

**ABORIGINAL EDUCATION:  
THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME**

By

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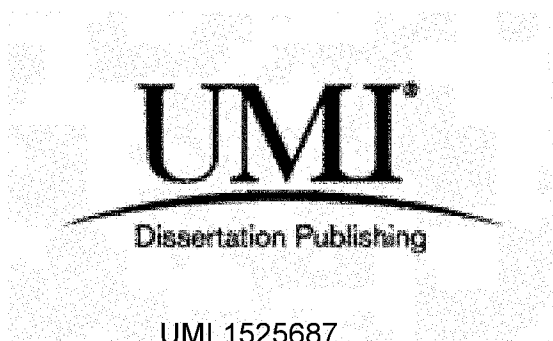
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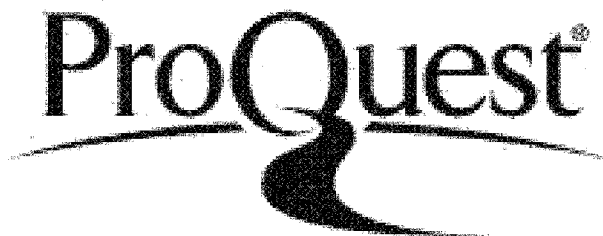


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### **Abstract**

This ethnographic inquiry is based on Dorothy E. Smith's (2006) institutional ethnography. In this study, I examined the positive supports behind six Aboriginal grade 12 students who graduated in June 2009. The students found their parents provided the main supporting factors behind their school success. To obtain a clearer picture of their school experiences, I used Smith's (2006) approach to scrutinize the relationships between these Aboriginal students and the rival discourses. Institutional ethnographers begin their research with the experiences of the participants, for example, based on "interviews, observations, and documents as data" (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 8), to see the interconnecting social relations in their lives, as well as to uncover the institutional power relations that are covertly arranged by discourse and texts to govern their everyday living experiences. The discourses identified in this study include the helping educators, school documentation and reports, the School Act, and the curriculum. I argue that those who hold power have seen to it via ruling relations that Aboriginal students are disempowered in their schools in much the same way that society and societal institutions deprive their communities of their power (Cummins, 2001, p. 180). I greatly hope that this study will somehow help to reverse this racially based disempowerment at both the school and community levels.

## **Acknowledgement**

On a journey such as this one, one does not travel alone. A lot of folks helped immeasurably along the way, and it is here that I need to take a moment to thank them. My deepest gratitude must go to:

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## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this research to the six Aboriginal students who so generously agreed to participate in this study. I would also like to dedicate this work to all those Aboriginal students whose spirits have been wounded or whose voices have been silenced by a Eurocentric education system, a system that hegemonically disempowers all those whose Aboriginal traditions, cultures, histories, and traditional ways of knowing sit outside the colonial, Western circle of learning.

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## **Chapter One**

To deconstruct, then, is to reinscribe and resituate meanings, events, and objects within broader movements and structures; it is, so to speak, to reverse the tapestry in order to expose in all its unglamorously disheveled tangle the threads constituting the well heeled image it presents to the world (Eagleton, 1986, p. 80).

### **Background of the Study**

The legacy of colonization is a pervasive phenomenon felt, seen, and heard by many Aboriginal students each school day. Sitting in classrooms, situated within the walls of the dominant society's schools and feeling unwelcome and invisible, these students often have their academic experiences detrimentally affected by the many variables their lives encounter, including acculturation and identity conflicts (Garrett, 1996); racism and discrimination (Dei, 1996; Frideres, 1993, 2008; Ghosh, 1996; Huff, 1997; Ponting, 1997; Satzewich, 1998); culturally nonresponsive curriculum (Abu-Saad & Champagne, 2006; Apple, 2000; Battiste, 2000; Nieto, 1992; Olivos, 2000; Said, 1994); low teacher expectations (Barman & Gleason, 2003; Minnick, 1990); bicultural conflicts, (Battiste, 2000; Darder, 1991; Garrett, 1996; Henderson, 2000); abject poverty (Reading, 2009; Ward, 2005; Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 2000); alcohol and substance abuse (Ward, 2005); family dysfunction and abuse, whether sexual, emotional, physical, or otherwise (Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 2000); and violence and various other negative factors (Reading, 2009; Ward, 2005). With these many variables adversely affecting their educational experience, Aboriginal students are likely to face academic difficulty.

Numerous studies have investigated these negative variables, and their findings inform us that relatively little has changed in the educational experiences of Aboriginal students. While many small steps have been made, both backward and forward, the fact

remains that not only are Aboriginal students all across the continent still graduating at unacceptably lower rates than non-Aboriginal students, they also continue to have the “highest dropout rates among all students participating in public schooling” (Garrett, M. Garrett, Roberts, Bellon-Harn, & Torres-Rivera, 2003) and are still twice as likely to be classified in “special education” categories than other learners (Frideres, 2008).

### **Positionality of the Researcher**

Dunbar (2008) stated that “there is always a story that frames the nature of research” (p. 89). Such a story begins with my experiences in coming into public education to help make a difference in the academic lives of Aboriginal students. Yet I was not always on this path. Initially, I planned to go straight into an MA program in history as soon as I finished my BA, so that I might teach at the college level. My goals changed one winter semester when I had the very good fortune to register in an undergraduate course offered by Simon Fraser University and facilitated by Carmen Rodriguez.

As an Indigenous woman from Chile, Rodriguez’ lived experiences added significantly to our sessions. Her descriptions of her firsthand experiences helped me see the inequities in our educational system for Aboriginal students. I had no idea prior to taking this multicultural education course that the educational experiences of Aboriginal students were so very different from those of other students.

It was from Carmen and our class text *Affirming Diversity* (Nieto, 1992) that I first heard about the inequities in public education. I learned of the ways in which inequities adversely affect bicultural students. These impacts result in early school leaving in far too many cases. This is particularly true for Aboriginal students.

From the lived experiences that Carmen shared with her pedagogical style, I walked away knowing that I was now on a brand new path. I no longer aspired to teach history and women's studies at the college level but wanted to head into public education to work specifically with, and for, Aboriginal students. How much this change in direction was a result of the course or my Aboriginal ancestry will never be known, but one thing I do know, had Carmen not traveled to the northwestern part of the province those weekends to facilitate that course, I might never have discovered my passion for these students and this field. I shall always be indebted to this amazing educator, whose personal life stories brought our course to life, enabling me to see something that was there all along, but I had yet to notice.

In retrospect, I now see that education course as life-changing for me in other ways, for it was during that same semester that I apprehensively began to come "out of the closet" to my friends about having Aboriginal ancestry. I had tried several times in years past, but either I was not taken seriously, or it was joked about in a degrading way. The responses only pushed me further back into the closet in shame. Of course, my husband and children were aware of my family's ancestry, but it was only after my history degree in Canadian and American history and Carmen's course that I began to feel more and more proud of this background.

When I achieved my teaching certificate, I was fortunate enough to be hired at the local junior high school where I had done my ten-week practicum. The following fall, I was offered a full-time position as a first-nations counselor at that same junior high school. I was absolutely thrilled to be offered the position.

The following year I was bumped out of that counseling position because of cutbacks. I had enjoyed the position and was offered the same position the following year at the

elementary level. It was during these two years as a First Nations counselor that my eyes were opened more than at any other time in my career as an educator. I heard about the many issues that negatively impact Aboriginal students, including sexual and other abuse, drugs in the home, absentee parents, racist teachers and staff, discrimination both in school and out, suicides, alcoholism and drug abuse, non-relevant curricular issues, and poverty. The more I heard, the more I asked, “Why is this demographic group of students plagued by these barriers to education?”

As Banks (1997) pointed out, Native American students in the primary and early elementary levels in Canada, much like their African American and Hispanic counterparts in the United States, are almost academically at par with “White mainstream students. However, the longer these students of color remain in school, the more their achievement lags behind that of White mainstream students” (Banks, 1997, p. 3-4). (Please see Appendix C for local, recent data that substantiates Banks’ statement). During my two years as a First Nations counselor in the northwestern BC school district where I did my practicum, I witnessed this phenomenon firsthand. One by one, my Aboriginal students would come to my office and tell me about the various issues that they were currently dealing with, either at home or in the school. In many of the cases, it amazed me that the kids had even made it to school.

In 2001, when I began to work full-time as a First Nations counselor, I soon noticed something that troubled me: most of the Aboriginal students who came to my office for counseling seemed to have the spark noticeably absent from their eyes. Even when they were smiling, they had a blank expression, which used to break my heart, although I was not sure why.

I loved my next job as a First Nations counselor at the elementary school level, and, had the cutbacks not come to pass, I would still be in that position. I wanted to be there to keep those children from falling somehow. I wanted to help them remain in school. I have always seen education not as a diploma that they need later, but as the vehicle that helps keep our youth on the right path. I worry about those who quit school because they might find themselves with the wrong crowd, trying to make a living the wrong way, which could likely see them in big trouble in future. It was not just about my wanting them to graduate; I wanted to make sure that these kids would be okay and live good lives later on.

The next year as I worked in two elementary schools, I came to see the very same phenomenon in the eyes of many of the upper elementary students. Once I noticed that even these younger students were lacking that spark, or life force in their eyes, it started to puzzle me because I could not imagine what would remove the twinkle from the eyes of so many youngsters. It was as if they had given up on something or something had died out. I did not have a name for this and was not sure what it was, exactly, but I got to the point that I was always looking in their eyes, directly, to see whether something was missing, a certain spark or life force that I was happy to see in the eyes of the younger students.

The following year, our job descriptions changed yet again, due to department changes. The First Nations counselors were now First Nations language and culture teachers, and my portfolio would cover two of the primary schools in town. For the most part, the students were energetic, curious about learning, and noisily happy to be in their classrooms with their friends. I will always be indebted to the district for providing me with those four years at those three different levels. They helped me, immeasurably, in opening up to the real world, which had somehow previously escaped my eyes, mind, heart, and soul.

The real world here is that place where middle-aged people like me, with Aboriginal ancestry, one-half European (Scandinavian) ancestry, and Nordic colouring—fair skin, light hair, and green eyes—can somehow meander through life without ever really knowing the reality that exists only a step or two away from their own situatedness or positionality. The limited worldview from which they see and experience the world around them is a skewed personal frame of reference.

I am a woman with Aboriginal ancestry on my mother's side (Coast Salish-Lummi), and today I am very proud of that fact, but that was not always the case. I am also one-half Icelandic, on my dad's side, and was born into a life of privilege. It was not luxury, as we were much closer to being poor, a lower-middle-class family with seven children. The colour of my skin did not have me "othered" by the dominant society, as it did for my late Nana. As a bicultural Indigenous, White woman, I must acknowledge that I was born into a life of privilege. I was never discriminated against because of the colour of my skin or my eyes, or excluded from schools, clubs, stores, or restaurants because I showed an ancestry that society did not value.

An example of my privileged status can be seen in that, before working as a First Nations counselor, I really never knew what racism was. I had heard about racism in school, but it was not until college that I learned about incidents like the smallpox blankets that were intentionally traded with the Aboriginal peoples in an effort to infect them and rid the newcomers of what many viewed as their "troublesome" Indian problem (Pritzker, 2000, p. 401). I remember wondering why I had never learned about this early version of germ warfare in high school. All the things I was forced to read in school depicted the "Indians" (as they were called then) as savages and uncivilized barbarians who scalped people. I clearly

remember being in ninth grade and slumping down in my seat when our class would have our silent reading time in social studies class. I will never forget the graphics in that textbook showing the Indians slaughtering people and savagely attacking them. I was so ashamed that I made sure I told nobody about my Indian ancestry. I was always in fear someone would tell my friends and that it would get out. I really did not want to be known as having anything to do with those so-called savages who could do those horrific things. I was so ashamed of my mom's family background that, whenever anyone would ask me what my heritage was, I would always very quickly reply, "I'm Icelandic."

Nor did I know about the educational inequities that most Aboriginal learners experienced every day or about the pain, anguish, and hardships in their lives. It is from a new mindset that I began my examination of the support systems behind the six graduating students in this study in the hope of helping future Aboriginal students experience school as most non-Aboriginal learners do: without barriers to achieving their personal academic best on their own terms and without feeling alienated or outside the circle.

To examine the factors behind the unacceptably low graduation rates amongst Aboriginal students compared to non-Aboriginal students, I chose to use the methods of institutional ethnography. Institutional ethnography is an "analytic approach that begins where we are—as actual people with bodies located in time and space. It offers a theorized approach to reflecting critically on what one knows from that embodied place in the world" (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 9). It is critical in institutional ethnography for the investigator to be conscious of the self because, by the very nature of institutional ethnography, the researcher is entering into a "social relationship" with the study's participants, as well as with any institutions or texts that may be interconnected: "This view of knowing...is part of

institutional ethnography's theory of knowledge" (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 15).

As students you must see that by virtue of what you know and how you take up your exploration that you are located *vis a vis* other people. Rather than treating a knower's location as a problem of bias, we believe that it reveals something about whose interests are served. And that is an issue of power. To explore how knowing relates to power, institutional ethnographers study how one's knowing is organized—by whom and by what (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 15).

I started this study from a position deep within the context of Aboriginal education, both academically and professionally and knowing intuitively that, with so many Aboriginal students failing to experience their academic potential, the causes must lie outside them. It had to be something bigger than these learners. I realized there were cultural differences that could be playing havoc with their educational experiences, but that seemed insufficient to explain why the majority of Aboriginal students continue to leave school without graduating. Following such a process, the researcher is much more apt to uncover social relations that otherwise might have been missed altogether with an "inquiry that began with the official purposes of institutions" (Babbie, 2008. p. 328).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Aboriginal high school students in British Columbia often experience difficulties remaining in school long enough to obtain their Dogwood Diplomas. Why is it that these learners fall through the cracks of our public education system when the majority of non-Aboriginal students generally reach their educational goals? (To see the discrepancy between Aboriginal students who graduate and non-Aboriginal students who graduate, please see Appendix C). The purpose of this institutional ethnographic inquiry is to contribute to knowledge that can be used to improve the unacceptably low graduation rates of Aboriginal students so their school experiences are just as successful as those of non-Aboriginal



students. The effort to impact graduation rates begins by examining the positive support behind Aboriginal learners who do make it to graduation, alongside the barriers this demographic group of learners comes face-to-face with, so that we can implement effective supports to help more Aboriginal students graduate within that six-year timeframe.

This Indigenous research study is an inquiry into the positive supports behind six Aboriginal grade 12 students who graduated in June 2009. Numerous studies have investigated the factors adversely impacting Aboriginal learners during their public school years (Abu-Saad & Champagne, 2006; Barman & Gleason, 2003; Battiste, 2000; Dei, 1996; Frideres, 1993, 2008; Garrett, 1996; Henderson, 2000; Huff, 1997; Minnick, 1990; Nieto, 1992; Ponting, 1997; Reading, 2009; Satzewich, 1998; Ward, 2005). However, very few advances toward increasing the graduation rate for this demographic group of students have been realized. Despite all the studies and millions of dollars in targeted funding aimed at improving levels of identity and achievement in the post-residential-school era, only surface changes have been occurring. By examining the support systems behind this study's six Aboriginal students as well as the barriers that many of these students encounter in our schools, this institutional ethnographic inquiry will indicate where efforts should be focused in the future.

### **Research Questions**

This study addresses the following open research questions and specific research questions.

#### **(a) Open Research Questions:**

To what extent do the sample participants of Aboriginal students experience systemic and social alienation in the public schools? What are the impacts on the students' academic

success and underachievement? For those Aboriginal students who remain in school long enough to graduate, what positive support systems behind them help them to do so?

**(b) Specific Research Questions:**

In providing the framework of the study inquiry, the following research questions are embedded as part of the interview questions.

1. What types of parental supports are present in the lives of these Aboriginal students who are about to graduate?
2. What types of cultural supports exist in the lives of these Aboriginal students?
3. What types of school connections occur in the lives of these Aboriginal students?
4. In what ways have their peers and community role models acted as supporting agencies to these students, motivating them to remain in school until graduation?
5. What amount of time, if any, did these graduating students spend at on-reserve schools during their elementary years?
6. What is the socioeconomic status of these graduating students?
7. In what ways did these Aboriginal students feel a sense of belonging in their school?
8. At what grade level do Aboriginal students begin to feel alienated, and how can the factors behind this alienation be eliminated or minimized?
9. What factors helped these students feel a sense of belonging in their school rather than the alienation that most Aboriginal students feel?
10. What possible ways does the legacy of colonization factor into these student's alienation?

## **Significance of the Problem**

When Aboriginals were compared with non-Aboriginals, Frideres (2008) informed us that the education gap persisted: more Aboriginal people were in the “less than grade nine category,” and only 16 percent were in the “university and all post-secondary categories” (p. 121). That is not to suggest that Aboriginal people have not improved their educational accomplishments because they have actually increased their educational attainments over the past quarter-century. However, so have non-Aboriginal people, “thus the gap between the two continues and, in some cases, has increased” (Frideres, 2008, p. 121).

The Hawthorne Report in the 1960s made it very clear to the government of the day that, until the “appalling” economic and social conditions of the country’s Aboriginal peoples were greatly improved, their educational success would remain elusive at best (Frideres, 2008, p. 14). As Reading (2009) has shown, this is particularly true for BC Aboriginal students because they perform significantly lower than non-Aboriginal children in most assessments:

...completion rates for students in Grade 8 (within six years of completion) from 1997–2001 were about 75% for non-Aboriginals students and 37% for Aboriginals (Morin, 2004). The percentage of students who wrote and passed the English 12 provincial exam was 65% and 31% in 2000–2001 for non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal students, respectively. For the mathematics 12 provincial exam, the difference between the two groups is even more pronounced (Harvey & Houle, 2006, p. 89).

Aboriginal high school students in BC, for the most part, are just like Aboriginal students elsewhere. They experience great difficulty remaining in school long enough to get their grade-twelve diplomas. To obtain a better understanding of this phenomenon and ultimately to help more Aboriginal students remain in school long enough to graduate, this study examines the related factors.

However, this study must not focus solely on those negative variables that adversely impact the academic experiences of our Aboriginal students and should seek out the positive variables that have helped the study's six participants graduate, so that similar supports can be considered for future Aboriginal students to provide them with equal footing. Then Aboriginal students in the future may have an equal opportunity to experience academic success during their school years, which they do not have today.

It is crucial that we help these learners achieve their academic potential and gain a solid education. For, without an education, their experiences as members of Canada's first nations will, in far too many cases, continue to be afflicted by unacceptable levels of unemployment, abject poverty, alcohol and substance abuse, and higher-than-average suicide rates. In some communities, suicide rates are ten times higher than rates for non-Aboriginal people (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004, p. 127).

As Battiste (2000) stated, "We cannot continue to allow Indigenous students to be given a fragmented existence in a curriculum that offers them only a distorted or shattered mirror; nor should they be denied an understanding of the historical context that has created that fragmentation" (p. 130). Factors such as alcohol, substance, sexual, and other abuses as well as violence, that contribute to a high ratio of incarceration per capita, cause these children to be brought up in families that are on the outside looking in, forced to endure "political and social conditions that perpetuate extreme levels of poverty, chronic ill health and poor educational opportunities" (L. Smith, 1999, p. 4.).

Additionally, as early as 2020, Aboriginal students will make up one of the three main demographic groups of learners in Canada, with the other two being rural and immigrant students (Harvey & Houle, 2006). Einstein defined insanity as doing the same thing over and

over again and expecting different results. Isn't it time that we educators took note of Einstein's wisdom and started doing something different?

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

Aboriginal peoples have educated their young to learn their history, worldview, and knowledge, as well as their cultural traditions from the beginning of their culture. Their knowledge was "embedded in the collective community's oral and literacy traditions; transmitted in the values, customs, and traditions; and passed on to each generation through their Indigenous language as instructed by the Creator and their elders" (Battiste, 2000).

Today, some 500 years after first contact leading to colonization, Indigenous peoples the world over are in dire shape educationally because of all the difficulties that colonization has forced their families and communities to endure, both economic and otherwise (Cahape & Howley, 1992). Of course, that is not to suggest that all Aboriginal students are experiencing difficulties, because that is not so. Indeed, the success rates vary considerably. Even across BC, some school districts are more successful in helping their Aboriginal learners than others. However, if we are to make our public school system legitimately equitable for all students, there is much more work to be done, particularly for Aboriginal students. Otherwise, these Aboriginal learners will continue to be dropouts or "push-outs" (Cahape & Howley, 1992, p. 1).

### **Assumptions**

Creswell (2007) stated that qualitative research begins with "assumptions" (p. 1), and three assumptions underlie this study. One is that various intervening variables in some situations can be counteracted by a positive variable. For example, with strong parental or cultural connections, which are the independent variables, the intervening variable has less of

a negative impact on the student's school experience. However, if an intervening variable, such as cultural conflict, connects with a negative independent variable, such as lack of parental connection, negative experiences at school become a very real possibility. Because many of these students are inundated with negative variables, a study exploring the nature of and the impacts behind the variables is necessary. However, even more necessary is a deeper examination into positive variables that help those 48% of Aboriginal students in BC who manage to remain in school long enough to graduate within that six-year time frame, in spite of the negative independent variables in their lives.

The second assumption in this study is two-pronged: students who are successful in school are more likely to be either from families who have not been negatively impacted by residential schools or from families who are in a lower socio-economic bracket. The third assumption is that aboriginal students raised with strong cultural ties tend to fare better academically than their Aboriginal peers without a strong cultural background.

I hope that this study will provide additional information to assist teachers and more of the province's Aboriginal students to remain in school long enough to graduate, so that their futures can be as bright as those of their non-Aboriginal peers.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

As the researcher conceptualizes the research problem, he locates it in a tradition of theory and related research. Initially, this may be an intuitive locating, chosen because of the underlying assumptions: how the researcher sees the world and how he sees the research questions fitting in. As the researcher explores the literature, however, he should identify and state those assumptions in a framework of theory....This section of the literature review provides the framework for the research and identifies the area of knowledge the study is intended to expand (Marshall et. al., 2006, p. 43).

### **Legacy of Colonization**

Various research findings have revealed various factors responsible for the lack of academic success among Aboriginal students, such as the legacy of colonization (e.g., Barman & Gleason, 2003; Battiste, 2013; Frideres, 2008; Garrett, 1996; Miller, 2000; Ogbu, 1991). Ogbu (1991) argued that the majority of academic troubles of these “involuntary minority” students, who were “brought into their present society through slavery, conquest, or colonization,” are very much related to the “historical forces” that shape their lived experiences (p. 9).

Aboriginal learners in BC have been, and continue to be, confronted with bitter learning experiences due to colonization, which often weakens their motivation to learn from the colonizers. Ogbu (1991) explained that the academic difficulties of these students are correlated with how they feel about having been colonized. For the most part, however, Ogbu (1991) contended that involuntary bicultural students deeply resent the “loss of their former freedom” and perceive the social, political, and economic barriers against them as part of their undeserved oppression” (p. 9).

Ogbu (1991) contended that the negative school experiences these students endured were due less in many instances to their academic abilities than to what he regarded as

cultural inversion. In an effort to retain their cultural identity, older, involuntary minority students may steadfastly refuse conform to the dominant group because they see being successful in school as being disloyal to their group (p. 367). They may resist the acquisition of the dominant group's set of skills, knowledge, values and beliefs, and so on, because they see academic achievement in school as a blatant "symbol of compliance" (Ogbu, 1991, p. 367) to the dominant group and all that it stands for. For that reason, many Indigenous students at the secondary level, and possibly even some at the upper intermediate grade levels, consciously work hard not to be successful in school.

The authors of The Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies (2002) blame what they see as a misleading curriculum for the way in which many Aboriginal students are either "marginalized (at best) or invisibilized," which helps the dominant group legitimize the country's historical record of compulsory assimilation and cultural annihilation of Aboriginal peoples (The Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies, 2002, p. 38).

Said (1994) saw this pedagogy of oppression as part and parcel of colonization, for he saw "nations themselves are narrations" (p. xii) and, as nations, those who must justify their actions with narratives to "prove their cultural superiority" (as cited in The Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies, 2002, p. 38). To do this justification on a mass scale, school curricula must help "promote theories of settlement, such as Columbus' discovery and the Bering Strait migration" (as cited in The Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies, 2002, p. 38), which helps bring about the social goals of those in the dominant group. School curricula are legislated by the states; therefore, it has resources needed to continue to write its own narrative. Said (1994) saw the state as having "the power to narrate,



or to block other narratives from forming and emerging,” which, according to the author, is critical for “culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them” (p. xii). Ponting (1997) saw this as “cultural racism” (p. 274), and stated that the official school curriculum is set up in such a way as to intentionally ignore any contributions (for example, economic, social, and cultural contributions that minority groups have made to the nation). Battiste (2000) saw it as cognitive imperialism, a manipulative tool used by the oppressors to “disclaim other knowledge bases and values” (p. 198).

Validated through one’s knowledge base and empowered through public education, it has been the means by which whole groups of people have been denied existence and have had their wealth confiscated. Cognitive imperialism denies people their language and cultural integrity by maintaining the legitimacy of only one language, one culture, and one frame of reference. As a result of cognitive imperialism, cultural minorities have been led to believe that their poverty and impotence are a result of their race (Battiste, 2000, p. 198).

### **Cultural Imperialism**

The Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies (2002) not only agreed that there is a hidden purpose of school curriculum, but indeed took the claim one step further by stating that Canadian curriculum was “insidious” to the country’s Aboriginal students whose families have been on this land since time immemorial (p. 40), and it did not go unnoticed. Many students understood just what is going on, as the portrayal of their cultures in this way served the goal of “cultural eradication by denying the validity, dynamism, value, integrity and accomplishments of the many Aboriginal cultures that have flourished and survived against all odds on this land” (The Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies, 2002, p. 41). Ponting (1997) concurred, arguing that it was this curriculum that is responsible for so many minority students’ dropping out of school “on a daily basis” primarily because of the hegemonic discourse of the dominant culture, which

can be expressed either by intentional “acts of omission” (p. 274) or by commissioning those authors who have no qualms about furthering the dominant society’s causes by writing curricula that are culturally irrelevant to the backgrounds of today’s diverse student populations in BC schools, but serve to promote “white cultural values” (Olivos, 2007, p. 63).

When bicultural students are intentionally left out of the curriculum, they are made to feel invisible, and they feel at odds with what they are being asked to learn when the curriculum is not within their worldview. Many bicultural students feel alienated from their school experience, and their rate of dropping out of or transferring to vocational streams can become quite high (Ponting, 1997). Battiste (2013) contended that education “has been used as a sword of cultural imperialism to assimilate Native North America into a hegemonic system (p. 162).

Concurring with Ponting (1997), Dei (1996) stated that a school’s curriculum not only passes on the knowledge of the dominant group, but how it should be created and distributed. He added that, for marginalized students, this curriculum and the pedagogical practices have become “sites for contesting their marginality and expressing opposition to the traditional roles of schools” (Dei, 1996, p. 21). Nieto (1992) explained, it is the dominant group that holds the keys to the society’s “power, knowledge, and resources,” and minority students see through this (Nieto, 1992, p. 195).

Apple (1982) has similarly described the connection, highlighting how many Aboriginal students experiencing difficulty in school do so intentionally because they look

upon acculturation exceedingly suspiciously. As Ogbu (1991) explained, involuntary minority students often regard the “process of culture change and adaptation which results when groups with different cultures come into contact—as a subtraction process leading to the replacement or even rejection of their ethnic cultures and identities” (p. 367). In their stand against the attempts to assimilate them into the dominant society, these students work exceedingly hard to resist what they see as the erosion of their identities and cultures and are eventually looked upon by their educators as students with behavioral and/or academic difficulties (Ogbu, 1991). Nieto (1992) argued that the resistance may present itself in either a passive or active fashion and may elicit counterproductive consequences that can go against the student’s best interests.

Could this phenomenon explain the blatant over-representation of Aboriginal students in alternate school settings and classes reserved for students categorized as having behavioral problems? It certainly helps to, although that is not to suggest that all Aboriginal students experiencing academic failure are doing so because they are resistant to mainstream culture, because that is just not the case. Many students experience academic difficulty because they are afflicted with fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), which is a condition brought about in the child when pregnant mothers drink alcohol during pregnancy. This syndrome has been clearly documented as a significant factor in the educational experiences of some Aboriginal students, primarily due to the behavioral difficulties that are “inherent to the condition” (McBride, 2001, p. 54) and this can play havoc with their ability to succeed in school. There are many other factors getting in the way of Aboriginal students’ experiencing academic success, such as racism, low teacher expectations, bicultural conflict, family dysfunctions, and poverty.

The findings of Williams' (2000) study in Vancouver showed that, for the many Aboriginal people who live in the city's east side, "the incidence of substance abuse is increasing, and the number of children in the school system with birth-related drug and alcohol syndromes has increased fivefold in the last five years" (p. 130). The implications from this study suggest to me that the problem is getting worse, which means that there could be even more Aboriginal students in Canadian schools classified in the future as having behavioral difficulties.

### **Legacy of Residential Schools**

The legacy of the Indian Residential School System is a far-reaching, dark blotch on Canada's history, spanning approximately 150 years and adversely affecting tens of thousands of Aboriginal lives.

Specific cost effects on Aboriginal learning experiences in residential schools have added social stigma and trauma to the loss of cultural components such as language. Williams (1995) studied the intergenerational trauma and dysfunction brought about by the disruption of cultural learning in the lives of First Nations children that the residential school attendees experienced. Her study connected the educational problems faced by Aboriginal students in Canadian public schools to the legacy of colonization; however, her study went even further as it offered remedies to help the children get back on track.

The main colonizing culprit here, according to Williams (1995), is the cultural disruption that took place with the first set of Aboriginal students sent to residential schools. This cultural discontinuity lives on today in the descendants of those school survivors, decades after the last residential school closed its doors.

Long, long before contact with Europeans, Native North Americans have had their own education systems in place (Kirkness 2013, p. 8). They had to, as their very survival depended upon it. Cultural transmission was previously done by the children's parents and grandparents (Frideres, 2011). However, due to the colonizers' assimilation policy (practiced at the residential schools), many Aboriginal parents became disconnected and incapable of teaching their Aboriginal languages to their children or of passing down their traditional values and belief systems to their young.

The residential attendees were programmed with fear and punished if caught speaking their languages. The aftereffects were so damaging, even after being freed from such schools, that many Aboriginal residential school survivors were still scared to speak their native tongues (Barman & Gleason, 2003). This occurs so much so that many do not speak their heritage language or teach it to their young, even today, for fear they or their children will get into trouble. This loss of cultural learning process was worse for those students whose parents attended residential school, as it meant that they were virtually incapable of passing on their cultural traditions and knowledge because they, themselves, were never taught them. Garrett's (1996) qualitative study of bicultural identity found that it is this cultural loss or deculturation that has hurt Aboriginals the most.

Relating theories of the learning difficulties that children of the Holocaust experienced to the Aboriginal school survivors' experiences, Williams (1995) attributes Aboriginal students' inability to learn as other children to being a result of their feelings of disruption and discontinuity, which results from their having to be non-Aboriginal at school if they are to fit in, and then Aboriginal at home when they are in their home communities. Freire (2000) regarded this as a symptom of self-depreciation or the inevitable internalization

of the opinion of one's oppressor. In working closely with Aboriginal students for several years, I have seen firsthand what this internalization looks like. Williams (1995) also witnessed how the racism, both societal and institutional, affected these students such that, after hearing others continually putting them down, they eventually begin to believe, internally, that they are indeed useless.

Current Aboriginal students are descendants of parents and grandparents who experienced schooling through the Indian Residential School System. Barman (2003), Boyko (1998), Frideres (1993), Miller (2000), Williams (2000), and L. Smith (1999) have stated the aim of residential schools was mostly to assist the assimilation policy of the Canadian government of the day, which meant retrogressive learning experiences and intergenerational pain for Aboriginal students who attended them, as well as their offspring, and not to actually educate Aboriginal children. As Schissel & Wotherspoon (2003) found, however, that assistance would "through direct attack on culture and spirituality," ensure that the Aboriginal students attending those residential schools would leave them being welcomed neither in "neither Aboriginal nor White cultures" (p. 61).

### **Cultural Genocide**

These purposeful processes of assimilation were aimed at socializing the young to "European, Christian, and capitalist values and aspirations" (Ghosh & Abdi, 1996, p. 24). In other words, the objective was to remove the children from their home environments and replicate a "new" people in a dominant culture, thinking and behaving like the Europeans. Hence, federal policy makers quickly set out to make Aboriginal children "White" by extinguishing everything about the children not White (Boyko, 1998). "By 1874, the Canadian government under Alexander Mackenzie began removing First Nations children

from their families and communities and placing them in Indian residential schools in an attempt to assimilate them into Canadian society” (Frideres, 2011, p. 58). For over 100 years, some 150,000 Aboriginal children were taken away from their parents, many times ripped literally out of their arms, unwillingly, to be sent away, usually very far away, to cold and sterile buildings filled with strangers.

The main objective was to teach the “Indianness” out of these children (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003, p. 31). One way or another, through beatings, starvation, and/or torture, these children were educated so they could become “civilized” (Frideres, 2011, p. 60). The exceedingly barbarous punishments on a daily basis reminded the children that “their Indian culture was unacceptable” (Frideres, 2011, p. 60–61). The residential school program proved a successful approach to solving the “*Indian problem*” (Frideres, 2011, p. 58). Though accusations of sexual and physical abuse began to be made in the middle of the last century, it was not until 1958 that a “recommendation for the abolition of residential schools was submitted to the federal government,” with the last one closing its doors in Saskatchewan in 1996 (Frideres, 2011, p. 59).

While not all of the Aboriginal students were subjected to spiritual and psychological abuse, almost all of them left residential school with a damaged “spirit” (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003, p. 60). All were removed from their families and their communities, and their culture, language, and spirituality were substantially dismantled (Frideres, 2011). Removal from home life must have been devastating, especially when upon their arrival their traditional clothing was quickly replaced with Western dress and hairstyles (White et al., 2009). The degree of fear in the hearts of the five and six year old children that attended those schools must have been unbearable. If the changes in physical appearance were not

enough to set off panic in their young hearts, they were also very quickly warned about English being the only language to be used, whether or not they spoke English. Harsh punishments were often the order of the day when children were caught speaking anything but English, even though many arrived at the schools knowing only their traditional languages (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2002, p. 51).

The principals and their school staff took care of the discipline, punishing the children as “they saw fit, with records showing that students experienced a litany of abuses including chaining and shackling; being locked in small, dark spaces; having their heads shaved; and being severely beaten with whips and fists” (White et al., 2009, p. 19). Though government documents of that era have very little pertaining to “sexual matters of that period, it is now widely known that sexual abuse was also pervasive” in residential schools (White et al., 2009, p. 19).

As would later become more widely known, not only did little academic learning occur in residential schools, for many First Nations students, residential schools were places of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse...clothed in European style of dress and they were placed in unsanitary living conditions. Students were taught to be ashamed of their culture and to see themselves and their people as inferior and immoral, often facing punishment if they spoke their native language....Physical abuse was also common in residential schools, and it is clear from government documents from the time that church and department officials were aware of the abuse and chose not to stop it (White et al., 2009, p. 19).

When those making the claims against the residential schools began to come forward, the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) took little or no action (White et al., 2009). They were not concerned enough about the children’s safety, physical or otherwise, to have those accused of offending the children “removed from the schools, siding instead with the churches, which defended the actions of their employees....Despite numerous suggestions



that regulations on the acceptable use and limits of punishment should be sent to school principals, no such regulations were ever issued” (White et al., 2009, p. 19).

Hookimaw-Witt (1998) argued that education is not the neutral entity that most think it is; indeed, she believes that education is “profoundly political” (p. 160). Arguing that it was their being educated in the first place that got Aboriginals into their current situation, Hookimaw-Witt (1998) stated that, because of the way that Aboriginal peoples were treated when they were students in the residential schools, she sees education as partially responsible for the destruction of Aboriginal cultures that has contributed directly to the problems in our community today. Lickers (2003) would concur, as she too believes that “residential schools contributed greatly to the deterioration of Native culture and values” (p. 56).

### **Bicultural Conflict**

Darder (1991) said the term *minority* “reflects and perpetuates a view of subordinate cultures as deficient and disempowered,” so prefers to use the term bicultural (p. xvi), and so do I. Bicultural, meaning one who walks in two worlds (for example, Aboriginal students attending mainstream, public schools). At home in their communities, they are Aboriginal, whereas in school during the day, they have to leave their cultural backgrounds, knowledge, and traditions in an effort to fit into the school culture.

Wotherspoon’s (2004) view, consistent with Frideres (1993), was that mainstream education perpetuates the “knowledge and power structures that foster the oppression of subordinate groups by dominant groups” (p. 37). He also sees “critical education” (p. 37) as an emancipation tool required to help (re)empower those who have been subordinated to

take back their lives by working hard to change both “their lives and the social contexts within which they live” (Wotherspoon, 2004, p. 37).

As Nieto (1992) informed us, the job of the dominant school is to strip the minority students of their cultures through “cultural eradication,” to make them “White” (p. 198–199). This, in turn, places the students in the middle of two worlds and, in the words of Henderson (2000), “unable to find a balance” (p. 60.). Their despair ultimately emerges “in early school leaving, substance abuse, suicide attempts, defiance of the law, and teen pregnancies” (Jeffrey & Conibear, 1999, pp. 25-26).

Garrett’s (1996) study on cultural conflict substantiated this: He found Native American students experiencing cultural conflict in school beginning “around the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade” (p. 3). The author described how, by the time these students reach grade 5 or 6, many of them change, by withdrawing, becoming “sullen, resistant, and indolent” (p. 3). The author connected the difficulties the children experience, both academic and otherwise (for example, loss of motivation, and personal and social problems), to the difficult time that many of them experience as they try to reconcile cultural differences (Garrett, 1996).

Battiste (2000) advocated for textbooks in schools to provide students with an unedited version of history, to give Aboriginal students a better sense of their socio-historical position in the world, and from which healing could come. This is in opposition to textbooks currently found in public schools because today’s texts have virtually left that side of history out. Battiste contended that what is needed is continued “participation in educational discourse, policy, and practice, in particular to identify and shape what is considered for school texts as knowledge for those schools,” so Aboriginals can have more of a say in the “transformation of knowledge” (Battiste, 2000, p. 129).

As scholars, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, unravel those prejudices, Indigenous peoples can begin to see that within their own traditions, within their own knowledge bases, there is a store of knowledge from which they can rebuild, heal, recover, and restore healthy and connective relationships (Battiste, 2000, p. 129).

Garrett (1996) saw “marginalized American Indians “as being “most likely to experience a variety of difficulties resulting from cultural conflict” (p. 2). The students most at risk for academic failure are those who are not comfortable moving back and forth between cultures (Garrett, 1996), and those students able to negotiate multiple cultures experience more success in their lives. Only when we are able to provide Aboriginal students a more inclusive environment in our schools will they begin to move more easily between their school’s culture and their own.

### **Racism and Discrimination**

Huff (1997) contended that, due to institutional racism, Americans are “ill-prepared to cope with the underlying causes of racial unrest and educational inequality” (p. 159–160), especially as they pertain to Aboriginal and African American students, and they will resolve the guilt by blaming the victim. Her theory about blaming the victim very much relates to this study. Often, it is the students’ intelligence level that is being questioned and not the Western, traditional educational system, which Frideres (1993) stated was specifically created for a “White, urban, middle class culture” (p. 186). This might explain why Aboriginal students, as well as other bicultural students, find succeeding in school to be challenging.

Aboriginal students and their families are indeed a racial minority within the Canadian social structure and endure facets of racialization and marginalization in their schools on a daily basis. How can that be? Culturally sensitive curriculum related to their

race is scanty (Ponting, 1997). Ponting (1997) saw this as a form of racism, which contributes greatly to the alienation that many Aboriginal students experience. Additionally, “the officially prescribed school curriculum regularly gives short shrift to the vital economic, social, and cultural contributions which racial minorities have made to Canadian nation-building” (Satzewich, 1998, p. 275). It was not that long ago that social studies textbooks were written by authors who were blatantly racist, using words such as heathen, savage, and uncivilized in reference to Aboriginal people (Huff, 1997).

Looking at textbooks today, it appears that the nation has come a long way in including racial minorities compared to the Dominion era of old (Gay, 2003). This is because racism is now regarded as politically incorrect and old-fashioned. In Canadian texts, resources need to follow national policies of inclusion, which means no blatantly racist images, names, or other depictions. Despite the progress, racism and discrimination continues to permeate British Columbia’s educational system. Racism just isn’t talked about. Barrett (1987), in his research report on the Canadian right wing “Is God a Racist?” explains how “racism in Canada has been institutionalized... as deeply as in the United States with the only difference being that, in Canada, racism has a much more polite face” (Barrett in Phillips, 1997, p. 182). Similarly, Ghosh (1996), states that “a long history of discrimination and neglect has resulted in the marginalization of Indian and Metis education in Canada” (p. 27).

For Battiste (2013), “racism is a theory, while intolerance, prejudice, and discrimination” are the applicative fuel needed to keep that theory running (p. 132). Battiste (2013) found that racist strategies are such integral part of colonization (even today) that “racial superiority, discrimination, and racialization have been an integral part of the tactical strategies and tools of colonialism, the defining ideology of Canadian education” (p. 133).

## **Chapter Three: Research Methods**

I think metaphorically of qualitative research as an intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colors, different textures, and various blends of material. This fabric is not explained easily or simply. Like the loom on which fabric is woven, general frameworks hold qualitative research together (Creswell, 1998, p. 13).

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, a brief background on my chosen method of inquiry, institutional ethnography, is provided, as well as the reasons why I felt connected to this particular methodology and chose it over other methodologies often used by qualitative researchers. In this chapter, I also touch on the many moments I experienced in this study when I had to make methodological decisions about unexpected, sudden changes between the early, inexperienced time of planning the study and the actual carrying out of the plan.

### **Participants**

Haig-Brown (1988) contended that for one “to understand a people’s history, a learner should start with the living generation of that culture” (p. 162) because “their combined life experiences most often bring them closer to their history than any book or paper in a library can” (p. 162). Thus, I chose to do a qualitative study so that I could work with and analyze data obtained from living Aboriginal students instead of studying data from other people’s research studies. Believing that students still in high school might best be able to provide the latest and most authentic data possible, I targeted as subjects in this study Aboriginal students who were in their last year of high school.

Of the six students willing to be a part of this study, three were female (Katie, Diana, and Sandra) and three were male (George, Timothy, and David). To protect the privacy of the students, I used pseudonyms in place of their real names. As previously mentioned all six

students had Aboriginal ancestry and were in their final semester of grade 12, scheduled to graduate that June. (For more information on the participants, please see Appendix B).

Initially, I had planned on inviting the entire grade 12 Aboriginal student population at my chosen secondary school to participate as a homogeneous population from which my target population would be chosen. I was going to use the snowball method, which is a form of “purposeful sampling that typically proceeds after a study begins and occurs when the researcher asks the participants to recommend other individuals to study” (Creswell, 2002, p. 196). However, due to the lack of timely student responses, I ultimately had to make other plans.

In addition to the interviews, I also planned to have a parent questionnaire, but that was changed when the pizza party for students was scheduled during lunch instead of at the after school student/ parent meeting. After school we would have had the opportunity to meet some of the parents. It was suggested to me that we change our after school meeting to a lunch hour pizza party because we were having a hard time getting students to commit to an after school meeting. I was also told that some parents work during the day and would not be able to make an after school meeting, so in wanting to have students sign up as willing participants, I agreed to the change.

In their work, Marshall and Rossman (2006), found that decision-making during the data gathering process “with various age groups requires sensitivity to their needs, their developmental issues, and flexibility” (p. 107). Agreeing to the pizza party instead of the after school meeting met my participants’ needs, although at the cost of having their parents as a part of this study, too. Parents could have added so many more levels in terms of

examining and exposing the social relations in this study. This would prove to be yet another decision for me, insofar as collecting data for this study.

As Creswell (2002) explained, with “homogeneous sampling the researcher purposely samples individuals or sites based on membership in a subgroup that has defining characteristics” (p. 196). With all six students being learners with Aboriginal ancestry and all planning to graduate that year, I made the decision to form the sample group from the initial target population of 13 at the pizza lunch. I initially hoped to select my subject participants using the snowball method. Due to the fact that only 13 Aboriginal students ultimately chose to attend the pizza lunch/introductory meeting, which I hosted one Friday before the 2009 spring break, that method would not prove feasible. Of those 13, only 6 of the students returned their parental permission forms. Hence, the snowball method was replaced by purposeful sampling, which is “quota sampling without a grid. You simply decide the purpose you want informants to serve and you take what you can get” (Bernard & Ryan, 2010, p. 365).

We hosted the introductory lunch in the school’s art room, where there were lots of stools and tables to sit at while we ate the pizza. This was another instance of my pre-planning going awry, as I had not thought about a lunch with the students only, but had always seen our meeting after school and with their parents. I had asked the two Aboriginal support workers about hosting a gathering after school so that I could get to meet the students with their parents in attendance. It was pointed out to me that most of the students had places to rush off to each day (jobs, helping with siblings at home, and so on), so I decided that instead of meeting after school and providing refreshments for the students and their parents, we would meet during their lunch hour and order pizza. With time moving on and spring

break about to begin, I was happy for the help the Aboriginal support workers could provide in meeting with the students. I agreed to change things from being an after school meeting to a pizza lunch with the students. After they introduced me to the students, I informed them that I would be speaking to them about why I was there as soon as they had had their pizza and soft drinks.

When everyone had finished eating, I introduced my thesis topic and went on to explain how important such a study was. I did not go into a history of Aboriginal Education but just told the participants how hard it is for Aboriginal students to make it to where they were in grade 12 and how impressed I was with each of them.

I told them that Aboriginal students the world over experienced many of the same barriers to educational success wherever colonization had taken place and particularly wherever residential schooling was a factor. I informed them of my deadline (June 12, 2009), and asked that the interview question packages, for those willing to be participants, be returned before June 2, 2009. I reminded everyone who was willing to be a part of the study that the interviews would take place at a mutually convenient time during the second week of May. Permission forms were given to students to take home to their parents to sign.

## **Methodology**

The thread I ultimately chose to weave this qualitative research study together with was institutional ethnography. Institutional ethnography was first developed by Dorothy E. Smith (1987) to help women, and later all oppressed groups, see the “apparently inexplicable organization of their own and other people’s daily lives” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004. p. 9). Nieto contended, “oppressive forces that limit opportunities in the schools are a reflection of such forces in the society at large” (Nieto, 1992, p. xxviii).



Institutional ethnography is a method of inquiry designed to help provide “an alternative to the objectified subject of knowledge of established social scientific discourse” (D. Smith, 2005). Using Creswell’s (1998) definition of qualitative research, I wanted to make this study into a “complex, holistic picture” (p. 15) of Aboriginal education, where both the barriers and supports that many Aboriginal students encounter in school were both illuminated. In providing the reader with the multiple dimensions of the issues, I showed Aboriginal education in such a way that its complexity comes through in all its layers and connections, because Aboriginal education is anything but one dimensional (Creswell, 1998).

Wishing to obtain deeper understanding of their research site, so they can see “what actually happens to those in it” (D. Smith, 1999, p. 6), as opposed to just studying their participants, institutional ethnographers purposely include themselves in the study. This is a significant departure from the more typical research methodologies where researchers obtain their data by objectifying “people” and their lived experiences by looking for “theoretical categories to arrive at an explanation” while concurrently working hard to keep themselves out of the study (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 17).

**Institutional ethnography.** Institutional ethnography is a process of inquiry that ethnographers use when they wish to examine and expose the “power relationships” found in the personal, everyday experiences of both themselves and their participants (D. Smith, 1993, p. 328). It was this aspect of this methodology that was congruent with my research questions because I also noted how institutional ethnography practices do not objectify the participants in their research methods but work hard to “see” their participants and their lived experiences, as well as themselves, in the “actualities of everyday life” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 17). As in Indigenous worldviews, institutional ethnographers are conscious of the

fact that the participants, researchers, and institutions they are looking at all come together to form “social relations” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 27).

As Campbell and Gregor (2004) explicated, all our lives and the events that we participate in are “*actually* tied together in ways that make sense of such abstractions as power, knowledge, capitalism, patriarchy, race, the economy, the state, policy, culture and so on” (p. 17). I connected with the everyday lives of oppressed people, in this instance, Aboriginal students and their academic experiences, and I saw how this methodology would help to expose the invisible hegemonic threads holding the quilt of colonization and imperialism together, so that its legacy is still felt today. L. Smith (1999) argued that “imperialism frames the Indigenous experience. It is part of our story, our version of modernity. Writing about our experiences under imperialism and its more specific expression of colonialism has become a significant project of the Indigenous world” (p. 19).

Imperialism still hurts, still destroys and is reforming itself constantly. Indigenous peoples as an international group have had to challenge, understand and have a shared language for talking about the history, the sociology, the psychology and the politics of imperialism and colonialism as an epic story telling of huge devastation, painful struggle and persistent survival (L. Smith, 1999, p. 19).

I was not sure which institutional threads were subjugating this group of people. In reading “as a whole, Native people are among the poorest and most disadvantaged groups in Canada” (Frideres, 2011, p. 167), I knew that there was definitely something deep at work to keep Aboriginal people from fully participating in society and in the labour force. Those same institutional threads kept Aboriginal students from fully participating in school and experiencing academic success. By reminding me about the connection between public schooling and the “perpetuation of cultural invasion and economic domination” that Freire (2000) recognized, Darder (2002) put the puzzle pieces together for me.

This project meant more to me than just discovering the keys to my research questions. When this thesis was but a seed of thought in my mind, I saw it as something that would grow and grow and grow until it would somehow help future generations of Aboriginal students. Admittedly, I began this project as a naïve researcher whose dreams were far bigger than her time or research abilities would allow. Initially, I planned to use postcolonial theory because it seemed a natural fit, considering I was doing a project so closely connected to colonization; however, it was at this particular stage in the project that I first heard about, and decided on using, institutional ethnography. It seemed a perfect fit for what I wanted to do with my study.

Initially I planned to propose an examination into residential schools, thinking that there are many people in the dominant society, and even in Aboriginal society, that continue to be uninformed as to why those schools were first implemented and what kind of impact they have had, intergenerationally, on the Aboriginal children who attended them, and on their descendants.

I was passionate about helping others to understand that the unacceptably low graduation rates of Aboriginal students are not due to student laziness or apathy. One adolescent student was as troubled and as angry as she could be and confided in me one morning in my office that she did not know anything about residential schools. I was shocked to hear her say that. I was still very green in the field and assumed that all Aboriginal people, including their children, knew the pain, trauma, and anguish that residential schools had caused to many that had attended them.

In the morning I was talking a bit about the intergenerational pain in some families due to residential schools. I had been trying to help this girl and did not know for sure if her

family had had anyone attend a residential school but recognized many of the signs and symptoms of residential abuse in some of her stories. After that day, I think back and know that both of us learned something very important, something that neither of us would forget, even though we each had learned entirely different things: she learned about residential schools, and I learned not to make assumptions based on race.

Three years after counseling that student, I was making plans with my first supervisor to do my master's research project on residential schools. I was exceedingly interested in them and in the tragic ways that they impacted Aboriginal families, intergenerationally. However, it was not long into my research that I began to realize just how many studies and books there were out there already on these schools, so I began to think of more refined topics to examine.

In my new position in a new school district a year later, I was chatting with one of my colleagues about her reserve. She was proud to say that very few are unemployed and almost every single child on her reserve graduates from school. I got very excited and got up from my desk and went over to hers to make inquiries as to what was behind these wonderful statistics. She said she did not know, but that was how it was. I told her that would be a fascinating study for someone to look into. I told her I was going to think about this for my study.

Obtaining permission from your school district to perform such a study is always best done by approaching your immediate supervisor. I went to my supervisor, who was our district's Aboriginal principal. I told her how I had been chatting with my colleague and what I was thinking of doing. She agreed that it would be nice to do a positive study in this area.

In my literature review, I came across a number of barriers that many Aboriginal

students have encountered in school, at one time or another. While I felt they were critical enough to include, I was also of the conviction that there was very little that I could significantly add to the studies already done in this area. Institutional ethnography offered me an opportunity to revisit those barriers and see them differently and through a lens that only this methodology can provide. Institutional ethnography provided both me and my participants a better lens through which to see our everyday lives, and the social relations all around us. We can then be governed and/or oppressed less and empowered more by such knowledge.

Knowing this background helped me to see how it was contacts and colonization that were the determining factors in the unacceptable graduation rates for Aboriginal students and ultimately helped me to see how a methodology such as institutional ethnography might help me with my research questions. I realized that this approach would best suit my purposes because it exposes the ruling relations that we are all impacted by in our everyday lives. This particular methodology not only focuses on the participants, but also honours them in “the textual basis of institutions and the characteristic workings of institutional discourse” (D. Smith, 2005, p. 3).

This was important to me because I had always sensed a connection between the legacy of colonization and the phenomena that this study examines. In other words, institutional ethnographers are interested in looking at the bigger picture by seeing or uncovering the “textual connections invisible but present in the everyday of people’s participation in the institutions” (D. Smith, 2005, p. 198).

This qualitative research study examined both the barriers and positive supports in the lives of my participants to contribute to the literature on how best to help future Aboriginal

students remain in school long enough to experience academic success and graduate.

Institutional ethnography was the best choice because of how the lives of Aboriginal people are so connected to, and governed by, powerful ruling institutions (for example, the state and its many institutions, including schools).

Institutional ethnography was chosen as the most effective methodology for exposing the ways in which these bureaucratic institutions govern Aboriginal people in their day-to-day lives. Institutional ethnographers look not just at the participants but at the way their lives interact with their world and particularly with the institutions that are found within their world (D. Smith, 2005). As D. Smith (1993) asserted, we are all constantly being involved in this phenomenon of “textually mediated communication, action, and social relations, whether we are aware of it or not and not just in our professional work, but indeed, in our everyday personal lives” (p. 209). Smith added “The *social happens*; included in the happening activities are concepts, ideologies, theories, ideas, and so forth” (D. Smith, 1999, p. 75).

My main research question was focused on finding out what positive supports are helping those Aboriginal students who do remain in school long enough to graduate. Once we are able to determine what helped these Aboriginal learners stay in school long enough to obtain their grade 12, we can then use that information to help more Aboriginal students remain in school long enough to also earn their Dogwood Diplomas within six years of entering grade 8.

When I heard about institutional ethnography, I knew this methodology could offer a way to examine Aboriginal education because of how institutional ethnographers see research as so much more than an “innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions” (L. Smith,

1999, p. 5). I knew that qualitative research could provide a medium through which my participants could be given a voice (L. Smith, 1999). L. Smith (1999) referred to the ever-increasing testimonies from First Nations people in Canada as verifying the evidence of “years of abuse, neglect and viciousness meted out to young children by teachers and staff in schools run by various religious denominations,” political conditions that have virtually silenced the voices of Aboriginal students and peoples (p. 69).

L. Smith (1999) contended, these “paternalistic and racist policies and legislation,” all of which were seen by those in the “white communities as necessary conditions which had to be met if Indigenous people wanted to become citizens (of their own lands)” (p. 69). Both laws and policies detrimentally impacted Aboriginal peoples “physically, emotionally, linguistically, and culturally” and left them without their traditional ways of being (L. Smith, 1999, p. 69). These policies and pieces of legislation were created to erase all traditional ways of being Aboriginal, as well as to “obliterate collective identities and memories and to impose a new order” (L. Smith, 1999, p. 69).

Even after the Second World War, when the post-colonial period was beginning according to some cultural studies theorists, many Indigenous peoples around the world were still not recognized as humans, let alone citizens. The effect of such discipline was to silence (forever in some cases) or to suppress the ways of knowing, and the languages for knowing, of many Indigenous peoples (L. Smith, 1999, p. 69).

Because of this silencing and my desire to “research back” (L. Smith, 1999, p. 7), I knew I wanted to give voice to the participants’ lived educational experiences and that the best way to do it would be by taking the institutional ethnographic approach. Qualitative research is a situated undertaking that positions the researcher out in the world that she is studying. By changing that which they are studying “into a *series* of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self... qualitative

researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3).

To study your question as a qualitative researcher means to do so in a setting that is both “natural” and “sensitive to the people and places under study” and means collecting data “that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). I went directly to where the students were: their secondary school, which is located in the older, northwest section of the district giving the school an inner city status. It was from this school site that I set out to collect data on the supports behind the six graduating Aboriginal students.

### **Site**

The school district where I work is located in the southwestern area of British Columbia and is one of the most populous school districts in the province, serving thousands of students. Within the boundaries of this district are the traditional territories of two First Nations, Katzie and Semiahmoo. While we have some on-reserve Aboriginal students attending our schools, the majority of Aboriginal students in this district are off-reserve, urban First Nations, Metis, or Inuit. This district, like the community it is situated in, has a very diverse population and a high number of Indo-Canadian students. Aboriginal students are a minority within the schools. It was within this school district, at a large secondary school in the northwest end of the large urban centre, that my research study on Aboriginal education was conducted. I chose this particular high school for my site because I had worked there for two months two years earlier and already knew the administration and some of the staff.

**Catchment Area.** This school is located in one of the poorest neighbourhoods in this urban centre. According to Statistics Canada, 2006, 30.9% of children 6 years of age and



under and living in the catchment area of the school in my study are living in poverty (Cleathero, 2009). One does not have to go too far in any direction from the school to see pockets of houses in states of dilapidation. This area is widely known for its crime, prostitution, drug problems, and sky train crime. Many students attending the school in this study are coming from homes where abject poverty is the norm and not the exception.

There are numerous industries in this city, including “services, high technology/ biomedical, agricultural and greenhouses, manufacturing, plastics, and telecommunications” (Lamb, 2012, para. 2), so one would not expect to see such poverty-stricken neighbourhoods or hear about homeless students trying to obtain an education on their own, or drug deals, robberies, stabbings, and so on, at the local skytrain station. Yet, that is the reality in this area of the city. While abject poverty is not a reality for all students at this school, it certainly is a reality for far too many of them attending the school that I chose for my study’s site. The school’s catchment area also happens to be home to the largest Aboriginal population in the city (Cleathero, 2009).

**Academics.** This school offers a variety of programs to students from Bases to an Integrated Academic Program (Inter-A) for its exceedingly diverse student population of approximately 1500 students. Aside from the academics, the school also offers students an array of after school programs, clubs, and sports teams. The school, which had long been a staple in the community, was completely rebuilt in the last decade, making it a modern building.

**Socioeconomics.** Based on its location, this school could easily fit the criteria for an inner city school. Fillipoff (2001) saw inner city schools as being “special... places where the most vulnerable children in our society receive their education. There is little doubt that

poverty is the most telling indicator of need for the children who attend these schools” (para. 2).

Factors often affecting the lives of students attending inner city schools are: “crime, hunger, transience, prostitution, homelessness, emotional neglect, single-parent families, physical and sexual abuse, English as a second language, delayed language development, social and cultural barriers, violence in the home and community, refugee/immigrant status,” as well as addictions such as alcohol or drugs (Fillipoff, 2001, para. 2).

I have been told there are drug dealers lurking about in hopes of getting free samples to students at my school site. Their objective is to get as many young students as possible addicted to certain drugs so they can increase their client base. I have also been told that some female students at this school are now earning money on the streets simply to help support their new drug habit. One female student was homeless and doing the best she could to stay in school. That is not to suggest that all students at my chosen high school site are drug addicts or being impacted by inner-city school-related issues, or come from a lower socioeconomic background. That is not so, but far too many students who attend inner city schools each day are in fact touched by one or more of these poverty-related issues, and this is particularly true for many Aboriginal students.

According to Cleathero (2009), “Aboriginal children living off reserves have a poverty rate that is almost twice as large as for non-Aboriginal children” (p. 10). While there are two First Nations reserves located within this large urban centre, both are relatively small, which means that the majority of the Aboriginal children attending schools in this district are off-reserve, urban students and likely living in poverty. With approximately 3000

Aboriginal students attending schools in this district, this means that many of them are coming from poverty-stricken backgrounds.

## **Methods**

The methods used by qualitative researchers exemplify a common belief that they can provide a “deeper” understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative data. Such purportedly “deep” understanding arises in qualitative researchers’ claims to have entered and mapped such territories as “inner experiences,” “language,” “cultural meanings,” or “forms of social interactions” (Silverman, 2000, p. 8).

This study was designed to examine the positive variables behind the retention of six secondary Aboriginal students and to provide a deeper understanding of why some students are able to remain in school long enough to graduate and others are not. I designed this study so that it would be culturally sensitive, respectful, and be a vehicle through which the six participants’ voices could be heard. Providing a medium for the voices of Aboriginal students to be heard was the deciding factor in my decision to do a qualitative study using an institutional ethnographic lens.

**Inquiring focus.** When I met with the students for our pizza lunch, I explained to them what I would be doing and how the research would be done. I was honest with them as to the reasons I wanted to conduct research in this area: the unacceptable discrepancies between Aboriginal learners and non-Aboriginal learners. I told them that by looking at what helped them to persevere through until graduation we might be able to better help the next generation of Aboriginal students coming in. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) described it as “taking a personal and inviting approach” (p. 99). Additionally, this inviting approach set up the interview in such a way that it helped to establish the “subject as the one who knows and the researcher as the one who has come to learn,” showing those being interviewed that their “ideas and opinions” are respected and equally important (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 99).

**Participant experts.** Bogdan and Biklen (2003) regarded this as one of the most effective approaches “to open-ended interviewing” because when the researcher treats their participants as an “expert,” it helps the “subject to be in on the study” (p. 99). As Glatthorn (2005) stressed, “Interviews are conducted with individuals or groups to ascertain their perceptions” (p. 45). I chose to obtain the data for this research study with this method to provide a medium through which the participants might have their thoughts on their educational experiences heard. This method of collecting data was also used because of the way in which it suited the school setting.

**Survey instrument: interview questions.** The survey instrument that I employed for my study of six Aboriginal high school students and the positive supports behind them being able to remain in school long enough to graduate was the online questioning method (See Appendix A). The reason I choose this method of extracting data from my participants was two-fold. First, answering the online interview questions could save a lot of time, which benefits both the participants and the researcher. Secondly, students answering my interview questions online and in the comfort of their homes, or in the Aboriginal room at school with one of their Aboriginal Support Workers, Daniel (a pseudonym), who they all liked and were familiar with, would help them to open up in terms of their answers. I felt that the web-based approach was the method best suited for this study. One other advantage to the web-based method was in terms of the imposition factor: I would be imposing less on my participants’ busy lives by not requiring after-school, interview appointments with them. The online questions could be done at the participant’s leisure. These factors made this particular method much more participant-friendly in my eyes.

The online, interview questions were comprised of thirteen, open-ended questions. Because the study was looking into what positive supports were behind the students' to help them remain in school until graduation, the questions needed to centre around various aspects of the participants' lives: such as the supportive role played by the participants' parents, extended families, and friends; the cultural involvement of both the students and their families; on-reserve school attendance; residential school attendance of family members, including extended family members; personal and/or family involvement in cultural events or cultural groups; personal sense of alienation at school; personal connections to educators at school or school itself; and finally, to obtain a socioeconomic grasp of the students' backgrounds, the interview questions asked about both the academic and employment history of the participants' parents.

**Procedure: data gathering.** Initially, I hoped to do face-to-face interviews, but changed direction after reading an article illustrating the benefits of using online interviews. I felt that online interviews would prove much less invasive. However, the online interviews never came to be. Despite sending reminders to each and every student, I did not get the hoped for response back from them. I followed the advice of one of the Aboriginal support workers at the school, who worked closely with the students and who was very well liked by them.

The support worker suggested that, given the lack of response for the online interviews, perhaps we might look at completing the interviews a different way. He offered to gather the students during their lunch breaks and in between their classes. After printing out the interview questions that I would send him, he would have the students sit in the

Aboriginal room and complete the online interviews. The interviews that were to take place over the internet now became open-ended interview questions with student support.

The support worker was instrumental in helping me obtain my data, as the subjects were all extremely busy and, like most teens, had busy lives outside their school day. Many of them worked part-time jobs or were expected home straight after school to help care for their siblings, a norm in Aboriginal communities: family comes first. More importantly, they all knew and liked this person very much. His stepping in to help seemed a natural choice given the connection he had with the students. They were grade 12 students with all the homework that grade twelve entails. The online interviews did not work out because these participants were too busy to become involved. Thanks to the support worker's suggestion, the interview questions were ultimately completed by six of the original 13 Aboriginal students who had attended our pizza party in March.

### **Research Design**

Qualitative research is often based on interviews because interviewing helps researchers obtain data that offers insight into the lived experiences of their participants that might otherwise not be uncovered. Institutional ethnography was my methodology of choice because the informal interview ethnographical method used for this research study matched the value and purpose of institutional ethnography. My research design changed again, as none of the six students completed the on-line, interview questions. A new plan had to be devised.

Meho (2006) commented that, "in contrast to face-to-face and telephone interviewing, e-mail interviewing enables researchers to study individuals or groups with special characteristics or those often difficult or impossible to reach or interview face-to-face or via

telephone” (p. 1288). While all methods have advantages and disadvantages, this method offered another advantage in that it enabled me to interview “more than 1 participant at a time” (Meho, 2006, p. 1288). Conversely, there were also disadvantages, one of which was that, by conducting online interviews, the opportunity to extend my participant’s responses was lost.

I called one of the Aboriginal support workers, Daniel, and asked him if he could help me by talking with them. He had worked with these students over the past few years and had good relationships with all of them. When he got back to me, he told me that he had spoken to the students. He learned that the students were all very busy and had meant to do answer the interview questions. He suggested a guided, face-to-face question process. He said he would find time, for example, lunch hours and spare blocks, to sit down with the six participants in the Aboriginal Room, and help them complete the interview questions. I accepted his thoughtful offer and thanked him for helping me.

As promised, Daniel gathered up the six students, one at a time, helped them with the questions and got all six of the completed questions back to me within a few days’ time. The study seemed to be back on track for stronger student responses. My original plan to do one-on-one interviews with my six participants ended up being them answering my open-ended interview questions that the support worker helped the students to complete. The method of collecting the data would have been strengthened if I had been able to add probing questions. In future studies I would interview my participants face-to-face, so as not to lose this potential richness of data. If I were to use this interview method again, I would have to ensure that a solid backup plan was in place, where I could interview all the participants a second time, if needed, and in person. I could then obtain whatever data the online

interviews did not provide. What had me reflecting on this was the fact that some of my participants left some questions blank, and I think if I had been present, I could have probed deeper and elicited more responses from the students in order to obtain more comprehensive data.



## **Chapter Four: Sites of Experience**

A person's experience is a major factor influencing the perspective they develop for looking out at the world. Each individual's social positionality is extremely influential in the way a person views gender relations, race relations, and relations of social class, as well as other forms of social relations. Indeed, an argument can easily be made that social positionality is at the base of what a person experiences, and is, therefore, extremely important in determining how certain discourses, either hegemonic, or counterhegemonic ones, are received (Orlowski, 2011, pp. 46–47).

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, the data gathered from six grade-12 Aboriginal students interviewed are presented and discussed. Prior to collecting this data, all six respondents and their parents were provided with an introduction letter from me. The letter that I sent home with the students contained an explanation of the interview process, as well as the significance and ultimate objective of the research study. The participants were given assurance that their identities would remain confidential. For example, this chapter will have pseudonyms in place of real names. This chapter also provides the reader with insight into how the participants' lived, day-to-day experiences (local data) become invisibly connected to the socially-set-up conditions of those experiences that extend beyond the local to the trans-local sites of experience, "where power is held" (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 44).

### **Katie**

Katie comes from a nuclear family of two parents and one sibling. Both of Katie's parents and her sibling graduated from high school, and both of her parents are employed. Neither of her parents attended residential school, nor did her grandparents. Katie's family does not speak their Aboriginal language but the family attends cultural events "but not many" (Katie, personal communication, June 9, 2009). Katie's family does not belong to any cultural groups (for example, dancing troupes or drumming groups).

Katie credited both her parents for her academic success, as well as her grandfather, stating he had “always been an inspiration to me, allowing me to believe there are still good people in this world” (Katie, personal communication, June 9, 2009). For Katie, her parents’ support meant a great deal, as they each inspired her to continue on with her dreams and aspirations by being “the brightest, kindest people” that she “could possibly know” (Katie, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

Katie credited her parents for instilling within her the values and morals that she chooses to live her life by, stating that they had “fully and completely” (Katie, personal communication, June 9, 2009) made her the “determined, hard-working person” (Katie, personal communication, June 9, 2009). she had become, adding her parents had always “supported” her and never questioned her plans for the future, saying they “were a constant to me during the hardest time of my short life” (Katie, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

In terms of secondary supports in her academic life, Katie cited that they were “most certainly” her parents, grandfather, and even her own educational drive, which was empowered by her hopes and dreams (Katie, personal communication, June 9, 2009). Her dreams were fueled by her “passion for neurology” (Katie, personal communication, June 9, 2009). Katie planned to go into medicine. Speaking about the support she received from her family, Katie ultimately saw her grandfather as her main secondary support. Although both of her parents graduated from university, she said they never pressured her into feeling as though she also needed to go. Attending university was more a case of her simply knowing she was “going to post-secondary... was simply an ingrained part of my being... I suppose it was my grandfather who was my secondary influence” (Katie, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

When asked about Aboriginal support she might have received, Katie said there had not been any. She added that there was no support that she needed. She has always been “an independent person and self-driven. Not to say that many of my educators have not been great and helpful, but there was never any question that I would graduate, go to post-sec and fulfill my dreams and aspirations” (Katie, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

In fact, later in the interview, Katie credited that her “will to graduate and become something got me through school” (Katie, personal communication, June 9, 2009). When Katie was questioned about whether she had ever experienced feelings of alienation at school, she stated she had not ever really experienced feelings of alienation in school and credited her participation in “French immersion” as the reason behind her always feeling as though she belonged (Katie, personal communication, June 9, 2009). She stated:

I’ve always been part of a group of friends, most since kindergarten. I’ve never felt alienated... Many people, not just Caucasians, have a predisposed disposition, or stereotype if you will, to Aboriginal students. Not to mention that their parents, many of them at least, did not graduate high school and so Aboriginal students feel they will not either, so already becoming alienated from many students who have dreams or aspirations (Katie, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

According to Nieto (1992), a national research study in the United States found that alienation was highly correlated to dropping out of school (p. 80). Katie was quick to offer advice to educators who might be working with students who do feel alienated at school, advising teachers and staff to “support them and lend them support in any way they can. Tell them and show them what life would be like if they graduated high school, and especially if they went to post-secondary” (Katie, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

Katie believed in following dreams and credited her “dreams and aspirations” for the future as the primary positive support that helped her to remain focused on her studies and in school long enough to graduate (Katie, personal communication, June 9, 2009). “Since that

time, my dream has been known and I have had to lay down the path to get to that goal. Graduating high school is en route, so it was a simple determination to graduate high school in order to attain my dream” (Katie, personal communication, June 9, 2009). Ending the interview on much the same note on which she had started, she said, “That and my parents have been the most positive support in my life” (Katie, personal communication, June 9, 2009). Hoping to inspire younger Aboriginal students still in school who are having difficulties sticking it out, Katie advised them to follow their dreams and passions and to be sure to “focus” on them:

Know that you have it in you. Let everything else fall by the wayside. Ignore negativity. Let your dreams lead you through school, allow you to graduate, and become who you want to be....Be happy during school. Find something to make the experience, and you will be more willing to graduate, do well, and continue your education (Katie, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

### **George**

George credited his parents, relatives, and friends with his academic success and explained how his friends and family, especially parents, helped him to stay in school by always being there when he needed help. Whenever things got too hard at school, he said, “There would always be someone, whether it be family or friend; there was someone to talk to” (George, personal communication, June 9, 2009). Both of George’s parents and siblings graduated from high school, and both of his parents are currently employed. George’s grandparents attended residential school. George felt that his relatives and friends also helped him to stay in school because he always felt “comfortable around people who I am around the most and felt that I could go to my friends/relatives whenever I needed to” (George, personal communication, June 9, 2009). He especially felt comfortable talking with his “girlfriend about what was troubling” him (George, personal communication, June 9,

2009). “because we could talk about anything and she wouldn’t judge me” (George, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

When asked if there were anyone that helped him to remain in school long enough to graduate, he said “Yes. Ms. [S.] and all the Aboriginal Support teachers” (George, personal communication June 9, 2009).

George’s biggest support was his family because, as he said, “Your family members will always be with you through thick and thin and no matter what happens, you can go to them” (George, personal communication, June 9, 2009). George did not experience alienation at school and attributed this to the fact he was active in extracurricular activities. When asked if he felt being a club member helped him to feel as though he belonged at school, he stated that the club that he belonged to gave him the “chance to meet new people and make more friends through school... I always felt welcome and that I could be myself” (George, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

George never attended an on-reserve school during his school years. No one in George’s family speaks their Aboriginal language, nor do they belong to any cultural groups, but they have attended cultural events like powwows; additionally, George attended sweat lodge ceremonies.

## **Diana**

Diana’s family background includes two parents. Both of her parents graduated from high school and are employed currently. Diana has a younger brother, for whom she serves as a role model. Diana sees her younger brother as an important positive support in her life, helping her to stay focused and to graduate as “he watches what I do so I try to get good marks, or at least show him I’m committed to school” (Diana, personal communication, June

9, 2009). Diana's grandparents attended residential school, and her family speaks their Aboriginal language. Diana never attended an on-reserve school during her school years.

Diana's family attended various cultural events, "We have potlucks, go to Metis and Metis youth conferences, and language camps" and they also "belong to a dance group...and my aunty is a famous dancer" (Diana, personal communication, June 9, 2009). For Diana, the main support helping her to remain in school was her parents and one of the school's Aboriginal support staff workers, Ms. S. While Diana said her mom helped her to "build characteristics that would keep me in school," it was Ms. S. that helped her to persevere until graduation and earning her Dogwood Diploma (Diana, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

Diana credited Ms. S. for helping her to be successful in school whether she was doing well or "falling behind schedule" (Diana, personal communication, June 9, 2009). Diana added, "Ms. [S.] helped me more than any teacher I've met in my school career. She supported me in my academic and personal life and helped me make school as easy and enjoyable as she could" (Diana, personal communication, June 9, 2009). Diana said Ms. S. was the only teacher who could manage to get it "into my thick skull that I couldn't drop out because I had to find a place to live but I could keep going to school and be better than my parents, which meant a lot to me because of the struggles I was dealing with throughout my grade 12 year" (Diana, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

Diana credited her friend for being the secondary supporting factor in her life in terms of helping her to remain on course, focused, and stay in school long enough to graduate. "My friends were a huge support system and helped me learn from their mistakes and not recreate them in my own life" (Diana, personal communication, June 9, 2009). Asked if there was

anyone else in her life that helped her to not leave school, Diana replied that her “grandparents always watched over me, especially in school. They would tutor me, advise me, take me out for quality time, and just give me an overall positive environment to live in, which made me want to be successful” (Diana, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

Diana believed that her biggest support system helping her to stay focused and remain in school was Ms. S. When asked about feeling alienated in school, Diana said “I did at one time because I was getting in trouble for something I never did. Even though they checked the cameras and proved me innocent, I was still sent home from school” (Diana, personal communication, June 9, 2009). Diana tried to combat that alienation from school by tutoring students who needed help, she was tutoring “younger kids in their academic classes: science, English, socials, and participated in native events being hosted at our school” (Diana, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

Diana felt strongly that the best way to help resolve the alienated feelings that many Aboriginal students experience is to have a room where Aboriginal students can go during the school day whenever they are feeling bad. She commented that she always felt welcome going to the Aboriginal room. Diana said, “They should support kids that want help from the Native room” (Diana, personal communication, June 9, 2009). Diana added, “I think it comes from people not understanding the whole process and how it affects an individual. They don’t understand why I get the help I need and why they don’t” (Diana, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

Diana credited her Aboriginal support worker, Ms. S., for being the most important positive support that stood out as having helped her to stay in school long enough to graduate. She stated how Ms. S. was “with me all day like a 5<sup>th</sup> parent or something. She

teaches me, pushes me to succeed, and coaches me on my struggles in life” (Diana, personal communication, June 9, 2009). Asked about what she would like to say to Aboriginal students coming up behind her, Diana said they shouldn’t be afraid of using the services offered to Aboriginal students. She advised them not to get embarrassed about going there or needing a little help with something, stating that is why the Aboriginal staff at the school is there: to help Aboriginal students. Don’t forget to ask for help in applying for scholarships and “Native summer programs” (Diana, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

### **Timothy**

Timothy’s parents did not graduate from high school, nor did his siblings. Both of Timothy’s parents are employed. When asked about residential school family history, Timothy initially said they had attended residential school, but then Timothy said he really was not sure if any members of his family were sent away to residential school. No one in Timothy’s family speaks their Aboriginal language, nor do they attend any cultural events. Timothy did not attend an on-reserve school at any time during his school years.

Timothy credited his parents as being the main supporting factor that helped him remain in school until graduation, explaining how they “encouraged” him to “keep going to classes” (Timothy, personal communication, June 9, 2009). The secondary supporting factor in terms of motivating him to stay in school until graduation was his friends. Timothy said that for him, school meant being able to be with your friends. He said he always “looked forward” to going to school “and seeing friends” (Timothy, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

Timothy felt that his biggest support system that helped him get through school was his “parents... and friends” (Timothy personal communication, June 9, 2009). Timothy said



they were “fun to hang around with [and] supported my education. I could rely on them” (Timothy, personal communication, June 9, 2009). Reflecting back on who was there for him at school, Timothy said his Aboriginal workers were always there to help him when he needed it, but “not so many teachers” (Timothy, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

Timothy was a member of the school’s wrestling team and said he never experienced feelings of alienation at school, although he understood why so many Aboriginal students did experience it: “Aboriginal students feel left out because there are not many other Aboriginal students in their school” (Timothy, personal communication, June 9, 2009). When asked what he felt educators could do differently to help Aboriginal students to feel as though they belonged in school, Timothy said, “I think our school does enough already” (Timothy, personal communication, June 9, 2009). In terms of future Aboriginal students, Timothy advised them to “stay in school. Listen to your teachers and parents” (Timothy, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

### **David**

The main supporting factor helping David stay focused and remain in school long enough to graduate was his parents. He explained how he had a “living reminder of what I would become if I did not get an education and a good job” (David, personal communication, June 9, 2009). David believed that the most important positive support in staying focused and remaining in school long enough to graduate would have to be his “extended family: “They expect a lot from me, but no more than I’m capable of” (David, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

David credited his teacher for being both his main supporting factor in helping him to stay on track until graduation and for being his secondary motivating factor. He stated how

his teacher “persisted in showing me my options to succeed” (David, personal communication, June 9, 2009). David also saw his friend as yet another positive supporting factor behind his success: “We were buddies in elementary school and he always did a little better than me, wasn’t gonna give up” (David, personal communication, June 9, 2009). David was involved in clubs at school and attributed his success to reach graduation to seeing “friends who succeeded” (David, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

David had three teachers at his school with whom he connected and that he believed helped him to get to graduation. These very committed teachers made learning and doing the coursework interesting through their genuine willingness to help and explain things to their students.

David saw himself as being his biggest support system. He kept himself on track throughout his school years even though he had a lot of support: my “personal ambition, hope around art made it possible... even though the tools and help to succeed was there [were there], it was up to me to either accept it or become another statistic” (David, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

David admitted to experiencing feelings of alienation at school but justified it to himself as something everyone feels: “It’s normal to feel different at times, we should never feel less than anyone else, equal, but not the same” (David, personal communication, June 9, 2009). David believed that it is a person’s own inability to express personal culture that is behind the alienation many Aboriginal students experience: students’ own inability to “express their culture, who they are” (David, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

David said being Aboriginal does not mean one has to be confined to “acting a particular way: Wear your hair a certain style, or choose a certain profession. Your culture

decides who you are, you decide who you will be” (David, personal communication, June 9, 2009). David does not see this issue as something that educators should worry about. He explained that it “is not their place” (David, personal communication, June 9, 2009). David attended on-reserve schools during his schooling years. Both of David’s parents graduated from high school and are currently unemployed. His siblings are younger and have yet to graduate. Members of David’s family (parents, grandparents) attended residential school and speak their Aboriginal language, but only “a little” (David, personal communication, June 9, 2009). This is the norm, and studies (Census, 2001) show “less than one-quarter of the total Aboriginal (Indian, Metis, and Inuit) population said they had knowledge of or the ability to converse in an Aboriginal language” (Frideres, 2011, p. 105). This lack of traditional Aboriginal languages can be attributed to the legacy of residential schools.

David’s family does not belong to any cultural groups, such as dancing or drumming, but does attend cultural functions such as “family potlatches and weddings when we can” (David, personal communication, June 9, 2009). David’s mother “used to wear traditional regalia” (David, personal communication, June 9, 2009). David advises those Aboriginal students coming up behind him in school to “persevere. Keep going, don’t feel sorry for yourself, you are *exactly* what you will be if you don’t learn to tighten your belt and keep your eyes on the future” (David, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

### **Sandra**

Sandra credited both of her parents for making it through school, stating that the main supporting factors in life are her two parents. Sandra was quick to add how Ms. S, her Aboriginal support worker, is also a main supporting factor in her life. Neither of Sandra’s parents graduated from high school, while one is employed and one is not. Her siblings are

“younger” than Sandra, so they have yet to graduate (Sandra, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

Sandra believed that the fact that neither of her parents graduated helped her to want “to succeed with that opportunity” (Sandra, personal communication, June 9, 2009). When asked why she chose Ms. S. as the most important positive support behind her sticking with school until graduation, Sandra attributed her determination to remaining focused in school on her family life, explaining, “neither of my parents graduated, our life has not necessarily been easy. Money is very tight most of the time, and I would just like to have an easy going life where I’m not worrying about whether the bills are paid and whether or not there is food on the table” (Sandra, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

Sandra isn’t one hundred percent “certain” if her parents or grandparents attended residential school (Sandra, personal communication, June 9, 2009). Nobody in Sandra’s family speaks their Aboriginal language or attends cultural events. There is one exception: “We have gone to the Aboriginal Christmas event that [my high school] holds every year for the past couple of years” (Sandra, personal communication, June 9, 2009). No one in Sandra’s family is a member of a cultural performance group.

Sandra’s secondary support factor was her Aboriginal support worker, Ms. S. Sandra stated how Ms. S. had “been a really big help with everything for the past two years. From giving me employment opportunities to post[-]secondary opportunities to even taking care of my teachers when I’m away” (Sandra, personal communication, June 9, 2009). Asked if there was anyone else at her school that she could count on for support when she needed it, Sandra said how grateful she was (Sandra, personal communication, June 9, 2009). Sandra added how she especially needed to credit Ms. S. for all the support that she offered her, “like

talking to Mr. G. for me on a regular basis and also helping me out with a grad dress! I'm very thankful for having someone like her by my side" (Sandra, personal communication, June 9, 2009). When asked what her biggest support system was in helping her to stay focused on her school work, Sandra said:

Ms. S... helped me stay on track the past couple of years, she got me into the post [-]secondary program called SPARK. She helped me get hired at RBC on the Aboriginal Summer Employment Program. I'm currently in the pool for Revenue Canada thanks to her and informing me on all of these programs, Also, the Aboriginal grad. It if were not for Ms. Sweeney, I wouldn't have as many successes as I do today. Thank You (Sandra, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

## **Summary**

In this chapter, the data gathered from the interview questions that the six Aboriginal, Grade 12 participants completed has been provided. The students answered questions pertaining to parental, family, community, and school supports, family background (looking particularly at family members being (or having been) residential school survivors, on-reserve school attendance during elementary grades, and cultural connections and activities). From these categories, positive support systems data was obtained from the interview questions and the results listed. From these results, the next step is to analyze the student data through the lens of institutional ethnography.

## **Chapter Five: Analysis**

It is methodologically important, institutional ethnographers insist, to be attentive to how someone, speaking about their life, misses its social organization. In order to discover and disclose how its taken-for-granted social organization is meaningful for what happens, a specialized inquiry must be conducted (Campbell & McGregor, 2004, p. 91).

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I illustrated how the lives of the six graduating, Aboriginal students have been affected and controlled by the standardized institutionalization put in place, and then held there, by the hegemony of the ruling relations. Employing the lens of institutional ethnography, which is as its founder, D. E. Smith (2005) claimed, is sociology for the people, I exposed the invisible connections between the institutionalized social relations of the participants' school day experiences to that of their academic experiences, connections that the participants did not even see.

### **Themes**

After the students had answered their interview questions and the data was collected, I read through all six of them immediately, taking notes on what the participants had said. I read the data through several times, labelling things that seemed significant either because they were falling into categories that were beginning to form, or they were connecting to other things already noted. As I continued, I was surprised at how some words were being repeated by other participants. I began to see a pattern and, narrowing down the many categories and connections that resulted from the participants' lived experiences as identified in their answers to the interview questions, I classified the repeated words into three overall themes. While there were many overlaps found within the six narratives, a comparative analysis of this data revealed three common themes: (a) self, (b) connections, and (c)

disconnections. These three themes indicated the multidimensional intricacy involved in a student's academic success.

**Self.** The theme of self (self-concept, self-determination, self-esteem, for example) emerged from the data in students' answers to the question that asked participants what advice they had for younger Aboriginal students. Unanimously, each of the answers had been given with words like, "persevere" or "stick with it" (conversation, June 9, 2009). The participant's answers told future Aboriginal students to believe in themselves (personal communication, June 9, 2009). Ideas of self-determination, stamina, positive attitude, strong beliefs, and self-esteem were all in the data and generously given out to future Aboriginal students so that they, too, could succeed in school. Not one of the participants saw academic failure, or any of the barriers that far too many Aboriginal students encounter, as the fault of anyone but the students themselves. Not seeing oneself in the social relations is what institutional ethnographers often observe. Few of us see our daily social relations for what they are: the standardized institutionalization of our social interactions.

**Connections.** Parental support was one of the first themes to surface in this research study. The first question on their interview handout asked the participants to list who they felt was the main supportive factor behind their remaining on track and in school until graduation. Each of the participants stated, at least once, that their parents had been the biggest support in terms of helping them to stay focused and in school until graduation. One student (Katie) noted how her parents were her main support system on six different occasions, while another (David) mentioned his parents only once. The other four participants (Diana, Sandra, George, and Timothy) also recorded their parents as being their

main supportive agents, with a total of 2, 1, 3, and 2 comments respectively, for a total of 15 mentions of parental support.

Both Sandra and David credited their parents as their main support as far as keeping them in school until graduation. However, the similarity in their answers ends here. Unlike David, who said his parents helped him to remain in school long enough to graduate by “being living reminders of what I would become if I didn’t get an education and good job,” Sandra credited her parents for keeping her in school because they did everything from the “little things” like waking her up in the morning to the “big things” like making her do homework before anything else (Sandra, personal communication, June 9, 2009). Another difference between the reports of personal experiences of these two participants is the fact that David’s parents graduated from school while Sandra’s did not. David did not see his parents as positive role models, while Sandra, whose parents did not finish high school, did see her parents in this way. Both David and Sandra have gone on to do the opposite of what their parents did.

Interestingly, two participants were the only two to give a negative response when asked if their parents graduated from high school. This finding is not out of line with research that informs us how students whose “parents have low levels of education and income are among the students most likely to leave school before graduation” (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003, p. 134). However, given that these two participants were graduating that year, in both instances the cycle appears to have been broken.

For their secondary supports, all but one participant (Timothy) mentioned family members. George mentioned his family five times and said he could go to his “friends or relatives whenever he needed to” (George, personal communication, June 9, 2009). George



also credited his friends five times, especially his girlfriend because they “could talk about anything, and she wouldn’t judge” him (George, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

Other participants also credited their families as their secondary support. For example, David and Katie each mentioned their families as the second most important supporting factor in their lives, while Sandra and Diana mentioned their families only once.

In terms of the third question, which asked about anyone else in their lives supporting them in terms of staying in school until graduation, all 4 participants, mentioned friends who supported them in their quest to finish school. Katie apparently did not have a need for extra supports, given how her parents and grandfather were so supportive. George credited his friends five times, while Diana did so on two occasions. David and Timothy mentioned their friends as supportive factors in their lives two and three times, respectively.

**Disconnections.** Of the six participants, four did not feel they had had any type of connection with their teachers or that any of their teachers had helped them remain in school until graduation. Diana mentioned the support she received from her Aboriginal Support Workers five times while not mentioning any of her teachers at all. Sandra, on the other hand, did credit her teachers two times and then mentioned her school’s Aboriginal Support Workers five times. This student felt she received much more support from the Aboriginal Support Workers than from her teachers. The two other participants (George and David) both credited their teachers with having helped them remain in school through graduation, with George mentioning his teachers twice and David once. These lived experiences are relevant given how many Aboriginal students feel alienated from their mainstream schools and classrooms. When viewed through the lens of institutional ethnography, the relevancy of the participants’ lived experiences become clearer.

***Institutional ethnography.*** Campbell & Gregor (2004) have determined that “locating the *actual* as a distinct terrain of inquiry is one of the first challenges” that institutional ethnographers encounter because “underlying anyone’s everyday life experience, something invisible is happening to generate a particular set of circumstances” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 17). Those unseen interactions that were taking place for the participants compelled me to dig deeper. Institutional ethnography is often used for research into the lives of oppressed groups of people and is particularly useful in helping professions such as health care, social work, and education (DeVault, 2008, p. 252). Some institutional ethnographers see being able to unpack these bureaucratic processes as a form of “organizational literacy” (DeVault, 2008, p. 252). This inquiry endeavors to read such processes as they take place in schools.

Wanting to know how these organizational texts, which have been set out by the provincial government, impact Aboriginal students in their day-to-day lived experiences, I employed the methods of institutional ethnography to uncover those organizational processes that take place each day at school. All of us are socially organized to an extent by those making decisions in our schools, workplaces, and communities. It is the purpose of this inquiry to expose those ruling relations so that those being ruled and organized, the students, can see through the sites of contestation and rise above them (Campbell & Gregor, 2004).

This resistance can only be accomplished by creating “knowledge of the social, grounded in people’s experiences of their own lives” (D.E. Smith, 1999, pg. 96). As D. E. Smith (1999) saw it, whenever people speak about their lives, they are also speaking about their social relations as the social arises in people’s daily activities and through the ongoing

and purposeful integration and coordination of those activities. Social life is not chaotic but organized to happen as it does.

What D. E. Smith (1999) called the social relations of everyday life are the intersections of all that happens. People's own decisions and actions and how they are coordinated with outside events are part of social relations (Campbell & Gregor, 2004).

The social relations of Aboriginal students and how they are organized result from the various decisions made each day at school, both their own and those made by others. It is through these day-to-day interactions with various educators, school support staff, school administration, and other institutional helping professionals that the students experience the hegemonic power of the school. School is also where the students are objectified and begin to exist "as an object, just as he [she] appears in organizational documents" (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 40). It is this "interplay of social relations, of people's ordinary activities being concerted and coordinated purposefully," that constitutes the social organization that D. E. Smith sees as the trans-local discourse, which is a major factor in how educational destinies are written up and created (Campbell & McGregor, 2004, p. 27). This social organization does not necessarily mean that each and every Aboriginal student will have a tough time in school, or be labeled *at-risk*, or become an early school leaver. There are some, like Katie, who do not, but the effects of hegemony and institutional racism do suggest that far too many of them will leave early.

***Hegemony and the ruling relations.*** The invisible power actuated by the hegemonic pull of the ruling relations is set into action so as not to appear as something done by the rulers but rather as the natural order of things. In fact, this power is constructed: "Hegemony refers to the ideal representation of the interests of the privileged as universal interests, which

are then accepted by the masses as the natural order rather than as a demonstration of the construction of power along lines of race, class, and gender” (Orlowski, 2011, p. 6). For years, I have wondered what was behind the blatant inequity in public education that would cause educational success to be so elusive for most Aboriginal students. In my experience as a First Nations Counselor, as an Aboriginal Language and Culture Teacher, and as an Aboriginal Helping Teacher, I have witnessed many acts of discrimination during my work day. Even in the face of that, I wasn’t one hundred percent sure that all I was seeing wasn’t just a few individual educators being racist. There was a seemingly invisible and intangible factor at work in the schools that I couldn’t define or describe.

Whenever I would hear about Aboriginal students in grade 10 or in other junior high school levels reading at the primary or intermediate-grade levels, I used to question what had happened or what not been taught for the achievement levels of Aboriginal students to be two to three years below those of non-Aboriginal students. This phenomenon is substantiated by Ide (2003): the longer Aboriginal children remain in school, odds are increased for their levels to “fall progressively further behind” (p. 99). For example, Timothy connected with his wrestling team at school so never felt alienated from his school’s culture. Nevertheless, Timothy did understand how some Aboriginal students begin feeling left out and unwelcome: because “there are not many other Aboriginal students in their school” (Timothy, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

Timothy’s sentiments about the Aboriginal workers always being there for him when he needed help but not many teachers (Timothy, personal communication, June 9, 2009) reflects Cummins statement that “students whose schooling experiences reflect collaborative relations of power participate confidently in instruction as a result of the fact that their sense

of identity is being affirmed and extended in their interactions with educators” (Cummins, 2000, p. 44). If Timothy had not been a member of the wrestling team, which helped him considerably to stay connected to the school and keep those feelings of alienation at bay, he might have had an academic experience more similar to that of other Aboriginal students.

I would hear from teachers how pathetic it was that so many Aboriginal students needed to be kept back so they didn’t end up in classes where they were unable to do the work. I always wondered why Aboriginal students were at least three times more likely than non-Aboriginal students to be classified as having behavioral issues (Mcbride, 2001). I wondered what was behind the other phenomenon that has Aboriginal students historically over-represented in populations of students classified as having special needs (McBride, 2001). Whatever it was, I began to feel that, irrespective of what these students did, the oppressiveness of their day-to-day school experiences was such as to work against the students’ graduation.

***Legacy of colonization.*** The long-promised national railway was the enticement that brought the provinces together into a confederation where new settlers could dream about a new life in the new world, where their dreams were but a little hard work away. But John A. MacDonald’s National Dream came with a price: the traditional lands of the country’s Aboriginal people. Lands all across the country were needed, which virtually rendered Canada’s Aboriginals and their “communities socially excluded from the rest of Canada” (Reading, 2009, p. 1). This detrimentally impacted the country’s First Nations peoples because the reserve system ultimately led to “marginalization in education, employment, housing, health care and many other services which effectively created a two-tiered society in Canada; one standard for Canadians and the other for Aboriginal Peoples” (Reading, 2009,

p.1). Irrefutably, Aboriginal peoples have been and “continue to be” colonized and as involuntary colonized peoples of Canada, they have been condemned to being on the periphery of this nation’s economic system and society at large (Frideres & Gadacz, 2008, p. 2).

With schools mirroring society at large, it is not surprising to find that Aboriginal students, for the most part, also sit on the outside looking in with many experiencing difficulties in school, “most notably in language arts. This is not unique to any province; it has been found nationally that the academic performance of Aboriginal children remains considerably below majority norms” (Battiste, 2013, p. 141).

After more than a century of public schooling among Aboriginal peoples in Canada, the most serious problem lies not only in the failure of public schools to liberate the human potential among Aboriginal peoples, but also in their limiting of diversity of thought to cognitive imperialistic policies and practices. These continue to deny Aboriginal peoples access to and participation in government and policies. They deny the use and development of their own worldviews and thought through the suppression of Indigenous languages and cultures in schools, and confine education to Western methodologies and approaches which undermine a balanced view of the world and threaten the global future (Battiste, 2013, pp. 141-142).

Orlowski (2011) saw this unequal social power through Foucauldian terms: as an invisible “set of social relations built seamlessly into daily relations and practices” that is set up to work as a “regulator in racial, class, and gender relations” in both society and its institutions, including in public schools, where this invisible social power is deeply “embedded in representation of text, such as the school curriculum” (Orlowski, 2011, p. 6). In fact, it was this very forcefully unequal, invisible social power that colonization gave birth to what Reading (2009) saw as the wind beneath the two-tiered system found in this country’s uniquely Canadian system of “apartheid” (DuCharme, 1986, p. 1).

Reading (2009) found that, as Canada evolved politically and economically, “it became necessary to dislocate Aboriginal peoples from their traditional lands in order to make way for settler societies” (Reading, 2009, p. 1). This dislocation of Aboriginal peoples also happened in our schools. While George, Sandra, Timothy, and Katie did not experience feelings of alienation at school with the supports in place for them; far too many Aboriginal students have endured these feelings of being outside the circle and looking in. In this study, for example, Diana and David both mentioned that there were times when they felt alienated at school (personal communication, June 9, 2009). That all Aboriginal students did not experience alienation does not make feeling alienated at school any less devastating for those who do, however.

When asked about feeling alienated at school, Diana said that she did feel that way once because of an injustice that took place at school. Diana said that having a special place for Aboriginal students to go to when they are experiencing this alienation from their classroom or school culture is the best way to help resolve the issue (Diana, personal communication, June 9, 2009). Diana went to the Aboriginal Room when she felt alienated, and she always felt welcomed there (Diana, personal communication, June 9, 2009). Diana gave the impression that she understood where her alienation was coming from when she said she thought it resulted from non-Aboriginal students not understanding what being Aboriginal in a school that has few other Aboriginal students was like. She expressed that the dominant culture’s lack of awareness adversely impacts many Aboriginal students, stating that they don’t get the “process and how it affects an individual” (Diana, personal communication, June 9, 2009). She also explained that these negative effects are why she

and other Aboriginal students need the help they receive in the Aboriginal room (Diana, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

Would this Aboriginal room be as necessary as it is now if all the educators in our schools were following Gay's (2010) work on culturally responsive teaching? That is, if more teachers were following Gay's (2010) lead and teaching with a culturally responsive approach, would Aboriginal students still feel so alienated in their classrooms and schools? Gay's work and the work of others would suggest not (Gay, 2010, p. x). This is because a culturally responsive approach to teaching brings the "cultural and language strengths" of students to the forefront. Drawing on these student strengths increases academic achievement; feelings of alienation naturally decrease as academic achievement rises (Gay, 2010, p. x).

Vandana (2000) contended that the inequities found in society are not accidental but are the result of the struggle that began with the inception of colonization "over the mind and the intellect," an unequal contest between cultures: their ways of knowing, doing, and being; cultural knowledge and traditions; languages; societal norms and traditions; stories; visual arts; music; religion; and so on (p. vii). The dominant society had its institutions backing it (that is, school, church, and state), and the dominant society was successful in ensuring that Eurocentric attitudes prevailed and everything Aboriginal was looked down upon—save for that very short time in history when the early Europeans needed Aboriginal knowledge and fur-trapping skills. Given a context that discounts the value of Aboriginal culture, Vandana (2000) asked whose knowledge will count:

And who will count as expert or as innovator? Such questions have been central to the project of colonizing diverse cultures and their knowledge systems. Indigenous knowledges have been systematically usurped and then destroyed in their own cultures by the colonizing west (Vandana, 2000, p. vii).



***British Columbia educational system.*** It was out of this history of a society that allowed Canadian apartheid that the BC school laws and policies came into being. Nieto (1992) asserted that “certain school policies and practices exacerbate the inequities that exist in society” (Nieto, 1992, p. 69). This dynamic can be seen in the case of Diana’s being sent home from school after being cleared from something that she had been accused of doing (Diana, personal communication, June 9, 2009). When asked if she had ever felt alienated at school, it was this incident that she remembered and that caused her to answer that she felt distanced from the school at that time. Being punished for something she was no longer being accused of clearly showed that Diana was not part of the power structure in this system. If she had been a middle-class, White student who had been unjustly accused of doing something, would she still have been punished after being cleared?

As will be shown below, one need only look at the British Columbia Provincial Prescribed Learning Outcomes (PLOs) to see how those with the power manage to exacerbate the inequities in society. The Canadian educational system was “developed and refined by and for a white urban middle-class culture,” (Frideres & Gadacz, 2008, p. 119). It should come as no surprise that the schools in this system would be modeled after those in Europe and would adopt English as the main language for a Eurocentric curriculum.

Frideres and Gadacz (2008) contended that the Canadian education system has never “affirmed” Aboriginal worldviews, cultures, histories, traditions, and ways of knowing but has ignored them for the most part, offering instead a curriculum that is completely culturally irrelevant to Aboriginal students and “foreign to the Aboriginal child’s everyday life” (Frideres & Gadacz, 2008, p. 119).

At the same time, however, I happen to know many non-Aboriginal educators who are on a daily basis giving their all each day so that Aboriginal students experience academic success. These same teachers attend Aboriginal pow wows, workshops, pro-d, and so on, and are helping Aboriginal learners move forward in their classes by being able to affirm these students' identities as Aboriginal youth in our school system. Nothing is ever that black or white that we can say with certainty that what Aboriginal students need is new, caring and culturally relevant teachers, for we already have many going above and beyond their call to duty to help Aboriginal children be successful in school. What one can say, however, is that we do need more of them, many more.

The competitive hierarchical structure of the schools is foreign to Aboriginal values. "Aboriginal students are alienated from their educational system at a very young age" (Frideres & Gadacz, 2008, p. 119). The fact that the "majority of Aboriginal students in British Columbia are enrolled in provincially operated public schools" (White, 2009, p. 181) would only exacerbate this problem and increase the numbers of Aboriginal learners feeling alienated from their classes and school cultures. George believed that stereotypes were the main factor behind students' tendency to feel alienated from school. He thought that educators could help students by providing "all the proven facts that Aboriginal students all aren't alcoholics and can succeed in school" (George, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

In BC, "the provincial Ministry of Education is responsible for the education of all K-12 students" (White, 2009, p. 181). As of 2006, there were "approximately 565,500" registered in BC's public schools, with just under 10% (approximately 55,000) of them self-identifying as being Aboriginal (White, 2009, p. 181). Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, the

neoliberal policies created to maintain the educational system as it is means that the institution that we call school is now being used “politically, corporately [more and more as educational institutions are forced to become more and more creative to obtain funding, for example, having to reach out to big business], legally, and socially to map out and define roles and relationships.

Schooling and our lives are mapped out to be organized in a particular way to serve the interests of a particular philosophy and ideology... [of] the ruling class” (Hersey, 2003, p. 100). Institutional ideologies are acquired by members as methods of analyzing experiences located in the work process of the institution. Professional training (teacher training in the case of teachers), in particular, teaches people how to recycle the actualities of their experiences into the forms or ways in which they become recognizable within any particular institutional discourse. For instance,

when teachers are in training they learn a vocabulary and analytic procedures that accomplish the classroom in the institutional mode... This ideological package provides a procedure for subsuming what goes on in the classroom under professional educational discourse, making classroom processes observable-reportable within an institutional order (D. E. Smith, 1987, pp. 161-162).

***British Columbia School Act.*** In schools, as in other bureaucratic institutions, “there are codes or rules for participating in power [and these] rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power” (Zimmerman, 2007, p. 115). In this province, school districts have their own policy manuals that regulate and control many of the day-to-day experiences of those attending the school and working there, as well as all those working in their districts (teachers, staff, and administration). On a macro level, these codes and/or rules in British Columbia (BC) are the pieces of legislation created and legitimated by the provincial government in its School Act that control and/or regulate

absolutely everybody's school day by outlining the rights and responsibilities of educators and administrators, school trustees, students, and parents, and so on, regulating everyone by way of textual mediation.

This orchestration is conducted so that the educational system in BC adheres to the wishes of those at the centre holding power. Hersey (2003) reminded us that although these policies are "determined" by the current official government, they are, in fact, a "linked discourse passed from government to government and therefore maintain the imbalance and rules of power" (Hersey, 2003, p. 106). Hersey contended these linked discourses are not meant to create an education system that is equitable because she is of the conviction that

inequality breathes and thrives in school environments... That there is a policy manual dictating acceptable behavior towards multiculturalism and human rights, employment equity, school admittance, teaching plans, operating budgets, acceptable curriculum, etc., indicates that there is inequality in each instance, and that the acceptable solution to the problems is to follow the departmental prescriptive formula. The government approach to schooling is rather to create an environment that maintains and preserves the status quo of the ruling class (Hersey, 2003, p. 106).

Diana experienced this inequality firsthand when she was sent home one day from school after being accused of doing something that she said "she never did" (Diana, personal communication, June 9, 2009). With the help of a videotape, Diana was cleared completely, yet was still sent home. This incident of getting into trouble and being sent home for something she didn't do and, more importantly, something that she had been cleared of doing with the help of a videotape, caused Diana to feel alienated from her school culture for the first time. If she was shown to be innocent, why did her school send her home?

Nieto (1992) contended that schools mirror society at large. If so, does this mean that school personnel look first to Aboriginal students when bad things are done like their counterparts in society do when something is stolen or done, or is this just a coincidence?

Injustices occur all too often to Aboriginal people in society, which helps explain the higher incarcerations rates for Aboriginal peoples. If we look to the late Donald Marshall, an Aboriginal man who spent eleven years in jail for a murder he never committed (Lambie, 2009), we see one example of this. Diane, too, was punished for something she never did. Her only crime was being Aboriginal. Had Diana been a non-Aboriginal student with blonde hair and fair skin, it is highly doubtful that the school administration would have sent her home for something she had already been proven innocent of.

Textual discourses are used to regulate students, their parents, teachers, school administrators, support staff, and anyone else working for the various school districts so that the status quo is peacefully maintained on a provincial basis. This is regulation is accomplished in such a way that those involved never actually see or come to know that all the time and help they are giving to those students in their caseloads needing extra one-on-one support is being used in this way. Though their help does ultimately end up leaving a paper trail that helps the status quo to remain steadfastly in place, educators who help students are seldom aware of how their work connects them to the way that these students eventually get categorized as special needs, at-risk, and so on.

***Duties of teachers.*** The duties of teachers are clearly laid out in the BC School Act, and teachers are expected to fulfill those duties as laid out in the Act. While a teacher's work day is filled with various tasks and responsibilities that have the teachers helping students in non-teaching ways, the teachers' primary responsibilities centre on the "designing, supervising and assessing of educational programs and instructing, assessing and evaluating individual students and groups of students; and performing the 'duties set out in the

regulations” (Ministry of Education, 1996). In other words, while a teacher’s day is full of many other duties, those prescribed by the School Act are given much more importance.

While providing teachers with a guiding hand in terms of what they are expected to do on the job, these educational policies also help produce texts that ultimately assist the ruling relations in maintaining their hegemonic control over school staff and students. This is particularly true for the teachers and students, both of whom are expected to comply with these policies. It is this “action over there,” that is unknowingly created that the ruling relations use to obtain and then maintain the control over various groups; of course, this “doesn’t just happen” but is very much planned to unfold that way (D. E. Smith, 1987, p. 162). The regulations put that planning into action. Excerpts from the BC Ministry of School Regulation School Act reads:

...the duties of a teacher include the following (a) providing teaching and other educational services, including advice and instructional assistance, to the students assigned to the teacher as required or assigned by the board or the minister; (b) ensuring that students understand and comply with the codes of conduct governing their behaviour and with the rules and policies governing the operation of the school; (c) assisting in providing programs to promote students' intellectual development, human and social development, and career development; (d) maintaining the records required by the minister, the board, and the school principal; (e) encouraging the regular attendance of students assigned to the teachers; (f) evaluating educational programs for students as required by the minister or the board (Ministry of Education, 2002).

As can be seen, the duties of a teacher are clearly spelled out and every rule, from encouraging attendance to planning and marking lessons, is expected to be complied with.

***Parents' entitlements and responsibilities.*** Olivos (2007) stated that joining forces on the “school campus is no easy task, for teachers or parents” as the teachers and their administrators already have days overflowing with various tasks that are all vying for their attention; on the other hand, their interactions with parents is one of the most important

aspects to their jobs (Olivos, 2007, p. 61). Unfortunately, these school and parent get-togethers do not always flow smoothly. In spite of this contradiction, most “school personnel tend to view their relationships with parents as distant and professional, void of biases, and always in the ‘best interest’ of children” (Olivos, 2007, p. 61).

Olivos (2007) found that, while the educators felt they were doing everything they could to help bicultural parents feel more useful and welcomed, the bicultural parents were not being extended true opportunities to be meaningful participants in their children’s education but rather opportunities that allowed the parents to help the teachers in the schools, while maintaining a subservient role (Olivos, 2007, p. 61). The relationship between the school personnel and its bicultural parents has been built on a foundation of “economic exploitation and race relations,” which have been “deeply influenced by a broader set of issues that define all relationships in our society between dominant and subordinate social groups” (Olivos, 2007, p. 61).

According to Hersey, the School Act defines the role of parents “using an ungendered, unclassed, and neoliberal language and philosophy” (Hersey, 2003, p. 102). Yet, as Hersey (2003) stated, because many Aboriginal students do not live with their parents, it is important to read the term *care-giver* each time the act states parent (p. 102). Interestingly, in the case of the six participants, each and every one of them lived with their parents (interviews, June 9, 2009). Hersey asserted that this discourse that establishes parenting expectations and differentiates healthy parenting expectations from less healthy, as well as places families who cannot respond equally in the at-risk category, is nothing more than double talk. She stated:

The discourse [is] essentially double-talk that presumes homogeneity, but instead constructs families in a hierarchy of possible compliance defining and point[s] out

those who cannot adhere as 'abnormal', 'vulnerable', or 'at risk.' All 'parents' are to support, encourage, communicate, attend, ensure, and care uniformly, but these demands placed on them further splinter, separate, and fragment an already unequal group (Hersey, 2003, p. 102).

What this Act fails to acknowledge is the fact that many Aboriginal children have grandparents care-giving for them, or are in foster care. The majority of families unable to care for their young have their dysfunction as a direct result of the legacy of residential schools. The legacy continues generation after generation due to the intergenerational pain and trauma that residential school survivors experienced. This intergenerational pain and trauma has been connected to post traumatic stress syndrome, which oftentimes leads to excessive drinking, drug usage and other unhealthy habits (Frideres, 2011, p. 130).

*Legacy of residential schools.* The fact that the residential school survivors were denied normal childhoods, in which children are raised by their families and where they learn to feel safe and also how to parent and to love, resulted in many families that are still incapable of parenting their own children through no fault of their own. Many non-Aboriginals are not aware of this, which is not surprising because very little of the legacy of residential schools is taught in schools. At the same time, there are many teachers in my district who are very much aware of the need for students to learn about the history of these schools. In an attempt to correct the lack of knowledge, these teachers regularly bring Aboriginal cultural facilitators to their classes in an effort to increase student understanding of the legacies residential schools and other issues that Canada's assimilation policies have left.

Residential school history is not one of this country's better known histories. This is problematic, particularly for a country such as Canada that has long prided itself on being multicultural. It was not all that long ago, 2008, that the legacy of residential schools came



to national attention when Prime Minister Harper apologized publicly to the country's Aboriginal people. Not surprisingly, this public, political apology and admission of the guilt of earlier governments and of the church helped educate many on one of Canada's darker secrets.

This history needs to be told to all students so there is more understanding and empathy shown to Aboriginal peoples and so the discourse in schools can change to be inclusive of Aboriginal worldviews and knowledge. Hopefully, the recent Truth and Reconciliation movement will be that connecting piece for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

Indian Residential School history has to be taught in schools so that students whose family members attended residential schools know more about them and what they did to the many children who attended them. Also, so students will know enough about the residential schools to ask their families if members attended them or not. Of the six participants, only four knew with certainty whether their grandparents had attended or not (three had attended); two participants could not say for sure if any of their family members had survived residential school or not (personal communication, June 9, 2009). Students who are unsure as to whether or not their parents or grandparents attended cultural events when they were little or if they spoke their traditional language would be one thing. Being unsure about whether or not their family members attended residential schools, which devastated the lives of so many Aboriginal children and their descendants through intergenerational pain and trauma, leaves a gap in family understanding.

In fact, this discourse often prevents Aboriginal parents from truly being in a helping position for their school-aged children (Frideres, 2011, pp. 84-85). The BC School Act is a

discourse that is so powerful that it can appropriate the power that parents have over their children. This is so because of the hegemony behind government discourse. This discourse helps to keep parents in their places, particularly bicultural parents and those parents who are not living the lifestyles of middle- or upper-class families. Confident they have the power of the act behind them, educators in the schools unknowingly support these defining and inequitable policies. Much like many of their children feel alienated from the classroom discourse, many bicultural parents feel intimidated and alienated from this exclusive educational discourse.

David was one of these alienated Aboriginal students who felt estranged from school. Not always, he said, but enough that he would have to justify it by telling himself everyone feels this way (David, personal communication, June 9, 2012). Through self-talk, David tried to convince himself that it was okay to feel different from others (David, personal communication, June 9, 2012). David attributed his alienation from school culture as being the result of Aboriginal students not being able to feel comfortable being themselves as Aboriginal youth.

*Helping educators.* A problem arises out of the interactions between the everyday school experiences that these Aboriginal students have and the responses of all those dealing with them on a daily basis, including educators, support staff, and administrators, as well as those from other institutions who may be called in to help (for example, the Ministry of Children and Family Development). Problematic sites can be found where those lived experiences of Aboriginal students in schools meet up with helping actions. For example, subsequent conversations, reports, and documentations result from interactions with those who help Aboriginal students at school, as well as with other helping professionals, for

instance, social workers and “social service agencies” that also work with the students (D. E. Smith, 2006, p. 168). Here is where the discourse of *at-risk* students often originates.

What begins as help for these students by caring educators unknowingly ends up on paper and becomes part of a paper trail that is ultimately used as a segregating and regulating tool for those in power, as the ruling relations now have these students segregated and headed towards becoming early school leavers. It is the disjuncture, or new at-risk reality for those students to be labeled as at-risk students as a result of the documentation of their exchange with caring educators.

Now those same students receiving help are classified by those same teachers, counselors, and so on, who have helped them as being at-risk, which informs everyone else that they are less than other students. “[They] truly don't have the skills—social, educational or professional—to be successful in any way. These youths are considered 'at-risk' students; at risk of failing, dropping out, or being expelled because of their behaviour” (Morgan as cited in Hersey, 2003, p. 123).

It is not only the students who can be deemed or classified as being at-risk but their families can also if they do not fit within the modern family construct. In the case of Aboriginal students, many of them are from one-parent families, meaning that these children may be classified as at-risk simply because of their family backgrounds.

In section 7 (2) of the British Columbia School Act there is no allowance afforded for parents who, for whatever reason, feel intimidated coming into our schools because of their own earlier school experiences (Ministry of Education, 1996). Rather, the British Columbia School Act is built on a discourse that presumes that all parents are comfortable in their children's schools and are able to visit them when necessary. Section 7 (1) of the School Act

states parents of school-age children attending school are, first, entitled to be kept informed about their children's habits as they pertain to "attendance, behaviour and progress in school" (Ministry of Education, 1996). If they request it, families have the right to be kept informed of both the school plan for their child's school and the "achievement contract for the school district," as well as given entry to any parents' advisory council established under section 8 and per section 7 (2) and to be included in meetings that they have requested or those set up by the school and/or district that pertain to their child's "educational program" (Ministry of Education, 1996).

*Duties of students.* The BC School Act expects that all students do two things: obediently follow all rules and participate in the educational program. The language is written so as to leave no room for misbehavior or misunderstanding on the part of the student, nor is there room for deviation of any kind from these policies. Children who are school age, that is, between the ages of 5 and 16, need to be in school on a regular basis, and they must adhere to all rules and be in a program offered by the local board. Many Aboriginal learners experience difficulty with all of the school's procedures and regulations. The main reason for this is because most Aboriginal parents traditionally raise their children in an environment where decision-making skills are the norm and are taught and fostered almost from infancy.

Hence, when Aboriginal children first come to school and are expected to follow the rules and allow the adults there to make all the decisions, many experience a cultural clash. As a way of helping alienated Aboriginal students and reducing this cultural clash, Sandra suggested that educators "make an Aboriginal club where there are activities and Aboriginal

speakers to just make Aboriginal students feel more welcome and informed about their culture” (Sandra, personal communication, June, 2009).

Much like their teachers and other district staff, students are also regulated and controlled as they live out their day-to-day school experiences with different expectations. While the teacher’s responsibilities are very clearly set out in the School Act in terms of what curriculum to focus on and what students learn, section 3 (1) also governs the students (Ministry of Education, 1996). First and foremost, students are governed by the regulation that states all children between the ages of 5 and 16 are required to attend school, with no student being able to legally become an early school leaver before sixteen (Ministry of Education, 1996). Indeed, according to the British Columbia School Act, there are two main duties that students are expected to follow: attendance and compliance.

As it does with their parents, the School Act, “places demands on the students, except where the parents had roles and responsibilities, students have duties” (Hersey, 2003, p. 102). The Act lays out, in explicit terms, the duties of parents and their children; the act also clearly prescribes how students must behave in school. A “shift in power” occurs in that “parents have roles and pupils have duties... [T]hese ‘duties’ further splinter, separate and alienate an already unequal group of students, placing those who cannot or do not measure up in those categories which give governments a free hand in their regulation” (Hersey, 2003, p. 102).

Section 6 (1) states a student must comply with all rules set by the school’s administrator or by the principal of the provincial school that the student is going to, as well as that a student must comply “with the code of conduct and other rules and policies of the board or the Provincial school”; it also states that every student attending school must be

registered in an educational program (Ministry of Education, 1996). Following the rules set out by the principal and school staff is not all that difficult for children to abide by. Many students comply, so why, then, do Aboriginal students have such a hard time?

MacIvor (1995) explained how child-rearing practices in Aboriginal families were traditionally more about ensuring the child's sense of autonomy remained untouched. Parents encouraged their children to learn by observation and personal inquiry. "Independent exploration was encouraged and parenting was often characterized by non-interference" (p. 82). The following illustrates:

Children are expected to constantly observe the world around them and learn from it. From this, it can be seen that one does not "teach" a child to learn. This amount of intervention in the child's autonomy would risk forever destroying the child's ability to observe and to learn from his [sic] own motives. The child is encouraged to only seek out knowledge of human experience and skills by being present in the practice of their telling (MacIvor, 1995, p. 82).

According to Darder (1991), Aboriginal students experience a hard time because of the way the rights of bicultural students are being stripped away. Darder (1991) contended that this hegemonic hold on North American "schools results, more specifically, from institutionalized social relations of power that are systematically asymmetrical, and therefore unequally privilege students from the dominant culture over students from subordinate cultures" (pp. 34–35).

Many Aboriginal students do not do well under this rule, and this is where the problematic sites can be found. Here is where the rules and regulations of the ruling relations and its hegemonic power over the day-to-day experiences of these students are exposed by the texts that help to give those at the hegemonic centre the control they need. Institutions such as schools, churches, and media have always assisted this; however, today, more and more, the relations of ruling depend on "common technologies communication and

regulation, control, management and the like,” (Griffith & Smith, 2005, p. 18), mediated by texts and textual technologies, such as “print, film, radio, television, computers, and so on”

(D. E. Smith, 2005, p. 227):

The ruling relations are social forms in which consciousness and agency become objectified and independent of particular people. They have become a medium in which people act and experience and include the phenomena that we know from Michael Foucault’s work as discourse—those distinctive genres of speech and writing, consciously developed and systematically taught, that constitute subjects and order the text-based realities of the ruling relations. They are, it must be stressed, media of action and not merely of regulation and control (Griffith & Smith, 2005, p. 18).

One rule that all schools expect students to comply with is that of attendance.

Students are expected to attend regularly. While many students do, there are many who do not get to school on a regular basis for various reasons, including socioeconomic issues (poverty), race and ethnicity, and socioemotional issues (Romero & Young-Sun, 2007). Of all demographic groups of students, Aboriginal students suffer from more chronic absenteeism and increasingly so as they move up into higher grade levels; although, it is a problem in the earlier grade levels, as well (Romero & Young-Sun, 2007).

The government expects Aboriginal students to be “registered in an educational program” offered by the local school board” (Ministry of Education, 1996). It also expects Aboriginal students to follow all school rules that have been authorized by the “principal of the school or Provincial school attended by the student” and to behave according to the “code of conduct and other rules and policies of the board or the Provincial school” (Ministry of Education, 1996). Textually mediated social organization helps the ruling relations to retain control, but none that are “more effective than those woven tightly into the fabric of classroom curriculum” (Ministry of Education, 1996).

Of all the codes found in BC's School Act and in district policy manuals, curriculum (the province of British Columbia's expectations of what students are expected to learn) is one of the most potent tools the ruling relations use to retain and maintain the status quo. Orłowski (2011) clearly substantiated this when he referred to the formal curriculum in BC as having been "identified as a hegemonic device in creating myopia around, for example, institutionalized and systemic oppression of Canada's Aboriginal peoples" (p. 7).

George stated that if more teachers were teaching all students that Aboriginal students (people) are not drunks or lazy, then stereotypes about Aboriginal people would be disempowered and, by removing that stereotypical power from the equation, more Aboriginal students would be as interested in coming to school to learn each day and staying with it until graduation as non-Aboriginal students are. George was right, for, until the stereotypes are defused and no longer able to harm Aboriginal peoples, understanding will be slow in coming and the academic reality of Aboriginal students will continue to have race-based barriers throughout their school years. This is critical especially when one takes into consideration the duties of students. In virtually every school district in this province, where there are Aboriginal students attending public schools, there are schools and school administrations working hard to find ways to improve on their Aboriginal student absenteeism rate. What they do not realize is that without huge changes to our school system, nothing they can do can force their Aboriginal students to willingly make it to school each day. The stereotypes and lack of understanding that Diana spoke about leaves the students feeling alienated, unwelcome, and silenced. As Whyte (1986) found, "the problem (of classroom silence) lies not with the child but rather is an educational problem of designing a learning setting which is right for the children- in which children feel



comfortable and secure enough to participate” (as cited in Kanu, 2012, p. 70). Aboriginal students would not miss so much school, or fail to take their duties as students (for example, attend school each day and so on) more seriously, when most, if not all, if the schools they attend were not sites of contest where they feel as though they do not belong. Once transformative changes to our education system are realized, this demographic group of students will take their duties as students just as seriously as non-Aboriginal students do.

In my experience, I have not yet seen a First Nations Studies 12 course have more than just a few Aboriginal students registered in it. This could be different in districts where the percentage of Aboriginal students attending school is higher, but in my district, only a few schools offer it. Of 121 high schools in my district, only a couple of them offer the course. It’s a phenomenal course with awesome content and resources but to date, few Aboriginal students have registered in it. Conversely, many non-Aboriginal students have told me how they love the course and wish they could have taken it more than once.

***Hegemonic discourses.*** Hegemony works so well because of how it is created to become virtually “commonsense” to the masses, which is why it is nearly impossible to reveal and fight (Orlowski, 2011, p. 43). Hegemony “shapes how people view life itself through organizing values, rituals, and meaning. Furthermore, hegemonic discourses can eventually become self-fulfilling prophecies” (Orlowski, 2011, p. 43). In Orlowski’s (2011) historical example, he showed how hegemonic discourses can have things appearing as though what’s happening is nothing more than manifest destiny. Such discourses leave the actors of the time, for example the Europeans, looking and even feeling free from any guilt arising from forcibly removing the Aboriginal peoples from their traditional lands and way of life. In actuality, the ruling relations had their hand in everything that was happening.

These hegemonic discourses can have Aboriginal students experiencing difficulties in school and subsequently blaming themselves for not being smart enough or determined enough.

Fortunately, not all Aboriginal learners internalize these hegemonic discourses to that degree and, as some of our participants showed, some appear to have a sense of this connection between their school experiences and the education system. Diana, for example, alluded to it when she spoke about the difficult “process” that Aboriginal students have to go through to finish school as something that non-Aboriginal students do not understand in terms of “how it affects an individual” and justified the school’s Aboriginal room by saying how important it was for Aboriginal students to have a place to go to during the school day when they felt bad or needed to feel safe (Diana, personal communication, June 9, 2009). Similarly, George said that if schools were to teach more about Aboriginal peoples and students, perhaps there would be fewer Aboriginal students experiencing difficulties at school (George, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

Perhaps the participants saw more of this connection between the education system and their educational experience than they led on, for, while not one of the six participants blatantly spoke out against of the education system and/or the barriers to education that many Aboriginal students experience, some of them did make statements that suggested they were cognizant of that connection. And this is a good thing because as Friere (2000) explained, the oppressed must see the problem and more importantly, “recognize its causes,” before they can free themselves from it (p. 47).

As more and more Europeans settled in Canada, Aboriginal lands were more and more needed. Helping to justify the removal of those lands from the Aboriginal peoples were “discourses on capitalism, Christianity, and White supremacy” (Orlowski, 2011, p. 43).

The introduction of “smallpox” and other European diseases took its toll, wreaking “death and destruction upon the original inhabitants to the land” (Orlowski, 2011, p. 43). While the Aboriginal peoples and their way of life were looked to for help during the fur trade, once the fur trade died out and the Europeans no longer needed the peoples’ skills and knowledge of the land, they were suddenly seen as inferior and treated as such (Orlowski, 2011, p. 43).

Within a short time and with the help of the media, “this oppressive process led to increased dysfunction in Aboriginal communities,” which only reinforced the European’s perceived notions of being superior to the Aboriginal people and their way of life. With the fur trade gone, the Aboriginal people were no longer needed and were suddenly in the way of the settlers’ progress (Orlowski, 2011, p. 43). Helping the settlers to justify their actions was the media. As Orlowski (2011) observed:

With the help of newspapers, racist conservatives put increasing pressure on the colonial government to pass legislation to segregate Aboriginal peoples from the “more respectable” all-White Christian neighbourhoods... A few years later the colonial government in British Columbia forced Aboriginal peoples to live on tiny reserves (Orlowski, 2011, p. 43).

Giroux (1981) saw this heavy-handedness of the colonial dominant class or “cultural hegemony” as an example of the dominant settler society or class exerting its control over the state and all of its institutions to obtain control over the natural resources (land, in this instance), “particularly through the use of the mass media and the educational system, to establish its views of the world as all-inclusive and universal” (Giroux as cited in Orlowski, 2011, pp. 43-44). Once this wheel was set in motion, it would not be long before the masses would all come to believe in what came to be referred to as manifest destiny. Manifest destiny was a way of seeing the blatant theft of Aboriginal lands and virtual obliteration of the Aboriginal traditional way of life as a God-given right.

None of the six participants laid the blame on the education system. Only one participant, George (personal communication, June 9, 2009) saw the education system as being responsible for the need for Aboriginal Support Workers in schools or for Aboriginal Rooms, where Aboriginal students can go to feel comfortable with people they quickly learn to trust. Yet, if the education system was a culturally relevant, equitable system, there would be no need for Aboriginal support staff or rooms. Non-Aboriginal students do not have above and beyond support. Why then do Aboriginal students need such an extended level of support?

This is needed because of the dominance of non-Aboriginal people in society and school. No schools that I am aware of have a special room for non-Aboriginal students to go to when they have a need to feel safe or welcomed. Yet, most schools today have such a room for Aboriginal students and that is because the powers that be in these schools and/or in their districts are beginning to recognize how the difficulties that Aboriginal students experience in school can no longer be seen through the lens of the deficits model, whereby the students are seen as the cause of educational failure.

Certainly, as in any demographic group of students, there will be some who are less ambitious, less apt to succeed. However, when the discrepancy between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal students is such that it is virtually two-to-one in terms of graduating within the six-years of beginning grade 8, as it was only a few years ago (see Appendix C), it becomes clear that it cannot be attributed to the students but is more of an institutional issue, one of institutional racism.

Battiste (2013) argued that cognitive imperialism and its educational practices and policies were put in place to ensure that Aboriginal students are educated for their place in

society (p. 162). Defining cognitive imperialism, Battiste (2013) stated that it is a tool of the Eurocentric educational system used to “manipulate” bicultural peoples in such a way as to leave them under the false impression that “their poverty and powerlessness are the result of their cultural and racial origins rather than the power relations that create inequality in a capitalistic economy” (p. 161).

Kanu (2012) saw that “race has been and remains a powerful ideology for legitimizing social and economic inequality between groups with different ancestries, national origins, and histories” (p. 47). The need for Aboriginal rooms as Diana advocated suggests inequality in schools for Aboriginal students. Recounting how one of the social studies teachers that he had interviewed, in his study of Vancouver social studies department heads, attributed the lack of academic success of Aboriginal students to their physiology, blaming “their physical makeup, the business of alcohol, alcohol abuse, substance abuse” (Orlowski, 2011, p. 134). Orlowski (2011) dismissed the teacher’s response as “essentialist racial discourse” (p. 134).

*Eurocentricity.* Nieto (1992) believed that the curriculum in most schools is at “odds” with most students and contends, “if we define curriculum as the organized environment for learning in a classroom and school, we see that it is never neutral but represents what is thought to be important and necessary knowledge” (pp. 73-4). Using curriculum as a “primary means of social control” (Nieto, 1992, p. 74) the ruling relations are guaranteed to have students learn what they want them to learn, as all high school students in BC have to have taken and passed Social Studies 8, 9, 10, and 11 if they are to graduate. In these high school social studies courses, students are taught “quite forcefully” that what is affirmed and valued at home is often contradicted and nullified in their classes in a

curriculum that is “often taught as if it were the whole, unvarnished, and uncontested truth” (Nieto, 1992, p. 74).

Since contact, and particularly ever since the fur trade died out and Aboriginal people were no longer needed to help the Europeans learn to live off the land, non-Aboriginal people have, for the most part, looked down upon Aboriginal ways of knowing and Aboriginal traditional knowledge (Ide, 2003, p. 98). Scorning “whatever the people said as gross, savage superstition,” immigrants insisted that their Eurocentric worldview was the “intellectual achievement of our species” (Ide, 2003, p. 98).

Eurocentricity exists today and is found in our public schools. Eurocentricity is not only in the curriculum, but found in everything students are expected to learn because of how all teachers are expected to teach under its principles (Ide, p. 98). As Ide (2003) aptly showed, far too many of the teachers teaching in our schools view the cultures and background knowledge that Aboriginal students bring with them each day to school as being less than the dominant society’s Eurocentric norm. This negative view acts as an inhibitor to the academic experience of Aboriginal students (Ide, 2003, p. 98).

Coffey and Delamont (2000) affirm that it is this everyday work of the classroom teacher that cannot be “separated from the reproduction, transmission and control of knowledge(s)” (Coffey & Delamont, 2000, p. 29). Teachers know that they hold the key to what is taught, in terms of “what is valid and relevant information,” and how it is presented to students (Coffey & Delamont, 2000, p. 29). As Delamont explains, teachers can be:

...seen as definers of curricula at both explicit and implicit levels; or at least the mechanisms and means through which *the curriculum* is effectively transmitted to students and pupils. Of course, ‘official’ school knowledge taught via a curriculum is only part of the knowledge base that is reproduced and transmitted in the school and in the classroom. Teachers and the school are also vehicles for the reproduction and transmission of social values, knowledge in the realm of personal and social

education, and folk knowledge about social norms such as sex roles and gender relations. Thus the school is the site and teachers the source of multiple knowledge(s) (Coffey & Delamont, 2000, p. 29).

Diana never said anything negative about her schooling. She only mentioned feeling alienated when she was punished for something she was exonerated for by a video camera. Though she had been shown by camera to be innocent, Diana got a taste of racial discrimination when the school administration sent her home for the day. She never mentioned being angry at the system, only alienated. If our education system was less hegemonic and more inclusive and equitable, Diana would have never been sent home. The real culprit might have, but not a girl whose only crime was being Aboriginal. This is not as far-fetched as it may sound, as Aboriginal peoples are over-represented in our jails and prisons (Frideres, 2008, p. 151).

*Meritocracy.* In his study on ten social studies department heads in Vancouver, BC, Orlowski (2011) observed the “dynamic that Aboriginal people have known for a long time, namely, that despite the lofty rhetoric of liberalism around tolerance and equality, Aboriginal students are still at an academic disadvantage at succeeding at high school” (p. 128). With nine out of the ten social studies department heads that he interviewed, Orlowski (2011) found that “almost all of the participating teachers relied extensively on the cultural-deficit discourse to explain why Aboriginal students fare less well in high school” (p. 139). Rather than placing the blame on the system for the difficulty Aboriginal students experience in school, these educators instead chose to place it on the students, as they did with Diana even after the video showed her innocence. The cultural deficit model helps spin the wheels of the discourse of meritocracy.

White liberals, which these teachers would classify themselves as, often rely on the discourse of meritocracy to explain academic and economic disparities rather than

acknowledging white privilege. According to St. Denis and Schick (2003), “[m]eritocracy assumes that power is equally available and distributed, thereby ignoring social, economic, historical, and political conditions... The cultural-deficit discourse ignores all of these conditions, and its usage keeps White privilege from view. These teachers, like many White people, are either “unaware of, or choose to forget, how disadvantage has been constructed historically (Orlowski, 2011, p. 139).

To substantiate this, one need only look to the high-skilled, high-paying jobs to see the extent to which the myth of meritocracy actually continues on this continent insofar as Aboriginal peoples in positions of high skill or power are present in proportion to their numbers in the population base. Certainly, there are Aboriginal people in positions of power, for instance, “well-educated professionals who are advocates, policy-makers, and managers... lawyers, physicians or academics” (Warry, 2009, p. 117); however, the percentage in such positions is minute in comparison to the percentages of non-Aboriginal peoples in those same positions. How is this so? In schools, initially, as Ide pointed out:

...it is the task of the Anglo educator to remove Indian [Aboriginal] culture from the student, then fill the void with Anglo culture that would permit Indian children to benefit from schooling. Whether or not the Indian child is ‘culturally deprived’ is debatable, and the decision depends upon one’s definition of culture and understanding of deprivation; but the fact that he or she begins his or her formal education with a cultural heritage which differs appreciably from that of the schools’ administrators, policy makers, and teachers cannot be doubted. This cultural barrier is a difficult one to surmount and many fail to make it (2003, p. 98).

Because of this cultural divide, many Aboriginal students are forced to walk in two worlds, the one they leave each morning when they leave home for school and where they are comfortable and that other world where, once at school, almost everything is different, from the classroom discourse to the dialect that they speak. While other students are learning the lessons, many Aboriginal students are busy just trying to learn the new ways of this other world that they have become part of. It isn’t easy to walk two worlds and as stated above, many do not graduate.



As Diana stated, she occasionally felt alienated at school and needed a safe and welcoming place to go to during those times. While she didn't say exactly what it was in the Aboriginal room that made her feel better there or why she advocated for future Aboriginal students to utilize the Aboriginal room and support services in place at the school, it makes sense that what is different in that room compared to all other rooms in the school is that the Aboriginal room is a place where Aboriginal identity is not only accepted but affirmed, be it people, culture, traditions, issues, and so on. As earlier studies have made clear (for example, Garrett, 1996), many Aboriginal students have an exceedingly difficult time trying to walk in two worlds, with one foot in the non-Aboriginal world while at school and the other foot in their Aboriginal world when not in school. For those who find that walk in two worlds impossible, the promise of meritocracy proves empty.

*Curriculum.* While most, if not all, K-12 teachers in British Columbia would like to believe they have some professional autonomy in terms of using their professional expertise in deciding what and how they will teach their students each year, the fact is, their professional autonomy is always situated within certain governmental boundaries set out by the BC government in its provincial curriculum, more commonly referred to as Prescribed Learning Outcomes (PLOs). The PLOs clearly outline what the government expects students to “know and be able to do at each grade and within each subject area” (Ministry of Education, Curriculum).

Many teachers over the years have told me that they do not teach by conscientiously following the prescribed learning outcomes (PLOs), rather they do their jobs intuitively, having learned the PLOs when starting out. Now that they *know* their curriculum well enough, they are able to teach their subjects without resorting to the PLOs and reading them.

This is where their local, day-to-day teaching experiences become a part of the trans-local discourse equation.

As each of the teachers participate and do their day-to-day jobs, interacting with one another and with the texts and filling out forms, documents, reports, and IEP files on the students, they each become agents in this trans-local discourse. One way that teachers become agents in this discourse is through the curriculum. Teachers' professional autonomy affords them the prerogative to decide how much of any ministry-prescribed curriculum they will teach, but they must nevertheless adhere to those PLOs that the Ministry of Education expects them to teach. They must also know the topics that they are teaching, which is where bias can be evident.

While social studies teachers will all have learned about the explorers, the Canadian government, and westward expansion, they would have all learned about those things from a Eurocentric perspective. At what point in their academic careers would they come to have a deep understanding of the impact of settler contact in terms of treaty issues, assimilation policies, the legacy of residential school, and the historical issues connected to Aboriginal self-government? Would teachers acquire a deep enough understanding for them to be able to help their students in understanding these issues and in being able to think critically about them?

This is not an unreasonable question to ask when one looks at the grade 11 social studies PLOs (Ministry of Education, 2005) and sees how the expectations of what students will learn all pertain to them being able to demonstrate their knowledge of the "challenges faced by Aboriginal people in Canada during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and their responses, in reference to residential schools, reserves, self-government, treaty negotiations" (Ministry of

Education, 2005). But how is this possible if, as Orlowski (2011) stated, of the ten social studies educators that he studied all “were not only members of the dominant society,” but also all were living the life that comes with being in one of the most privileged groups in Canada: middle-aged, middle-class, white, males (p. 134).

Orlowski (2011) explained that their backgrounds and privileged lives were most certainly a contributing factor, if not the main factor, behind how these teachers perceived the educational issues that many Aboriginal students experience. Additionally, “all of them went to high school in British Columbia. The crucial hegemonic strategy that they were subjected to in high school was one of omission-very few students in this province have learned about Aboriginal cultures or history” (Orlowski, 2011, p. 134). There is hope on the horizon, however, as new teachers coming out of provincial teacher training programs are being introduced to Aboriginal issues, and that’s a start. What is much more needed, however, is the same introduction to Aboriginal history at the public school level so that everyone has some background knowledge of this province’s Aboriginal history.

It is here where things begin to become somewhat clearer in terms of the curriculum used to retain the status quo. It is here also where most bicultural students have an exceedingly difficult time, if not an impossible time, finding themselves or their families and cultures represented in their textbooks or in the “curriculum to which they are exposed” (Nieto 1992, p. 76). When the students do see themselves represented in their textbooks, it is usually through the non-Aboriginal perspective, which is often very much distorted (Nieto, 1992, p. 76) and which, as Warry (2009) contended, can impact their senses of themselves and play havoc with their identities (pp. 102-103). According to the student data, four out of six participants are in families that celebrate their Aboriginal culture by participating in

community events or dance groups or drumming groups. In this study, only four participants answered affirmatively when asked if their families participated in cultural events (Katie, George, Diana, & David, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

Research has shown how the “inappropriateness of the school curriculum to the lives of children alienates many students” (Battiste, 2013, p 106; Nieto, 1992, p. 75; & Warry, 2009, pp. 102-103). One American study in a junior high school found that even though the school was diverse, the majority of teachers in that school were still teaching to the old canon: a Eurocentric curriculum. Again, George made mention of what he has noticed about his school curriculum being full of stereotypes about Aboriginal peoples. He was wise enough to know what it would take to help more Aboriginal being more successful in school. If George, who was in his graduation year, could see the issue and know how to fix it, why is it that the educational system, which has been in place for generations, cannot seem to?

A Eurocentric curriculum would only interest those from the dominant culture, for example, those with a European-based, middle-class heritage because that is the student demographic group that this system was created for. “The researchers concluded that if the students, based on their home experiences, thought that cultural diversity was valuable, they learned in school that it was not as valuable as the dominant culture” (Nieto 1992, p. 75). This discovery is what is happening each day in school to our Aboriginal children. Their identities are being played with and harmed and their ability to function at their full potential gravely affected.

The fact that two of the six participants (one-third) felt alienated at school suggests this. George also argued that fewer Aboriginal students would need the Aboriginal room or support offered at the school if more teachers would teach more about Aboriginal people and

students. Again, due to having a Eurocentric educational system, very little in the curriculum pertains to Aboriginal people, cultures, histories, etc. George was absolutely right.

Substantiating this are the many studies that have shown that achievement climbs when a culturally responsive teaching approach is offered (Gay, 2010, p. x; Nieto, 2010; and Warry, 1997).

**Textbooks.** In the United States, the history textbooks have left out the forced removal of thousands of Native American people from their homelands (Rains, 2003); likewise, in this province, history textbooks often conceal similar facts that would tarnish our province's history (Orlowski, 2011). This omission, according to Orlowski (2011), is an intentional "crucial hegemonic strategy," (p. 134), whereby the ruling relations intentionally exclude Aboriginal cultures or history, and is part of "the institutional and systemic forms of racism Aboriginal peoples have been subjected to in the name of progress and nation-building" (Orlowski, 2011, p. 134). "Missing from such a stereotypical and narrow portrayal is the Native struggle, past and present, for 'Homeland Defense' to protect their Homelands from invasions" (Rains, 2003, p. 202).

Given the regulations and policies found in the School Act, as shown above, Aboriginal children have to attend regularly and attend even their social studies classes, where their young sense of self is being attacked by non-truths and by omission. Aboriginal histories, issues, and cultures are completely left out of the curriculum. Aboriginal children feel alienated from their schools and classes when their cultures, histories, and knowledge are so devalued in school that they are not even mentioned. Because this "banking concept of education," as Friere (2000) coined it, is so far removed from students' lives or realities, students end up feeling alienated from their learning (as cited in Battiste, 2013, p.106).

In this framework, youth receive an education in which the teacher talks about reality as it if were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he or she expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students. His/her task is to “fill” the students with the contents of his narration- contents that are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance (Battiste, 2013, p. 106).

Granted, there are some authors today providing students with more authentic accounts of Aboriginal life, histories, cultures, issues, and so on; but, for the most part, those authors are not in our high schools. Children, including Aboriginal children, all across this continent are still being taught incomplete information, as the text by Cranny & Moles (2001) substantiated throughout; while Aboriginal people are in the text, the information is incomplete. One example of this is to be found on page 12, where Aboriginal peoples from 1876 to 1913 and the topics of reserves, farming, smallpox, assimilation, and residential schools are covered in three short paragraphs, leaving out all of the details. Keeping all of this out of the books that students are expected to learn from is giving them only a part of the story, and we wonder why Aboriginal children, many of whom would have heard their families versions of these issues, do not read these school books or attend their classes? Yet, due to the School Act (Ministry of Education, 1996), Aboriginal children are absolutely expected to be at school each and every day. Is it surprising to hear that many do not attend regularly? Would you attend a school where everything about your family, your community, and your way of being was either downplayed each day in the books you had to read or, worse, completely left out and that left you feeling as invisible as the spirit world is to human eyes?

In BC, all students taking Social Studies 8 have been prescribed to learn all about ancient societies, such as Egypt, Rome, China, and Africa. While learning about these culturally rich and ancient societies must be very interesting for these students, the question

that begs asking is why are BC students being prescribed to learn all about foreign, ancient societies? This province has its very own ancient societies and societies that are far, far older than the ones currently being taught. It is now common knowledge that Aboriginal cultures have been here, on this land, for thousands of years (Rains, 2003, p. 204). Why, then, are BC students expected to learn about these faraway ancient societies when this province has its own First Nations peoples who claim that their histories go back to Time Immemorial, which means always here. Why don't our BC students get to learn about our own First cultures? Why are the students being taught about other ancient cultures that are so far away and irrelevant to students' lives here in BC?

This question applies particularly to Aboriginal students. It would be their ancestors that the grade 8 classes would be studying. If they were allowed to study Aboriginal ancient societies, this would make the curriculum exceedingly relevant to them. As Gay (2010) argued, studying culturally responsive curriculum would raise student interest levels while dramatically improving student learning (p. 164). Would those learners not be more engaged and less likely to skip classes if they were studying about Aboriginal people?

It is the provincial government that funds the purchasing of school resources (for example, textbooks) and prescribes what students of British Columbia will learn. What are the reasons behind the provincial Ministry of Education mandating Prescribed Learning Outcomes that all grade 8 students in BC will learn about other ancient societies when the province has its very own Aboriginal ancient societies to study?

If grade 8 students were to study local, ancient Aboriginal societies, it could prove disconcerting, given past and (not so long ago) provincial policies and actions towards Aboriginal peoples. Could the reason that BC children are expected to study ancient Chinese,

Roman, and African societies when they have their own ancient societies to learn about be so they do not begin to question certain policies? To question policies that have been part and parcel of BC's history from when BC was still a colony and policies that are overtly discriminatory and racist towards Aboriginal people.

Textbooks are a critical component of the curriculum found in most schools because they reinforce the “dominance of the European American perspective and sustain stereotypes of any group perceived to be outside the mainstream. When it is an Aboriginal child reading those pages, it isn't the words that cut as much as the message they all get, which can be deadly to their educational goals” (Warry, 2009, p. 102). Aboriginal children do not enter school with a plan to fail. Most kindergarten students arrive at school with the excitement of the unknown. Aboriginal students do not fall through the cracks as soon as they get to school; indeed, it is only after a few years of being there that the messages continually being sent to them via their textbooks, their classroom discourses, their teachers and their schools become clear enough for them to actually understand their position in school and society. School textbooks play a big role in the disheartening discovery that these elementary students endure. As Warry (2009) argued, when young students read textbooks that portray their culture negatively, it affects them adversely, possibly causing them to experience personal identity crises (p. 102).

David was clear about what he felt the role of teachers is in terms of Aboriginal students. According to David, he said teachers should not have to do anything extra for Aboriginal students as it “is not their place” (David, personal communication, June 9, 2009). Yet, if textbooks are as harmful as the authors above described, and for Aboriginal students, they are, as many studies have shown (Kanu, 2012; Battiste, 2013; Orlowski, 2011), David



does not understand the power behind the formal curriculum in which textbooks play a major role.

***Teacher autonomy.*** While teachers have some choice insofar as what they teach their students and how they teach it, their day-to-day professional experiences are somewhat confined to those PLOs and, indeed, even regulated by them. If the administration found that they were not teaching the standards that the BC Ministry of Education set out for the students of this province to learn, those teachers could be reprimanded. As D. E. Smith (1987) stated, “the curriculum sets definite objectives for each grade level. It therefore organizes the internal articulation of school classrooms from year to year” (p. 197).

The objectives that the curriculum is setting out are anything but equitable. As shown above, one doesn’t have to look at too many grade level examples to see how the curriculum as set out by the BC Government, both past and current, is for White, middle-class, European Canadian students. The main contention Nieto (2002) has with curriculum is with its power to either “enable or handicap students in their learning” (p. 133). How does it enable or handicap? The formal curriculum does this to Aboriginal students by being “partial, fragmented, alienating, and disrupting to the inner wholeness that their education trajectory has been” (Battiste, 2013, p.163).

When a student comes to school with a background from the dominant society, he or she is already ahead of those students coming to school with a bicultural background. Ahead not only in terms of background knowledge, which definitely helps dominant students get and remain ahead, but also because background knowledge helps keep them feeling connected to their learning, their classes, and to their teachers. Conversely, when bicultural students get to class, oftentimes, there are many things they have to get used to during class

time. This can automatically change their focus and put them behind their non-bicultural peers without the discordant background.

When teachers ignore the cultural backgrounds of their students' lives and/or their cultural ways of being, thinking, and doing, it can and often does leave their students with a disempowered sense of identity, which results in the alienation from their classes and school cultures, and the resultant lack of motivation, which presents as decreased academic success (Battiste, 2013, p. 106; Gay, 2010, p. xviii; Nieto, 2002, p. 133). These texts that the government makes provincial teachers teach, via the powers of the School Act, are there to ensure that the teachers teach only that which the government officials want the students to learn. The curriculum that is prescribed has very little to do with First Nations history at all. It is a sterile version of B.C. history that has been conveniently written with a selective memory that has virtually left much of our history completely out of the curriculum.

Much like their students, teachers also must comply with the school act and teach as they are instructed to teach. Their teacher autonomy only applies to the how and in what order they will teach their curriculum and to not what is taught. While they may resist the powers that regulate them, much like the students oftentimes resist their regulators, the teachers nevertheless have to do as expected. As D. E. Smith (2001) explicated, however, it is exactly here at this site of the problematic that Aboriginal students begin to feel alienated from their classrooms and schools, for it is here where the real regulating takes place: in the curriculum, an invisible controlling agent supported by those holding the power. The students are innocent in this interaction that is connecting them and their daily school lives to what the ruling relations have intentionally organized. It is only after someone has pointed this out to the participating parties that they come to see how they were a part of this

institutional drama. Everything becomes much clearer when it is looked at in hindsight. It is this hindsight that institutional ethnography affords the researcher to contribute to and pass along to her/his inquiry participants.

D. E. Smith (1987) reminded us classrooms must be regarded as “a work organization” because of how students’ problems in their classrooms are connected and even “attributed to this ‘background’ effect” (p. 173). D. E. Smith (1987) saw the classroom as a place in which the organization of work provides a “different basis of investigation than viewing the classroom, say, in terms of the teacher’s expectations or in terms of interpersonal interaction or role structures (p. 173). In this place of work for students, they are expected to do just that—read their textbooks and work as instructed. Many Aboriginal students find it distressful to be told to read things that either leave them out or have them represented by inaccuracies or untruths.

In my day, the Aboriginal people that I was forced to read about in grade nine were portrayed as violent savages, called barbarians, and described as uncivilized people who scalped those they fought with (or in many other degrading stereotypical ways). I detested social studies. In looking back, I can now see why. Today, it is different. You won’t find those types of descriptions in new social studies textbooks, nor will you find any historical data on why reserves were really needed or why those same reserves were reduced in size many times over, even after having signed treaty documents (Rains, 2003, p. 203). In that respect, public school high school textbooks have improved somewhat since I was in public school, however, the textbooks in our public schools continue to shed little light on the historical aspects of Canada’s racist past, nor do they allow the reader anything close to an in-depth accurate account of this province’s history as it pertains to Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal peoples have been consistently either relegated to being only in the distant past or as “two-dimensional savages” (Rains, 2003, p. 202). When students begin to hear about Aboriginal people, it is usually starting with the year 1492, as if Aboriginal people did not exist before Columbus (Rains, 2003, p. 204). The hegemony is so powerful and pervasive that “most non-Indians do not consciously consider that Indians ‘had’ history before the coming of the White man” (p. 204), but as Rains (2003) explains:

Native people have existed on this land for more than 20,000 years... even if one begins with a more conservative estimate of 10,000 years ago that is more than 10 millennia- not ten centuries, but *more than* 100 centuries ago- it is long before ‘Europe’ was even a twinkle on the political landscape. Native history here on this land existed long before the Great Pyramids of Egypt or the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Yet, to begin American history with 1492, and to relegate the longer history of Natives here to ‘prehistory,’ as if they existed outside the boundaries of human history, denies their sustained stewardship of the ecological balance and cultural relationship with this land mass for more than 9,500 years. Being relegated to ‘prehistory’ ignores the laws and social, political and cultural institutions ‘which maintained the peace within a given Native Nation, without courts, police officers and prisons (Rains, 2003, p. 204).

This clearly shows how Aboriginal cultures have been swept aside and left out of the official knowledge and explains why it is that relatively little of Aboriginal ways of being are found in school textbooks.

Frideres and Gadacz (2008) found that the curriculum and its way of purposefully excluding Aboriginal cultures, histories, ways of knowing, and religions, and so on, negatively affects their identities as Aboriginal children by leaving them feeling invisible and excluded from their classes and schools (p. 119). They argued that the curriculum and the texts used to teach it are having a damaging impact on the personal development of Aboriginal children (Frideres & Gadacz, 2008, p. 119). As “Kardiner and Ovesey (1951) found, people to whom negative traits are continually assigned will eventually begin to incorporate them into their identities. Someone who is continually called inferior will

eventually believe it to be true” (as cited in Frederes & Gadacz, 2008, p. 119). In our study, George substantiated this succinctly when he said that educators can help their students overcome feelings of alienation by providing them with “all the proven facts that Aboriginal students aren’t alcoholics and can succeed in school” (George, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the focus has been on analyzing the student data and seeing through the lens of institutional ethnography to what degree the students’ academic and school experiences have been impacted and invisibly controlled by the ruling relations. These translocal discourses include the hegemonic power found in school, the legacy of colonization, the BC Educational System, the School Act and its policies and regulations, parents’ entitlements and responsibilities, the duties of teachers, the legacy of residential schools, the duties of students, hegemonic discourses, meritocracy, the curriculum, textbooks, and teacher autonomy. While all of these discourses carry enough power to adversely impact the academic and school experiences of Aboriginal students, none have quite the same power, both hidden and otherwise, to exert over them that curriculum has.

## Chapter Six: Discussion

I am an optimist in that I see great transformative possibilities in the role of the school, especially in the... classroom. To claim neutrality by teaching strictly to the formal curriculum cannot be mistaken for being objective. This level of naivety is unacceptable. We need to have the blinders removed so that hegemony can be understood on a very deep level. It is imperative that all teachers entering the field... understand one very important axiom: *all teaching is political* (Orlowski, 2011, p. 204).

### Introduction

Using the lens of institutional ethnography, this study examined the main supportive factors behind six Aboriginal graduating high school students. To obtain student data, open-ended, interview questions were given to each of the participants. As soon as the student answers were collected, summarizing was begun by the researcher. Once the summarizing was completed, analysis of the data was begun.

### Themes

Institutional ethnographers sometimes employ the methodological path of coding in search for themes. Some institutional ethnographers may turn to coding in an effort to pinpoint the primary themes found in the data (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). This was the case in this study. From the coding and subsequent analysis of the participant data, three themes soon became apparent in this study: self, connections, and disconnections.

**Self.** One of the three main themes that emerged from the data after several readings was the theme of self. All of the participants saw their educational experiences either to their credit, as Katie did, when she stated her academic success could be attributed to her “will to become something” and her drive (Katie, personal communication, June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2009), or conversely, as their fault, their doing when not successful

None of the participants spoke negatively about their schooling experience or about any systemic or hegemonic barriers being strategically placed on their educational paths because of their Aboriginal heritage. This became apparent near the end of the survey when some of the students spoke first about feeling alienated at school and later, when they were speaking to future students about being successful in school. Diana came close to however, when she justified the need for the Aboriginal room and how it was utilized by Aboriginal students needing cultural and/or academic support. Arguing how non-Aboriginal students do not understand what it entails to be an Aboriginal student in a public school where the majority of students are non-Aboriginal, Diana spoke to alienation when she said, “people not understanding the whole process and how it affects an individual” (Diana, personal communication, June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2009). Indirectly approaching the real issue, that of being Aboriginal in a non-Aboriginal school, Diana comes close to addressing that issue when she names it a “process” (Diana, personal communication, June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2009). Irrespective of the name she gives her experiences in school as an Aboriginal student, the message of what she is saying is not lost.

Aside from Diana speaking about the process, the participants saw school failure as the fault of the Aboriginal students. I was completely taken aback by this because I assumed that most, if not all, of them would have seen through the system that they are inside and acknowledged that a lot of the negative school outcomes and educational failures that many Aboriginal students experience were due more to the negative barriers mentioned in Chapter Two: Literature Review (for example, the legacy of colonization, assimilation, and residential schools, bicultural identity conflicts, and racism and discrimination). Instead of being resentful of the non-Aboriginal educational system and its discriminating treatment of its

Aboriginal students, all of the participants stressed individual stamina, self-determination, attitude, and self-confidence levels as the determining factors needed by all students need if they wanted to succeed. This substantiates what others have found (Campbell & McGregor, 2004), in that those involved in social relations are seldom aware of exactly how their day-to-day actions are actually being “socially organized” (p. 44). In this study, none of the participants spoke to the connection between their daily school interactions with helping educators and the hegemonic, system.

This became evident both when the participants indirectly spoke about feeling alienated in school and when they gave advice to future Aboriginal students that academic success as individuals requires perseverance or having the stamina to stay in school long enough to graduate. Not one of the participants saw the educational barriers they encountered as being connected to the system itself. The lens of institutional ethnography helps “us obtain a deeper understanding of those factors behind the ‘conditions’ of those socially organized lives and ‘map them’ ” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 17).

### **Connections**

Various connections in the daily school experiences of the six participants were illuminated in this study. Not all of the participants felt connected to their parents. Not all of the participants felt connected to their teachers or Aboriginal support workers at school, though, some did.

***Parents.*** In looking closely at the data, there is a difference between the number of times Katie credited her parents with being her biggest supportive factors and the number of times the other five participants credited their parents. For example, there is a two-to-one difference between the responses from Katie and George and a six-to-one difference between



David and Katie's numbers. The lower frequency at which the other parents were mentioned by their children and the frequency in Katie's response, suggests that Katie's parents, both of whom are university graduates, may have been consistent in showing her their respect for our education system. She has a very positive attitude about education, as well as about her educational needs, what she plans to do, and how she has always been on track in terms of planning for her future in "neurology" (Katie, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

Katie stated her parents have always supported her academic aspirations and "were always a constant" for her in her "short life" (Katie, personal communication, June 9, 2009). Katie added how, since she was young, she "knew" she would go on to "post-sec" and fulfill her "dreams and aspirations" (Katie, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

***Friends.*** While most of the participants credited friends with helping them to remain in school long enough to graduate, some did not. Sandra did not mention any friends as being a supporting factor in her success. Conversely, David mentioned his friends being very helpful in keeping him focused and in school. In terms of academic success, he mentioned his extended family four times as being there for him as his secondary support in the family or friends category. While one credited parents as the biggest support system, the other participant stated the biggest support system came from friends.

In some ways, Katie had a more supportive background than the other participants based on her responses to the questions and the self-confidence and strength her answers suggested. Katie's solid determination to become educated so that she may follow her passion (neurology) suggests she is likely to continue on to university. Katie does not have any friends who were supporting factors in her remaining in school but noted how her grandfather was definitely her secondary support.

With regards to the main focus of this study, identifying the primary support systems behind the six graduating Aboriginal participants, the data has shown the parents in each case are the main supporting factor in their children remaining in school through graduation. This has shown to be true in this study, even for the participant who credited his parent's negative ways of being as the main influence in helping him to stay in school and graduate with friends. These findings affirm the importance of parents in their children's educational experiences.

*Caring teachers.* The participants' answers did not form much of a pattern in terms of having connections with teachers. Early on in my analysis when I was thinking about themes, I contemplated naming one theme "caring teachers" because of how often the topic came up. However, in the end and due to the overall lack of evidence showing the connections between the participants and their teachers, I had to change my mind and keep caring teachers as a sub-heading under themes. In fact, only two participants felt they had a strong connection with one or more of their teachers. In her seven year study with Native American students, Deyhle (1992) found that "learning involves a trust relationship" (p. 116). Trust takes time and if students are not connecting to their teachers, there isn't the opportunity to work on building trust.

While four participants felt that they had shared a connection to any of their teachers or felt that their teachers had helped them in any way to remain in school long enough to graduate, two participants, Sandra and David, were both very grateful to some of their teachers for having helped them be successful in school. Research studies (Nieto, 1992) have shown in "case after case, students remembered those teachers who had affirmed them, whether through their language, their culture, or their concerns. Teachers who called on their

students' linguistic skills or cultural knowledge were named most often" (Nieto, 1992, p. 242). Sandra thanked one of her teachers, Mr. Minnick (pseudonym), for motivating her to finish her "grad transitions" and Mr. Brown (pseudonym) for having "put up with her" (Sandra, personal communication, June 9, 2009). David, the other participant to feel a connection with a teacher, actually credited three "very committed" teachers "who made learning and doing the coursework through their genuine willingness to help and explain things to you" (David, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

***Caring support staff.*** Four of the participants also credited their school's Aboriginal Support Workers with helping them to stay on track academically through graduation. Not all of the participants felt they shared a connection of any kind with the Aboriginal Support Workers. Of the six participants, four felt they did, and two did not feel any connection. The two participants not feeling any special connection to the school's Aboriginal Support Workers were Katie and Timothy. Of the six participants, these two participants represent the one with the strongest answers and attitude towards education and the participant with the briefest and least completed answers. Neither student sensed a connection to their Aboriginal Support Workers.

Katie's answers were all lengthy and displayed self-esteem and self-confidence, while Timothy's came back with the fewest answers and those questions that were answered, were completed in an exceedingly terse style. Their response styles came across as being on opposite ends of a spectrum, but the similarity of this experience was apparent.

### **Disconnections**

This research study examined the connection between the local, lived experiences of the participants and their interactions with the various helping educators and staff members

in their schools. Through investigating the translocal discourses and the impact they had on the participants, the controlling influence of the ruling relations has been exposed. In so exposing those translocal discourses, patterns of impactful disconnections arise, academic barriers that hinder the academic path of a certain demographic of students; in particular, many Aboriginal students.

***Racism.*** As noted above, two of the six participants felt alienated at school. Put differently, one-third of the six participants felt alienated from their schools and classroom experiences. Does this mean that these two students did not have any caring teachers in their academic career? No, not necessarily as two participants spoke about their connections to caring teachers and one participant, David, had three caring teachers that he felt connected to. If cross racial connections, as experienced by Aboriginal students as having caring teachers, helps Aboriginal students to remain in school, then the solution is simple: more teachers in our system with a deep understanding of Aboriginal issues, histories, cultures, and so on, as well as a strong sense of empathy for their Aboriginal students. Since only two of six participants mentioned feeling connected to caring teachers, however, does that suggest that the racism in schools that Cannon & Sunseriès (2011) described be present in our schools as well (p. ix)? There have been three types of racism found in our schools, including individual, systemic, and institutional.

For “structural inequality theorists, historically produced social structural conditions create the current difficulties in educational advancement for American Indian students” (Deyhle, 1992). In Deyhle’s seven year study on Navajo and Ute Native American students, she found that racism basically represented a “constructed model of assimilation” that has been used by those in the mainstream of society and with power to structure and maintain

political and economic control over the Native American community (Deyhle, 1992). It is no different in Canada for Aboriginal peoples as Battiste (2013) explains, “racism continues to remain integral to constructed Canadian consciousness, enforced by education and governments, and entrenched in public media. Canada remains a racist society” (p. 135). If racism and discrimination are so entrenched in society, then it is possible that two of the main barriers to Aboriginal students having successful school experiences are racism and discrimination and the producers of those alienating feelings that many Aboriginal students experience.

Deyhle (1992) found that there was a strong correlation between students remaining in school and having good relationships with their teachers (p. 101). A superintendent she interviewed told her how some of their senior teachers held “traditional views of Indians” (Deyhle, 1992, p. 101). He told her how “wiping the slate clean of these teachers would help the Indian students” because he explained, their Indian students learn quickly “which teachers don’t like them and avoid them,” (Deyhle, 1992, p. 101). As Battiste (2013) stated, the oppressive results of this racism find their way into “differences in school outcomes, in employment and education rates, as well as in levels of poverty, incarceration, social maladjustments, and suicide” (p. 127).

Battiste (2013) argued that racism “is more than race hatred or prejudice; it is about power to oppress and subordinate. It is the structural subordination of one group in society based on the idea of racial inferiority that establishes a hierarchical power relationship” (p.138). While none of our participants came out and said anything about racism or being treated discriminately Diana was treated unfairly after being proven innocent. This kind of racism exists in this school. The other participants may not have noticed it or perhaps they

did and not wanting to look different or stand out, were scared to do anything but remain quiet about it? These feelings of alienation that our participants experienced could also be due to sociocultural and political factors.

L. Smith (1999) stated generations of “abuse, neglect and viciousness [were] meted out to young children by teachers and staff in schools run by various religious denominations,” for example, residential schools (p. 69). L. Smith (1999) argued that these residential schools were supported by a “paternalistic” government with “racist policies” and “legislation,” and affected the people not only physically but also emotionally, linguistically, and culturally, as well (p. 69).

As Warry (2009) explained, this neglect can have an exceedingly detrimental effect on children and adults alike because “when children see negative images of their culture in school texts, or when as adults they experience racism or discrimination or when their culture is denigrated or marginalized, they can feel unworthy, embarrassed, humiliated, or enraged” (Warry, 2009, p. 102). Within this system, only those who *get* that official knowledge (that is, those who were born into the dominant society), are born with the key to that secret, hidden, official knowledge that outsiders (read most bicultural people) are not often privy to (Apple, 2000). St. Denis (2011) asserted:

Racism in Canada has ensured a mostly negative schooling experience for Indigenous children, not only through stereotyped and racist teachings about Aboriginal peoples, but also what was offered as schooling through residential schools and what is offered in integrated public schooling today (St. Denis, 2011, p. viii).

***Hegemony & the ruling relations.*** Due to the hegemonic weight of colonialism and its production of official knowledge, which has been cleverly utilized to keep the status quo moving along uninterrupted by its use of systemic and institutionalized racism (Apple, 2000), far too many Aboriginal parents find themselves on the outside looking in at a system that

virtually excludes them and has their children in its schools questioning their identities and internalizing a hatred for their Aboriginal heritage (Warry, 2009, pp. 101-103).

*Institutional ethnography.* With institutional ethnography, when one is wanting to obtain a genuine understanding of the ruling relations within educational institutions (in this instance, how the ruling relations connect up with and impact the lived educational experiences of Aboriginal students), one needs to examine the day-to-day experiences—both during school and out of school because "everywhere in our daily and nightly lives there is social organization in which we participate without much conscious thought" (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p.29). This can be seen in the way that the participants did not appear to notice the ways in which their daily school lives are interwoven and organized by invisible means.

It is only through the lens of institutional ethnography that researchers are able to gather specific examples of exactly how students are affected by the power relations in society and in their schools. While the participants may in fact be the experts in terms of their lives, they are also situated within those lives and in local sites and are often not able to see how the ruling relations (translocal discourses) both shape and control their actual lived experiences. The six graduating Aboriginal students in this study evidently did not see the hegemonic hold upon their daily school experiences. None of the students mentioned anything about school not being the equalizer that most educators see it as. Not one of the participants saw through the hegemonic hold that the education system has over them and their futures. Indeed, school was promoted by the participants. Of the six, only two—Diana and David—felt alienated at school. Translocal discourses detrimentally impact the academic and school experiences of Aboriginal students. Those holding institutional power use that

power such that Aboriginal students are disempowered in much the same way as those institutions deprive Aboriginal students' families and communities of power (Cummins, 2001, p. 180).

It was the objective of this study to examine the supports behind the six graduating Aboriginal students and their academic success. As is often the case, to get the good, one must also deal with the less than ideal of any situation. So it was with this study, in that, while the supporting factors were found, so, too, were the hegemonic, systemic barriers in the academic lives of Aboriginal students. This study did not elicit the results I was expecting in terms of academic success and school alienation, academic barriers, cultural connections, and strong identities. The sites of interest that were viewed through the lens of institutional ethnography in this inquiry were the local sites "where life is lived and actually experienced by actual people and the extra- or trans local discourse that is outside the boundaries of one's everyday experiences" (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p.29).

Diana was an example of how those interacting in social relations never really get to see them for what they are. Diana felt alienated at school after being cleared of something that she had wrongly been accused of. Instead of being offered an apology for being accused of something she never did and that a videotape of the incident proved she did not do, she was sent home for the day. Thus, Diana felt alienated from her school after such a discriminating punishment, yet she only felt alienated that one time. The important question is why didn't she see that incident for what it was, discrimination, and come to see her positionality at school? Interestingly, only two of the six participants mentioned feeling alienated at school.



While a number of participants recommended the Aboriginal room for Aboriginal students who experience alienation, for the most part, the participants did not comment about this hegemonic hold at all, which I found unsettling. I notice my assumptions, so I will suffice it to say that only two participants commented on alienation at school.

***Meritocracy.*** Cummins (2001) saw the exclusion from Canada's economic pie as being helped along by the myth of "equal opportunity," or meritocracy, which, he states, is believed by many to "be a given"; and, in terms of Aboriginal people being on the margins, it was generally assumed that anyone who fails does so because of his own "inferiority" and not because of the system (Cummins, 2001, p. 180). This type of thinking becomes internalized for students, too, and not just for the adults in the society at large. Educators often tend to "blame the victim," rather than see a student's failure as an educational systemic issue, because of their particular pedagogical style. David shows us how this works when he advises future Aboriginal students to decide who they will be and what they want to be (David, personal communication, June 9<sup>th</sup> 2009). Meaning, go out and do your best and you will be able to become who and what you want to be as an individual. It is not really that simple in a social context.

***Helping educators.*** In my district, there are non-Aboriginal district-based staff in all of the schools to help all students, Aboriginal learners included. For Aboriginal students, specifically, there is also Aboriginal department support staff working in the schools to provide service to them. For example, there are Aboriginal helping teachers, Aboriginal teacher advocates, Aboriginal district behavior specialists, Aboriginal child and youth care workers, and Aboriginal counselors, as well as an assortment of school-based Aboriginal

support staff including Aboriginal teachers, Aboriginal educational assistants, child and youth care workers, and aboriginal support workers.

These teachers, support staff, and other educational professionals all work as helping agents, supporting students with special needs. Aboriginal students are over-represented in such classifications even though they are in a minority in terms of student demographics (Ministry of Education, 2013). This correlates with how Aboriginal peoples in Canada are over-represented in the justice system, for example, in the rate of incarceration, where, although Aboriginal peoples make up a small percentage of Canadians, they are over-represented in Canadian jails.

All of these helping educators are very busy and work very hard visiting and helping in the schools each day. While each and every one of these helping educators provide valuable service to those Aboriginal students in need of it, this is also where we find that critical component of what D. E. Smith referred to as the “complex of relations in which this local world is embedded” (D. E. Smith, 2006, p. 172). That is, it is in the relationships with helping educators that ethnographers can inquire into these interactions, where the disjuncture of the socially organized lives of all participants become mediated through textual discourse, and the problematic can be exposed for what it is in the “extended bureaucratic, professional, legislative, and economic, as well as other social relations involved in the production of local events and activities” (D. E. Smith, 2006, p. 172).

Though each of these interactions with helping educators may have helped the six participants, each time these Aboriginal students were helped, there was one more instance of them being categorized by race as an Aboriginal student. It is these very intersections between participant and representatives (employees) of the institution that institutional

ethnographers come to see as the problematic. Granted, these social interactions with the helping educators are seen as helpful to these Aboriginal youth, but conversely, they are also the mediated sites where the participants become textualized. No other student receiving learning and/or behavioral support has to declare their ancestry, only Aboriginal students, yet those other students still receive learning and/or behavioral support.

Of the six participants, only one failed to credit a helping teacher or Aboriginal support worker as having helped her or him to get through her schooling and that was Katie. Every other participant credited their teachers or Aboriginal support workers as having helped them to remain in school and graduate. Therefore, we know that five of the six participants have large files as each time someone helps an Aboriginal student in school they are to document it in a detailed manner. This is in case of an audit by the Ministry of Education.

Katie was known to the Aboriginal support workers and invited to the pizza lunch, it can be assumed that she has, at one time or another disclosed her ancestry. Schools have staff investigate students with possible Aboriginal ancestry because it means more 131 funding for the school. While student support is an important staff funding, in the case of Aboriginal students, that support often comes with a very high price: “depriving bicultural students of their identities” (Kanu, 2012, p. 16). Some studies have found that the more Aboriginal students mastered their school’s formal knowledge, the more their identities as Aboriginal youth were questioned (Kanu, 2012 & Battiste, 2013).

***Translocal discourses.*** Campbell and Gregor (2004) differentiate social relations as not being something that is done or forced on people or even something that actually happens to people. Indeed, it is the sum of the interactions between people when they “actively...

participate in social relations, often unknowingly, as they act competently and knowledgeably to concert and coordinate their own actions with professional standards [and]... organizational rules. We draw on what we know” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 31).

In terms of the six Aboriginal student participants, this means that they are also actively participating or engaging in social relations at the school and with various discourses (for example, the school act, the helping educators, the documentation and reports, and the curriculum). They may not do so knowingly, but they are all active participants in social relations. These very records, documents, and/or reports result from these social relations when the helping educators fill out the required forms documenting their help and the day-to-day school experiences of their students and end up being problematic for the students they have helped.

As Cummins (2001) found, it is the information that the helping educators provide in those documents that enables the ruling relations to “disempower” these children in much the same way society disables their communities and keeps the status quo firmly in place and those communities subjugated and living in the margins of society (p. 180).

The history of the education of culturally diverse students in the United States and most other countries is a history of thinly disguised perpetuation of the coercive relations of power that operate in the wider society... Culturally diverse students are defined as deficient and confined to remedial programs that act to produce the deficits they were ostensibly intended to reverse (Cummins, 2001, p. 280).

From this data, the discourse of Aboriginal students being at-risk emerges, because it is here where those educators helping Aboriginal students at school need to read files, both current and previous reports, and have conversations with other educators about these students. The problematic comes into being when the sum of the at-risk discourse becomes larger and more significant than the sum of its parts as educators do their work.

While the helping educators are not doing this knowingly, their daily tasks, including what they read about the students they are working with, what they see and witness about the students they are working with, and what texts they create as they document their findings, all leave documentation of that day and put that student in a textualized form, a form that the next educator or helper can read and later add to, and the cycle continues. Before long, that student is no longer just an Aboriginal student at that school, but an at-risk student, which brings in more helpers, as well as more special funding. This special funding is often sought out by school administrations to help them help their at-risk students.

While the help that the student is receiving is seen as being needed and coming from the good intentions of the caring educators who are dedicated to helping these students obtain an education, the fact remains that, as the ruling relations continue to rule, their decisions will continue to work to keep the status quo as it is and operating in the same historic patterns. Educational institutions become the means by which ruling relations are replicated.

Katie is the only one of the six participants who did not credit her teachers or Aboriginal support workers. The other students did, which means they all qualify to receive help at school. This can be seen as a good thing but it can also mean that they are being tracked more than Katie is. It also implies that the other five participants are being textualized as at-risk students each day as their helping educators complete their daily paperwork. All are expected to document when they worked with their Aboriginal students and what was done. This is for an audit but through the lens of institutional ethnography, it can also sometimes be seen as Aboriginal students being *helped* into becoming early school leavers. Many Aboriginal students get pushed out because they cannot handle the identity

“battleground” where, in order to do well, one need master the dominant culture and leave behind one’s own (Kanu, 2012 pp. 16-17).

*Textualized students.* As more and more educational helpers follow the documentation process, as they are expected to do, a textualized Aboriginal student comes into being. This documentation that has textualized the student is now responsible for the student being labeled as at-risk. With each subsequent addition to the file, a stronger argument or justification is made for more help. As more educators become involved, more and more documentation will be created and needed until at, some point, the increased documentation gives birth to a discourse of at-risk students, who are virtually transformed into an Aboriginal textualized student. Some students get classified and their paths in school change. In terms of being de-classified, they are actually more likely to stay classified and at-risk until they leave school- with or without their diplomas. How can that be? It is possible through the power of discourse, an exponentially powerful subjugator that serves the useful purpose of holding power at the centre of the institution.

The student’s school experience changes quickly, gathering momentum as it does until such a student has been clearly and oftentimes permanently classified as at-risk and tracked by helpers into limited opportunities. From situations like these come the stereotypes that Aboriginal students are not quite as smart as the other students. This is such a common stereotype that one of our participants, George commented on how important it was to get teachers to teach students that not all Aboriginal are “alcoholics and [that they] can succeed in school” (George, personal communication, June 9, 2009).

Many Canadians continue to see Aboriginal peoples stereotypically as the “drunken Indian” (Warry, 2009, p. 115) or with feathers and teepees. The only First Nations to use

teepees and feathers were those found on the prairies. Those stereotypical photos of men wearing feathers had no correlation to Northwest Coast First Nations people, as Northwest First Nations lived in longhouses made from cedar and wore clothing made from cedar bark. Not every Aboriginal person drinks alcohol or is lazy. It is these stereotypes that our participant, George, is referring to when he connects the alienation of Aboriginal students in mainstream schools to “stereotypes” (George, personal communication, June 9, 2009). George was right because, as we saw above, when children experience their cultures being made fun of or belittled through stereotypes or other negative ways, they can withdraw, become emotionally detached, feel “unworthy and embarrassed, humiliated or enraged” (Warry, 2009, p. 102).

Gee (1996) offered his definition of discourses as being “ways of displaying (through words, actions, values, and beliefs) membership in a particular social group or social network, people who associate with each other around a common set of interests, goals, and activities” (p. 128). Discourses are also one’s way of being, seeing, thinking, and doing, as well as how one interacts with another. An example of how powerful discourses can be might be seen with David, who was very involved in clubs at his school. It is possible, even probable, that the common discourses that he and his fellow club members would have shared at school were strong enough to help him remain in school. Even if the shared discourses were not enough on their own, they most certainly would have been a contributing factor in David not becoming an early school leaver and Aboriginal statistic.

Discourses also include how one speaks, listens, reads, writes, as well as one’s “acting, interacting, believing, valuing, and using tools and objects, in particular settings at specific times, so as to display and recognize a particular social identity” (Gee, 1996, p. 128).

The discourses that this study has correlated to the educational day-to-day experiences of the six participants are such that the primary goal of each of them is to categorize and thus restrain, educate perhaps, but not with the same quality of education students from the mainstream receive. This brings us back to the myth of meritocracy.

Finn (2009) saw it as the backbone to the hegemonic hold on certain demographic groups of students because “the meritocracy myth maintains that we offer the same education and powerful literacy to all students,” when, in fact, he argues that this is not the case (p. x). According to Finn, public education has a two-tiered system in place, and one in which students from poor, working-class families normally do not receive resources.

First, there is empowering education, which leads to powerful literacy, the kind of literacy that leads to positions of power and authority. Second, there is domesticating education, which leads to functional literacy that makes a person productive and dependable, but not troublesome. Over time, political, social, and economic forces have brought us to a place where the working class (and to a surprising degree, the middle class) gets domesticating education and functional literacy and the rich get empowering education and powerful literacy (Finn, 2009, pp. xv-xvi).

This educational double standard is then justified by the “logic of deficit,” a discriminating belief that school failure is due to students’ lazy ways of being, lack of parental support, lower socioeconomic status, cultural differences, and so on. It is never because of the system itself but due solely to the deficits found in the students and their families (Finn, 2009, p. x).

Aboriginal students often come to school with many of these so-called deficits, for example, a different dialect of English from both non-Aboriginal students and educators from the dialect of dominant society and they are often very quickly seen as arriving with “deficits” and needing help. It is this help that has them interacting on a daily basis with the education helpers at their schools and that gets them classified as at risk and into special



needs categories. In the resulting relationships and documentation, because of the various hegemonic discourses, they become textualized students.

Instead of changing the system to fit Aboriginal students, we have a system that is determined to change the child. As the residential school assimilationist experiment showed, nothing good comes from forcing children to leave their cultural selves outside the school door. Why not spend the funding on making new ways to help these bicultural students bring their whole selves to school when they arrive each morning and see what learning can happen? We have done it the European way for decades and decades, spending millions and millions of dollars on a system that insists dialects need to be changed and languages left behind in favour of Standard English. We have continued to do the same thing over and over again these past many decades, all the while claiming to expect different results. Is it not time we stopped and actually listened to what Einstein, who is known for his genius and who defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over again, all the while expecting different results?

Weedon (1997) also saw discourses as hegemonic devices and argues that discourses are far more than mere “ways of thinking and producing meaning” and are powerful coercive subjugating tools that are “constantly under siege and widespread in society,” ineradicably fixed in all of our institutions: “law, medicine, social welfare, education, and in the organization of the family and work” (Weedon, 1997, pp. 104-105). That is not to suggest that the subjugating tools will never be challenged, as that is not so; there will always be groups who will challenge the powerful discourses in society (Weedon, 1997, p. 105).

D. E. Smith (2001) contended that the needs of the ruling relations are securely entrenched in our public school system and thus protected from those “initiatives originating

in the public discourse of the intelligentsia and strikingly effective at preventing localized grassroots initiatives from generalizing throughout” (p. 1147). They are apparently so entrenched that our six participants did not see the school or the educational system as being negative even when, like Diana, they were being discriminated against.

D. E. Smith (1977) did not see schools changing, despite the attempts she and others have made to have the various textbooks these schools promote changed and made less oppressive to students. She discussed the demands made on the institutions: “These are the institutions which we can begin to see now most clearly as those that do oppress us and enforce the oppression which is part of the economic process and economic relations of the society” (D. E. Smith, 1977, p. 25). D. E. Smith (2001) found our educational institutions to be at fault insofar as the racial inequities found in society at large go, in the state, and in the intellectual activity around us. According to D. E. Smith (2001), schools reproduce the

...social organization of inequality at multiple levels... Within the school, class, race, and gender emerge as dynamic and exclusionary groupings formative in students’ identities and associations... To state it very simply, some students learn that their own voices have authority, that they count, should be heard; others learn their lack. Some learn that they belong to groups that have agency in society and that they can count on being recognized as such. This forming of groups is more than the ‘socialization’ of individuals; these are ways of relating that are projected and perpetuated beyond school (2001, pp. 1148-1149).

As has been shown in this study, Aboriginal students are not in the group that learns how their own voices have power or that they count, as the voices of Aboriginal peoples, including students, have been silenced by colonialism (L. Smith, 1999, p. 69). In other words, it would appear that the dynamics of class-based, race-based, and gender-based discrimination and prejudices are alive and well in public education.

***Declaration of Ancestry.*** In BC, as soon as students voluntarily declare their Aboriginal ancestry, mechanisms are put into place by the ruling relations so that they can be organized and classified as Aboriginal students. This racial division is set up early on by those holding power over those participants involved in the day-to-day life of the school, although not done by those with control, but by those working for them in various capacities. As Campbell and Gregor (2004) pointed out, the everyday actions of teachers, administration, support staff, as well as those from outside helping professions, and the students are all connected and “socially organized. They are coordinated, ruled, put together as part of the social relations of their respective settings” (p. 44).

Thus, for the study’s six graduating Aboriginal students to receive personal help from helping educators they had to disclose their Aboriginal heritage, otherwise the schools would not receive the targeted funding (known in BC as 131 funds) to cover these ‘above and beyond’ services offered for Aboriginal students. While this funding then guarantees these learners the helping supports they need, it also places them on a list, which they tend to remain on until they leave school, where race becomes the determining factor and where students become racialized.

No other demographic group of students is asked to disclose their heritage like Aboriginal students are, and no other demographic group of students are over-represented in learning disabilities like Aboriginal students, who are almost twice as likely to be categorized as having learning disabilities than non-Aboriginal students (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 8). This is a blatant example of institutionalized racism in our public education system.

While not all of the participants actually utilized the Aboriginal room or the Aboriginal supports that were there at their disposal, many of them did. To receive these

supports, they had to have self-disclosed as having Aboriginal ancestry. Other students with special needs also receive such supports, yet are not asked to disclose their heritage. What's race got to do with it?

For the six graduating Aboriginal participants, this means that, while they were actively involved in these social relations, they were also “implicated in social organization that extends beyond them” as invisible pawns of those powerful ones who have a vested interest in keeping the status quo much like it is. A status quo where the “textually mediated social organization” begins with this group of students (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 44). Beginning with texts such as the student's registration documents when she/he first registered, there would have been mechanisms in place for “coordinating activity across many different sites. Attention to these types of textual coordination can make visible just how links among settings are put in place” (DeVault, 2008, p. 7). While attention to these coordinated textual activities may help to expose the larger agenda of those in power, the fact is, only one of our participants (Diana) spoke about the school being unfair to her when she was sent home for something she never did. Battiste (2013) contended that “Aboriginal students have been contaminated by an educational system built on false colonial and racist assumptions that targets them as inferior, and creates self-doubt among Aboriginal students” (p.180).

### **Limitations of the Study**

According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), all proposed research projects have inherent limitations. Limitations derive from the conceptual framework and the study's design. A discussion of these limitations

early on in the proposal reminds the reader what the study is and its boundaries and how its results can and cannot contribute to understanding.

Framing the study in specific research and scholarly traditions places limits on the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 42).

One of the main limiting factors in my research is how limited my data actually are in terms of showing generalizability. That is, with only six participants, this work cannot inform us of a large population. While small studies have their place, if I were to do another research project, it would be done on a much larger scale so that it would provide substantial data, thereby giving it more reliability and authenticity. And more credibility in terms of providing a clearer picture of just how intertwined the social interactions of Aboriginal students are with their everyday lives in the institution known as school.

Another limitation in this study is the way the data were gathered. Initially, I had planned to collect the data for this study via face-to-face interviews with the students. However, upon hearing about the feasibility of online interviews and how much more user-friendly they were in comparison to in-person interviews in terms of the participant's time, I changed my collection method. Like other students, Aboriginal students have full lives with various extracurricular responsibilities and schedules. I thought that by using online interviews, perhaps more students would participate. If I were to conduct another qualitative research study, I would not choose online interviews as my method of collecting the data. This collection method greatly reduced my chances of extending the interview questions whenever possible. Probing and follow-up interviews would have helped me to ultimately come out of the study with more comprehensive data.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, we discussed the various ways that Aboriginal students are invisibly controlled in school and heard how our six participants did not notice, sense, or feel this hegemonic hold on them, or see their failures, or those of so many other Aboriginal students,

as being inherent in our education system. This was first noticeable with the advice that each of them gave to those younger Aboriginal students coming up behind them. With each of the participants, their advice disclosed how they saw themselves as Aboriginal students in mainstream schools without actually saying it.

Not one of the six participants blamed the system for those academic difficulties or failures experienced all too often by Aboriginal students. George did question the curriculum, though when he said fewer Aboriginal students might experience difficulty in school if the teachers would begin teaching more about Aboriginal people and students. He even specified what they needed to teach, which was “teaching all the proven facts” about Aboriginals.

One-third of the participants felt alienated from the school at one time or another. Some felt alienated much more than others. Due to the lack of Aboriginal curriculum, pedagogy, and histories taught in the schools, it is a wonder that all participants did not feel alienated at school. Five of the six participants utilized the Aboriginal room and the support services provided by the Aboriginal support workers. One is left questioning if the other two-thirds of the students did not feel alienated from their classes and/or school, why they needed to seek out the support workers or the Aboriginal room?

Of these six graduating participants, some did indeed have family members who were residential school survivors however, a few of the participants were not even sure if their grandparents attended residential school. One of the assumptions that I brought to this research study was a strong correlation between descendants of residential school survivors and academic issues and yet, some of the graduating participants had family members who had attended residential schools. Another assumption was that culturally stronger Aboriginal

students equaled academically stronger students and yet in this study only a few of the participants acknowledged cultural backgrounds or activities.

The third assumption that I brought to the study was a connection between graduating Aboriginal students and parental support. This study substantiates this. Each of our participants' credited their parents as being their main support in helping them remain in school long enough to graduate. However, I also believed the data would demonstrate a correlation between strong cultural backgrounds and academic success. This was the case with some participants it was not the case with all of them.

The statistics on Aboriginal students graduating from high school within six years of beginning grade 8 continue to show a discrepancy compared to the percentages of non-Aboriginal students graduating within that same timeframe (Ministry of Education, 2013). By studying the positive supports behind six graduating Aboriginal students, this study has shown what helped to keep some Aboriginal students connected to school long enough to graduate was their parents. In closely examining the positive supports behind our participants, this study encourages further research with larger numbers of participants.

Beginning as an examination into positive supports behind the six graduating Aboriginal students, who remained in school long enough to graduate, institutional ethnography evolved into an analysis of both the supporting factors behind the participants and the invisible, hegemonic, and systemic barriers that Aboriginal students encounter in public education. Battiste (2013) substantiated this when, from her latest study, she contended how "Aboriginal students have been contaminated by an educational system built on false colonial and racist assumptions that target them as inferior, and create self-doubt among Aboriginal students" (p. 180). In short, this study became an institutional

ethnographic investigation into the legacy of colonialism as it pertains to Aboriginal students in public education exposing the legacy of colonization, assimilation, and residential schools as the hegemonic tools of the ruling class, not as something that is happenstance but as translocal discourses carefully put in place by those in power to keep a people positioned without power. There is no better way than to preclude them from obtaining a quality education, which will then recreate their place in society.

While there were some positive supports highlighted in this study, such as parental and family influence, the supportive strengths found in friends and extended family members, and so on, much of what was exposed (for instance, a glimpse into the various hegemonic ways that the ruling relations have kept Aboriginal students without social power, in terms of obtaining a solid education and in doubting themselves, through the institutional ethnographic lens was negative, disheartening, and blatantly and hegemonically racist. As Orlowski (2011) stated (see chapter opening quote, above), “all teaching is political” (p. 204). What could be more political than the ruling relations using their public education system to hegemonically keep generations of Aboriginal students from obtaining equitable educational outcomes or full autonomy?

### **Recommendations**

Reflecting back on my first research study and all I have learned from it, I believe a follow-up study with similar questions and a much larger number of graduating and non-graduating Aboriginal students would be helpful in terms of improving our educational system so that it is more equitable to all students. Further research in the areas of education that I feel could prove exceptionally beneficial to equalizing our education system for all students would be:



1. Studies of classroom concepts where Aboriginal students are not only meeting expectations but excelling;
2. Studies of teacher groups where culturally relevant curriculum is the norm;
3. Studies of parental and teacher interactions;
4. Studies of parent volunteers and their experiences in mainstream public schools;
5. Studies of newly elder-approved Indigenous material available to BC schools.

As this and many other studies have shown, the time is long overdue for us to stop seeing our educational system through the lens first formed by European settlers. No longer are the students attending our public schools of European-only backgrounds. We have students from all across the globe now attending our schools and we have thousands and thousands of Aboriginal students registered in public schools all across this province.

Is it any wonder that these students do not feel as though they belong in our schools when their Aboriginal cultures, histories, traditions and so on are so seldom the subject of study in these students' classes? Add the legacy of colonization, assimilation, and residential schools to this and it becomes understandable why so many Aboriginal students have absenteeism issues. Would you want to go somewhere where you were made to feel unwelcome, devalued, and inferior? This is the insanity that needs to be looked at and transformed so that these Aboriginal youth have a fair and equal opportunity to excel in school and in life. Only then can we say with any honesty that our province offers a quality, public education to all students. It is time to take action to give British Columbia's education system the transformative overhaul that social justice requires, so that when, in future, we refer to *our quality public education system here in British Columbia*, we are not simply

telling untruths but speaking of an inclusive educational system that all children in this province have equal access to.

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**Appendix A**  
**Survey Instrument:**  
**Interview Questions**

Instructions: Please read through the following interview questions before starting them, answering all of the questions with as many details as you possibly can.

1.

a) Who is/was the main supporting factor insofar as helping you to stay focused and remain in school long enough to graduate?

- ☐ parent(s)
- ☐ relative
- ☐ friend
- ☐ community member
- ☐ teacher/educator

b) Please explain how he/she/they helped you

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2.

a) Who was the secondary supporting factor in your life in terms of helping you to stay focused and remain in school long enough to graduate?

- ☐ parent(s)
- ☐ relative
- ☐ friend
- ☐ community member
- ☐ teacher/educator

b) Please explain how he/she/they helped you

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3.

a) Was there anyone else in your life during your school years that helped you to stay focused and remain in school long enough to graduate? (parent(s), relative, friend, community member, etc.

b) Please explain how he/she/they helped you

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4.

a) Can you credit any educators as having helped you during your school years to stay on task and remain in school?

\_\_\_yes \_\_\_no

b) If so, please explain their position and how they helped you.

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5.

a) In your opinion, and after answering all of the questions above, who was your biggest support system insofar as helping you to stay focused and remain in school long enough to graduate? \_\_\_\_\_

b) Please explain.

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6.

a) Did you have anything to help you connect to your school(s)? e.g., sports, art, clubs, etc.? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no

b) If so, do you feel that this involvement helped connect to your school(s). Explain.

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7.

a) Did you ever feel alienated from school?

\_\_\_yes \_\_\_no

**b) Please explain.**

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**8.**

**a) In your opinion, where do you think the alienation that some Aboriginal students experience comes from?**

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**b) What can educators do to make sure the issue of alienation is fixed for Aboriginal students?**

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**9.**

**Did you attend an on-reserve school during your school years?**

**\_\_\_yes \_\_\_no If so, for how many years? \_\_\_ years.**

**10.**

**a) Did your parents/guardians graduate from high school?**

**\_\_\_yes \_\_\_no**

**b) Are your parents/guardians employed?**

**\_\_\_yes \_\_\_no**

**c) Did your siblings graduate from high school?**

**\_\_\_yes \_\_\_no**

**d) Did your parents/grandparents attend residential school?**

**\_\_\_yes \_\_\_no**

**e) Does your family speak your Aboriginal language?**

**\_\_\_yes \_\_\_no**

f) Do you and/or your family attend cultural events?

\_\_\_yes \_\_\_no      If so, please explain

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g) Do you and/or your family belong to any cultural groups (e.g., dancing, drumming, etc.)?

\_\_\_yes \_\_\_no      If so, please explain

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11.

a) Of all things listed above, what is, in your opinion, the one most important positive support that stands out insofar as having helped you to stay focused and remain in school long enough to graduate?

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b) Please explain why you choose what you did as being the most important positive support.

12.

With all of the above in mind, please offer any suggestion you might have to those Aboriginal students coming up behind you and needing help to stay focused and in school long enough to graduate.

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13.

If you have any else that you feel is/was an important positive support in your life that helped you to stay focused and remain in school long enough to graduate, please add it/them now.

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## Appendix B

### Student Data Table

Name	Gender	Lives with Parents	Main Support	Secondary Support	Extracurricular Connection to School	Family Members Attended Residential School	Family Attended Cultural Events	Experienced Alienation at School
Katie	Female	Yes	Parents	Grand-parents	No	No	Yes but not many; nor do they belong to any cultural groups, etc.	No
George	Male	Yes	Parents	Friends	George belonged to a school club	Grandparents attended residential school	Yes but not many; nor do they belong to any cultural groups, etc	No
Diana	Female	Yes	Parents & Mrs. S (Aboriginal Support Worker)	Friend	No	Grandparents attended residential school	Diana's family belongs to a cultural group and attends many cultural events	Yes
Timothy	Male	Yes	Parents	Friends	Timothy belonged to various school clubs & one sports team	Not sure	No	No
David	Male	Yes	Extended family	One teacher & a friend	David belonged to various school clubs	Yes both his parents and grandparents attended residential school	Sometimes his family attends ceremonies and other cultural events	Yes
Sandra	Female	Yes	Parents	Mrs. S (Aboriginal Support Worker)	No	Not sure	No	No



## Appendix C

### Progress of Students

#### PROGRESS OF STUDENTS ENTERING GRADE 8

The report includes Aboriginal students who have self-identified as being of Aboriginal ancestry (First Nations status and non-status Metis, and Inuit) on September 30th. You will notice changes to historical and trend data. Once a student has self-identified as being of Aboriginal ancestry, the student is included in all reported outcomes for Aboriginal students.

The data represent a cohort of students as they progress from Grade 8 through to Grade 12 completion. Each year out-migration estimates are factored in. If a student leaves for another district, that student's information will be reported in that district's cohort information. (Grade transition includes transitions to a higher grade in any school type.)

#### PROGRESS OF STUDENTS ENTERING GRADE 8 IN SEPTEMBER 2006

Completion Year	Year	Aboriginal			Non-Aboriginal		
		All Students %	Female %	Male %	All Students %	Female %	Male %
	1	100	100	100	100	100	100
	2	98	98	98	100	100	100
	3	96	96	95	99	99	99
	4	89	90	88	98	98	98
	5	79	81	77	94	94	94
11/12	Completion	57	62	52	84	86	82

