. In addition, the federal government provided funds for institutions and universities to begin to meet First Nations educational needs and as such, programs were created like Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP), Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP), Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP) and Northern Teacher Education Program (NORTEP) along with many other programs created since implementation of the policy of Indian Control of Indian Education.

First Nations Traditional Worldview of Learning

The Aboriginal approach to traditional learning involved the dissemination of a way of life by elders and community members through stories (Hains, 2001), songs, dance, rituals (Johnston, 1990a), customs, traditions, prayers, ceremonies (Johnston, 1990b) and language. These varied aspects developed everything about what First Nation people knew of themselves, others and Mother Earth. First Nations worldview takes into account that there is a Creator. For many First Nations people the Creator is known as the Great Mystery, Great Spirit, or Great Power (Sioui, 1992; Johnston, 1995). Amerindians throughout North America recognize that there is an intimate spiritual interactive relationship between the Creator and the created (Napoleon, 1996; Yuxweluptun, 1995, p. 48). They believe they have been entrusted by the Creator to be stewards of creation (Canada, 1996b; Yuxweluptun, 1995, p. 48). What was created is the embodiment of the Creator and therefore respect and reverence for all things is a major part of the First Nations way of life and worldview. Creation is referred to as Mother Earth and First Nations people understand they are not only stewards, but students as well and Mother Earth is the instructor (Hart, 1996).

First Nations people throughout North America have always understood that they were interconnected (Canada, 1996c) with their world and that they were entrusted with its care by the Creator (Canada, 1996d). Since the beginning, First Nations have acknowledged and attributed their existence to the Creator and therefore they would show respect and give thanks for all they received from the earth. Everything was seen as being in balance and in harmony (Yuxweluptun, 1995, p. 46), to a large extent, creator was foremost the teacher. First Nations peoples developed much of their worldview based upon the lessons found in nature. One of the most basic teachings passed down from generation to generation and millennium after millennium is the concept of the circle. The circle is seen as sacred (Sioui, 1992, p. 8), all encompassing (Wilson & Wilson, 2000), it is a gift from the Creator (Boys-Watson, 2005). “The fundamental feature of Aboriginal worldview was and continues to be, that all of life is a manifestation of spiritual reality” (Canada, 1996e).

First Nations throughout North America have gathered in a circle for many centuries to debate, consult, inform and strengthen the community (Graveline, 1998; Pranis, 2005; Wilson & Wilson, 2000). The concept of the Circle is part of the worldview of First Nations people. First Nations view their world order as circular. The sacred circle of life represents things like the sun, moon, seasons, wind movement and stages in life. For First Nations peoples, the world as a whole is intimately interconnected and has a circular balance and framework. Therefore, teachings and beliefs are interrelated in a circle of life. The circle is divided into four quarters and within the circle there is an order of four; for example, four directions, four seasons and four human races; each considered sacred (Sioui, 1992, p. 10).

The circle is perhaps the symbol most widespread among Aboriginal cultures. All creatures in the biosphere are conceived of as part of the circle of life. Time is

understood as cyclical, returning the daylight and the seasons in a predictable round and carrying human beings inevitably toward a stage of life where they are dependent, like children, on the strength and care of others (Canada, 1996f).

For many centuries and to the present day, elders (Canada, 1996g) have played a vital role in transmitting the culture with all its varied facets. Elders taught the up and coming generations through stories (Johnston, 1995, p. xiii), observation, participation, practice (Hains, 2001, p. 10) and role modelling (Hart, 1996, p. 64). Spirituality encompassed every part of life for First Nations people (Vick, Smith, & Herrera, 1998), whether it was through dreams, ceremonies, or a prayer after a successful hunt, elders were there to impart their spiritual knowledge (Battiste & Barman, 1995, pp. 107-109), as spirituality was tantamount throughout the ages (Weenie, 1998, p. 59). The importance of the spiritual realm in regards to First Nations worldview cannot be overstated, traditionally the young learned about the spirit world, history, lineage and the role they are to play in the community through their elders, everything that one needed to know came from the elders. Elders also taught that the Great Spirit infused everything and everyone with traits and spirit like characteristics (Johnston, 1995, p. xx). The elders throughout time have always instilled a sense of balance along with a holistic view that included all of the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual, elements; this formed the basis for First Nations way of learning and knowing.

Traditionally, First Nations families throughout North America lived together with extended family members in different forms of dwellings (Canada, 1996h) that would accommodate several families; these dwellings together formed the community (Johnston, 1995, p. xix). This type of living facilitated elder participation and created more cultural fluidity in that teaching and learning happened continuously, simultaneously and pragmatically. Traditional

Aboriginal education focused on the whole child, their intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical being (Canada, 1996i). Responsibilities were shared and children learned from medicine men (Cardinal, 1969, p. 82), elders, wise men and various community members (Cardinal, 1969, p. 52) such as grandmothers and grandfathers (Johnston, 1990a, p. 69); the whole community was directly involved in raising the child.

Traditional child-rearing practices survive in many Aboriginal families and they are consciously being revived in others. Some parents are fortunate to have the continuing support of an extended family, with grandparents and other family members available to share the responsibilities of parenting and to pass on knowledge and skills that support a strong sense of identity and self-esteem (Canada, 1996j).

A brief overview of the First Nations traditional worldview of learning would not be complete without an introduction to the Trickster as an instrument of instruction. Within First Nations culture exists a trickster figure often referred to as Coyote, Hare, Nanabush, Old Man, Raven, Wesakychak, or Kluskap. The trickster figure can take on various roles and can be conveyed as being half spirit and half human (Canada, 1996k). Trickster is thought of as being neither female nor male, thereby creating a greater connection to those who come into contact with the story and thus enabling them in their own way to be a part of the story. Trickster has always been a part of Aboriginal stories and indeed an integral part of the Aboriginal cultural fabric. Through Tricksters chaotic fumbling, excessive appetite, foolish ways and bravado we can learn about ourselves. Not only does Trickster set himself up, but Trickster can also presents the solution to the created problem (Bazylak D, 2002). It is as though a mirror is placed in front of the person hearing the Tricksters stories and this allows the listener to internalize the message imbedded in the story and confirms that Trickster is a being more than some mythical like

creature that is confined and constricted by parameters. Trickster's unique characteristics transcend cultures to create the ultimate instructor, student and teacher for Aboriginal people. In his book, *Trickster Shift*, Ryan (1999) presents Trickster through Aboriginal contemporary art. "This Trickster *is* a definite presence, albeit more energetic and peripatetic than aesthetic. It is this Trickster, too, whose countless adventures and comic exploits have entertained and educated generations of Native peoples and whose influence has left a lasting impression on the work and practice of many Native artists" (p. 5). Perhaps it is because of Trickster that Aboriginal people have such a self-reflective sense of cultural humour as found in Basil Johnston's books *Ojibway Tales* (1993) and *Moose Meat and Wild Rice* (1987). Even though there is no direct teaching about Trickster, there is however the spirit of Trickster in each story exemplifying Trickster as a cultural phenomenon. There are a great number of Trickster stories both old and new. Trickster is such a fluid character that Trickster will continue to occupy the hearts and minds of Aboriginal people for centuries to come.

Eurocentric Education Overview

The Eurocentric-style of education was profoundly different from what First Nations children knew and the approach to discipline was starkly different from anything First Nations children had ever experienced (Dickason, 1996 p. 165; Cardinal, 1969, p. 84). The perspective of Eurocentric education goes back many centuries and as such, the idea of education is deep rooted in ancient idealistic thought; this overview, however, will present the Eurocentric approach to education only from the time of so called contact, the settlement of Europeans on Turtle Island (North America). The notion of Eurocentrism (Graveline, 1998, p. 23) emphasizes European culture as being preeminent and superior to other cultures and thus the new inhabitants to Turtle Island set about to attempt to transform the inhabitants, First Nations peoples, to be like

them. The term Eurocentric education often invokes such words as condescending, prejudicial, imperialistic, paternalistic, patriarchal, colonial, domineering, capitalistic, acculturation and assimilation. For most people the words conjure up a sense of negativity and for others a sense of displacement and rejection. The visitors (Europeans) viewed First Nations people as primitive, uncivilized, uneducated savages, so much so that the new settlers thought they could just take the land from them without consultation. At one point of time in Canada's history, in 1749 to be exact, a bounty had been placed on the Micmac of Nova Scotia for resisting colonial expansion (York, 1990, p. 56; Dickason, 1996, p. 160). The point being made is that there were serious conflicts between the government and rulers of the day and Aboriginal peoples. A brief look into Canada's history and treatment of Aboriginal people reveals continuous conflict up until the present. Perhaps it is that the old colonial mentality still exists today; that Aboriginal people are a primitive simple minded people, uncivilized and uneducated. One cannot argue that cultural biases, prejudices and stereotypes do not take on a life of their own and live throughout generations and centuries.

From the very beginning colonialist made an effort to educate the First Nations people, whom they viewed as heathens and slaves (Adams, 1999, p. 13). As early as 1620, children were taken from their family and sent to France to receive the proper education by the Recollects and later by the Jesuits. Their hope was to convert some First Nations so that they would return and win over the hearts and minds of their communities and in essence, to evangelize their own people. Their vision however, never came to fruition; but efforts to civilize, Christianize and educate persisted (Dickason, 1996, p. 165). In 1845 "A government report to the Legislative assembly of Upper Canada recommended Indian Boarding Schools be adopted," according to the Provincial Residential School Investigation timeline submitted at the Henry Arthur Plint

residential school court case. The Parliament of Canada passed the *Indian Act* legislation in 1876 that gave the government the power to regulate just about every part of Aboriginal life (BC Treaty Commission 2000, 2007, p. 29) and paved the way for industrial schools, boarding schools and residential schools. By 1900 there were thirty nine boarding schools in Canada along with a number of industrial schools and a large number of day schools (Dickason, 1996, p. 334). In 1920, Bill 13 and 14 were passed in parliament; these bills allowed the government to seize and sell Native lands with half the proceeds going to the government. Bill 14 gave the government custodial powers to apprehend Indian children if they were not attending school as a part of the governments compulsory enfranchisement. Soon after the passing of Bill 13 and 14 the church and state got together officially to deliver First Nations education, before this it was mostly a missionary effort to educate Aboriginal people (Tenant, 1990, pp. 100, 333).

According to Duncan Campbell Scott, deputy superintendent general, the whole purpose of educating First Nations children was to assimilate them into mainstream society (Tenant, 1990, p. 92), in other words, according to Scott, “Kill the Indian in the child” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, p. 6). This thrust to assimilate and integrate persisted until all residential schools were eventually closed. The Gordon residential school in Saskatchewan was the last residential school to close its doors in 1996. Late into the 19th century remnants of this worldview persist (Adams, 1989, pp. 146-148).

Canada’s first attempt to educate First Nations came from the French, followed by the British. Both viewed education as a tool to either assimilation or integration. Once the British came to power, the same colonial mindset to indoctrinate used by the French was employed by the British and thus began the formal educational of Aboriginal people. The British worked with the church to indoctrinate and assimilate the ‘Indian’ with the primary goal to civilize and

Christianize them (Dickason, 1996, pp. 225, 333; Canada, 1996l). It was not until the 1960s that the federal government pursued a policy of integrating First Nations children into public schools; with the changing economic structure in Canada, First Nations families had begun to leave reserves to seek employment in urban areas. The result was an increase in numbers of First Nations students in the public school system (Canada, 1996m).

Residential schools were a dark part of Canadian Eurocentric education and Canadian history. On June 1, 2008, the Government of Canada established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission with a five year mandate to investigate the government funded church-run schools that began in the 1870's (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, p. 1). It followed that on June 11, 2008, on behalf of the Government of Canada, the Honourable Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper formally apologized to all Aboriginal people who had endured the hardship of the residential school system and acknowledged that it was a policy of assimilation. He also recognized that residential schools had left a damaging impact on Aboriginal culture, heritage and languages.

The Current State of First Nations Education

There are two views of what First Nations education should look like, the government's view (federal/ provincial) and a First Nations' view. In six years it will be half a century since First Nations peoples expressed their expectation of First Nations Education through the Red Paper in response to the federal governments White Paper (Battiste & Barman, 1995, p. xiii). Throughout the last forty-four years a variety of sources such as the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and provincial government's labour market reports indicate that Aboriginal high school students and post-secondary students are lagging behind the rest of the population, nationally (Canada, 1996n) and provincially (Stock, 2009, p. 1). Blair

Stonechild, author of *The New Buffalo, The Struggle for Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada* lays out disparaging Aboriginal post-secondary educational results (2006, pp. 40-43).

Similarly, The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People used the census data from Statistics Canada for 1981 and 1991 to evaluate and compare the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educational attainment levels. In the 1981 statistics 8.2% of Aboriginal people graduated from high school; in 1991 that number rose to 11% of students, an increase of only 2.8%. In comparison, in 1981, 16.6% of non-Aboriginal students graduated from high school and in 1991 the percentage rose to 18.9% of non-Aboriginal students who graduated from high school, a difference of 2.3% (Canada, 1996o). Upon analysis, an educational lag was persistent from 1981 through to 1991. When we compare this with the 2006/2007 school year in British Columbia, only 49% of Aboriginal students graduated from high school, compared to 83% of non-Aboriginal students, a 34% difference as noted in the British Columbia Ministry of Advance Education and Labour Market Development, *Aboriginal Report – Charting our path* (2008, p. 8). There is a persistent disparaging educational gap between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal graduation rates nationally and provincially. The provincial graduation gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people has remained around 30% from 2002 to 2007 (British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, 2008, p. 8).

Post-secondary graduation rates between the Aboriginal population and non-Aboriginal population are somewhat similar to national and provincial high school graduation rates between both groups (Canada, 1996p) and as such, a comparable educational lag exists for Aboriginal post-secondary students as well. Again, using the data provided in the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People* (Canada, 1996q) we find that in 1981, 2.0% of Aboriginal students completed a university degree and in 1991, ten years later, 2.6% of Aboriginal students

completed a university degree. In comparison, in 1981, 8.1% of non-aboriginal completed a university degree and in 1991, 11.6% of non-aboriginal students completed a university degree. Using the British Columbia Ministry of Advance Education and Labour Market Development, *Aboriginal Report – Charting our path*, in 2008 7% of Aboriginal students completed a university degree while 24% of non-Aboriginal students complete a university degree (2008, p. 23). First Nations on-reserve people are not included in these figures. Provincially, on-reserve students, whether high school or post-secondary, have a lower graduation rate than that of off-reserve students on a consistent basis. A document released by BC Stats, *The Educational Attainment of Aboriginal People Part II-Post Secondary*, indicated that in 2007 4.5% of the Aboriginal people living on-reserve completed a university degree or certificate, in contrast to the 24.6% of the non-Aboriginal population who completed a university degree or certificate in (Kittredge, 2005, p. 1). Using the Census data from 2006, 4% of on-reserve First Nations students completed a university degree compare to 25% of non-First Nations students (Stock, 2009, p. 3). Stock (2009) wrote the following for the BC Stats Business Indicators:

The difference in educational attainment between Aboriginal groups is considerable, 43% of First Nations people (age 25 to 64) living on-reserve have not completed their high school education, compared to 29% of First Nations people living off-reserve and 22% of Métis. Only 12% of the non-Aboriginal population have not completed high school – a 31 percentage point gap with First Nations people living on-reserve. At the other end of the education spectrum, only 37% of the First Nations people living on-reserve have completed a post-secondary credential, compared to 62% of the non-Aboriginal population. The post-secondary completion rate is higher for Métis and First Nations people living

off-reserve (51% and 45%, respective), but still lower than the non-Aboriginal population (p. 2).

On June 11, 2011 Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development's (AAND) Minister John Duncan and Shawn Atleo, Chief of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), announced the beginning of a consultation process with First Nations to draft educational legislation (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2011). The consultation is twofold, first between December 2012 and April 2013, AADN will participate in a regional consultation process with First Nations parents, educators and leaders to explore solutions to improve elementary and secondary education for First Nations peoples on-reserve as part of the federal government's Economic Action Plan 2012, with the end result being to develop a First Nations Education Act. The Economic Action Plan 2012 committed the Government to having legislation in place for September 2014 (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2012a). The second part of the consultation process will be to present the draft legislation to First Nations communities across Canada and provincial governments. For the most part, legislation regarding First Nations education is not viewed as a step in the right direction because legislation has historically been imposed upon First Nations peoples both federally and provincially. The same is true when it comes to trust between First Nations and federal/provincial governments in relation to past and present treaties. Nonetheless, progress towards Federal First Nations education legislation is moving forward. On April 9, 2013, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, the Honourable Bernard Valcourt announced the signing of the Tripartite Education Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in Mattagami, Ontario by the Government of Canada, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, comprising nearly fifty First Nations

groups and the Government of Ontario (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2013).

On December 14, 2012, the First Nations Leadership Council in B.C. expressed their opposition toward the First Nations Education Act consultation initiated by the Federal Government of Canada. The Federal Government released a document called, “Developing a First Nations Education Act: Discussion Guide” and the First Nations Leadership Council claimed it was: (1) created without input from First Nations, (2) the discussion guide is unilateral and paternalistic, (3) it demonstrates that the Federal Government has an antiquated, stereotypical and racist perspective, (4) that the First Nations Education Act would be assimilationist in its policies, (5) and that if the discussion guide were put in place in B.C. it would mark a huge step backwards. The First Nations Leadership Council stated that Ottawa should honour First Nations in B.C. through the education jurisdiction agreements and supporting legislation that are already in place in B.C. Specifically these are the Tripartite Education Framework Agreement between the Provincial Government, Federal Government and First Nations Education Steering Committee, as well as the Transformative Change Accord that is already in place to improve the socio-economic and First Nations educational gaps that exist. Even though the Federal legislation is not directly associated to post-secondary education, it is however indirectly related in that it sets a precedent for First Nations education as a whole. The proposed Federal First Nations education legislation approach that is supposed to come into effect in 2014 is in conflict with B.C.’s First Nations Education Act, Bill 46 that was passed in 2007 (British Columbia Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, 2007). The legislation of Bill 46 was the first of its kind in Canada. One way this legislation was to serve First Nations is that it would allow First Nations high schools to grant graduates eligibility for admission to

post-secondary institutions. Bill 46 primarily focused on K-12 (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2007) enabling First Nations to assume self-government jurisdiction over their education.

The Provincial Government, the Chiefs' Action Committee and the Government of Canada became educational partners when they signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 1999, along with other signatories, to improve Aboriginal Education (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2012a). The Tripartite Education Committee was formed from the MOU and a framework was developed so that B.C. First Nations could begin to assume self-government jurisdiction over education and together work at addressing the educational gap that exists between First Nations and non-First Nations. Another significant milestone was reached when a tripartite MOU was signed between Canada, B.C. and the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) in 2012, which led to the signing of the Educational Jurisdiction Framework agreement that would allow students to transfer without academic penalties (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2012b).

In 2005, the Provincial Government, the Federal Government and the Leadership Council representing B.C.'s First Nations people signed the Transformative Change Accord (Government of British Columbia, 2005). Working collaboratively, the parties to the Accord agreed to take immediate action to address several concerns, one of which is post-secondary education. The Transformative Change Accord opened the post-secondary education dialogue that led to the 2007 Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Strategy and Action Plan (Government of British Columbia, 2007). The number one goal set out in the strategy action plan is to specifically address the persistent First Nations post-secondary educational gap.

Personal Perspective

I am a Métis person (Aboriginal). I grew up in a family of ten children. My father's side of the family is Métis and my mother's side of the family is English, French and Métis. On my Father's side neither my grandfather nor my grandmother knew how to read or write, as was the case with a number of their children. They could not write their name or read the service bills they would get. On the other hand, on my mother's side of the family, both of my grandparents were literate and so were their children.

Growing up, I attended an elementary bilingual Roman Catholic school where misbehaving students were threatened with the strap by both nuns and teachers. Primarily, my elementary school experience was quite negative, due in large part to a short attention span, my rebellious nature and my strong desire to be out commercial fishing or hunting with my father. I would much rather be outside playing or working than being in school. Part of the reason for me feeling this way was that I did not feel a sense of belonging or acceptance at school; in fact the opposite is true, I often felt fearful, alienated, picked on and left out of activities whether it be in the classroom or playground. At times I asked my father to take me with him to go fishing instead of going to school and I would be out of school for several days at a time. Sitting at my desk or listening to the teacher was the last thing I valued or appreciated.

My grandfather had a commercial fishing outpost on Georgian Bay, in Ontario, located on the Great Lakes, called the Watchers Island. Every summer my father would take the whole family to the Watchers as soon as school was out. I would work with my father and brothers commercial fishing each day to help earn a living for our family. Once the nets were lifted and the fish were cleaned I was free to swim, canoe, fish, hunt and explore the island to my heart's

content. I could not wait for the last day of school so that we could head for the Watchers and escape my educational woes.

My father taught me many practical, traditional and outdoors skills that he himself learned from his father. Each summer I would learn new life long skills and further develop abilities necessary to survive in life and contribute to the wellbeing of the family. From a practical perspective, I learned to navigate in an open boat without instruments, maintain and repair outboards motors, fillet various species of fish, as well as prepare a shore lunch for guests. Net making and net repair is something that has been passed down from generation to generation. Fishing for certain species or harvesting particular foods during seasonal times of the year is still a tradition family members participate in. From an early age outdoor skills seem to dominate my need for learning. Under my father's guidance I learned to fish, hunt, track and harvest rabbits, ducks and deer.

Personal Educational Growth

After completing a two year occupational course, I finished high school with a grade ten diploma and soon after I started working in the labour force as a general labourer, baker assistant, carpenter and welder. By the time I was twenty I moved to British Columbia and started commercial fishing. In 1992 I decided to go back to school because the commercial fishing industry was looking very bleak and I felt in time that I would not be able to do the strenuous physical labour required. Another deciding factor to go back to school was that the commercial fishing industry was a high risk job; each year many workers were seriously injured, maimed or killed.

At the time, I was living on Vancouver Island and I decided to visit the Chemainus Native College to see if it was possible to upgrade and perhaps get my grade 12. I was asked to

return the next day for an assessment and when I did I did not score very well on the assessment. As it turned out, I had grade five level grammar skills and grade three level math skills. If I was going to upgrade then I had a lot of work ahead of me. After sleeping on it for the night I decided it was time for me to upgrade and work at getting my grade twelve so that I might be able to get a job other than commercial fishing. Two and a half years later I completed my grade twelve. I had no idea what I wanted to do or be in life now that I had my grade twelve. One of the administrators at the Chemainus Native College suggested I take a career assessment and so I did. To my surprise the career assessment indicated I might best be suited as a shop teacher. I met a former Chemainus Native College student who was in a teaching program called Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP). I was invited to sit in on one of the classes. Within a few months I was enrolled in the program. I attended the first two years of the University of British Columbia's (UBC) NITEP program at their Duncan field center and the remaining three years on campus in Vancouver. If a seat at the University had not been reserved for me when I signed up for the program I would have never been able to compete with all the other students out there as my grade point average was not high enough to qualify for entry into the teaching faculty. I realize now that I was not less of a student then, I just had a different skill set than most students that apply to the education faculty.

Facing My Educational Fears

I was terrified to enter the Chemainus Native College and indicated that I wanted to go back to school as an adult. Ever since I was young I had a nagging desire inside of me to want to do better educationally and finally I took the bull by the horns. The seven and half years it took for me to become a teacher was the hardest and most terrifying thing I have ever done and yet the most rewarding.

I spent so many days at sea on the West Coast (Pacific Ocean) that I needed to find something to pass the time, so a good friend recommended buying a book to read. I was twenty four years old before I read my first novel. To a large degree, this was my start down the road to recovery. Since that day I have gained a new love for learning. It seemed like I could not hide from the fears I faced with my low level of education. Pursuing a post-secondary education has most certainly helped me with my fears. Since becoming a teacher I have even enrolled at the University of Northern British Columbia to complete my Master of education degree. The hardest thing I had to do every day was to find the words necessary to write another paragraph to inch my way one step closer to completing my thesis.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this research is to identify some of the key factors that encouraged on-reserve members of a First Nations Band in Central British Columbia to pursue their post-secondary education. The research approach is qualitative and the methodology is participant personal narrative observation, whereby Band members share their story of the importance of their post-secondary education. Talking circles will be used to gather data at a designated location in the First Nations community in central British Columbia.

Research Questions

The overall purpose of the study is to answer the main research question: What were the keys to success in education for elders and adults in a First Nation community in central British Columbia? There are three subquestions in relation to the main research question: What motivated First Nations on-reserve Band members to pursue their post-secondary education? What challenges did the individuals experience and how did they overcome the hurdles before

them? What were their post-secondary education experiences and how can they be beneficial to others?

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

First Nations Post-Secondary Education in Canada

A brief look at the relationship between Canada and First Nations is in order to establish how we arrived at the educational relationship between the Government of Canada and First Nations people today. *A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times*, by Olive Patricia Dickason (1996), is a comprehensive and highly praised resource that closely examines the history of Canada and First Nations people. Dickason explains that in 1857, the government passed First Nations enfranchisement (having the full privileges and rights to citizenship) legislation with the intent to gradually civilize First Nations so that in time they would become self-sufficient (p. 234). The British viewed it as their duty to civilize native people and help them become more like British citizens (Dickason, 1996, p 232); one means of doing this was through education (Dickason, 1996, p 225). The Act of 1857 built upon what was already established in the previous legislation of 1850-51 (Dickason, 1996, p 258), whereby First Nations land would be managed by the government and sold or leased in order to suit the government's purpose (Dickason, 1996, p 284). There are seven dates of interest historically in relation to First Nations education. The first date is 1867, the year of Confederation, when First Nations became the responsibility of the federal government. The second date, is 1876, the year the Indian Act was introduced, giving the federal government self-imposed power to solely decide what is best for First Nations people, namely 'assimilate' and 'civilize'. First Nations people who pursued higher education or became ministers, lawyers, teachers, or doctors gave up their 'Indian' status and were enfranchised (Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000, pp. 171, 190; Dickason 1996, pp. 252, 284). The third date is the amendment to the Indian Act in 1884, giving

the federal government even more power over First Nations people, down to the minutest detail. Indian agents were introduced federally; every aspect of First Nations life required the approval of the Indian agent, including permission to leave the reserve. The fourth date is 1920, when Bill 14 was introduced making education mandatory for all First Nations people. The fifth date is 1951 when a parliamentary investigation rejected the Indian Affairs education policy as it was then and recommended the integration of First Nations' children into the public school system (Dickason 1996, pp. 329, 336). The sixth date is 1972 when the National Indian Brotherhood (the present day Assembly of First Nations) issued its policy document entitled *Indian Control of Indian Education* (Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000, p. 231; Battiste & Barman, 1995, pp. 262-263).

The seventh date is 1982, when section 35 was included in the Canadian Constitution recognizing Aboriginal rights and entitlement as law. Section 35 of the 1982 Constitution affirmed First Nations treaty rights and government obligations (Assembly of First Nations, 2010, p. 6). First Nations hold the view that education at all levels is historically a part of treaty negotiations and as such is the fiduciary responsibility of the federal government (Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000, pp. 14-15). The federal government's take on the issue is that education should be based on the pre-existing treaty arrangements as they were at the time, the standard of the day (Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000, p. 15). Each of these dates reflects a stage in First Nations education and signifies a gradually higher degree of First Nations education autonomy and self-control. These advances over time lead to the development of First Nations education with First Nations, rather than for First Nations.

It was not until the National Indian Brotherhood's policy paper, *Indian Control of Indian Education* that significant policy changes were made for First Nations people pursuing post-

secondary education (Stonechild, 2006; MacIvor, 1995, p. 73; Malatest & Associates, 2002, p. 43; Richardson & Blanchet 2000, p. 13). The National Indian Brotherhood's policy paper served as an impetus to instil the government to begin to work in conjunction with First Nations to alter education policy in order to suitably address the evident First Nations educational need. Their policy paper was a demand for the right to relevant, adequate and appropriate education at all levels, from preschool through post-secondary, an education that recognized and connected with 'Indian' cultures, languages, heritages and values. An education that would radiate respect, honour and pride:

We want education to provide the setting in which our children can develop the fundamental attitudes and values which have an honored 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/Assembly of First Nations, 1972).

The Assembly of First Nations, formerly the National Indian Brotherhood updated their policy paper in 2010 and the updated policy paper title is now *First Nations Control of First Nations Education 2010*:

The purpose of the policy framework presented in this paper [*First Nations Control of First Nations Education 2010*] is to reaffirm the First Nations' vision of lifelong learning presented in the ICIE 1972 [*Indian Control of Indian Education*] policy and reassert First Nations inherent Aboriginal and Treaty rights to education. This policy framework provides strategic recommendations that will enable the development and implementation

of education legislation, governance frameworks, policies, programs and services for all levels of education for First Nations learners at all stages of lifelong learning (Assembly of First Nations, 2010, p. 3).

The updated policy recognizes there is a further need to reform education and that the collection of data is a prerequisite in making positive progressive change involved in the reform and delivery of First Nations education. One critical update under Policy Implementation Recommendations 2.1.3 is the appeal for governmental support in creating data management systems and infrastructure that follow the principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OACP), whereby First Nations reserve the authority and rights to collect data as well as intellectual and traditional knowledge.

In 1993, the University of British Columbia (UBC) witnessed an historical event, the official opening of the First Nations House of Learning. It was a comprehensive learning center designed around the social, academic and cultural needs of First Nations people of British Columbia. Between 1992 and 1993 there were an estimated 250 First Nations students enrolled in degree programs at UBC (Gardner, 2000, p. 191). During this time, Verna Kirkness coined the phrase “1000 First Nations students by the year 2000” (LePage, 1999, p. 1). Gardner discusses UBC’s commitment to First Nations post-secondary education and highlights that in 1997, UBC’s Senate and Board of Governors formally approved the goal statement, “1000 First Nation students by the year 2000” (Gardner, 2000, p. 206). The significance of this cannot be overstated. While enrolled in the Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP) at UBC in 1999 I wrote a paper entitled, UBC’s Unmeasurable First Nations Goal, “1000 First Nations Students by the year 2000” for my 301 Technical and Business Writing course (LePage, 1999). The more I looked into this goal statement, the harder it became to assess the validity of the

statement. There was no data collection or way of tracking student success or program performances. I had to do ground level data collection by going from department to department to get an estimate of how many First Nations student might be enrolled in various departments. I compiled the data I collected and the results left me bewildered. The best estimate of the number of First Nations students enrolled in UBC by the year 2000 was 500, using the approximate enrolment provided by the First Nations House of Learning (FNHL). The worst case scenario was that there were only 382 First Nations students enrolled at UBC using the data I collected from the different departments. So how did UBC justify “1000 students by the Year 2000”? They arrived at that number based on the fact that 3.8% of B.C.’s population is First Nations according to the 1996 census; therefore, 3.8% of the University’s First Nations population would be the same. According to these figures from UBC Planning and Institutional Research, there would be 1, 071 students by the year 2000. A similar lack of institutional statistical data collection is mentioned in, *Best Practices in Increasing Aboriginal Postsecondary Enrolment Rates* (Malatest, 2002, p. 9). This example is used as an indication of the broad lack of accountability and responsibility towards data collection and statistical data analysis in reference to First Nations post-secondary education across Canada.

However, the University of Saskatchewan’s College of Arts and Science and the Palliser Campus of the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Sciences and Technology were among the first institutions to collect data to increase Native ancestry student enrolment (Dorion & Yang, 2000, p. 177). The Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission granted the University of Saskatchewan permission to implement their Affirmative Action Program on February 28, 1988. They were to measure and monitor the education they provided to Aboriginal peoples to increase higher level learning participation (Basran, 1990, p. 280).

April 15, 2008 marked a milestone for Aboriginal post-secondary education. The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) formulated a framework called, Learn Canada 2020, involving provincial and territorial ministers and that they "... will use [the framework] to enhance Canada's education system, learning opportunities and overall education outcome with one of the goals to eliminate the education achievement and graduation gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students" (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2008). On March 29-30, 2011, CMEC held a workshop on improved data, better outcomes: strengthening Pan-Canadian Aboriginal data (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2011). The workshop was attended by National Aboriginal Organizations (NAO's), Regional Aboriginal Organizations (RAO's), ministers of Aboriginal Affairs, Canadian Education Statistics Council and stakeholders. In the CMEC Summary Report following the workshop, The Director General, in a thank you letter stated, "We need to build better data related to Aboriginal learners as an essential component of the larger effort to eliminate the gap in academic achievement and graduation rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students" (Council of Ministers of Education Canada, 2011, page 3). The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada published Key Policy Issues in Aboriginal Education: An Evidence-Based Approach (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2012a). The commissioned report was part of CMEC's Aboriginal Education Action to begin to address the education gap. The report consists of two parts: Part 1, Identifying Data and Evidence Gaps, Part 2 Strengthening Administrative Data building on their commitment with Aboriginal people. This is educational post-secondary progress in Canada with Aboriginal people rather than for Aboriginal people. The CMEC's initiatives are likely to succeed because they are collaborating and corroborating with Canada's First People.

Federal and provincial governments recognize the need to address the education gap between First Nations and non-First Nations for several reasons; they understand that, “Between 1996 and 2006, the Aboriginal population in Canada grew 45%; nearly six times faster than the non-Aboriginal population at 8%” (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009, p. 10). Furthermore, according to the Assembly of First Nations, Aboriginal youth could play a key role in meeting Canada’s economic development:

The Aboriginal population is expected to make up 12.7% of the labour force growth between 2006 and 2026. Immediate and affirmative action along with significant financial investment will be required to realize the full potential and economic impacts of Aboriginal youth, particularly given Canada’s labour shortage and increasing need for a highly skilled competitive workforce (Assembly of First Nations, 2012, p. 5).

The awareness of the need to close the educational gap cannot be overstated as it could add \$71 billion to Canada’s GDP by 2017 (Assembly of First Nations, 2012b, p. 14). Statistics Canada released the data on Aboriginal people from the 2011 census on May 8th, 2013:

New data from the National Household Survey (NHS) show that 1,400,685 people had an Aboriginal identity in 2011, representing 4.3% of the total Canadian population.

Aboriginal people accounted for 3.8% of the population enumerated in the 2006 Census, 3.3% in the 2001 Census and 2.8% in the 1996 Census (Canada, 2011a).

It is interesting to note that the Canadian Centre for the Study of Standards (CSLS) reported that, “In 2026, using the medium growth projection for the Aboriginal and general population, the Aboriginal population is projected to make up 4.6 percent of the Canadian population” (Sharp & Arsenault, 2010, p. iv). Using figures from the NHS and CSLS the Aboriginal population is 0.3% away from meeting the expected population of 2026 in 2013.

Statistics Canada released the data on Aboriginal people from the 2011 NHS on May 8th, 2013. The data indicates that half of the registered First Nations population in Canada live on-reserve and as previously indicated, the greatest educational gap exists between on-reserve First Nations and non-Aboriginal people. Using current data from the 2011 National Household Survey the overall Aboriginal population increased by 20.1% compared to 5.2% of the non-Aboriginal population. Aboriginal children 14 and under represented 28% of the total Aboriginal population whereas the non-Aboriginal population represented 16.5% under the age of 14. Similarly, Aboriginal youth aged 15-24 represented 18.2% of the Aboriginal population whereas the non-Aboriginal population 15-24 represented 12.9% of the non-Aboriginal population. In addition, the 2011 NHS also indicates that half of the registered First Nations population in Canada live on-reserve and as previously indicated, the greatest post-secondary educational gap exists between on-reserve First Nations and non-Aboriginal people in reference to university degree completion (Canada, 2011a).

The 1991 Census revealed 0.9% of First Nations living on reserve attained a university degree compared to 12.2% of non-First Nations, a difference of 11.3% difference. On June 26, 2013, Statistics Canada released the NHS 2011 data on the educational attainment of the Aboriginal people in Canada. The NHS indicated 4.7% of First Nations living on-reserve aged 25 to 64 achieved a university degree compared to 26.5%, a difference of 21.8%. According to Statistics Canada the university degree achievement rate between First Nations living on-reserve and non-First Nations in regards to university degree attainment gap has nearly doubled in the last two decades. The central issue remains unchanged, that of the on-reserve First Nations university degree attainment. "Research has shown that the health and well-being of individuals is closely associated with their education levels" (Kashaninia, 2011, p 1). "Education plays an

important role in the labour force success” (Buliziuk, 2011, p. 3). “The disparity in educational attainment means the skill levels of the jobs that are available to Aboriginal people are considerably lower than those available to non-Aboriginal people. Few Aboriginal people have university degrees, so most of the professions are not accessible” (BC Stats, 2006, p. 3);

According to Mendelson (2006) when using the 2001 Census closing the educational gap in Canada between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people poses a substantial challenge and is likely impossible in the near future based on Aboriginal population numbers and percentages.

If the gap were to be closed in a decade, another 6,500 Aboriginal students would have to obtain degrees every year. Assuming on average four years to get a degree and allowing a margin for dropout, Aboriginal enrolment in universities would have to increase by about 30,000. Given that there are only about 225, 000 Aboriginal people between the ages of 20 and 34, and given that the total number of Aboriginal people with university degrees at the present time is less than 29,000, and enrolment of 30,000 does not seem realistic or perhaps even physically possible in the near future (p. 28).

In 2012 the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2012b), published the, *Literature Review of Factors Affecting the Transition of Aboriginal Youth from School to Work*. In their review they acknowledge Aboriginal peoples are the fastest growing population in Canada; however, “...their education and employment outcomes lag significantly behind the rest of the population” (p 1). An interesting note in their literature review is that Aboriginal youth 12-18 indicated they are interested in various professional careers (p. 2). Their literature review also states Aboriginal youth have a desire to pursue careers that would allow them to serve their community or further develop their culture (p. 3). Most importantly the CMEC literature review highlights four areas of utmost concern for policy makers:

- not enough Aboriginal young people in Canada are reaching their full potential;
- the problem is not new, but it is persistent and increasingly urgent because of demographic patterns;
- there is no simple solution owing to the complexity of the problem, vast regional differences, and the number of government levels involved; and
- innovative strategies and constructive policies do exist that we should borrow/adapt/bring to scale (p. 68).

In their Survey of Post-Secondary Education Programs in Canada for Aboriginal People, Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen (2000, p. 4) refer to three ways that Canada uses to approach post-secondary education for Aboriginal people. There is the add-on approach that is viewed as Aboriginal enrichment of existing curriculum and pedagogy (p. 20); the partnership approach based on bi-cultural cooperation between First Nations and mainstream educational institutions (p. 22); and, the third approach is the First Nations control approach whereby First Nations reclaim educational delivery with an emphasis on cultural re-integration, control of educational programming, content and delivery (p. 24). The three approaches can be viewed as progressive steps in the process of the development of Aboriginal post-secondary in Canada (p.27). The authors have also stated that the three approaches are not the only ways to classify Aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada (p. 20). Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen also present an Annex at the end of their paper titled, Aboriginal Programs in Canada (p. 69). The Annex is a commentary of the various types of programs within various colleges and institutes. In the paper they prepared for the CMEC titled Best Practices in Increasing Aboriginal Postsecondary Rates, Maltest & Associates (2002) highlight a number of key elements and barriers leading to the success of Aboriginal post-secondary students. More specifically they provide discourse related

to colleges and academic institutions within Canada and abroad that have developed and fostered successful programs to address the learning needs of Aboriginal students (p. 24-34).

Efforts to Address First Nations Educational Gap in Canada

Over the last ninety years Aboriginal peoples have strived to have a national lobby group and throughout those years Aboriginal people have faced tremendous governmental opposition at all levels, including legislation in 1927 preventing Aboriginal peoples from forming political organizations (Dickason, p. 328; Assembly of First Nations, p 1). Seven notable national Aboriginal lobby groups have existed over the last ninety years and they are as follows, in chronological order: The League of Nations, The League of Indians in Canada, The North American Indian Brotherhood, The National Indian Council, The National Indian Brotherhood, The Native Council of Canada and Assembly of First Nations. In 1968 the National Indian Council dissolved to reform into two separate organizations, the National Indian Brotherhood representing the Status and Treaty Aboriginal groups and the Native Council of Canada representing the non-Status First Nations and Métis groups. The National Indian Brotherhood became the Assembly of First Nations in 1982, the Native Council of Canada became the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples in 1971. The Assembly of First Nations and the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples arguably the two most widely represented national lobby groups in Canada. These Aboriginal groups brought to the forefront many issues and indirectly have had an effect on the state of First Nations education as it is now. The Assembly of First Nations is a non-service organization that represents First Nations across Canada and strives to influence government policy. Within the Assembly of First Nations is the Education Secretariat that is working to improve First Nations education at all levels and in all areas across Canada for First Nations people. The other political organization to emerge as an advocate is the Congress of

Aboriginal People which represents off-reserve, non-Status and status Indians, Métis and southern Inuit living on and off-reserve. On April 18, 2013, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples met with the provincial and territorial Ministers of Aboriginal Affairs; together they formed the Aboriginal Affairs Working Group (AAWG). The AAWG have set the education gap as one of three priority issues to be addressed (Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, 2013). Aboriginal people across Canada are more dedicated, united and committed to eliminating the enduring educational gap that exists at all ages and grade levels between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people.

The phenomenon of the rise of First Nations post-secondary programs and institutions in the 1970s is a turning point for Canada's First Peoples in education (Richardson, Blanchet-Cohen, 2000, pp. 4, 54). A number of indigenous institutions came into existence and various institutions developed quality programs designed to attract, retain and certify Aboriginal peoples throughout Canada. As part of their research paper, Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen included case studies of five Aboriginal post-secondary education programs as a sample of indicative initiatives that are in place to address the Aboriginal education gap within Canada. The five programs presented in their study are the First Nations Partnership Program, the Nunavut Sivuniksavut Program, the First Nations House of Learning, Malaspina University-College and Saanich Adult Education Center.

First Nations post-secondary educational gains are being made across Canada. The Assembly of First Nations reported on the status of indigenous higher learning institutes across Canada.

There are sixty (60) First Nations owned and controlled post-secondary institutions which deliver a wide range of programs to approximately 100,000 learners, including

preparatory programs, adult upgrading, trades and apprenticeship, certificate, diploma, degree, and advanced degree programs (Assembly of First Nations, 2012, p. 3).

The Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning (IIHL) emerged to address the post-secondary educational gap of indigenous people across Canada, First Nations and Inuit people (Assembly First Nations, 2006, p. iii, iv). “IIHL’s deliver a wide range of programs including basic literacy and secondary upgrading, language and Indigenous knowledge base programs, skilled trades and university graduate degree programs” (p.26). On March 10, 2011, a virtual summit on indigenous institutions was hosted by the First Nations University of Canada (Assembly of First Nations, 2011). Students from across Canada that attend indigenous institutes of higher learning participated in the virtual summit by responding to online questions to facilitate dialogue on the topic of Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning. The participants in the Virtual Summit restated the importance of indigenous institutions and how they provide a cultural environment, relevant learning, a safe place to learn and demanding programs (p. 17).

The National Association of Indigenous Institutes (NAIIHL) was established in 2001 (National Association of Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning). In 2007 the NAIIHL represented sixty four Aboriginal controlled post-secondary institutions of higher learning throughout Canada (Canada, 2007, p. 22). The NAIIHL’s objective is to promote Indigenous controlled institutions of higher learning by providing support and improving IIHL resources. The NAIIHL is supported by and works collaboratively with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada’s (AANDC) through the Indian Studies Support Program (IISP). NAIIHL carries out research to assist Indigenous peoples and communities (National Association of Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning).

In February 2007, the Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development tabled a document in the House of Commons called, *No Higher Priority: Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada* (Canada, 2007). The Standing Committee presented ten recommendations that were put into the following six categories: Creating Positive Outcomes; Student Funding; Data Collection and Tracking; Allocation and Delivery of PSE Funding; Indian Studies Support Program; and Access to Post-Secondary Programming. NAIHL and AFN along with other national indigenous organizations reported on the topics presented in the recommendations. In his evidence presented to the Standing Committee, Trevor Lewis, (Chair, National Association of Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning) stated:

The Federal Government has taken the position that support for post-secondary education is a matter of social policy rather than legal responsibility. As a consequence, federal support has not evolved with the reality of the growth of our institutes or the growth of our student population (Lewis, 2006).

More importantly Trevor Lewis encouraged the standing committee to accept the policy recommendation presented in the report entitled *Review of the Indian Studies Support Program Component of the PSE Program Final Report Presented to the Joint AFN-INAC PSE Working Group*, prepared by Chignecto and Katenies (Assembly of First Nations, 2006). The Standing Committee also included an appendix in the report of provincial post-secondary achievements (Canada 2007, p. 43). A major topic of the report is the need to address funding for students and academic institutions. In relation to demographics the Standing Committee revealed federal departmental documents indicated between 1971 and 2001, the Aboriginal population increased 322% compared to 37% of the non-Aboriginal population, with Bill C-31 and the 1985 *Indian Act* amendment helping to account for the increase (Canada, 2007, p. 5). The committee

members also conducted a survey of reports on Aboriginal post-secondary education and recognized a tremendous amount of reports have been written in recent decades and that now they understand why Aboriginal people may feel like they have been “studied to death” and the committee acknowledged why Aboriginal people may feel frustrated because so many issues have been raised in the scores of First Nations educational reports, but have been inefficiently addressed (Canada, 2007, p. 8). The Chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development reiterated the Standing Committees sentiment, “The Committee is convinced that it is possible and essential, to meet the challenges, starting now” (Canada, 2007, p. xix). The literature on the efforts of Aboriginal education in Canada reflect both an optimism and urgency to be more proactive rather than reactive when it comes to closing the educational gap between First Nations, particularly on-reserve and non-First Nations.

First Nations Post-Secondary Education in British Columbia

According to the Centre for the Study of Living Standards (Sharp, A, & Arsenault, 2010, pp. 15 & 16) two thirds of the Aboriginal labour force and employment growth will occur in Western Canada and B.C. could stand to gain, providing Aboriginal people are properly equipped educationally.

Given the demographic structure of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population, Aboriginal people will undoubtedly play a significant role in shaping the economic future of Canada, and in particular, that of the Western provinces (p. v).

Conversely, “If there is no change in the Aboriginal participation and employment rates, the Aboriginal population will contribute to the overall trend towards higher dependency rates” (Sharp & Arsenault, 2010, p. 12). A number of public post-secondary institutions in B.C. have recognized the need to do a better job of meeting the educational needs of indigenous peoples

(First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008, p. A). In many respects, B.C. is leading the way in addressing the educational gap that exists between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population (Assembly of First Nations, 2012, p. 26); for example, there are seventeen affiliated indigenous institutes of higher learning and sixteen non-affiliated institutions (Assembly First Nations, 2006, p. 19). These institutions offer a broad range of services and programs to meet the unique needs and challenges of students and the various communities they represent. Indigenous institutes in B.C. are autonomous community based organizations and governed by independent boards or by Chief and Council (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008, p. A) and reflect the philosophy of Indian Control of Indian Education and as such, “Indigenous institutions exist for the express purpose of addressing the human resource needs and capacity developed of First Nations communities. Programs and services reflect First Nations worldview, epistemologies, cultures, customs, languages, values, and histories” (Assembly of First Nations, 2012, p. 43).

A major reoccurring theme throughout the literature is the inadequate federal and provincial funding for indigenous controlled post-secondary institutions in British Columbia and Canada. In 2005, an examination of government policy by The Aboriginal Institutes’ Consortium revealed the constant issue of the lack of federal and provincial funding for indigenous institutions (Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2005, p. 49). Even though the Canadian Race Relations Foundation focuses on Ontario in their examination, their paper highlights the large systemic problem faced by indigenous institutes nationally. The lack of funding remains the biggest challenge facing indigenous institutions; limited funding jeopardizes programs, curriculum development and staffing (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008 pp. B-C, 1; The Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association, 2007, p 5).

Indigenous institutions have struggled since their inception (The Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium, 2005, p. 56) to be recognized provincially as viable institutions that contribute to the well-being of Aboriginal students and as a result play an extremely constructive role in demographic figures and employment labour force outcomes. One of the many recommendations from the Report of the Provincial Advisory Committee on Post-Secondary Education for Native Learners was that the BC Ministry of Advance Education, Training and Technology provide targeted funding (1990). Then in 1995 the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework recommended allocations of funds for indigenous institutions (IAHLA, 2007, p. 14). In 2006, McCue wrote a paper for the Centre for Native Policy and Research in which he stated, "Funding continues to be a major issue" (McCue, 2006, p.14). He clarifies further in that funding needs for Métis and non-status Aboriginal youth are not being met through the Federal Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) (2006, pp. 14-16). Similarly, in the research paper that Malatest & Associates (2002) wrote for the Council of Education Ministers they discuss the lack of funding faced by Aboriginal people:

While Status Indians are theoretically eligible for band funding of their postsecondary education, many do not receive it. Aboriginal people are increasingly vocal about the limited resources of the PSSSP transfer, which necessitate a limited number of interested Aboriginal people being able to access band funds (51).

In 2007, the BC Ministry of Advanced Education (AVED) put in place the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Strategy Action plan to which they committed to improving higher education for Aboriginal learners. The vision statement of the 2007 Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Strategy Action Plan is as follows:

Aboriginal post-secondary education outcomes are comparable to those of non-Aboriginal learners, and that public institutions and Aboriginal organizations and institutions play appropriate roles and are supported by the combined resources of the federal and provincial governments (Ministry of Advanced Education, 2007, p.1).

In 2011 an external evaluation of the Action Plan was completed and used to create the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework and Action Plan, 2020 Vision for the Future (2012). Goal number three in the 2020 Vision for the Future report stated: “Financial barriers to accessing and completing post-secondary education and training are reduced for Aboriginal learners” (British Columbia Ministry of Advance Education, 2012a, p. 13). With the announcement of the new Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework and Action Plan the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education announced a commitment of \$16.2 million towards Aboriginal post-secondary programs and student assistance (British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, 2012b).

The extensive Final Report, Evaluation of the BC Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Strategy by Jothen in 2011 brought forward a list of imperative recommendations. In the Conclusions and Overall Recommendations sections they articulately stated, “The lack of evaluation framework built into (from the start) the 2007 Strategy and clear logic models and measurement indicators for some program elements, made it challenging to assess the outcomes of every element” (Jothen, 2011, p. vi),. In addition, the following observation was made of foremost importance:

One strong message from Aboriginal post-secondary students and Aboriginal communities was about the serious financial barriers impeding participation and retention in higher education. This was particularly an issue of First Nations students. While it is

beyond the scope of this evaluation, the Evaluators believe mention should be made of concerns consistently raised by Aboriginal students, educators and communities regarding what they see as deficiencies and, in fact, real declines in the levels of resources available for post-secondary studies (Jothan, 2011, p vi).

Among other recommendations, the report also recommended that the Ministry consider developing a partnership with Indigenous Adult of Higher Learning Association (IAHLA) and Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning (IIHL) in that such partnerships, “... have proven highly successful in community-based delivery programs and bridging programs” (Jothan. 2011, p ii).

Nonetheless, even though there is a substantial discrepancy in funding, Indigenous Institutions of Higher Learning are making a significant difference in addressing the learning needs of Aboriginal people provincially and nationally.

Efforts to Address First Nations Educational Gap in British Columbia

Literature sources indicate that the provincial government began to become concerned about the Aboriginal post-secondary education gap around 1988. According to the Report by the Provincial Access Committee, *Access to Advanced Education and Job Training in British Columbia*, highlights the issue of the post-secondary educational gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in “... that the Provincial Government take immediate steps, in consultation with Native Indian groups, universities and colleges, to develop and implement a detailed strategy to address the diverse advanced education and job training needs of Native Indians” (Provincial Access Committee, 1988). Soon after the Provincial Access Committee released their report, the Minister of Advanced Education, Training and Technology announced the formation of the Provincial Advisory Committee on Post-Secondary Education for Native Learners in 1989. The initiative, *Access for All*, brought together First Nations, the public and

post-secondary institutions to aid in policy development (Provincial Advisory Committee, 1990, p. 4). It is through this initiative the Provincial Government, along with *Access for All* participants formed a goal to bring First Nations post-secondary education rates to the national average by 1995, a five year optimistic plan to bolster Aboriginal post-secondary education. After consultation and reviewing all the material and evidence, the Provincial Advisory Committee released their report (Provincial Advisory Committee, 1990). Then the Ministry of Education, Skills and Training published the *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework* (1995) to redress the issues. Their policy framework included four objectives, one of which was to "... increase the participation and success rates of Aboriginal people in post-secondary education and training" (p. 1). The next significant step was the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training in 2005 and then the Ministry of Advance Education implementation of the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Strategy and Action Plan in 2007. The signing of the New Relationship Agreement in 2005 would also be a pivotal point in First Nations post-secondary education as it lead to a government to government relationship in recognition of past injustices, new approaches and a renewed commitment (Union of BC Indian Chiefs, a). The release of the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework and Action Plan 2020 Vision for the Future (2012) marked a pivotal point as well. The 2020 Vision for the Future is sectioned into three components throughout the document, Short-Term Results by 2013, Medium-Term Results by 2016 and Long-term Outcomes by 2020. An overview of the literature indicates there has been a cooperative consorted effort invested since 1989 in effecting meaningful First Nations post-secondary change.

There are several First Nations organizations that play a major role in the efforts to address the First Nations Educational Gap in British Columbia. They are the Indigenous Adult Higher Learning Association (IAHLA), the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC). Each of these organizations is a major provincial and federal advocate for First Nations education in British Columbia. The Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association is an organization focused on improving post-secondary education in B.C. IAHLA came into existence in 2003 when Aboriginal adult learning centers and post-secondary education institutions gathered together to form a more unified voice in representing both centers and institutions to further develop indigenous language, culture and knowledge. One of IAHLA's main objectives is to support post-secondary institutions through research (Indigenous Adults of Higher Learning Association).

The First Nations Education Steering Committee was established in 1992. They are an independent society with over one hundred First Nations community representatives. Their main objective is to improve First Nations education in B.C. and communicate First Nations educational priorities to the provincial and federal governments while supporting First Nations communities to work together in developing a brighter educational First Nations future. Much of FNESC expertise is in the realm of elementary and secondary First Nations education. They have made a significant impact as a First Nations advocate organization. One of their more recent accomplishments as stated by FNESC: "We have won the legal recognition of our authority to be decision-makers in the education of our children, protected in federal legislation (2006) and provincial legislation (2007)" (First Nations Education Steering Committee).

The Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UNBCIC) was created in 1969, in response to the federal government's 'White Paper', which was viewed as an attempt to assimilate First Nations

into mainstream society (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, b). “The goal of the UBCIC is to support the work of our people, whether at the community, nation or international level, in our common fight for the recognition of our aboriginal rights and respect for our cultures and societies” (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, c). A recent advocacy measure from UBCIC was to issue a new release, on June 5, 2013, demanding that Federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada rescind their decision to centralize the Indian Student Support Program (ISSP) rather than have regional First Nations committees that oversee the funding selection process (Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, d; Hyslop, 2013).

The Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework (1995) drew attention to public institutions such as The University of British Columbia that has the First Nations House of Learning; Capilano College, in partnership with the Squamish Nation have established a transition program; Malaspina University-College that has a First Nations Arts-One program; Simon Fraser University, the North Coast Tribal Council and School District #52 have implemented a First Nations Language Teacher Education Program (Ministry of Education, Skills and Training (pp. 3-4). Malatest and Associates give another example of First Nations post-secondary progress in *Best Practices in Increasing Aboriginal Post-Secondary Enrolment Rates* (2002).

Aboriginal control has successfully extended to the development of curriculum and the hiring of staff at mainstream postsecondary institutions. For example, the successful development of a strong Aboriginal voice in the development of curriculum and Aboriginal studies at the University of Northern British Columbia has included establishing the Nisga’a Protocol Agreement with UNBC. This gives the Nisga’a control

over hiring related to Aboriginal programs and over standards in conjunction with the university (p. 44).

For the first time in B.C. history, in 1995, the government of British Columbia through the College and Institute Act granted two indigenous institutions, the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology and the Institute of Indigenous Governance the authority to grant degrees. At the time, Saskatchewan was the only other province to take such a bold move in recognizing the significance of Aboriginal institute control and authority (The Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium, 2005, p. 32).

Efforts are being made by the Ministry of Advanced Education to improve their accountability towards First Nations and their post-secondary education. This is noticeable in the review process of the B.C. *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework – 2020 Vision for the Future* (2012a) that involved input from IAHLA and the FNEESC. In their feedback to the Ministry of Advance Education, the IAHLA and FNEESC emphasized the importance of recognizing the recommendations put forth in their 2008 policy background paper, *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in British Columbia: A Place for Aboriginal Institutes* (Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association, 2012).

Momentum in re-evaluating the Private Career Training Institutions Agency is growing. Plant (2007) brings to light in *Campus2020 Thinking Ahead: The Report, Access & Excellence The Campus 2020 Plan for British Columbia's Post-Secondary Education System*, the need to revisit the Private Career Training Institutions Agency as pointed out in recommendation 29: “Undertake an independent review of the Private Career Training Institutions Act in 2009” (p. 57). Following Plant’s report recommendations, the Ministry of Advance Education commissioned an independent review in 2008 by John Watson of the Private Career Training

Institutions Act. Watson states among other things, “The report contains recommendations to help develop a deeper pool of experienced academics and administrators and thereby improve student outcomes and credit transfer for Aboriginal institutions” (2008, p. 3).

It seems that the Ministry of Advanced Education recognizes the importance of the recommendations that FNEC and IAHLA brought forth in their policy background paper and the review of the Private Career Training Institutions Act by Watson (2008). The Ministry of Advanced Education has known for some time the divisive nature between (private) Aboriginal post-secondary institutes and public post-secondary institutes as they state in the 2012 report, *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework and Action Plan 2020 Vision for the Future* to, “... provide for designation of Aboriginal-controlled institutes as public post-secondary institutions, in reference to their 1995 *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework* (British Columbia Ministry of Advance Education, 2012a, p. 5).

There is a greater move towards the quality assurance framework that the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education first introduced in 2003. Education Quality Assurance (EQA) is the term for British Columbia’s quality post-secondary education. “EQA is a voluntary mechanism available to all eligible post-secondary institutions in B.C.” (British Columbia Ministry of Advance Education). The First Nations Education Steering Committee policy background paper *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in British Columbia: A Place for Aboriginal Institutes* brought forth a number of pivotal recommendations to address post-secondary quality assurance.

Recommendation #1:

The Province of British Columbia should create policy and legislation that establishes a more integrated post-secondary education system in BC by recognizing the unique and critical role of Aboriginal institutes.

Recommendation #2:

Recognizing the need for academic quality assurance, which will facilitate student mobility, efficiency of the system, as well as mutual accountability, the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association (IAHLA) will work with Aboriginal institutes to create an effective and thorough quality assurance system based upon high standards and rigorous review (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008, p. D).

On April 4, 2012, the Ministry of Advanced Education released a discussion paper entitled *British Columbia's Quality Assurance of Post-Secondary Education Framework*, where they stipulated, "The Framework will be used to create a new Quality Assurance Act for all post-secondary institutions delivering education in or from BC"; furthermore, it is important to note that "The framework also takes into account previous reports on the quality of post-secondary education commissioned by the Ministry of Advanced Education as well as national and international commitments" (British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, 2012c, p. 2). Then in March 2013, the Ministry of Advanced Education, Innovation and Technology (AEIT) released the Green Paper, *Quality Assurance Framework British Columbia* (Ministry of Advanced Education, Innovation and Technology, 2013). The AEIT Green Paper is a live document that is intended to guide AEIT and post-secondary institutes in the creation of more harmony between post-secondary institutions in British Columbia. "During the first phase

of the engagement process, students, stakeholders and the public provided feedback on the goals and objectives outlined in an initial discussion paper” (p. i). One of the sectors that AIET proposed in the quality assurance framework is Aboriginal-controlled institutes (p. 17). EQA is an extreme large leap forward in Aboriginal institutions receiving the necessary federal and provincial funding to create and implement post-secondary programs and courses designed and taught by Aboriginal people, bringing Aboriginal Institutes one step closer to seeing the fulfillment of First Nations Control of First Nations Education.

An indication that the government of British Columbia is serious about improving Aboriginal post-secondary education is that they are starting to monitor their progress by commissioning independent reports on the efforts to improve Aboriginal post-secondary education. Reviews or reports like the *Final Report Review of Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Programs, Services and Strategies/Best Practices & Aboriginal Special Projects Funding (ASPF) Program* (Jothan, 2005) and the *Final Report Evaluation of the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Strategy* (Jothan, 2011) have informed the Ministry of Advanced Education in creating the 2012 *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework and Action Plan 2020 Vision for the Future* (British Columbia Ministry of Advance Education, 2012a, p. 5).

Another confirmation that the Provincial Government is willing to move forward in the new relationship with First Nations is the Tripartite Educational Framework Agreement (TEFA) that came into effect on September 1, 2012. It is a five year agreement between Canada, British Columbia and the First Nations Education Steering Committee (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2012b). The agreement is a commitment by the parties to work together to improve elementary and secondary schools and student success for Aboriginal learners in

British Columbia. “As of March 30, 2012, AANDC has received Band Council resolutions from 85 of 86 eligible First Nations that operate schools in B.C. AANDC will work with First Nations that have passed Band Council resolutions over the next few months to amend their funding agreement accordingly” (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, c).

Another effort towards First Nations post-secondary education is the Student Transition Project (STP) initiated in 2005 by the Ministry of Education as a means of strategic planning. “The Student Transition Project provides data on student transitions from K-12 into post-secondary institutions” (British Columbia, 2010, p. 18), includes special reports and studies on Aboriginal student transitions (Heslop, 2010. p.9).

The government of British Columbia has taken numerous steps to improve Aboriginal education from preschool to post-secondary throughout B.C. For example, each year the province publishes an Annual Report on the New Relationship progress with Aboriginal People. The report is a review of past successes, present events and future endeavours in the government’s relationship with Aboriginal peoples.

The provincial government, through BC Stats, publishes Census Fast Facts that include a range of statistics related articles about Aboriginal people, both on and off-reserve (BC Stats Census Fast Facts). BC Stats also publishes the Labour Force Characteristics of Off-Reserve Aboriginal Population. The reports cover topics such as employment, unemployment, types of jobs, labour supply and schooling (BC Stats Labour Force Survey). BC Stats uses statistics to evaluate Aboriginal trends to guide and inform the relationship between the province and Aboriginal people. Many of the strategies, initiatives and agreements are ongoing and in a constant flux being revisited, revised, clarified and evaluated.

Aboriginal post-secondary education is not a disconnected entity in and of itself; rather, it is intimately connected to each stage of the educational process; a child's successful education experience through preschool, primary, intermediate and secondary translates into a successful post-secondary graduate. First Nations have always understood learning as a lifelong process from pre-natal to elder.

Gaps in the research

The general research topic of Aboriginal post-secondary education is more inductive whereas as the specific research topic of university degree completion for on-reserve First Nations is more deductive. There is a limited amount of qualitative research available on the topic and more qualitative research is needed. A majority of the literature is quantitative in nature, drawing most of the data from the same source Statistics Canada (Council of Ministers of Education, 2012b, p. 10). The data that is available is often skewed in that a number of reserves do not complete the census; Aboriginal groups are treated as one result; there is inconsistent data collection throughout the educational system; there appears to be a tendency to use off-reserve Aboriginal statistics more often as it projects a more successful outcome. The literature review covers extensive commissioned reports that include lists of recommendations. Throughout the literature very little is mentioned of Aboriginal children with special needs and how they can be included in the positive results of Aboriginal post-secondary statistics. At times the literature mentions post-secondary results are dependent on accomplished Aboriginal elementary and secondary students, but little is offered to advise how to make it happen. Another trend that is observed, but often times ignored, is that Aboriginal women are consistently more successful in achieving university degrees. The trend is noticed and highlighted, but not understood. Furthermore, there is very little research to expound First Nations post-secondary graduate

experience once they are back in their community. In addition, having such a broad range as 25-64 used by statistics Canada can be misleading and inaccurate, making it difficult to interpret First Nations intergenerational trends in post-secondary education. Lastly, the literature rarely broaches how the socio economic situation on-reserve influences First Nations desire to pursue post-secondary education. These are areas that directly and indirectly affect First Nations post-secondary outcomes. Each of these gaps are worthy of further study.

CHAPTER III

Methodology and Design

The methodology for the study is qualitative research using a personal narrative research design to collect recordings and field notes that will provide the story of the individual's post-secondary education experience (Creswell, 2005). The data for this study will be collected through talking circles and observation. Talking circles are a traditional method of information sharing among First Nations people and similar to focus groups. Adults and elders will participate in the circles that will take place on a First Nations reserve in central British Columbia. The data will center on a problem solution narrative structure that relates to the research questions.

A qualitative method is chosen in order to maintain participant originality. Adults and elders will be telling their point of view or experience regarding their participation in the post-secondary education system. A personal narrative approach will allow the researcher to get as close as possible to what the educational experience was for the individuals. Using a personal narrative design will provide an opportunity for participants to freely talk about their personal perspectives. In addition, the personal narrative is culturally appropriate and it is expected to provide a familiar environment and comfort level for all participants. First Nations people have developed strong oral communication skills over the ages and thus the personal narrative design will be best suited for the study. In addition, verbal communication has long been the order of First Nations culture, both past and present. An example of this is when elders and leaders speak to the community about traditions and teachings which take the format of a personal narrative.

The research will consist of three talking circles made up of three rounds. This will be accomplished by passing a talking stick (see Appendix B) clockwise (to the person on their left)

around the talking circle. In each talking circle only the individual holding the talking stick is permitted to speak according to tradition. Therefore, each round will begin with me giving the topic or question for the round. An introductory meeting (potluck) will take place prior to the talking circle activity in order for participants to get acquainted and at the beginning of each talking circle thereafter. As an Aboriginal Cultural Educator, I will facilitate each talking circle.

There will be approximately 8-12 adults and elders participating in the research talking circles. The three talking circles will be audio recorded using a digital voice recorder (not video recorded). Throughout each talking circle participants will share their personal post-secondary educational experiences, motivations, challenges and how their experience can be beneficial to others. A similar format will be used for all three talking circles. The talking stick is passed clockwise to each participant in the talking circle and each time the talking stick completes the circle it is considered one round of the talking circle.

The three rounds for the first talking circle are as follows:

1. Round one: Share one encouraging educational experience.
2. Round two: When did you pursue post-secondary education and what motivated you?
3. Round three: What are some of the best things about having completed your post-secondary education?

The three rounds for the second talking circle are as follows:

1. Round one: Share one encouraging educational experience.
2. Round two: What were some of the challenges you faced pursuing a post-secondary education and how did you overcome the challenges?
3. Round three: Why did you decide to return to the reserve after completing your post-secondary education?

The three rounds for the third talking circle are as follows:

1. Round one: Share one encouraging educational experience.
2. Round two: What advice would you give to students, parents, teachers and Band members regarding your post-secondary education?
3. Round three: Now that you have completed your post-secondary education, what advice would you give to post-secondary institutions?

At the beginning of each talking circle the objective is introduced, the purpose of the talking circle is presented and guidelines for the talking circle are established by the facilitator. Even though a talking stick will be used to indicate the speaker, the facilitator will interject if necessary so that I may ask participants to clarify what is being said through questioning or paraphrasing.

Each talking circle will proceed as follows:

1. A sign will be posted by the entrance, "Talking Circle in Process";
2. Adults and elders will be asked to form a circle;
3. A brief overview of the traditional talking circle and talking stick will be given;
4. Talking circle topic will be presented;
5. The facilitator/researcher's role will be reviewed (see Appendix E);
6. Talking circle guideline will be presented (see Appendix C);
7. Three consecutive rounds will take place in the talking circle (1 ½ hours);
8. At the end adults and elders will be thanked for their participation.

Research Site and Purposeful Sampling

The research will take place on a First Nations reserve in central British Columbia. As with a number of reserves in B.C., the reserve is located in a semi-rural area. The Band typically

views itself as a progressive First Nations Band, actively engaged in treaty negotiations and diligently administering Band programs and resources. The Band is proactive in providing youth programs and support; they also provide opportunities for all age groups to participate in cultural activities.

The focus of the research will be First Nations community members who live on-reserve and have completed their post-secondary degree. Talking circles will be open to Band members that have completed their post-secondary education in order to determine motivating factors of how the individuals succeeded to graduate from a post-secondary institution. If counseling is necessary as a result of the talking circles a counselor will be available for participants through Band services. The primary focus group are on-reserve Band members that have attended post-secondary education. Two non-First Nations guests will be invited to participate in the talking circles, a counselor and a youth worker, both are non-Band members, but are employed by the Band. They are critical players in the community and having them there will provide a tremendous support for participating Band members who participate in the talking circles. The talking circles will take place in a building on-reserve and measures will be taken to minimize any disruptions, cell phones will be turned off, a sign will be posted saying 'Talking Circle in Process Do Not Disturb' and the best time for the talking circles will be selected by the participants and researcher.

There are several reasons why this First Nations community is chosen for the study. First, a Band staff member shared with me that some adults and elders from the community have a post-secondary degree. Second, I am interested in contributing to the First Nations community's well-being. Third, some of the elders that meet as a women's group on a regular basis have a post-secondary degree. They are familiar with one another and are willing to share

their post-secondary experience with others. Fourth, as a Métis person I completed my post-secondary education as an adult and recognize the significance of such a feat and want to document what motivated the group of individuals and the roadblocks that they overcame to pursue their degrees. It may be possible to learn a great deal from this group of resilient First Nations people that have acquired their post-secondary degree.

The talking circle will take place between January and February 2014. Prior to the study taking place the researcher will coordinate an informal potluck with the assistance of the participating counselor and youth worker. The counselor and youth worker will recruit talking circle participants and invited them to the potluck; an invitation will be extended to Chief and Council to attend the potluck. The intent of the potluck social function is to get acquainted, answer questions and give a brief oral presentation along with a pamphlet (see Appendix F) to inform Band members of the talking circle topic, purpose and possible dates when the talking circles might take place. Coffee, tea and cookies will be provided at the end of each talking circle.

Qualitative Data Analysis Procedures

The three talking circles will be digitally recorded using an audio recorder. Upon completion of the talking circles a transcriber will transcribe the recordings. A Confidentiality Agreement Transcription Services contract will be sign by the researcher and the transcriber to ensure confidentiality. The researcher will analyze the data by way of coding to determine themes and sub-themes as well as present and discuss the findings and bring fourth recommendations.

Researcher's Role and Potential Ethical Issues

The researcher's role will be to facilitate the talking circles, code the data, collect field notes documenting personal observations and report the findings. Talking circle participants are required to sign a letter of informed consent prior to participating in the talking circles. The researcher will forward the talking circle questions to Chief and Council prior to the commencement of the talking circles or the collection of any data. The document will be presented to Chief and Council upon completion of the research.

At any time during the talking circles if there is any uncertainty as to what is meant the facilitator will paraphrase or use questioning to clarify. The researcher will endeavour to create a comfortable environment for the participants, socially and culturally. In the event that hurtful memories are exposed the researcher will recommend counselor follow up. Personal observations will be recorded in a note book after each talking circle. To address potential ethical issues special care will be given in that the data will be masked to ensure anonymity, confidentiality and privacy of the participants; however, due to the nature of qualitative research and the small size of the community, the names of the participants might become known. Participants will be made aware of the possible risks. Once the study is complete the data will be put away in a locked box at the University of Northern British Columbia for no more than five years; after which time the data will be destroyed in accordance with UNBC's Ethics Committee stipulations. The researcher will gather the data between January and February 2014. Upon completion of the talking circles and analysis of the data according to UNBC's expectations the researcher will provide a copy of the research to Chief and Council. The researcher will provide a copy of the research to participants once it is accepted by the University at a potluck dinner.

The researcher will give a copy of the research to Chief and Council and participants in person, or by e-mail, or mailed directly to them.

Methods of Validation

To check for validity of the study, I will adopt the qualitative method of member checking of transcribed and analyzed interview data (Creswell, 2005) by providing the information to a member of the advisory committee that will listen to or read the transcript from the digital audio recordings from the talking circles. Individual interviews will be conducted and recorded if clarification is required. The advisory committee will read the researcher's field notes to validate and provide input regarding data analysis.

Delimitations

The talking circle and personal interviews will take place on-reserve, between January and February 2014 in a quiet organized setting. Each member participating in the talking circle will sign a letter of informed consent prior to taking part in the circle (see Appendix D). The researcher is an experienced talking circle facilitator. At the beginning of each talking circle participants receive a brief overview of the traditional talking circle and talking piece. Then the researcher will inform participants of the talking circle topics and guidelines of the talking circle. It is difficult to determine the length of a talking circle as it is largely dependent on the number of participants and the length of time each participant takes to respond or share their reflections, thoughts, feelings, ideas and experiences. However, a rough time parameter will be mentioned at the beginning of each talking circle. The facilitator will inform participants that the talking circle is expected to take about one and a half hours. To introduce or review the talking circle guidelines 5 minutes; to get everyone settled 10 and give a brief overview of the talking circle 10 minutes; round one, share an encouraging educational experience, 20 minutes; round two, the

response to the first research question, 20 minutes; round three, the response to the second research question, 20 minutes; closing 5 minutes; for a total of 90 minutes. The facilitator will inform participants of the rough time schedule at the beginning of each round in order to conclude the talking circle in a reasonable time for everyone.

Limitations

1. The study is limited to a small First Nations population located in central British Columbia.
2. The results are limited to on-reserve First Nations.
3. As purposeful sampling is carried out the results cannot be generalized.
4. There is no certainty how many First Nations post-secondary graduates will be present at the talking circles or participate.
5. Researcher and talking circle facilitator are performed by the same person.
6. This research is not designed to compare one First Nations community to another.
7. The nature of the study allows for only a small group of post-secondary graduates to participate.
8. The results are limited by how comfortable and honest the participants are with me.

Building Rapport

At the very beginning of the study the researcher contacted the Band and was referred to the counselor that works for the Band. The counselor suggested for the researcher to get involved in various community activities where the researcher's skills could be utilized. Over a period of two years the researcher participated in two main events, dip net making and hunting prior to completing the study. The researcher had worked as a commercial fisherman for many years and acquired net mending skills. After being invited by the Band to make a traditional river dip net

the researcher and several youth began the process of making the dip net over several days.

First, we went out and cut down a dried beetle killed lodge pole pine. Second, we gathered some willow branches for the hoop. Third, we stripped the bark from the pole and willow branches.

Fourth, we bent the willow branches into a circle to form the hoop and lashed the branches together with twine. Fifth, we lashed the hoop to the pole as tightly as possible and made a cross piece to support the hoop that was attached to the pole. It was a warm summer day and some of the elders that participated in the talking circles came by to visit while the net was being made.

Bannock was served each day we gathered to make our dip net.

The researcher participated in two hunting parties over the last two years. We would first meet prior to the hunt to plan the location and make a list of the supplies that were needed. Then we would meet at the designate area within the traditional hunting territory. The hunters had a support group that took care of the meals and packed lunches. In the evening we would gather around the fire for drumming and storytelling. There was no game harvested on the first hunt, but new relationships were created and old ones renewed. Much of the process for the second hunt was similar to the first. A new location was selected for the second hunt. Two moose and four deer were harvested. There was a concerted effort in getting the game hung on a meat pole to cool overnight. The following day elders came to the camp to provide the necessary leadership to process the game. Several weeks later a community feast was held to commemorate the successful harvest of game, herbs and berries. Throughout the activities members of the community displayed enthusiasm, commitment and team work.

CHAPTER IV

Analysis of Research Findings

A letter of invitation was sent to potential participants informing them of the time and dates the talking circles would take place. The three talking circles took place on January 20, 23 and 27, 2014. There were a total of 16 participants at the three talking circles. The researcher, the counselor and youth worker prepared a meal for participants prior to each talking circle. The first talking circle set the framework for the next two talking circles. The Chief was at the first talking circle and this may have influenced the way some of the participants responded as the participants at the first circle seemed to be a little more eloquent in their responses to the questions.

Participants of the first talking circle were given a choice of having the talking circle upstairs or downstairs and they elected to have the talking circle upstairs where everyone was seated for the meal. The group felt we were already sitting in a circle and everyone was comfortable with the seating arrangement so the group decided to start the talking circle where we were rather than getting reestablished in another room. Participants were presented with a pamphlet that explained the purpose of the talking circles along with questions that would be asked in the talking circle and clarification that anonymity could not be guaranteed in the sense that the researcher could only request that each participant respect the talking circle and keep what is said in the circle confidential.

Prior to the first talking circle a discussion ensued of how to proceed through the three talking circles. Most of the participants indicated they would only be able to attend one talking circle. After consulting with my thesis adviser, it was decided that since there would be different participants at each circle it would be best if the participants at each talking circle would be

asked the same questions. An assurance that the same participants would attend all three talking circles could not be obtained and this meant the previous talking circle format needed to be modified. As a result, the format for the three talking circles was altered, only the first two questions of the original six questions were asked at each talking circle. However, many participants in each talking circle used the six questions that were laid out in the pamphlet as their guide to tell their post-secondary story. Also, the first part of each talking circle where the participants would share one encouraging educational experience was dropped to allow appropriate time for participants to respond to the questions.

The other change that took place was the choice of the talking piece for the circles. The participants chose an eagle feather for the talking circle rather than the talking stick. The reason being the eagle feather had greater cultural significance for this First Nations Band as appose to the talking stick that is associated with First Nations from Vancouver Island. This change demonstrated flexibility and cultural sensitivity. It also indicated that the researcher was interested in creating a comfort level for everyone.

Before each talking circle participants were asked to read and sign the Letter of Informed Consent (see Appendix D). At the beginning of each talking circle the researcher informed participants of the facilitator's (researcher) role and basic talking circle guidelines, in particular that participant confidentiality be maintained; that is, what is said in the circle is to remain in the circle. The researcher informed participants that some notes would be taken during the talking circles and that a voice recorder will be used to record the talking circle. It took approximately three hours for each talking circle to answer the two questions.

Several steps were involved in the data analysis. First, the researcher listened to the complete recordings approximately ten times. Second, when listening to the recordings the

researcher used a voice recorder to keep track of themes, sub-themes and keywords. Third, the researcher typed up the voice recorded notes for further analysis. Fourth, the transcript was formatted using headings to organize the data for the study. Fifth, the researcher read and searched the data for major themes, sub-themes and keywords. Once the transcript was formatted it was easy to search using the navigation pane. A transcriber was acquired to type the recordings into a text document and ninety four pages were transcribed from the recordings. A confidentiality agreement for transcription services was signed between the researcher and transcriber.

The study did not focus on the level of post-secondary education nor did it ascertain how many Band members had completed their post-secondary education. Nonetheless, it is important to mention that the Bandleaders at the time took the initiative to consult institutions to see if one of them could provide a post-secondary program. After a lot of consultation and dialogue an institution did agree to provide a post-secondary program for the Band. The Band made a seven year commitment to the program and in the end twenty-one Band members completed the program with a degree. A number of participants were in the graduate program together and other participants obtained their post-secondary education through various institutions. The talking circles provided an avenue for participants to reflect on their post-secondary education as a group. Participants often shared that other family members also pursued post-secondary education spanning several generations. The name of the participants were changed to ensure anonymity. What is written is their story, a story of courage, strength and wisdom to pursue their post-secondary education in spite of overwhelming odds.

There were two main research findings that were derived from the two questions that were asked at the talking circles.

1. Motivational factors

- a. Common motivational factors:
- b. Encouragement from a visionary nun
- c. Government, family and community support
- d. A desire to build self-worth and self-sufficiency
- e. A desire to upgrade educationally
- f. A desire to contribute to the community
- g. A desire to not be dependent
- h. Properly trained Band member to conduct Band affair

2. Benefits of pursuing post-secondary education

- a. Cultural Impact
- b. Educational Impact

First Question

When did you pursue post-secondary education and what motivated you? The first participant to speak at the first talking circle gave a historical account of the various educational steps the Band had taken to address their educational concerns before speaking of the factors that motivated him towards his post-secondary education. “In the early 70s we uh, set up uh, in the community an Adult, Adult Basic Education Program and a lot of our members uh, went through that...” (Circle #1 - Sam). “And out of that program, people started to question and think about their future and I will always remember that _____ asked and it is written in one of our old newsletters somewhere, “Why can’t we go to university?”” And this was back again in the 70s. So from that time, it has always been at the forefront of education and we make education a priority” (Circle #1 - Sam).

One participant in particular talked about a dream she had from an early age of pursuing post-secondary education. This is the same person that Sam quoted as saying, “Why can’t we go to university?”

I have always wanted uh, my education. I always dreamed of, of, of receiving a cap, you know you see all these graduates with caps you and I really wanted that and I just kept thinking oh, if only someday that I could you know do this and that was my dream and when I was in the residential school at _____ uh, that we had to write an essay on what we want, wanted to do after we graduated and, and so I had written that I wanted to be a teacher and to be a teacher was to uh, you know, I, uh, I saw our community the way it was and, and wanted the uh, kids uh, to have an education, but not the way we had to go and get our education so I wanted to be a teacher just you know be helpful to our people, uh, but you know that was my dream... (Circle #2 - Debbie).

Sam went on to say, “By the early 80s, again the question kept cropping up why can’t we go to university? By the mid-80s, we started negotiating, we started asking, we asked _____, we asked _____, we asked _____ can you deliver a program in our community that meets the needs of our community? Each and every one of them said no we can’t. We don’t have the means to do it.” (Circle #1 - Sam).

The Catholic Sister was a common motivating factor that many of the participants talked about. She encouraged, supported and lovingly pushed them to seek a higher education. She was relentless in her quest to see Band members up-grade, to get their grade twelve equivalent and then pursue post-secondary education. She approached the university she was attending regarding the Band’s vision to pursue post-secondary education. The result, the university

opened its doors to the Band after taking two years to negotiate a suitable program. In response to the program and partnership, twenty-one Band members graduated in education and business.

All the participants spoke fondly of the Sister as they recalled her tactful persuasive ways. "As in everyone else, I always had Sister _____ to push me along" (Circle #1 - Betty). In time of financial need the Sister was there to help out as one participant related:

One year she, I told her I can't afford it, I've got four children, she says get down there, if you have a place to stay we will make arrangements. One day she came over to check on us and she went to the Catholic Church and she got me grocery money because I used up all my education money on trying to complete in _____ and _____ (Circle #1 - Betty).

With a chuckle another participant and elder remembered the Sister's persistence, "Sister said I can quit anytime, but I think the sister was such a pusher, she pushed and pushed and shoved. I even locked her out of my house and she got in. She sent my niece to come and talk to me. That Sister was just a bully. "Do you want to quit?" There was no such thing as quit." (Circle #2 - Julie).

Still, another participant tried to sum up the role the Sister played in her getting a higher education:

So umm, I did [pursue post-secondary], but it was also the help of my, my family, like my sisters were involved in an education route and my brothers were in there, in a program and there is a lot of support and I think one of the other, the ones that really believed was Sister _____ umm, gave a lot and always supported right through, right through to the end and I think without her and my mom's words, I don't think I would have made it (Circle #3, - Pam).

One of the participants in particular put things into perspective as she covered the history between herself and the Sister:

... you have heard a lot of talk about _____ and she's been in my life, she was in my life since I was a child and uh, my sister, _____ and I lived with when uh, for about a year in _____ and from that time forward like she was always in my life anyways. She was always pushing me. She was standing beside me. She was pulling me. Like she was uh, she always getting me to reach for one goal higher. Like when I finished high school, she said, "Now you are going to go to university", when I finished university now she said, "You are going to go on to a Masters". I finished my Masters and she says now you are going to go to your doctorate so there was always one more thing after, after I finished one thing. I didn't uh, go on to my doctorate (Circle #2, - Anita).

In the community there were other individuals just as important in motivating as the Sister. Some participants recounted how the group that signed up for the program and the community in general played a role in motivating the participants, "So that is, the motivation came again from the early 70s, people with a vision, past leadership, our own community members, all of our own community supporting the program and supporting the students (Circle #1 - Sam). It was as though the group was a nucleus, a smaller version of the larger community. "I missed a lot of classes, so I had to stay a couple more summers, but again without that peer support, _____, _____ and others, _____ in the last couple of years, I wouldn't have made it and again like I was saying with the group as a whole, that peer support was one of the biggest factors" (Circle #1, - Sam).

One of the participants who was not one of the original core group members who had pursued post-secondary talked about how he and his family supported his brother to make it through post-secondary.

The best thing about going away to school is just being able to grow up and mature and learn how to take care of myself and another good thing was that I was able to stay down there and live with my brother _____ and support him in his schooling and stuff and he'll never admit it, but we, our family supported him through his education and did everything we could to make sure he completed it. I worked every kind of job to make sure we had food on the table and stuff like that and we did every little thing to make sure that he made it through and that was the best thing about going away to school was to support him and to grow into the person I am today (Circle #2, - Wayne).

Yet another participant reflected on the support the group as a whole provided especially through some of the most tragic times.

I don't remember the last year, they had church, we had like a church celebration, part of the grad or something and _____ asked me can you say all the names of the people that were born, all the names of the people in those 7 or 9 years and all the babies that were born and all the people that we lost and there were a lot of people from when the program started to when the program finished, there were numerous people who died, a lot of elders, a lot of leaders and that was one of the hardest things that I ever had to do because I said those names in church and the numbers, there were more deaths than births, but they continued through the program so that tells me that there was a real camaraderie, a real passion and a real love among the group" (Circle #1, - Diane).

Through the educational process the group grew closer together and relationships were strengthened. Participants reflected on the larger community environment as they studied together.

I think amongst ourselves as people you know, it created better relationships amongst ourselves and going through as a group I have a great better relationships outside community, cohesiveness amongst the group, learning you know who's, if I am having problems in this area, I can go to this person or help this person, you know you develop that, like we are all in this together kind of idea (Circle #3, - Jackie).

Family was another strong motivating factor either directly or indirectly. Three sisters sat next to each other in one of the circles. The first sister to speak had this to say about family support:

When I started my post-secondary education is when they, umm, brought the _____ program to the reserve, that was now late 80s, (unintelligible words) the mid-80s and then I finished in 92. I guess what umm, mainly got me going was my mother. I think right to the end where she umm, encouraged me to finish, cause back then I didn't really have any self-confidence in my education although they wanted me to finish high school and graduate umm, for a lot of reasons, I didn't take education as serious as they did and I didn't really understand why it was so important. I guess maybe they just saw more than, more than, more than I did. Cause I thought growing up on-reserve is everything that I needed was here, cause they showed a way of life, that umm, that I had some knowledge of the culture, had some understanding and I didn't feel education was important so I was glad I did and I think you know it was the support of our, seeing our whole family go to school. Cause in, family back then was really

important, to support each other, through your, my ups and downs and I had four kids to bring up and think about them, but I didn't take it seriously until my mom. One time I came back I was really having a hard time and she told me, I told her I was going quit. I said I can't do it. I, I just can't finish. It is too hard on the kids and there's not enough family time and struggling financially, emotionally, spiritually and everything. She told me that if I finish I won't have to depend on anybody. So from there that's what I did, I went back and, and it was always kept in the back of my mind that was always my biggest push to finish was just those words, you won't have to depend on anybody again, you can look after yourself and your kids. (Circle #3 - Pam)

The second sister went on to speak of the precious classroom memory she had of her mother:

"...it was intriguing to work with language ideas and just watch it. Sometimes watch what was happening, being present was, was, was just amazing for me. So I was fortunately to appreciate now that, that, that time of sitting with my mother in a classroom where both of us were students" (Circle #3, - Jackie).

Jackie spoke with high regard of her father as he raised them to valued education and make it a priority:

About our dad there he was a veteran, a World War II veteran. He was Chief for many years, having come back and endured life as an equal in Canada's army fighting in the war witnessed so many things and came back knowing himself what it was that he wanted and was able to articulate it and I think we grew up with that, being raised to know what it meant to be raised by a veteran, were the expectations were there. The Canadian Army did a pretty good job I think of that. You believe in something strongly

enough to be able to want to give up your life for it, that is something, that was, that was there as a person” (Circle #3, - Jackie).

The third sister went on to describe further the significant part that her family played regarding her desire to strive to acquire her education.

I was glad to be doing something like my sisters; I always knew education was important. We learned that at a very young age because Lord help us if our younger brother _____ got home ahead of us because he was always doing very well in his schooling and he would get home with the report card. We would walk in and our dad would be sitting there and he would ask where our report cards were” (Circle #3, - Ann).

Parents played a pivotal motivational role in the lives of their children as they were exhorted to achieve post-secondary education as one of the other participants stated:

I always in, I was always taught by my father, always pursue your education because what the other cultures know, the other races know, you have to know too, to get on that same level were your education strong enough to understand their words, that’s how I have always see it, is that, learn what’s been taught and educated and spoke of so you can speak on those terms also” (Circle #1, - Betty).

One of the participants from the second circle talked about how her parents groomed her for post-secondary when she was a child. “Even before I went to college and even before I finished high school, my mom and dad had told me that umm, no matter what I was going to finish high school and I was also going to go to college, so it was like uh, something that was already put out there (Circle #2 - Anita).

Children and independence were another significant motivating factor for participants. Participants clearly communicated they were passionate about the ability to provide for their

children. "My major driving force back then was a lot of my, was _____, my oldest boy, just trying to uh, trying to be the better dad. I guess and trying to make up for lost time or whatever it might have been. It was a lot of my driving factors and then just graduating was part of it" (Circle #1, - Joe). Fighting back her emotions, one of the participants who sought post-secondary in a different institution than many of the other participants shared the following:

I told her I want to go to _____. I hear there is a First Nations program and I want to do my BA because I love accounting, I love money. I like to support myself and I didn't want to live on welfare. I applied for welfare once in my life and I cried all through the process because I was taught always support yourself because it is what everyone is taught, you know, raise yourself, educate yourself and _____ came back to me and said we can't put you in that program because it costs too much and no one has ever gone to _____ before, but I am going to bring it back to the education board and we'll see where it goes from there. In that one week she had me scheduled for the CAT test the application to go into university. The next week, I was packing up my children and myself and we went, we were off to _____ to go, to go to school. This was independent as a single mom because as I had mentioned before it was a time in my life where things weren't going right in my family, in my husband, I, relationship, where I had to do something for my children. Where what if the possibility if he is not going to be there for me or my children. Somebody has to be there to raise them and that was my biggest step forward was my oldest son to know that there, that we all can graduate and we can complete whatever we wanted to do and they're my biggest motivation and my biggest accomplishment to teach them that where there's a will, there's a way, no matter what the odds are, single parent, single person, First Nations,

you can do it. All my children have graduated and I have my youngest one, yet to go through (Circle #1, - Betty).

One father who upgraded and attended the university program set up by the Band talked about his motivation to further his education to be a better role model for his children and to prove to himself higher education was possible.

My name is _____ and what pursued me to post-secondary education was umm, getting my grade 12 and Sister _____ was a great part of that in getting us all studied up and prepared for it, 8 hours' worth of tests. Umm, that was a huge step in my education, because before then it was umm, grade 10 and low self-esteem and a lot of that was due to alcohol also umm, yeah and the motivation was I wanted more, to prove to myself and my kids that a higher education was possible and so far it is working I guess. Umm, I started off with ah, post-secondary with umm, the group back in 19____, ____ (Circle #1, - Ron).

Perhaps the best way to summarize how family played a motivational role could be summed up this way. "And so again I'd just like to say my biggest inspiration was my mom and dad, my grandparents, my ancestors and my children and then later in life it was a lot of colleagues and colleagues' support" (Circle #1, - Sue). There was hardly a participant that did not share how their post-secondary education impacted their life, the lives of their children and the lives of their grandchildren.

Second Question

What are some of the best things about having completed your post-secondary education? In regards to the second question participants gleamed with enthusiasm and a sense of elation as they responded to the question.

My name is _____ and I have to say some of the best things that came from my education was encouraging a lot of the younger generation to go to school and my encouraging some of the secretaries go on with your education cause I was right were you were. Carry on, like go back to school finish your education and at times it feels like I am a broken record, but at times there is just one of them that needs it that's like, yes, victory so that's one of the things that I would have to say that is the best thing that came from getting my education was encouraging others to go get their education" (Circle #1, - Sarah).

A well-known member of the community and former Chief had this to say about the best thing of having completed his post-secondary education.

My name is _____. Again, what were some of the (unintelligible word), I mean, what were some of the best things? And there's quite a few things that umm, I'm like I mentioned earlier that I am proud about having completed the umm, program. Just the fact there I was able complete and again after 9 years umm, you know, made me very proud, again not only myself, but to see the group as a whole graduate in _____. You know when you see all of our students going up to accept their umm, certificates and that in, in _____ with the support group that we had from _____ was just, to me was pretty amazing. Like I said it is something that has never been done and I don't think will never be done again in this country, with such a program. Again like I mentioned some of the best things was having the family, peer support that we set up to umm, provide that support to individual students and that I think that's what made it such a success (Circle #2 - Sam).

A grandmother and stalwart of the community pondered the best thing about her post-secondary experience.

I mean the best thing about going to _____ was that we had all the support. If anything happened to one person, everybody was there to help them they'd tell us you know do you need help with your papers, do you need, do you need us to cook for you, do you need us to help look after your kids or do you need a time out or, they were always there and she [her niece] was one of my best support for doing my papers (Circle #2, - Julie).

Another participant spoke of how she gathered a form of strength from her post-secondary education.

I guess the best thing for me for completing my school, I don't know, to me just gave me a ticket that I could go and work somewhere. Where this was something needed or required to get a job and all the benefits that came with it. But I think the other side, what it gave me was knowing that I could stand up to the challenges (Circle #3, - Pam).

Throughout the talking circles many of the participants spoke directly or indirectly of the job opportunities that post-secondary provided and how their education has prepared them to better meet their personal needs and the needs of their community.

A participant who had previously worked for a local school district and has since move on to work with a local government agency expressed what post-secondary meant for her.

The _____ program or completing university was a stepping stone for me to complete my umm, to go on to my Masters of Education in Counselling Psychology. I did that through the University of _____ and completed that in 19, _____. And what my mom didn't tell you is that they started just before me. They were doing their

masters in linguistics through _____ University and the only thing that stopped them from going and completing their Masters was they had to go live in, at _____ and they refused do it. So they were that close to finishing it, that's all they had to do. So they started before me. Umm, what my degree or what my degree has done for me is umm, I was able to get a really good job (Circle #3, - Anita).

With a smile on her face an elder in the community and who graduated along with the group relayed the best thing about graduating for her.

Well first of all I'll tell you the date I graduated was the greatest day of my life. I thought that was the most eh, exciting time. I, I was waiting for my diploma and, and I was way in the back with my, my niece _____ and I was crying and she told me I had no, no, no business to be crying. I told her you would too if you waited this long to for this day to come along and she, I told her I was so happy, I never thought I would see this day and she told me "quit crying, making, making everybody look at you." I said let them look, I said I'm really happy and she be seen supporting, she has a tissue there too; I just told her I was so happy, she was embarrassed. She won't admit it she (unintelligible words) supporting. I think she was embarrassed, but that was a really good day and I said I accomplished what I came for, I had this paper and I was able to get jobs and have, make my children proud of me, my grandchildren and my great-grandson said "who would ever believe me I said, my great-grandmother is my teacher." I said, I said "yeah, that's true." (Circle #2, - Julie).

The previous participant's sister was sitting beside her and talked about what she felt was the best thing about getting her post-secondary education:

Well I, my name is _____. Some of the best things that uh, uh, about having, I completed my education um, first of all I was very, very proud and happy and I received my cap that I always wanted and I still have that cap today. It's uh, still stashed away where I look at it once and awhile and remember that day and uh, also I have been uh, working as a language teacher since 85 (Circle #2, - Debbie).

A sense of accomplishment and satisfaction was heard in the elder's voice as she remembered the value of completing her post-secondary education.

Cultural Impact

Education has become a family and community value where children are learning to appreciate the accomplishments of their elders. One Elder and great grandmother shows the value of education to her children and grandchildren by putting their picture on her wall of fame.

Just happy I have an education and, and know a lots of, lots of things. I have friends, but you ask my grandchildren I have none because I am mean. Then they see my friends.

Oh yeah you do have one friend, but it makes you happy, satisfied just to walk up and get your diploma and that was the greatest thing, besides my children and grandchildren.

After my great-grandchildren, comes my grandchildren and then my, my kids and I always tell them the happy, a happy day will be when I go up to your graduation and I have pictures with my grandchildren at their graduation that is hanging on my wall. I have one wall just for graduates I tell them. I said when your picture goes up there, that'll be another proud day (Circle #2, - Julie).

Several participants spoke about the ability to serve their community now that they have graduated from post-secondary. One aspect that came from the interviews was that Band members are better suited to provide and perform necessary Band administration tasks. Through

their post-secondary education graduates offer a type of leadership that did not exist prior to the Band graduate program initiative. Much of the Band administrators, Chief and Council members consist of Band members from the Band graduate program. Some of the graduates are directly involved in treaty negotiations and others are language and cultural teachers that teach at the Band school and local school district. One of the graduate participants now sits as a university senate member at one of the nearby universities to provide First Nations leadership at an institutional level. After graduating, graduates have not idly sat back; the opposite is true in that they have become involved in the community. They have filled a variety of positions throughout their community and surrounding communities. After the initial Band program, the leaders consulted with local universities to develop a university weekend program in conjunction with other First Nations groups in the area.

The former post-secondary grad students understand they have become more enriched through their education individually and as a community. They have had the courage to step outside of their familiar culture and learn to live and succeed in a very different culture. They came to the realization that they could rise up through past and present challenges. This type of courage has now given them a renewed vision.

I am very proud of my brothers and sisters who went through the education system. I know what it takes to go through that, to work with them, the fun we had, the challenges we had, the growth in each and every one of us, the growth as a community. You look at it from the umbrella point of view, from where our parents were, the changes that were, we went through as students and learning to where we want our children to go to our grandchildren and that's something that we have to keep in our visions is what we want for our children were we made a treaty. What are the jobs and skills that are going to be

needed for our people, so that we can grow as a community and not be dependent (Circle #3, - Ann).

Post-secondary education has allowed participants to be more self-sufficient as individuals and as a community and has assisted in cultural preservation. Band members went away to learn and came back enriched. Participants developed a greater degree of self-worth and self-esteem. Many of the participants referred to their geographic move as difficult yet enabling them to preserve and enrich their worldview.

Academic Impact

Participants from the talking circles spoke about maintaining a balance between education and their culture. They indicated that now that they are certified teachers they have been able to secure teaching positions at the Band school. This alone has been extremely significant in that it has provided an opportunity for them to show their community they are able to fill such positions and earn their trust and respect. One teacher spoke of the challenges of teaching in her own community and her efforts to overcome them. In the end, the community did accept and understood that a First Nations teacher teaching in their Band school has more pros than cons. First Nations teachers are familiar with cultural style, how to meet specific student needs and represent role models for First Nations children. In addition, they were able to establish better communication with parents. The British Columbia Teachers Federation and the British Columbia Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) supports employment of Aboriginal teachers (British Columbia Teachers Federation, 2013-14) and has published disparaging ratios of First Nations teachers to First Nations students. Participants did not seem threatened by education in that somehow traditional culture would be eroded away by education. In fact, the opposite is true. Some of the participants said that they were better able to integrate

traditional culture and values into the classroom when one participant in particular spoke of how much she enjoyed her post-secondary experience and summed up the way she was feeling, “Like I said before; I umm, I umm, would love to live on campus you know for the rest of my days you know because I, I just love, just loved the environment that, the whole enviry [sic]. I’m traveling through umm, you know, when down with _____ to _____ and I was up at _____, I would say, gee, I’d love to be able to stay here and just, just be a student. So I have nurtured the desire to learn, for the sake of learning” (Circle #3, - Jackie).

One of the younger participants fought back her tears as she spoke about her children who were about to enter university and of the encouragement her daughter received from family. She also quite succinctly summed up the role of the community when it came to education.

We got the letter today ironically and my middle child was accepted to university and we’re really happy. We had her phone some community members, we had her phone a couple of her uncles and aunts and to hear them cheer was really good and like hear them and encourage her “go do it.” She’s turning 18. She hasn’t quite turned 18 yet so like we are really excited and my oldest one we are waiting on her letter to go to _____ in _____ so and listening to some of the other youth that have children and trying to encourage them go back, go back and get your education. Go do it! You can do it! This community will hold you up” (Circle #1, - Sarah).

Final Thoughts

Creating friendships and assisting in various activities before and after the study with the Band established trust, respect and assurance that the researcher is genuinely interested in the people themselves and not solely for the purpose of gathering data to benefit the researcher.

Using culturally appropriate methodology to do cultural research was a key component to engaging participants in order to collect a rich array of data. It is important for researchers working with a First Nations community to be flexible and culturally sensitive.

As previously discussed in the thesis, *Literature Review of Factors Affecting the Transition of Aboriginal Youth from School to Work*, it is pointed out that Aboriginal peoples are the fastest growing population in Canada. The opportunity exists for the government of Canada, British Columbia and the Bands to meet First Nations academic learning needs in order for British Columbia and Canada and the Bands to address the present and future work force demands.

Thus far post-secondary graduates have done well encouraging family, friends and community members to consider post-secondary education. However, the Band should consider encouraging and motivating post-secondary graduates to proactively engage others to pursue post-secondary education through post-secondary organized activities or informal activities like common gathering to talk about the past post-secondary experience and how the post-secondary experience is still relevant today.

Here are some final thoughts to the study after reflecting on my research and my personal educational experience. First Nations are resourceful, resilient and a determined people. First Nations are actively preserving and transmitting their culture while developing a greater sense of independence.

Post-Secondary Education

Embraces Courage

Endows Strength

Bestows Wisdom

Heals Emotions

Exhorts Pride

Builds Self-esteem

Bequeaths Legacy

Empower Character

Creates Equality

Restores Faith

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

The First Nations group allowed the researcher to be a part of their community and become a part of their history. This First Nations Band has applied what they have learned through their post-secondary education as individuals and as a community. It is one thing to go to school and apply what you have learned and it is quite another thing to have gone to school and not practiced what you have learned. This First Nations group had a vision when they created the graduate program and succeeded. Before attending post-secondary education they were proactive in instituting educational, social and emotional reform.

Graduates have stepped up to assist local Band members and family to attend post-secondary education. This is a form of higher learning, being able to explain to someone the importance of post-secondary education and to talk about what you have learned is critical to the learning process. The other aspect that is recognized throughout the talking circles is how participants have unknowingly exercised the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) within the community. The Zone of Proximal Development is about what a learner has already mastered and what he or she can achieve. It is about being in the gap where things seemed doable and yet not too difficult. As numerous participants apply the right amount of pressure to encourage family, friends and community members, some that are encouraged ultimately move forward with their education.

When the Sister passed the Band experienced a tremendous loss. The big question that was not directly addressed in the talking circles is who is going to take her place? Even though many of the participants did not say directly they have taken the Sister's efforts to heart, many of them have and are now supporting, encouraging and assisting similar to what the Sister did.

Through the effort of all who have pursued post-secondary education the number of community Band members who are seeking higher education continues to increase.

In the end the community has experienced improved quality of life. They have progressed educationally and have taken the opportunity to grow emotionally and intellectually. An educational post-secondary culture has been created through this conscientious First Nations group. The Band's educational story of courage, strength and wisdom is being passed down from generation to generation.

Recommendations: Institutions, Federal and Provincial Governments

1. The literature review and participants acknowledge the shortage of funding to support individuals and the community in order to access significant post-secondary achievement. The Federal and Provincial governments should provide adequate funding to develop and maintain a post-secondary education support system through daycare, housing, tuition, mentorship, access to mental, spiritual, physical and emotional well-being.
2. The study could be replicated in other communities in order to validate possible common success factors to develop a platform that may facilitate reaching more First Nations communities to engage potential post-secondary students.
3. Institutions as well as the Federal and Provincial governments would do well to use this Band's graduate success model to further study how research can play a larger part in addressing the shortage of First Nations professionals and skilled workers in B.C.
4. The Band should form a deeper partnership with the Provincial and Federal governments to formulate a specific post-secondary education action plan based upon their particular graduate success factors.

5. The Provincial and Federal governments should promote ground level facilitators that will support, encourage and advise regarding post-secondary education.
6. The First Nations population growth offers a huge potential to meet the increasing provincial work force demand. Post-secondary education stakeholders could make a significant difference in the end result by proactively cooperating to engage the employable First Nations population through post-secondary education.
7. A genuine relationship with Aboriginal Peoples must be established prior to any research to develop long term meaningful ties to facilitate open communication before gathering data.

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Appendix A

Talking Circle Topics and Questions

Talking Circle 1

1. Share one encouraging educational experience.
2. When did you pursue post-secondary education, and what motivated you?
3. What are some of the best things about having completed your post-secondary education?

Talking Circle 2

1. Share one encouraging educational experience.
2. What were some of the challenges you faced pursuing a post-secondary education, and how did you overcome the challenges?
3. Why did you decide to return to the reserve after completing your post-secondary education?

Talking Circle 3

1. Share one encouraging educational experience.
2. What advice would you give to students, parents, teachers, and Band members regarding your post-secondary education?
3. Now that you have completed your post-secondary education, what advice would you give to post-secondary institutions?

Appendix B

Talking Stick



Appendix C

Talking Circle Guidelines

1. Respect confidentiality
2. Only the person with the talking stick is permitted to speak
3. Give your name each time you speak
4. Take your time and say all that you would like to say
5. Direct your comments to the question asked by the researcher
6. Pass the talking stick clockwise, to the left when finished speaking
7. No put downs
8. You can pass on your turn if you would like to do so
9. Always be respectful
10. Make an effort to listen attentively to the speaker

Appendix D

University of Northern British Columbia
Ken LePage Talking Circle Research
Letter of Informed Consent

Dear Participant:

Participant Name

Please read the following items, check the box (☒) and sign at the bottom if you agree to contribute to this research under the proposed conditions.

1. I have been informed that this talking circle has been created by Ken LePage to help him complete his Master's Degree research for the University of Northern British Columbia. The purpose of the talking circle is to research why some members of your community were successful in completing a university degree and what can we do, as a community, to ensure that other indigenous peoples can be successful as well.
2. My participation in the talking circle is voluntary, and I can withdraw from the study at any time.
3. Researcher, Ken LePage, is a Métis person who has conducted many talking circles. He will facilitate the talking circle and will digitally voice record and compile notes after each session. Ken LePage is aware that traditional talking circle protocols must be respected throughout each session.
4. While my participation will be kept confidential unless I make a written request to be identified, I realize that there is a risk that my identity will become known. My privacy will be protected such that I am not identifiable in the written analysis.
5. The primary researcher Ken LePage will keep the digital voice recordings (files) and notes for no more than five years in a locked box at the University Northern British Columbia. No one except the researcher and his advisor will have access to these documents in any form without my written consent.
6. Ken LePage may use the digital voice recordings and notes for further analysis; in that eventuality, all conditions of confidentiality will be strictly maintained.

7. I understand and agree that the findings of the study may be published; however, my confidentiality will be maintained in any publication.
8. If I have further questions about the study I can contact Ken LePage at (250) 791-6289. I may direct any complains I have about the project to the Office of Research, UNBC, (250) 960-5820.

☐

I have read the above information and agree to participate in the talking circle(s).

Participant Name

Signature

Date

Ken LePage

Signature

Date

Appendix E

The Facilitator's Role

1. Acknowledge the people and territory the talking circle is being held on.
2. Open, guide, and close the talking circle.
3. Clarify the difference between confidentiality and non-confidentiality.
4. Ensure participatory consent forms are signed and collected.
5. Prepare the environment and setting for the talking circle.
6. Introduce talking circle guideline.
7. Oversee that the talking circle respectful.
8. Make sure talking circle protocol is followed.
9. The facilitator may ask for clarification through questioning or paraphrasing during the talking circle.
10. Acknowledge participant contribution in a non-judgemental way.
11. The facilitator is to demonstrate empathy, positive regard, warmth, genuineness, concreteness, competence, respect, and objectivity.
12. The facilitator will clarify elements of the talking circle i.e., talking circle guests; a person can pass and later ask to share.

Appendix F

Anonymity

Talking circle participants need to be aware that unanimity cannot be guaranteed in a talking circle in that the research cannot ensure participants do not talk of what is said in the talking; however, the research will ask that confidentiality be kept within the talking circle.

Talking Circle Questions

- When did you pursue post-secondary education, and what motivated you?
- What are some of the best things about having completed your post-secondary education?
- What were some of the challenges you faced pursuing a post-secondary education, and how did you overcome the challenges?
- Why did you decide to return to the reserve after completing your post-secondary education?
- What advice would you give to students, parents, teachers, and Band members regarding your post-secondary education?

Now that you have completed your post-secondary education, what advice would you give to post-secondary institutions?

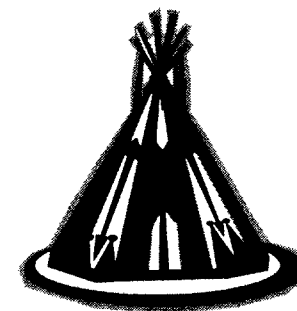
Who is the Talking Circle Facilitator/Researcher?

Researcher, Ken LePage, is a Métis person who has conducted many talking circles and is an Aboriginal cultural educator. Ken works for School District 27 and teaches primary. He will facilitate the talking circle and will digitally voice record and compile notes after each session.

Contact US
Phone Barb: [250 397-2502]
Phone Ken: [250 706-8581]



First Nations
Post-Secondary Education
Talking Circles



First Nations
Post-Secondary
Education
Talking Circles

Wisdom Courage Strength ...

Talking Circles

We would like to hear your story of how you had the wisdom, strength and courage to pursue a post-secondary education. There will be three talking circles. Throughout each talking circle participants will share their personal post-secondary educational experiences, motivations, challenges and how their experience can be beneficial to others. Another reason for the talking circles is to help me (Ken LePage) complete my post-secondary education (M. Ed.) with UNBC.

An introductory meeting (potluck) will take place prior to the talking circle in order for participants to determine if they are interested in participating in the talking circles and so that everyone can get acquainted. There will be a potluck each evening before the introductory meeting and talking circles. The research will consist of three talking circles made up of three rounds. If you agree to take part in this study, the researcher is asking that you attend the three (3) talking circles. North American First Nations talking circle protocol will be reviewed and followed at each talking circle.

Important!

Participants must sign a Letter of Informed Consent before participating in the talking circles. The Letter of Informed Consent outlines the researcher's responsibilities and lets participants know the various technical aspects of the study.

- If you are First Nations and have pursued a post-secondary education you are invited to attend
- Each talking circle is expected to take about 1 ½ hours, but it could be longer.

Barb Guertsen and Brenda Grant will be present at each talking circle to be of support, but will not participate. Similarly, the researcher (Ken LePage) will be present, but not participate.