

FINDING Q^wAMQ^wƏMT:
RE-STORYING POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

by

John Alexander Chenoweth

B.Ed., University of British Columbia, 1994
M.A., San Diego State University, 1999

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES
(Interdisciplinary Studies)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Okanagan)

July 2017

© John A. Chenoweth, 2017

The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the College of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis/dissertation entitled:

FINDING QWAMQWƏMT: RE-STORYING POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR
ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

submitted by John Chenoweth in partial fulfillment of the requirements of

the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Dr. Jeannette Armstrong

Co-Supervisor

Dr. Diana French

Co-Supervisory

Dr. Sharon McCoubrey

Supervisory Committee Member

Dr. Wendy Klassen

University Examiner

Dr. Michelle Pidgeon

External Examiner

Abstract

Aboriginal people face numerous challenges in post-secondary education. In this research, I identify the shortcomings evidenced in the educational system in relation to Indigenous identity and epistemology, external Aboriginal policy, Indigenous control of education, and Indigenous community. Additionally, I examine the realities of Aboriginal people who have paused-out and then return to school, and what factors influence their successful educational experiences.

I use a *syilx* Indigenous systems-based pedagogy embedded in a traditional story as my primary theoretical framework. The Four Chiefs story is a *syilx* Okanagan construct that serves as the model with four oppositional concepts to address community-based questions. This is the basis of *enowkinwixw*, a *syilx*-based governance decision-making process. I survey 60 students from across the province who attended the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology. Questions relate to a student's experience in the K-12 system, the transition to post-secondary, and actualities while attending NVIT.

Analysis indicates that shortcomings in the educational system relate to a lack of acknowledgement of Indigenous identity. Aboriginal students return to school for economic reasons and concern for future generations. A balance of encouragement and support from outside and within the educational system lead to a fulfilling educational experience. Without the Indigenous Community realizing how important it is to take control and reorganize how it re-imagines the educational experience of its Aboriginal students, nothing will change. This Study demonstrates that the Four Chiefs model is an appropriate and useful tool to re-

imagine Aboriginal post-secondary education. It is a holistic approach to illuminate the many educational challenges faced by Indigenous students as part of their Indigenous community.

Preface

The University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board Certificate number H12-02919 approves this work.

My supervisory committee reviewed the work presented in the thesis: Dr. Jeannette Armstrong, Dr. Diana E. French, and Dr. Sharon McCoubrey.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Preface.....	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Tables	viii
List of Figures	ix
List of Abbreviations	x
Glossary	xi
Acknowledgements.....	xii
Dedication	xiii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Background	1
Research Design.....	2
Placing Self in the Research.....	4
Methodology	15
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	21
Policies and Practices: K-12 to Post-secondary Education.....	21
Community Control over Education	28
Indigenous Epistemology and Pedagogy	37
Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework	47
Indigenous Systems Theory	49
The Four Chiefs.....	52
<i>tmix^w</i>	56
Chapter 4: Methodology	59
<i>syilx</i> Indigenous Pedagogy of Enowkinwixw as Methodology	62
How the People-to-Be will Survive in the New <i>tmix^w</i>	67
Black bear – Indigenous Identity	67

Saskatoon Berry – External Aboriginal Policy	69
Salmon – Indigenous Control of Education.	70
Bitter Root – Indigenous Community	72
A New Understanding	74
Four Chiefs: Education as <i>tmix^w</i>	76
A New Framework for Education	77
Fly.....	79
Questionnaire Process	83
Chapter 5: Results	86
Demographic Summary.....	110
Chapter 6: Analysis and Discussion	113
What are the Shortcomings in the Education System?	113
What are the Realities of Aboriginal People who Return to School after Pausing-out?...	120
What Factors Influence Successful Educational Experiences?.....	125
Chapter 7: Conclusion.....	133
Shortcomings in the Education System.....	134
Realities of Aboriginal People who Return to School after Pausing-out.....	137
Factors that Influence Successful Educational Experiences	139
Limitations of the Research.....	142
A Note for Fly (Participant Students)	144
Final thoughts	145
References.....	148
Appendix 1	158

List of Tables

Table 1: Bands by Fiscal Year	59
Table 2: Worst Socio-Economic Health Regions in BC (2012).	79

List of Figures

Figure 1: Enowkinwixw: four parts nested view.	57
Figure 2: Enowkinwixw oppositional dynamics model.....	63
Figure 3: <i>Enowkinwixw</i> : four parts nested view – education as <i>tmix^w</i>	75
Figure 4: Identity.....	87
Figure 6: Age.	88
Figure 7: Gender.	88
Figure 9: Sense of humour.....	90
Figure 10: Ability to learn.....	90
Figure 11: Residential school.....	91
Figure 13: Education importance in home.....	99
Figure 14: Activity since leaving school.	101
Figure 15: Reason for returning to school.	102
Figure 16: First day of school.	104
Figure 17: Ability to do well.....	105
Figure 18: Skills to do well.....	105
Figure 19: Realization.....	106
Figure 20: Ability to achieve goals.....	108
Figure 21: Capable of achieving goals.....	108

List of Abbreviations

AANDC	Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada
ABE	Adult Basic Education: the provision of courses at the high school level
ACCC	Association of Canadian Community Colleges
AFN	Assembly of First Nations
AVED	Advanced Education
BC	British Columbia
FNESC	First Nations Education Steering Committee
FNHL	First Nations House of Learning
GWES	Gitksan Wet'suwet'en Education Society
IAHLA	Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association
IC	Indigenous Community
ICE	Indigenous Control of Education
ICIE	Indian Control of Indian Education
II	Indigenous Identity
MoE	Ministry of Education (BC)
NITEP	Native Indian Teacher Education Program
NVIT	Nicola Valley Institute of Technology
RAGC	Report of the Attorney General of Canada
RARO	Registration and Recruitment Officer
RCAP	Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

Glossary

Aboriginal	Refers to either First Nations, Inuit, or Métis
<i>captik^{wł}</i>	
Enowkinwixw (<i>na^fwqⁿwix^w</i>)	Dialogical process to arrive at resolution
First Nations	Refers to persons who identify themselves as First Nations people. This term includes First Nations people living on reserve or off reserve.
Indigenous	People having a long-term knowledge and understanding of the land or place
Mainstream Education	The current education system in elementary and high school that is based on westernized philosophy and values.
<i>nsyilxcen</i>	Okanagan language
Pause-out	Refers to people who step away from formal education to pursue other interests. In the thesis, the term refers to Aboriginal people who have left high school before graduation for a variety of reasons.
<i>q^wamq^wəmt</i>	balance and happiness
<i>q^wənq^want</i>	pitiful and unbalanced
<i>sama?</i>	non-aboriginal person
<i>sqilx^w</i>	The People torn from the earth and dream in a spiral
<i>tmix^w</i>	All lifeforms in nature
<i>yelmixwem</i>	Okanagan term for chief

Note: as a convention, Okanagan words are not capitalized and are italicized.

Acknowledgements

I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank my committee members Dr. Jeanette Armstrong (co-supervisor) for her endless effort and encouragement throughout the writing process; Dr. Sharon McCoubrey for all her teachings and advice; and Dr. Diana French (co-supervisor), for coming into this process at a late date and making significant influence on my work. In addition, a thank you is extended to Dr. Gregory Younging, who was my original supervisor. Thank you to Elders Mary and Ed Louie, from the Okanagan Nation, for the countless afternoons of sharing stories of what has been and what ought to be. I am privileged to be part of their lives. I would also like to acknowledge NVIT faculty, staff, and students for sharing with me and for the encouragement to continue on this path. I am especially grateful to Dr. Aruna Gore, Dr. Verna Billy Minnabarriet, and Dr. Stephen Ameyaw for their personal guidance and strength in the entire process. I would like to honour and thank the research participants for sharing their stories and allowing me the privilege of representing them. I admire the strength, courage, and honesty they demonstrated in their narratives. They will be forever in my reason for being.

I would also like to thank my wife, Simone, and my two sons, Nathan, and Noah, for their understanding and unwavering support over the years of this venture. They all have remained my biggest fans. Lastly, I want to recognize my family and especially my late father, Bob, and my mother, Lena. My mom has always been the rock in our family and has taught us so much about being “good people”.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my sons who not only believed in me, but also showed me how to be a father. Soon, they, too, will be picking up the bits of Coyote and rebuilding ourselves. Thank you so much, my boys.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the world before this world, before there were people, and before things were like they are now, everyone was alive and walking around like we do. All creation talked about the coming changes to their world. They had been told that soon a new kind of people would be living on this earth. Even they, the Animal and Plant people would be changed. Now they had to decide how the People-To-Be would live and what they would eat...

(Armstrong, 2009, p. 358)

Background

Aboriginal people are not enjoying the same graduation rates in completing high school graduation, as does the general Canadian population (Association of Canadian Community Colleges, 2005; Auditor General of British Columbia, 2015; First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Between 2010 and 2015, the BC school completion rates for all Aboriginal students in the Kindergarten to grade 12 systems (K-12) hovered between 54-63%, while the non-Aboriginal completion rate remained constant at approximately 86% (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 29). The education gap that persists at the high school level between Aboriginal Canadians and the general Canadian population will take decades to close (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2004).

Cherubini (2014) states that although Canada has three ethnically diverse founding groups, English, French, and Aboriginal, the latter people in this country have never been formally recognized as a founding nation. The absence of formal recognition is mirrored in the lack of Aboriginal identity being represented in schools, curricula and classrooms (Cherubini, 2014, p. 11). The inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge (IK), models, methods, and content are based on the premise that students will benefit from education in a

culturally safe manner that draws upon, promotes, and enhances awareness of Indigenous traditions (Archibald, 2001; Battiste, 1998, 2004; Battiste, Bell, and Findlay, 2002; Newhouse & Peters, 2007; Pidgeon, 2008).

Research Design

I have learned that the best model to address the concepts and research questions I propose can be found in the teachings of an Okanagan *captikʷl* (story) that poses a question through a systems-based template. I follow the Enowkinwixw inquiry template of The Four Chiefs, interpreted by Armstrong (2009) and explained throughout this dissertation. Specifically, I explore the concept of *qwemqwəmt* (balance and regeneration) within the *syilx* framework of dialogue known as the Enowkinwixw process, which is introduced in the Four Chiefs story. This *syilx* systems-based methodology provides an analysis tool to analyze the literature and questionnaire results of participants. The four-part nested lens is used to identify the questions I seek to answer through this study. Indigenous pedagogy provided in this story is an ideal vehicle to allow the reader to understand the concepts and teachings I wish to convey. In order to grasp the teachings from this story I had to sit and reflect on many related facets of my own childhood and education and intertwine these with the experiences and stories from the people I have the privilege of working with now.

The excerpt introducing this chapter is the introduction to a traditional Okanagan *captikʷl* (story) depicting how all the Plant and Animal Chiefs gathered to discuss and decide how the People-To-Be would survive and what they would eat. The story takes place in a time before humans. The quote introduces the listener to the question that needed to be answered by the entire community resulting in agreement on a process to

move forward with helping the People torn-from-the-earth, or the *syilx*, to survive in the world and move towards balance and regeneration. This particular traditional Okanagan story forms an Indigenous framework to assist in answering the questions I have for my research of how the Aboriginal people will survive the world of post-secondary education.

Educational success rates at the K-12 and Post-Secondary Education (PSE) sectors for Aboriginal people are directly correlated to systemic factors that continue to marginalize Aboriginal students in public education system across the K-12 and PSE sectors in British Columbia. My research questions are as follows:

1. What are the shortcomings in the educational system?
2. What are the realities of Aboriginal people who have paused-out of K-12 then returned to post-secondary school?
3. What factors influence successful post-secondary educational experiences?

This research explores the literature on the Aboriginal educational landscape and the educational experiences of Aboriginal post-secondary students who have paused-out of K-12 and returned to post-secondary school. The analysis and conclusions will generate, as the goal of the research, new knowledge for improving the current post-secondary Aboriginal education system. In particular, the aim is to improve service by addressing the specific needs of Aboriginal young and adult learners to open pathways for further opportunities in the Indigenous identity landscape, external Aboriginal policy landscape, the Indigenous control of education landscape, and the Indigenous community landscape. These landscapes will be discussed and explained throughout the dissertation in relation to the three questions posed above. The new way of coming to this knowledge arrives from utilizing an old method of Indigenous inquiry to examine insufficiencies in a system. The

significance of this study is that I will be looking at deficiencies within the educational system rather than looking for deficiencies within the Aboriginal student.

I am fortunate that these methods are found in the stories passed on by our First Nations ancestors in our stories. One of the aspects of my childhood I vividly recall is answering questions asked by my parents and grandmothers related to what I have done in school for the day. I was asked what I have done, what did I learn, how will I use what I learned tomorrow, and lastly, if I have any questions for any of them. The practice influenced the methods I use in addressing any questions that I may have and are influential in my conclusions to this dissertation.

Placing Self in the Research

Leadership for the sylx is to set example, to lead through a willingness, to give up personal bias, and to find a way for others to act responsibly through setting the example to follow...

Jeannette Armstrong (2009, p. 85)

As an Okanagan Nation member and a son to educators, I grew up as an active observer and participant in the realm of Aboriginal education. Over the past two decades, I have had the pleasure and privilege of serving communities and students in order that they may have what the late Grand Chief and founder of the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT), Gordon Antoine, shared with me. He said that NVIT was created to provide a better quality of life through education for the “Indian” people of the Nicola Valley. Many challenges remain.

When I first began my career as a teacher in the Nicola Valley, BC I was asked by another Indigenous educator, Mandy Na’zinek Jimmie, to go and speak to an Elder named Eliza Edwards from the Lower Nicola Indian Band. Over the course of several years I was privileged to have had Eliza in my life until her passing. My first encounter with her will

forever be in my memory. I asked my mother if she knew her and she said she did, that she was family. I recall going to her home at Springs one evening in September 1994 and knocking on her door.

After a couple of knocks the door opened and there stood a short elderly lady with a kerchief tied around her head, something that was not uncommon for the elders of the area. She asked me who I was. I responded that I was, John Chenoweth, Native Studies teacher for the local school district. She responded with the same question, "Who are you?" and I responded with the same answer, that I was the Native Studies teacher from the local school district. I was beginning to think that she was hard of hearing. She had a concerned look on her face and finally spoke, "No, who are you? Who are your people?" "Oh," I said. Flustered, I said that I was the son of Lena and Bob Chenoweth and grandson to Maggie and Alec Marshall. With a wide grin she opened the door and said, "Come in, grandson."

(John Chenoweth, 1994, personal communication with Eliza Edwards).

My teachings of who I was in relation to my extended family and my career had been rekindled. My first professional introduction to the importance of identity ensued. I had many lived experiences of the importance of identity throughout my childhood.

I grew up listening to many stories from my mother, grandmother, and aunts about how our family struggled to overcome barriers and achieve things that required great effort. The stories contained humor and sadness and always left me feeling like I was a part of something greater than myself. My grandmother used to tell me about how my grandfather rode wild horses at rodeos and won many prizes for his feats. In one particular story, she said she presented him with a clean shirt on the day of a rodeo and she told him to bring back the shirt as clean as it was when he put it on.

My grandfather traveled by horse team and wagon over 50 miles to attend the rodeo and prepared for the journey so that the horses had food and water. He rode in the rodeo and then returned later that evening with his clean shirt and the prize money. They were able to go to Merritt the next week to buy provisions at the store. My mother listened

and I could see her nodding in agreement as if the story had occurred only a week ago. I loved the time because we were all together and we could focus on listening together to each topic. My grandmother would switch to other funny stories about Coyote and his failings when trying to outsmart the other “humans” in a time before humans existed. This was my introduction to *captik^{wł}*, traditional Okanagan origin stories that were used to teach us about who we were. I have my earliest memories of Coyote stories from this time and was always fascinated by how Coyote would try so hard to do something and then fail. The underlying lesson was to try to be good and respectful or you might end up like Coyote.

captik^{wł} is a traditional Okanagan method for conveying important information and to provide lessons to audiences depending on their age and level of knowledge. *captik^{wł}* can be categorized into four general genres. The first is the world-before-humans, which can be loosely called origin stories (Armstrong, 2009, p. 92). These stories are generally set in very formal social settings. The world-before-humans *captik^{wł}* have a general theme as a set of principles for all humans to live by to survive. The world-before-humans *captik^{wł}* feature specific *tmix^w*, which are things in the natural world, taking the forms of animals, birds, plants, fish, insects, and reptiles that are the characters in the story. The characters are never actual animals but are people in animal form in a time before this one. The characters are also not humans but humanized *tmix^w* in a world where all is *tmix^w* (Armstrong, 2009, p. 93).

According to Armstrong (2009), the second and third genres are people-were-living *captik^{wł}* and people-were-traveling *captik^{wł}*, which are stories taking place in a more familiar environment and include teachings of how people survive in places of transition

to other places (p. 92). The last genre is Coyote-traveling *captik^{wł}*, which are different from the other stories as they have a transformative message for the listener. Typically, the message involves Coyote as a trickster and imitator. All of the stories have a long history of relevance and are important for the sharing of knowledge among all audiences on the history and teachings of many Indigenous people (Archibald, 2008, p. 5).

The Four Chiefs *captik^{wł}* is the basis for the theoretical framework that provides for a coherent systems based view of education as *tmix^w*. The Four Chiefs *captik^{wł}* is a “world-before-humans” *captik^{wł}*, which presents the community-based ethos of *tmix^w* using an Indigenous methodology called Enowkinwixw in the form of what can be loosely termed an origin story. A paragraph or two of the story appears at the start of each chapter. I remember acquiring the book for the elementary and secondary schools in Merritt in my first year as a teacher and I remember reading the story to elementary school children in 1995 without realizing the power of the story.

As I was growing up, I also experienced many forms of *captik^{wł}* that were related specifically to my family and my own teachings of what I ought to do to be a better person on this earth. My models in the stories were my parents and my grandmothers. I often tell my children stories of how I grew up and the lessons I learned about being a good person, and how I ought to be seen on this earth from the many lessons I experienced.

My motivation for exploring the topic stems from one of my grandmothers, Maggie Marshall, who lived with us for most of my life until I left home. She was with us through good times and bad times. My grandmother had lived a life of poverty and was uneducated in a formal sense but was wise beyond her years. When she first moved in with us in Kamloops she struggled with alcohol and could not really live on her own when

she was drinking because she did not take care of herself. I recall travelling to Merritt, BC with my father to find my grandmother passed out in a back alley. I was 10 years old the first time we went to find her. My dad showed no sign of embarrassment when we helped her into our car in front of many people and then brought her home. From this moment I learned that being humble in service was more important than trying to save one's reputation. My father would mention that my grandmother needed help and that we were going to help her. After a few days, my grandmother would talk to me and thank me for helping her. I did not know why she did what she did; I just knew that when she needed help I would be there. As I grew older my grandmother also taught me humility.

When I was in the eighth grade, my grandmother would sometimes ask me to go shopping with her. We would walk to the thrift shops where she bought flour and clothing. Even though the flour bag had holes where a mouse had chewed through it, she was unperturbed, knowing we had a sifter that would remove the mouse droppings. I told her that I would not eat the bannock that she made from the flour because of the mouse "poop" and she simply asked me, "What's the matter? Are you a *sama*?" a word she had said meant "white man" but in this sense, she told me I needed to stop acting like the queen. My grandmother also bought me used underwear, which I objected to. Again, I was told to not be like the queen and I learned to wear used underwear until I was in my twenties. These lessons taught me how to be humble and caring and that I should never be embarrassed or afraid to help people in need. My mother and father also seemed to learn many lessons, and throughout all of my early years, I witnessed countless episodes of watching them do beautiful things for people who were pitiful or in need of help.

I often dealt with people who had not lived well. Even though my father was a teacher and my mother was a First Nations support worker, we did not have an extravagant lifestyle. Many of my extended family members and others whom we knew lived in poverty and needed help in facing various obstacles (e.g. financial, government services, and education). My father mainly taught at-risk students in a program called work-study-work-experience. Occasionally, my father would pull me from the school to participate in one of the grand adventures involving his students who had been cast aside by the system. The students were often not well served by the schools and they tended to be put into programs where they were largely unseen and unheard. My father, however, treated the students like they were his children. At first, I was a bit jealous but soon realized that his students needed someone who believed in them. By the time I entered high school, I also believed in them. Most of the students in the programs were Aboriginal and living in poverty.

My mother worked as a First Nations support worker for 20 years before she retired. In her position, she only worked with Aboriginal children who often did not have enough to eat and who struggled in school because of poverty and racism issues. She was good at her job because she was much like my grandmother, able to speak the truth and caring about others. One of her former clients, who was also our neighbor, once gave a speech to a crowd in which he said he would not have graduated from Simon Fraser University with a Business Degree and become a bank manager if it were not for my mother. It was a powerful moment, because I knew it to be true and I was fully aware of my mother's impact on the youth who were at-risk students. I recalled when she would return from work to help "our" people who were being treated badly at the school or by a

teacher or who did not know how the education system operated and needed a guiding hand. I loved the way she told us how she worked with principals and teachers so that they would understand why a student was struggling and how schools should be helping students instead of punishing them. Today, I still wonder how many students were able to complete school and live a good life because of my mother's efforts. I know I was one of those who benefitted from her teachings.

I always knew that I would complete high school and then go to college. My mother and father often asked me what I wanted to study at university. For me, graduating from high school was an obvious path to higher learning, and when I graduated I attended a ceremony for Kamloops school district Aboriginal students. At the ceremony in 1984, only eight of us were in attendance. Even though I was just 18-years old, I wondered why so few Aboriginal students were at the celebration, given that my high school had a total of 600 grade 12 students. I eventually became a post-secondary student when I was 23 years old and graduated with a teaching degree at 27 years of age. I graduated from the Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP) at UBC, a program where my father had worked when I was five years old. The critical lesson of always making yourself available to help those who need it must have worked on me in light of my chosen career path. I have always enjoyed my role as a teacher, elementary school principal, and Dean of the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, working with students over the past 23 years. I have had many opportunities to talk with students about their feelings about their respective educational journeys.

Throughout my life, I have learned many lessons from my grandmothers (one First Nations and the other Swedish) on how I ought to carry myself, and how I should work

hard in striving for a better life. I am no different from most other people in this regard. My father is of Swedish and Irish ancestry and my mother is an Okanagan Nation member. One of my lessons on the topic of identity happened when I graduated from the NITEP program at UBC. At the graduation ceremony at the longhouse we were told by Dr. Verna Kirkness to wear something traditional. I did not own anything traditional and I was told to borrow something. I went to the graduation ceremony in a shirt and tie. I did not want to borrow my “identity”. We were also told to introduce ourselves and tell the audience which First Nation we came from.

As I sat in the back room waiting to be introduced, I wondered what to say because both of my grandmothers were sitting in the audience. I thought “if I say my name is John Chenoweth, a member of the Okanagan Nation”, then my Swedish grandmother would be upset at me because she was a very proud Swedish woman. When my name was finally called, I walked out of the back room and moved towards the microphone. I scanned the audience to see where my wife and family were sitting. I quickly glanced at both of my grandmothers and knew my Swedish grandmother was waiting to hear what I would say when I introduced myself as she had heard the previous introductions and was obviously concerned that I would not acknowledge my Swedish ancestry. My Swedish grandmother smiled at my introduction.

My Okanagan grandmother was just sitting there smiling, it did not matter to her what I would say, she was just proud that I completed my degree. As I reflected on this experience, I really started to think about how identity is such a powerful force in terms of knowing who you are and how you are seen on this earth. I was raised in an environment where we would often write down all of the ethnic backgrounds we had flowing in our

veins. We would chuckle in the fact that we were all “Heinz 57”. However, we were all Okanagan in the ways we treated each other and the people around us. That identity silently made me who I am today. What I have learned from my experiences growing up and my work experience is that too many in the Aboriginal community have struggled to find success in the education system primarily due to not having their respective identities acknowledged.

I position myself as an Indigenous educator who was raised in a strong and tight family/community centred environment that was empirically Okanagan. As such, the research questions I want to address are closely tied to a traditional question asked in our traditional teachings in the form of the Four Chiefs story.

Sometimes, when talking to students about reflecting on their experiences and aspirations, I refer to navel gazing (i.e. the practice of *omphaloskepsis*) for a few minutes to gain a better understanding of themselves and their world. This thesis could be considered as my navel-gazing exercise to fully understand and explore the experiences of Aboriginal peoples in the educational system of BC in relation to how students see themselves as members of the *sqilx*” in the Okanagan. The term *sqilx*” means “the people” or “the dream in a spiral” (Cohen, 2010, p. 35) and it was the name of my grandfather, Alex Marshall.

I was once sitting in my office and reflecting on the story I am about to tell, when I realized that our faculty and staff have experiences like this one every day and they are part of the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) and the people who work here. It is completely natural for us to take an individual under our wing or to invite them to stand up in our circle and nurture, support, and believe in them until they realize they can fly.

The following story reveals the urgent need to address our lack of understanding about Aboriginal success in education:

An academic support person asked how she might assist the young woman standing at the desk. The woman replied excitedly that she needed a form faxed to her band education coordinator. The support person asked the young woman if she would rather have the documents scanned and emailed, but in her eagerness, the young woman does not consider the efficiency of using email. She is only familiar with faxing. Therefore, the young woman hesitantly responds that the education coordinator is waiting to see the fax and asks the support person to please fax the form.

While observing this interaction, I was curious about what was so important on the form that it caused all the excitement in the young woman. I smiled and asked what was making her smile so much. She proudly responded that it was a copy of her electrical foundation marks and she had successfully completed her certificate and was now eligible to become a first-year apprentice. I could see her confidence and happiness spreading across her face.

We chatted for a bit and then she told me that her partner wanted to take the upcoming piping and plumbing foundation program. Her partner, who was nearby, looked like a deer caught in the headlights when he realized the conversation was shifting to him. He pushed himself backwards and seemed to shrink into the seat. My eyes turned toward him, pinning him in his place, and I asked if he was interested in signing up for the program. He shyly grinned and said he was thinking about it. In his shyness, his eyes were avoiding mine; he appeared cautious and a little flustered, and I imagined that he would have rather waited in the car.

His partner insisted that he was very good at repairing things like leaking toilets and drains and had done this kind of work for more than five years. Again, he was realizing that he was stuck as the centre of attention; all eyes were on him in the small academic support room. The child also sensed the scrutiny and moved closer to his mother, leaving his father to cope with the attention from all those present.

Before he could change his mind or answer any other questions, the application was completed and he was scheduled for an assessment for math and English, and he was enrolled into the program. The RAROs made him feel welcomed and important, that he was being heard and that they were there to help him.

(Personal Story, 2015)

The young couple is archetypical to the NVIT. Both individuals did not have very successful experiences in the K-12 system and wanted a better life for their child. At the

same time they were fearful that they were not good at school and would never be successful.

I have always wanted to examine the concept of how students arrive at a point in education where they are balanced and at peace. Fortunately, I have had many opportunities to see the moments of joy when a student realizes success after working hard and earning good grades and accolades. As a tree planter, I once experienced the important motivators for success.

Between 1984 and 1994, I worked at various minimal wage jobs and travelled throughout the world. In 1989, I was working in a crew of 90 tree planters and we were camped at Tsay Kay Dene, a very remote community at the top of Williston Lake in northern BC. Typically, in the evening we would hang out at camp and sit around the fire. I will never forget the discussions I heard and their lasting impact on me. At the time, I was 23 years old and had started the tree-planting job after making six dollars an hour cutting lawns. The other planters talked about the universities they were attending and the programs they were taking. I heard about science at the University of Calgary, pre-law at McGill, and English literature at UBC. They seemed to go on and on for hours about their academic lives. I do not think I ever felt that out of place. I remember sitting there thinking, “man, what the heck am I doing? Can I go to school?”

Previously, I had unsuccessfully tried to attend the University College of the Cariboo, which I am sure did not make my parents happy. At the end of the planting season in 1989, I told my friends that I was going to Vancouver to enroll in college and to find a wife. I did both. My fiancée, later wife, was a huge inspiration for me to pursue

higher learning, and in 1994, I graduated from UBC's Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP).

Upon reflection and dialogue with my mother and her sisters, I realized that my passion for helping others to succeed stems from my innate relationship to my Okanagan values and beliefs that I fully understand make me who I am. My earlier stories about my grandmother and mother and father exemplify my training for being a servant to those in need. As I mentioned earlier, the needs in Aboriginal education are great and the awareness of the experiences of Aboriginal people in this country are small. A critical inquiry is needed to address the gaps that exist.

Methodology

My methodology for analysis is to replace the environmental ethos of *tmix*^w over an educational landscape and in particular the Four Chiefs story is the framework through which the Aboriginal post-secondary context is examined. Stonechild (2006) calls education the new buffalo and uses the educational policies of Aboriginal people in Canada as the landscape for his argument. He purports that education will be the new provider of all things for Aboriginal people just as the buffalo was in the prairies before the mid-19th century. The buffalo provided Aboriginal people with material for food, clothing, and shelter, as does the *tmix*^w for Okanagan people today. In addition, the new *tmix*^w in this oppositional dynamics model also embodies the Enowkinwixw: Four Parts Nested View. The Four Chiefs are transliterated as Indigenous Identity (II), External Aboriginal Policy (EAP), Indigenous Control of Education (ICE), and Indigenous Community (IC), that gather together to answer the question: "How will the People-To-Be survive in the new *tmix*^w?"

I am using a mixed methods approach in order to present and research what others have found in the Aboriginal educational landscape. I conduct research to ask the students of a particular target group their experiences and views on those deficits. The literature review investigates research situated in areas discussing Indigenous identity, Indigenous community, external policies related to education, and Indigenous control of education. The methodology utilizes these four parts-to-whole concepts to mirror the systems-based *syilx* Indigenous inquiry model found in the Okanagan *captik^{wl}*, the Four Chiefs, as explained by Armstrong (2009).

The Four Chiefs story provides the best method to construct an appropriate framework to address the quest for balance and regeneration that is required to achieve success in Aboriginal education. Like all stories, the reader has the ability to interpret and learn from the teachings provided by it (Archibald, 2008). The people-to-be, or current and future students are here now and they are in our schools. In order for me to understand and conceptualize a new paradigm for inquiry into Aboriginal education, I must first seek to understand how we arrived at where we are now. If the Four Chiefs seek to provide a method to find balance and regeneration, then I must first understand why we are unbalanced and struggling as an educational system.

As the title of this research presents, Finding *Q^wamq^wəmt* is about the search for balance and happiness within Indigenous post-secondary education. The opposite of balance and happiness in my language is *q^wənq^want*. Specifically *q^wənq^want* as a term refers to a state of being pitiful and unbalanced. Within the Indigenous context in this country we have experienced much to leave the by-product of *q^wənq^want*, within

Indigenous communities in general, and specifically, within Indigenous educational contexts.

The marginalization of Canada's Aboriginal population was systemic and deliberate, resulting in catastrophic health conditions for people living on reserves across Canada (Daschuk, 2013). Poor health conditions, systemic assimilation, and general racism gave rise to new policies to remove Indian children from reserves for their education in residential schools. The poor health conditions on reserves coupled with the poor educational experiences in the residential school system led to "new 'unnatural' pathologies, such as AIDS, diabetes, and suicide emerging under physical and social constraints experienced by Aboriginal communities today" (p. 186). The effects of marginalization on First Nations people in Canada are responsible for an assumed sense of learned helplessness in the First Nations community, resulting in unbalanced communities with little to no support or understanding of the educational systems.

First Nations people and Indigenous communities in Canada have endured centuries of colonization and assimilation (RCAP, 1996). Mi'kmaq community and educational leader Marie Battiste (2013) outlines how current education systems in Canada perpetuate bias:

The education system has not yet ensured that non-Indigenous children develop an accurate understanding of the Indigenous peoples in Canada and their knowledge systems, much less who is their neighbour (p. 32).

She adds:

Aboriginal peoples in Canada and Indigenous peoples throughout the world are feeling the tensions created by a Eurocentric education system that has taught them to distrust their Indigenous knowledge systems, their elders' wisdom, and their own inner learning spirit (p. 24).

What type of environment is created in Indigenous communities and school systems through this? It resembles an Indigenous environment and a school system that is unbalanced and how the intergenerational impact of colonization continues to be felt today as described by Battiste above. The following concepts (FNESC, 2008) signify the process of control that the government of Canada holds over First Nations people, and in particular, regarding education: colonization-an agenda that relies heavily on the hegemony of a government over Indigenous people; Indian Act-a law that essentially was designed to control Indigenous people in this country; residential schools, day schools, public schools (K-12 and post-secondary)-these aspects of education speak to the transition of education for Indigenous people from outright subjugation to more local controlled models; current data-these data speak to the plight of FNESC to insist that the provincial government in BC provide appropriate data to guide the development and direction of indigenous education in this province. Largely absent from these lists are the important aspects of the relationality of Indigenous people within the education system as described by Battiste (2013): “However, Canada’s educational institutions have largely ignored, and continue to ignore, Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy” (p. 87).

First Nations people have had to endure two phases of hegemonic treatment in regards to education: colonization and the implementation and administration of the Indian Act. Since first contact, colonization began during an era of economic gains for both the colonizer and the First Nations. The phase can be viewed as one of reciprocal need (Saul, 2008). During the period, Europeans depended heavily on the resourcefulness and friendliness of First Nations just to survive. In terms of trade, Europeans were considered to have “married up” in marriages to First Nations women, and such marriages allowed

the European trader to have greater access to the rich resources associated with the First Nations community, namely furs (Saul, 2008).

As more and more Europeans landed on Canada's shores and more and more Indigenous people perished over a span of 250 years from wave after wave of epidemics, the problem of what to do with the Indian entered a new phase; and in 1876 the Indian Act was passed. The Indian Act contained a set of laws and rules pertaining to the treatment and behavior of Canada's First Nations people. From the Indian Act, the policy of educating Indian children was enacted. Some 130 residential schools and countless federal day schools were created across the country (Stonechild, 2006). RCAP (1996) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2014) both identify questions and gaps in relation to funding and access for Aboriginal people to attend post-secondary programming.

Stonechild (2006) outlines the plight of Canada's First Nations people in regards to post-secondary education. Initially, the history and development of Indigenous higher learning access was limited due to the interpretation of treaty language and Indian Act language pertaining to funding for education. The lived experiences of indigenous people within higher learning spoke to the limited funding and supportive environments as major barriers that were not addressed or considered in the external Aboriginal educational policies. Stonechild (2006) links these gaps as reasons why we are still struggling today with issues of funding, support, and access.

The contextual foundation for the research is situated in the literature review (Chapter 2). The review of the literature is concentrated in four key areas: Indigenous identity; silyx concepts; Indigenous pedagogy and epistemology; and current realities. I will present the theoretical framework in Chapter 3. It guides the research study with a

critical lens and highlights the rationale for the study. The importance of following a process that is respectful of the participants and Aboriginal peoples in general is emphasized. The methodology (Chapter 4) explains in detail how the research was conducted and the Indigenous methodology employed. The results (Chapter 5) present the narrative of the population that has been surveyed. Participants describe their history and the struggles they have experienced in their educational settings, along with their most positive experiences in the analysis and discussion (Chapter 6). This thesis is finished (Chapter 7) with conclusions and my personal thoughts.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

They held many meetings and talked for a long time about what the People-To-Be would need to live. All of the Chiefs thought and thought. “What can we give to the People-To-Be to eat that is already here on earth?” they asked one another. “There seems to be no answer”.

(Armstrong, 2009, p. 359)

In order to identify and understand a systems-based analysis tool rooted in a *syilx* Indigenous systems-based pedagogy to examine the deficits in the education system an examination of the literature is crucial. In this chapter, I will review the literature on the subject in four dynamic polarities as a parts-to-whole view of a system inclusive of cultural identity, external Aboriginal educational policy, Indigenous control of education, and Indigenous community. The first section of the review will focus on British Columbia kindergarten to grade 12 (K-12) and post-secondary educational policies and practices that exist currently. The second part will focus on efforts made by Indigenous communities to gain control over the education of its people. The latter section of this chapter will examine the literature on Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies as relevant to the topic. I will conclude with an introduction to a *syilx* Indigenous pedagogy that will serve as the model of a systems-based analysis tool to examine the deficits in the educational system in BC.

Policies and Practices: K-12 to Post-secondary Education

The lack of success of Aboriginal students in the K-12 system is not a new phenomenon (Richards, 2012). The disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in regards to high school completion has exhibited a large gap for several decades. A dichotomy even exists in the Aboriginal population as Aboriginal students

living on reserve have an even lower high school completion rate than Aboriginal children who attend schools in public settings and are living off reserve (ACCC, 2005). The Auditor General of BC (2015) reported that BC must do more to close the gap between the success rates of those in the K-12 school and the general population. This requires a deeper look at the historical, political, and financial causes, and accordingly, I review research related to the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC), the BC government in the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Ministry of Advanced Education (AVED). I also consider research conducted for the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) for data that can provide a greater understanding of Aboriginal education in BC.

The province of British Columbia has worked with Aboriginal communities and organizations to arrive at the current benchmarks to improve the educational experience of Aboriginal post-secondary learners.

Aboriginal learners succeed in an integrated, relevant, and effective British Columbia post-secondary education system that enhances their participation in the social, cultural and economic life of their communities, the province, and global society.

(AVED, 2004, p. 11).

The British Columbia government has a longstanding history of collecting data on the transition of Aboriginal students both in the K-12 public system and in the post-secondary system (FNESC, 2008). The Ministry of Education and the Central Data Warehouse report annually on demographics of constituents and share the information publically. The information also informs evidence-based decisions by policy makers. As mentioned in the introduction, between 2010 and 2015 the BC school completion rates for all Aboriginal students in the K-12 system increased slightly between 54%-63%, while the

non-Aboriginal completion rate remained constant at approximately 86% (MoE, 2015). BC has a total of 60 school districts and 62,491 students self-identified as Aboriginal in the 2014-15 school year. The number represents approximately 11% of the total student population of 552,788 from K-12. The percent of Aboriginal students enrolled in the BC public school system has risen from 7.4% in 2000-2001 to its current level of 11% (MoE, 2015, p. 3). This is a significant increase in the Aboriginal population and is worthy of consideration. The data are based on the voluntary self-declarations of students and parents at the time of student registration at a school. Stats Canada also released data pertaining to the recent census in 2011, which permits comparisons of the rise in the Aboriginal population and enrollment in public schools in the province of B.C. (Statistics Canada, 2012).

The education gap in the K-12 is also resulting in the evident gap between the percentage of Aboriginal people who hold college certificates, diplomas, and degrees, in comparison to all Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2012). For many young people in Canada, the desire to pursue post-secondary education is often over-shadowed by the reality that by the time they reach a post-secondary school entrance age they have already been disqualified or excluded from applying to school (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002). Reasons for students not pursuing post-secondary education include the ongoing debates about peer groups, academic preparedness, socio-economic community conditions, and family education levels (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002).

The Auditor General of BC (2015) recommended 11 strategies that were accepted by the provincial Ministry of Education. The strategies included recommendations and direction to ensure school boards work with school district superintendents to improve the

success rates of Aboriginal students. In order to achieve this, it was highly recommended that school districts build meaningful relationships with Aboriginal communities to support Aboriginal students in their transition throughout the K-12 system. Measures were recommended to be in place such as regular monitoring of transition rates for Aboriginal students and that the targeted funds for Aboriginal students be used appropriately and meaningfully to address the lack of educational success. Although it is too soon to evaluate the progress of the recommendations, they will be greatly scrutinized and thought about over the coming years. It is evident that Aboriginal people face even greater barriers to success in post-secondary education than most others based on the above information (Parkin & Baldwin, 2009).

The Aboriginal Post-Secondary education training policy framework and action plan (AVED, 2004) was directed at improving the outcomes of Aboriginal post-secondary students enrolled in BC schools of higher learning. The goals encompassed the systemic change so that the public post-secondary education system is relevant, responsive, respectful, and receptive to Aboriginal learners and communities; providing access to community-based delivery of programs, through partnerships with Aboriginal institutes and communities. Other areas of focus included reducing financial barriers, seamless transitions from K-12 to post-secondary education, and continuous improvements based on research and data tracking. Recognizing that increased post-secondary education levels of Aboriginal people results in better labor market and health outcomes for individuals, better community-related outcomes is expected to benefit all British Columbians.

The National Working Summit on Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education undertaken by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada provided more

effective policy advice and recommendations to the federal government on Aboriginal education. Some of the recommendations included: enhancing community outreach; engaging institutional Indigenization; securing sustainable funding; developing a relevant curriculum and implementing appropriate modes of delivery; increasing collaboration between stakeholders; building a culture of education; developing community partnerships; increasing collaboration; meeting demand; creating a new distribution model; and giving the right kind of support ensuring transparency (AUCC, 2011, p. 4). To ensure that more Aboriginal students started and completed their post-secondary education, all participants were committed to the following principles: working collaboratively, sharing knowledge, and taking a holistic approach.

In British Columbia a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed to solidify partnerships between the British Columbia Ministry of Education and the BC Aboriginal Education Partnership. The MOU led to the development of a framework for the creation of Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements (AEEA). These AEEAs are five-year formal agreements between and among school districts, local Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal organizations, and the Ministry of Education that address specific performance goals and outcomes for Aboriginal learners as described in a study by Kitchenham, A., Fraser, T., Pidgeon, M., Ragoonaden, K. (2016). In the study 22 school districts were investigated to determine the breadth and success of AEEAs. In regards to the transition to post-secondary for Aboriginal students the report indicates that 56% of current EAAEs contain reference to the transition (p. 7). Of important note in this study is the clear lineation that success is measured not only by academic success but also a sense of belonging and culture (p. 12).

The efforts of the British Columbia provincial government were made to improve the educational success rates of Aboriginal people attending public K-12 and post-secondary schools and have resulted in limited improvements. The current literature suggests that the deficits in the success of Aboriginal students lie in the socio-historical realities of Aboriginal people (Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski, 2004). Relevant evidence still needs to be collected about Aboriginal people who dropped-out of the K-12 and then return to post-secondary and their experiences and attributes for making the decision to return.

Some of the more recent post-secondary approaches have created improved access for Aboriginal people including transition programs, Aboriginal gathering places and the inclusion of Elders (Parent, 2011; Pidgeon, 2008). Current research initiatives are also trying to identify the latent barriers to Aboriginal post-secondary education (Pidgeon, 2008; Billy-Minnabarriet, 2012). Some have contended that a vast amount of previous research has compared outcomes of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students examining the differences in terms of academic outcomes. This may be seen as an unfair practice because how can one compare the benchmarks of academic success of a marginalized people to that of the dominant culture (Deer, F., DeJaeger, A., & Wilkinson, L. 2011)?

Little Indigenous research has considered motivational factors that might influence Aboriginal people who have dropped-out of the K-12 system to return to pursue post-secondary education or the barriers that may exist. This dissertation addresses this gap by providing voice to Aboriginal students who have dropped out of the K-12 school system only to return to post-secondary.

As Deer, F., DeJaeger, A., & Wilkinson, L. (2011) state,

“very few of the studies bring the qualitative voices of Aboriginal students to answer this question. Like many student experiences, the experiences of Aboriginal students are multi-faceted and the areas of influence are not mutually exclusive, but are overlapping and intertwined” (p. 3).

Some Aboriginal post-secondary institutions have implemented appropriate solutions for eradicating the barrier, for example, the 40 First Nation Indigenous Adult Higher Learning Association institutions in the province of BC. One of these schools in BC is NVIT. The five local First Nations in the Nicola Valley, as a means to ensure that their community members had a learning environment that validated their identity, created NVIT in 1983 and ensured control was with the Indigenous community as outlined below:

During the early years, NVIT was an institution that was administered by the Nicola Tribal Association and as such all systems and structures (financial and administrative) were operated through a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) hired by NTA for the purpose of managing the fledgling institution

(Billy-Minnabarriett, 2012, p. 62).

Throughout BC, all of these institutions are grounded within their respective communities ensuring that control remains intact and that identity and local Indigenous knowledge is evident. The IAHLA organizations are evidence of how the Indigenous community maintains its struggle to resist the colonial hegemony of the federal and provincial governments to create learning centres for Indigenous people that reflect their respective identities. The next step is to explore what the Indigenous community has done in recent years to clarify what challenges still exist.

Community Control over Education

It was at Aboriginal insistence that provisions for schools were included in the treaties. They wanted on-reserve schools that would give young people the skills to help their people in their dealings with settler society. They never envisioned a school system that separated children from their parents, their language, and their cultural and spiritual practices. In some cases, they bluntly told Indian Affairs officials they did not want their children to become like white people (Pettit, 1997, p. 49).

Aboriginal people in Canada have long resisted the colonization of their communities. This is especially true in the case of the government's will to have all Aboriginal children attend residential school. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) relates countless stories and reports of individual First Nations children vehemently opposing the unjust and unfair conditions they endured during their time at a residential school. The resistance is evident up to and including the National Indian Brotherhood's (1972) *Indian Control of Indian Education* paper that called for drastic changes to the education of First Nations children. Since then, more and more First Nations people have entered post-secondary settings to gain an education (Pidgeon, 2008). Some Indigenous students enter the world of higher learning with an indignant edge to their demeanor, as noted by scholar Dr. Bill Cohen (2010), who described his experiences as a young man at the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology in British Columbia. He was "going through an emotionally driven phase and would get very angry hearing about all the awful things that had been done to the Indians and the Indigenous peoples of the world" (p. 84). Dr. Cohen (2010) continues, "At NVIT, I discovered I was a pretty good student and began to enjoy 'the academic stuff'" (p. 85).

Dr. Cohen had sought to discover who he was and he was taking the first step. He was introduced to Indigenous teachings and philosophy and learned to love finding

himself and connecting the threads of who he is with his larger community (Cohen, 2010). Another Indigenous scholar, Dr. Armstrong told me that she had left high school part way through the eleventh grade because she felt that her instructors were racist and she would not tolerate being treated in such a way. She indicated that she returned to school the following year under circumstances that would allow her to be successful (personal communication, 19 May 2015). These individual narratives provide reasons why Indigenous institutions have developed in response to the colonial structures and barriers of our current educational system that did not, and continues in many ways to fail our students.

Aboriginal people in Canada do not achieve the same kind of success in education as do the majority of Canadians (ACCC, 2005; AGBC, 2015; FNESC, 2008; RCAP, 1996). As Saul (2008) contends it would unfortunately appear that to improve on this, Aboriginal people would need to adopt some of the traits and values of the mainstream society, through the variety of programs that are designed to prepare students to perform like the general population. In reality, movements that launched research on Indigenous educational philosophies and the creation of Indigenous educational learning centres were initiated by trailblazers such as Kirkness (1991), Archibald (2008), and Battiste (2013) within the last 40 years. These scholars and Indigenous community leaders have initiated a new movement that seeks to move Indigenous education to a top priority with current governments across Canada. Sadly, this incredible work is not being absorbed by mainstream Canada.

In his book on the formation and foundation of Canada, Saul (2008) began by saying, “We are a Metis civilization” (p. 3). Essentially, the author was equating

Canadian values and mores with a deeply Indigenous rooted system that had been forgotten over the centuries because of colonization and racist political practices.

In fact, the perception of Aboriginal people in this country have changed little over the previous 150 years (Daschuk, 2013; Saul, 2008). Daschuk (2013) shares that between 1867 and 1880 the immigrant perception of Aboriginal people was that the Aboriginal people lived on reserves out of town, they were pitiful, sick and dying, and needed our help. Saul (2008) wonders if the perceptions have changed. Educational systems mirror societal attitudes (Durkheim, 1951). If we are to believe Durkheim, then, as a nation, we have a long way to go in order to transform our education.

Interestingly, the education system is based on students having the physical, mental, and emotional capacity to absorb information and learning (Saul, 2008). In the lens provided by the theoretical framework, an obvious imbalance exists in the education of Aboriginal people. If Aboriginal students have a positive self-image and support for education at home, as presented within the analysis of the survey responses in Chapter 6, then why are so many Aboriginal students not enjoying the same success in education as other Canadians? It is crucial that the Identity aspect of the student is acknowledged and respected by all learning institutions. As Deer (2008,) states,

Integrating Aboriginal subject matter into provincial curricula serves a number of specific goals, such as the development of self-concept, the development of effective learning environments, and the understanding of Aboriginal values, beliefs and history by non-Aboriginal peoples (p. 3).

Recognizing Indigenous identity can be viewed as a positive motivation for all aspects of education. As mentioned previously, the historical educational experiences of Aboriginal people have led to abysmal educational experiences for Aboriginal students.

Brown (2004) explores emotional competency and barriers to education formed at an early age due to emotional hurt. The lack of self-esteem and feelings of shame can overpower the space to learn. Self-esteem and self-worth play a large role among First Nations individuals and their ability to have a positive perception of their own learning abilities. Brown (2004) defines self-esteem as the feeling one has about oneself, stating that self-esteem plays an important role in learning. According to Brown, when the hurt is removed, learning can happen. While I agree with Brown (2004) that self-esteem is an important attribute for all people, there is a gap in the research in the area of Aboriginal students who have a positive self-image and still do not succeed in the educational system. The research addresses that gap. Interestingly, the Auditor General of BC (2015) links poor success rates of Aboriginal people in public K-12 schools to the racism of low expectations.

The Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association (IAHLA) commissioned a study, *Transitions from Aboriginal Controlled Post-Secondary Institutes* (Hunt-Jinnouchi, 2011) to identify education institutions in BC that are working toward developing and implementing access programs that are culturally relevant. The study identified the following models as meeting the association's goals: the Aboriginal public post-secondary institute (NVIT), the urban-based Aboriginal private post-secondary institution (Native Education College), the northern rural Aboriginal institute (Gitksan Wet'suwet'en Education Society, GWES), the central interior Aboriginal institute (En'owkin Centre), and the coastal corridor institute (Heiltsuk). Aboriginal institutes were found to play a better role in providing Aboriginal students with holistic approaches to education thereby equipping students with the tools needed to transition to other education institutes

successfully (Hunt-Jinnouchi, 2011). The report made a major contribution in finding that cohort models provide experiential knowledge whereby students can apply new skills and knowledge toward the job market opportunities and access to other higher education learning environments (FNESC, 2008).

Pidgeon (2008) examines the question of what makes a university a successful place for Aboriginal students. The author moves away from a student-deficit discourse by analyzing universities from an Indigenous methodological and theoretical approach, in terms of: (a) how Indigenous Knowledge is defined and found in universities and (b) how Indigenous understandings of success, responsibility, and accountability resonate at three universities in BC, Canada. She also indicates that Indigenous Knowledge (IK) was present in only small sections in the academy in programs and through Indigenous faculty members, staff, and students. She argues that First Nations Centres play a critical role by holistically supporting the cultural integrity of Aboriginal students and being agents of change across the institution.

Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) uses the 4Rs to examine the responsibilities of universities to Aboriginal higher education. The following institutional responsibilities were represented as: the first “R” (respect) speaks to the ability of post-secondary schools to respect First Nations cultural integrity. The second “R” (relevance) speaks to the ability of post-secondary schools to ensure that the curricula and student experience is relevant to the First Nations perspectives and experience. The third “R” (reciprocal relationships) speaks to the ability of post-secondary schools to have reciprocal relationships with Indigenous students and the inherent II therein. Finally, the last “R” (responsibility through participation) speaks to the ability of post-secondary schools to allow First

Nations students to participate in the post-secondary experience by being fully immersed and participating in the learning process (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). These authors point out that the institutional accountability to address Aboriginal students must come from both inside and outside the institution.

Indigenous people cannot do this alone. Indigenous leader and author, George Manuel and Michael Posluns (1974) stated that Indigenous people want to steer “our” canoe, but will take help from non-Indigenous people to help with the paddling. Manuel and Posluns (1974) also noted that it would take a truly great leap of imagination for Canadians to see Indigenous people as partners in the concept called Canada. The TRC Calls to Action (2015), and specifically actions 62-65, state:

62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

- i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade 12 students.
- ii. Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.
- iii. Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.
- iv. Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.

63. We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:

- i. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.
- ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.

iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.

iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above.

64. We call upon all levels of government that provide public funds to denominational schools to require such schools to provide an education on comparative religious studies, which must include a segment on Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices developed in collaboration with Aboriginal Elders.

65. We call upon the federal government, through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, post-secondary institutions and educators, and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and its partner institutions, to establish a national research program with multi-year funding to advance understanding of reconciliation (p. 7-8).

What these calls to action perpetuate is the Indigenization the post-secondary and K-12 educational systems in this country and that the task is the responsibility of Canadian governments and organizations as well as that of the Indigenous community.

Recent developments in Aboriginal higher education include cooperative arrangements with First Nations for the development of culturally relevant training programs to meet specific needs, and the recognition of university degree credit for completing certificate programs (Alcorn & Levin, 1998). Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen (2000) describes some of the unique post-secondary programs that have been established to meet the distinct needs of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The authors refer to short case studies that pointed to various programs and models for delivering education. In their critical examination of the case studies, special reference is made to how they were designed in terms of add-on, partnership, and First Nations-controlled approaches.

In British Columbia the Ministry of Advanced Education (2004) in partnership with the First Nations Summit, the First Nations Education Steering Committee, and the Indigenous Adult Higher Learning Association created the Aboriginal post-secondary

education and training policy framework and action plan titled 2020 Vision for the Future to positively work together to address barriers to having Aboriginal people enjoy success in BC's post-secondary settings. The 2007-2010 Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Strategy includes multiple approaches to improve the educational experience of Aboriginal students through creation of new policies, gathering places, scholarships, and Aboriginal Service Plans (p. 5).

While these action plans have resulted in much more involvement of Indigenous communities in the control of educational initiatives in post-secondary settings, they do not go far enough. Access to education for Aboriginal people who have dropped-out of the K-12 education system and transition back to post-secondary to continue their studies is still in need of more commitment and control by Indigenous communities. The desire of Indigenous communities to achieve linguistic and epistemic visions due to the history of colonization and residential schools is still paramount and in need of a concentrated movement towards more Indigenous control over education.

Fundamental questions exist at the centre of the debate for First Nations educators and programmers. How Indigenous communities achieve the goals of self-determination, language revitalization, access to post-secondary education, and sustainable funding for Aboriginal post-secondary education? What are the criteria for evaluating Aboriginal post-secondary education? How can post-secondary education address both the need for more Aboriginal people with degrees and graduate degrees and the need for higher education that is culturally grounded and provides Aboriginal students with the tools to transmit their culture? In assessing the situation of post-secondary education for Aboriginal peoples,

Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen (2000) consider the following areas: access and rates of completion, Indian control of Indian education, and relevance.

Much research has focused on public mainstream post-secondary education and the pertinent barriers Aboriginal students face including housing, day care, and preparedness, access to education, funding limitations and other cultural and language issues. For example, *Honoring What They Say: Postsecondary Experiences of First Nations Graduates* (Archibald et al., 1995), examines First Nations student experiences in post-secondary and discuss barriers such as racism, lack of finances, and a lack of cultural identity in the learning settings. These have been identified by Aboriginal institutions such as the Indigenous Adult Higher Learning Association (IAHLA), the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC), the First Nations House of Learning (FNHL), and others (Pidgeon, 2008). Other recent research has focused on the barriers to Aboriginal student success in the post-secondary system such as Parent (2011). The gap this dissertation addresses is different from the study mentioned above in that the target group of Aboriginal students are not post-secondary graduates. Rather, they are Aboriginal people who have paused-out of the K-12 school system and returned to post-secondary to continue their studies.

This section has presented some of the more recent post-secondary approaches that have created improved access for Aboriginal people. The critical aspect of the transformation of the educational system in relation to Aboriginal people is the acknowledgement and respect towards Indigenous control of education. In order to grasp this concept one must consider Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies. In relation to this Cohen (2010, p.35) insinuate that his research could best be stated as:

“I present my ideas as one of the many foxes in the Okanagan, gathering up the bits of skin, bone, and hair of coyote. When enough is gathered we can breathe on the assembled pile and Senklip, coyote, will awaken, yawn, and say, —Oh, I must have closed my eyes for a few minutes and carry on as if he’d had only a brief nap...”

Indigenous Epistemology and Pedagogy

Before colonization, Aboriginal peoples’ ways of knowing and understanding had been evolving for thousands of years. For generations, Indigenous people relied on their ways of examining and relating to nature, the universe, and the interconnections between these dimensions (Battiste et al., 2002). Traditionally, Aboriginal education processes were carefully constructed with instruction, observing natural processes, adapting to modes of survival, obtaining sustenance from the animal, water, plant, and material worlds, and using natural materials to make tools and implements. According to Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005), the traditional processes for learning to hunt caribou, by observation and meaningful participation, offer insight into how we create opportunities for students learning to operate computers; both require patience and organization. Some Aboriginal education is expressed through dreams, visions, songs, storytelling, and connections to the land and each other. This type of knowledge is experiential and is integrated into the holistic, mind, body, soul, and spirit (Archibald, 2008; Armstrong, 2000). The affective domain is important to learners as well as to educators since the cognitive way of learning often loses sensitivity towards the learner’s feelings. From the Algonquin Anishnaabe perspectives, knowledge is gained from personal experience and reflection (Gehl & Minidoo, 2010). Indigenous Knowledge begets Indigenous identity.

The Indigenous pedagogies of mentorship, apprenticeship, ceremonies, and practice help to unlock the affective domain and give it credence with feelings and insights (Brown, 2004).

Brown (2004) states that paying attention to the affective, fosters an upward movement towards healing and learning that has been essential in NVIT transformation (organization) of knowledge. A balance exists between the cognitive, affective, physical, and spiritual dimensions of a student's life at NVIT. In some ways, NVIT education reflects a "way of being and doing" that runs contrary to what is practiced in mainstream colleges and universities: individual accomplishments and competitiveness versus collective activities; learning through books and direct instruction in the contrived environment of the classroom rather than through experiential learning in real-life settings; a focus on cognitive understanding as opposed to a balance between the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual (Armstrong, 2004, Moodley, 1992, Pidgeon, 2008).

In terms of educational content, the inclusion of IK, traditions, perspectives, worldviews, and conceptions in curricula, instructional materials, textbooks, and course books have the same kind of effects as the inclusion of Indigenous methods in education (Archibald & Williams, 2007; Canadian Council on Learning, 2007a; Evans, McDonald, & Nyce, 1999).

According to Armstrong (2009), "Director General of UNESCO, Fredrico Mayor defined Indigenous as peoples having... an immense knowledge of their environment, based on centuries of living close to nature" (p. 68). Armstrong (2009) adds that one cannot separate the culture from the land when considering indigeneity. Therefore,

appropriate curricula development must consider the linkage between Indigenous people and the environment from which they came.

Being truly connected to the land puts Indigenous cultures in a unique position in modern times to be aware of and knowledgeable about the interrelationships, needs, benefits, and dangers of education for Aboriginal peoples. The ideal concept of Aboriginal education flows out of what is natural and innate, is rooted in historical traditions, and has a practical application. The learner is situated in a broad interconnected web of relationships with the land, with ancestors, and with others. Aboriginal education is hands-on, experiential, and geared towards meaningful purposes. Little opportunity exists for individual expression or for learning to occur as a natural evolution over time (Minnabarriet, 2012). My review of the literature indicates that there is an abundance of this type of research (see Archibald, 2008; Armstrong, 2004; and Battiste et al., 2002).

Values, language, curricula, textbooks, campus festivities, and orientation often lead to more success and retention for many students (FNESC, 2008; Malatest & Associates, 2004; Mendelson, 2006; RCAP, 1996). In an earlier study, Agbo (2004) concluded that effective instruction and course delivery methods motivate learners to learn with ease and become successful. The experience of Aboriginal students at NVIT has been influenced by factors such as family and cohort group support (Billy-Minnabarriet, 2012). Similarly, research by the First Nations Education Steering Committee (2008) and Pidgeon (2008) found that most of the support services, such as child-care, tutoring, and financial aid, cited by Aboriginal students are important services that facilitate the students' success and retention. The Indigenous worldview (and IK) has greatly influenced Aboriginal students in such areas as their holistic, open system; ecology, spirituality,

humanity, collectivism, community, storytelling, elders, and sense of community and belonging. Simpson (2001), Stonechild (2006), Evans et al. (1999), and Preston (2008) have suggested that Elders contribute greatly towards Aboriginal education. They act as positive Aboriginal role models to enhance the students' understanding of Aboriginal peoples, traditional ways of learning, values, culture, and mentorship.

Pidgeon (2008) argues that Indigenous understandings of success in education are related to the Indigenous understanding of self-determination, social justice, decolonization, and empowerment. Moreover, Smith (1997) suggests that the goals of self-determination are part of the goal of social justice, involving the processes of transformation, decolonization, healing, and mobilization. In presenting these findings, Battiste et al. (2002) and Hampton's (as cited in Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000) reveal new perspectives on epistemologies that serve to counter the cognitive imperialism that processes of colonization unleashed against Indigenous people and their shared cognitive realities. These include Indigenous storytelling.

In relation to the concept of 'Indigenous Identity', the role of storytelling is to transmit knowledge from the past to the present generation (Archibald, 2008). As a main theme in this thesis, stories are a way of analyzing and sharing knowledge. For example, *captik^{wl}* oral literature is the core tool of an educational transfer system within the Okanagan people (Armstrong, 2009). Stories contain the requisite systems and methods through which to find purpose and responsibility in our world (Armstrong, 2009). The stories told by elders, grandparents, and parents are a means for transferring knowledge about the ways of knowing, living, and spirituality that relate to the way of life of Aboriginal peoples. In this thesis, the storytelling approach mirrors an intergenerational

approach where those who have learned from their experience convey the knowledge to those who are interested in learning.

According to Cajete (1994), “The telling of a story is such a universal part of human communication and learning that it may be that storytelling is one of the most basic ways the human brain structures and relates experience” (p. 137). Through stories, we share our feelings, heal wounds, discover hope, increase understanding, and strengthen community. An Indigenous academic who has contributed to the development of IK, Joann Archibald (1998, 2001, 2007, and 2008) maintains that stories are not only to be recounted and passed down; they are also intended as tools for teaching. Archibald (2008) utilizes concentric rings to bind the nested system in which an individual is situated in a family, community, and ultimately, the “land” that cannot be divided. The educational landscape that I am examining does contain small pockets of Indigenous ways of knowing, however, the absence of effort to increase these pockets could result in a system that contributes to the current crisis in Aboriginal education. It also results in an unbalanced system for Indigenous learners.

Indigenous Knowledge (IK) forms the foundation for an Indigenous person’s sense of self. Armstrong (2000) defines this being as “The Dance House,” which incorporates the elements of self, family, community, and the primary place of “land”. “These fundamental areas are the physical self, the intellect, the spiritual, and the emotional” (Armstrong, 2000, p. 37). The Dance House is the epistemological foundation of IK and it relates to the building and thriving of an Indigenous person. What this will look like is a balanced person, individually, with a supportive family, secured in a supportive community in a “land” that is ever regenerating to support the needs of today and the

future generations. In these foundations, several “points of struggle” intersect with Indigenous ways of doing and non-Indigenous epistemology when Indigenous educational process devoid of the Dance House foundations, which lead to conflict and tension, and imbalance. The result is are educational experiences in Canada for Indigenous people that are not positive.

An important aspect of IK in education is in providing education that fits with Aboriginal students’ inherent perspectives, experiences, and worldviews. Importantly, for non-Indigenous students and teachers, education that uses such methods often raises the awareness of Indigenous traditions and appreciation of their cultural realities (Battiste et al., 2002). Furthermore, Aboriginal students in post-secondary institutions can reclaim and revalue their languages, symbols, arts, and culture, which can improve their educational success (Battiste, 2000; Kavanagh, 2008; Smith, 2000).

Defining IK in the last few years has been prompted largely by the works of several Indigenous scholars including Archibald (2008), Battiste (2000), Kavanagh, (2008), and Smith (2000). The renewed interest in how IK affects Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics, students, communities, and academic institutions leads naturally to another question: What factors affect IK? Despite the ubiquity of the IK definition, the question has received more attention from Indigenous academics than non-Indigenous academics. This may be explained by IK being an act of empowerment by Indigenous people (Battiste et al., 2002).

According to Battiste et al. (2002), Indigenous academics have attempted to affirm and activate the holistic paradigm of IK to reveal the richness of Indigenous languages, worldviews, teachings, and experiences, all of which have been systematically excluded

from contemporary educational institutions and Eurocentric systems. With this act of intellectual self-determination, Battiste et al. (2002) argues that Indigenous academics are developing new analyses and methodologies to decolonize themselves, their communities, and their institutions (p. 4). The research on Indigenous Knowledge strengthens Indigenous identity in Indigenous community members. It serves to foster a sense of place that is so crucial to the Indigenous community member (Armstrong, 2009). It is important to note how this knowledge is continuously looping and connecting within and outside of the concentric rings that bind Indigenous knowledge to the land (Archibald, 2008) As a result, the dissertation serves to create a new systems-based analysis tool rooted in Indigenous *syilx* epistemology.

Syilx Indigenous scholars such as Armstrong (2004, 2009) and Cohen (2010) have provided community members much to consider when thinking about the systems-based realities of *syilx* epistemology. Armstrong (2004), in *Natural Knowing – Schooling and Sharing the Okanagan Way*, shares that education in a traditional Okanagan setting occurred as a natural part of family and community in everyday living. Of main concern was caring for the environment so that sustenance was available for all community members in a sharing manner (Armstrong, 2004). Sharing of resources in western epistemology is regarded as “possessions being divided among others, rather than the manifestation or demonstration of how-to-be” (Armstrong, 2004, p. 10).

Armstrong (2009) organizes two very important concepts in her dissertation that relate to my studies: she introduces *syilx* knowledge theory and *syilx* methodological procedures of inquiry. She asserts that the knowledge system of the *syilx* people is grounded in whole-systems theory, which is expressed as a nested system within which

one is embedded. The process of learning knowledge is through *captikwł* oral literature as the core tool of an educational transfer system. Armstrong's (2009) examination of the *captikwł* story emphasizes that human embeddedness in the whole system requires learning related to how the individual is influenced by family, community, and the land as a life force.

Armstrong (2009) proposes a methodological process expressed in the *captikwł* of the Four Chiefs as the methodology procedure by which to examine the whole system for imbalance. The examination occurs through a lens of four components viewed as oppositional dynamics to reveal areas of imbalance in the whole system.

A community member has a responsibility to see the community as a living organism, interconnected with the family, individual, and the land. In seeing the community through this lens, the education system evokes a sense of wholeness, rather than that of departmentalized learning (Armstrong, 2004). Barlow (2000, pp. 27-35) interviewed Capra who asks how long before western ways of knowing contemplate sustainability, as it was evident in traditional people, much like the *syilx*. The systems-based pedagogy of sustainability is at the core of *syilx* Indigenous pedagogy (Armstrong, 2004) including the research of Cohen (2010).

Cohen (2010) noted that the purpose of his research was to “theorize Okanagan transforming pedagogy with the recovery of Okanagan ways of knowing, and fluency in our language for our children” (p. 36). Okanagan transforming pedagogy is best understood through the following:

I present my ideas as one of the many foxes in the Okanagan, gathering up the bits of skin, bone, and hair of coyote. When enough is gathered we can breathe on the assembled pile and Senklip, coyote, will awaken, yawn, and say, —Oh, I must have closed my eyes for a few minutes and carry on as if he ‘d had only a brief nap...

(Cohen, 2010, p. 35)

Cohen (2010) stresses that it is vitally important to understand that the *syilx* Indigenous pedagogy is in constant transformation through the centuries of colonization and hegemony. Cohen sees himself as one of the Okanagan foxes that is gathering up bits and pieces of ourselves so that we may encourage future generations to learn our history. His vision for *syilx* Indigenous pedagogy is to encourage all who can to take the responsibility to learn as much as we can from our Elders and the stories of the land. He is “Okanagan and connected to strands of knowledge and practice that have continued from thousands of years of sustainable Okanagan governance and stewardship” (Cohen, 2010, p. 35). *sqilx*^w is a term referring to Okanagan people and it specifically refers to the “dream in a spiral” (p. 35). Okanagan people are seen as intertwined in the spiral of *tmixw*, or the vastness of everything (Armstrong, 2009). *syilx* Indigenous pedagogy is therefore, laced with connections to all aspect of the individual to their family, community and ultimately to the land. Cohen (2010) uses the spider web to reveal this interconnection. The Four Chiefs story utilizes similar facets of the interconnectedness of our communities to everything (Armstrong, 2009).

In summary, the literature review reminds us that every experience we have in education is connected to everything in the known universe. The current realities of Aboriginal education contain socio-historical realities that have never been in concert with

contemporary practices regarding Aboriginal education. In this thesis, I utilize a syilx Indigenous systems-based framework that currently exists to provide some solutions to problems that continue to hinder success for Aboriginal students in relation to the retention of their identity.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

The four Chiefs of all Creation are: Black Bear, Chief for all creatures on the land; Spring Salmon, Chief for all creatures in the water; Bitterroot, Chief for things under the ground; Saskatoon Berry, Chief for things growing on land.

(Armstrong, 2009, p. 358)

This research is grounded in Indigenous ontology and relational accountability and I will be using a syilx Indigenous story to guide the theoretical framework for my research. Since it is situated in a post-secondary educational context it is also important to examine from an educational learning theory that also provides a lens for the research and viewed as educational theory of constructivism and social constructivism. Constructivist learning theory asserts that students do not learn by directly memorizing information but instead that students learn by actively organizing and making sense of information in their own ways (Ormrod, 2004).

Of central concern is to put forward a framework to theorize learning that stimulates intrinsic motivation to keep students' learning positive by promoting relevant interests and individuality (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Social constructivism encourages the learner to arrive at their own view of understanding as influenced by culture or by being embedded in their own worldview. The learner as a member of a particular community inherits historical cultural developments and language and these are acquired throughout life. The learner's epistemic background provides a necessary context for effective mediation (Nieman & Monyai, 2006). This also stresses the importance of the nature of the social interaction with knowledgeable members of the community. It echoes the "nested" view of Indigenous theories that guides this research.

Indigenous theory and methods reflect Indigenous values of respect, responsibility and accountability, allowing for reflexivity, ethics, and dialogue, thus bringing collaboration, engagement, and transformation (Cohen, 2001). Collaboration is grounded in the concept of relatedness with the “whole” community that is the people, the land and everything they engage in where we live. Social constructivism calls for the provision of multiple representations of reality, based on the relationship between the instructor and the student (Surgenor, 2010). It is a view of interdependence that compliments what contemporary theorists and science now refer to as “systems theory” (Capra, 2000).

Indigenous theory as a systems model provides a view about the way people see themselves in harmony within the whole system as a part of the ecosystem in order to sustain a healthy planet (Capra, 2000). Ecoliteracy is an educational concept connected to the knowledge one has for a specific environment in the way that environment is layered with relationships, through cycles, nested components, and feedback loops that bind everything in it (Capra, 2000). This view is consistent with social constructivism as Mascolol and Fisher (2005) describe learning environments that provide multiple representations of reality. Capra’s Centre for Ecoliteracy models a constructivist-learning environment by providing real-world settings or case-based learning instead of predetermined sequences of instruction. “Classrooms” engage the learner in the environment and therefore show the “nested” system in which the theory envisions the world (Capra, 2000).

These social cultural theories imply that social interaction plays a most important role in cognition. Social constructivism envisions a shift from a focus on the teacher to a focus on the student and the relational context between the two. Scardamalia (2002)

contends that, as students become active participants in the knowledge construction process, the focus of learning shifts from covering the curriculum to working with ideas. These modes of thought support the claim I am making: if students have Indigenous epistemology, language and identity, the students will have the tools necessary to succeed. The nested system is the Syilx model of social constructivism.

Indigenous Systems Theory

The negative legacy and mistrust of research on the topic of Indigenous people is still held by many Indigenous people in their communities (RCAP, 1996). Conducting research that is respectful, relevant, responsible, and reciprocal can be a difficult undertaking (Archibald, 2008; Pidgeon, 2008). Smith (1997), a Maori scholar, proposes and supports argument for the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) theory and indicates its three components. The first, conscientization, is seen as a process of revealing the reality or understanding that marginalization of IK exists. The second, resistance, is seen where a group of oppressed people react and respond or act proactively to oppressive events. The third, praxis, is seen as a means of commenting on prior events and moving forward in a much more positive manner. The author further explains that IK becomes possible in community-based educational settings by reclaiming IK and reframing it into contemporary pedagogy. This results in restoring and returning it toward celebrating, through connecting, networking, and naming, in that way protecting and negotiating, toward discovering, sharing, and creating Indigenous projects of decolonization (Smith, 1997, p. 38).

Ecological knowledge can also be conceptualized as a way of understanding the web of social relationships between a specific group of people and the land they have

inhabited since time immemorial (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). Systems theory seems to borrow from the concept of Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge and creates what is known as ecoliteracy (Capra, 2000). Indigenous people are part of the ecosystem in which they inhabit and through thousands of years of living in a place, traditional ecological knowledge of Indigenous people evolves and grows in order to sustain the environment as a part of their identity (Battiste & Henderson, 2000).

Indigenous pedagogy flows from Indigenous knowledge of systems, which can be described as a unity between the individual, their family, their community, and other beings in the natural and spirit worlds (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). When Battiste and Henderson (2000) discuss Indigenous knowledge, they invoke how important it is to tie IK to a place rather than to a culture. Ways of knowing for Indigenous people connect them to family, community and place represented by the concentric rings conceptualized by Archibald (2008), and the web suggested by Cohen (2010). The same observations of Indigenous ways of knowing are evident in the work of Armstrong (2009). These system theory concepts speak to the inseparable relationship of Indigenous peoples between the individual, family, and community to the land that they inhabit. As Battiste and Henderson (2000) contend “these multilayered relationships are the basis for maintaining social, economic, and diplomatic relationships-through sharing- with other peoples” (p. 42).

Archibald (2008) utilizes concentric rings in her work to explain how stories are intrinsically connected to the knowledge that exists in Indigenous communities. Holism is an Indigenous philosophical concept that best describes the multilayered relationships (Battiste and Henderson, 2000). Concentric rings symbolize different levels of

embeddedness in how everything is connected and thereby influential both intrinsically and externally:

The image of a circle is used by many First Nations peoples to symbolize wholeness, completeness, and ultimately wellness. The never-ending circle also forms concentric circles to show both the synergistic influence of and our responsibility toward the generations of ancestors, the generations of today, and the generations yet to come (Archibald, 2008, p. 11).

To transfer this understanding as theory proposed in this dissertation it is important to view Indigenous knowledge of systems as central to theorizing education experience of Aboriginal student subjects, thereby arriving at the Indigenous methodology used in the dissertation.

Armstrong (2004, p. 11) emphasizes how syilx epistemology “attempts to reconstruct a way that shows how family, community, and land must interact in celebration and appreciation of the gift of life”. Armstrong (2004) states that the concept of community is seen as a living organism and that the entire community must remain healthy and thriving. Utilizing the concentric rings provided by Archibald (2008) one can realize that a greater sense of belonging exists when their identity is related to how they are connected to the greater community and the land. The theory seamlessly fits to the syilx Indigenous theories found in Okanagan stories.

These stories, this language, these ways, and this land are the only valuables we can give you – but life is in them for those who know how to ask and how to learn (Cajete, 1994, p. 41).

In 2010, I learned about the Enowkinwixw process as grounded in systems in a graduate theory class I took at UBC Okanagan. Armstrong taught the class using the Four Chiefs story and I realized that the story and the process could be an excellent theoretical

model as well as a methodological tool for my research. For the sake of greater clarity between theory and methodology, I will share more about the Enowkinwixw process and the teachings found in the Four Chiefs story in Chapter 4 in discussing methodology.

The Four Chiefs

In the world before this world, before there were people, and before things were like they are now, everyone was alive and walking around like we do. All creation talked about the coming changes to their world. They had been told that soon a new kind of people would be living on this earth. Even they, the Animal and Plant people would be changed. Now they had to decide how the People-To-Be would live and what they would eat.

The four Chiefs of all Creation are: Black Bear, Chief for all creatures on the land; Spring Salmon, Chief for all creatures in the water; Bitterroot, Chief for things under the ground; Saskatoon Berry, Chief for things growing on land.

They held many meetings and talked for a long time about what the People-To-Be would need to live. All of the Chiefs thought and thought. “What can we give to the People-To-Be to eat that is already here on earth?” they asked one another. “There seems to be no answer.”

Finally, the three other Chiefs said to Skəmxist, “You are the oldest and wisest among us. You tell us what you are going to do.” Skəmxist said, “Since you have all placed your trust in me, I will have to do the best I can.” He thought for a long time and finally he said, “I will give myself, and all the animals that I am Chief over, to be food for the People-To-Be.” Then he said to Nti?tyix, “What will you do?” Nti?tyix answered, “You are indeed the wisest among us. I will also give myself and all the things that live in the water for food for the People-To-Be.”

Spł'im, who was Chief of all the roots under the ground said, “I will do the same.”

Siya? was last. Siya? said, “I will do the same. All the good things growing above the ground will be food for the People-To-Be.” Chief Skəmxist was happy because there would be enough food for the People-To-Be. Skəmxist said, “Now, I will lay my life down to make these things happen.”

Because the great Chief Skəmxist had given his life, all of Creation gathered and sang songs to bring him back to life. That was how they helped heal each other in that world. They all took turns singing, but Skəmxist did not come back to life. Finally, Fly came along. He sang, “You laid your body down. You laid your life down.” His song was powerful. Skəmxist came back to life. Then Fly told the four Chiefs, “When the

People-To-Be are here and they take your body for food, they will sing this song, they will cry their thanks with this song.”

Then Skømxist spoke for all the Chiefs, “From now on when the People-To-Be come, everything will have its own song, and the People-To-Be will use these songs to help each other as you have helped me.”

That is how food was given to our people. That is how songs were given to our people.

That is how giving and helping one another was and still is taught to our people.

That is why we must respect even the smallest, weakest persons for what they can contribute.

That is why we give thanks and honour to what is given to us

(Armstrong, 2009, pp. 358-362).

The Enowkinwixw process is a parts-to-whole dialogic procedure for decision-making in the Four Chiefs story. It exhibits a way to view the whole system through separate components as an educational system as a relational model for 1) the individual and their cultural Indigenous identity; 2) how external Aboriginal policy has an overall effect on education; 3) how much educational control might be available to the Indigenous community; and 4) the Indigenous community process. Communication, clarification, and identification as process theory constructing a systems view encourages balance for sustaining communities and their relationships to place through cultural identity, policy, community, and control. The literal meaning of the Enowkinwixw process can be seen as, “a number of heads together, filling each other, drop by drop with a composite view” (Armstrong, 2009, p. 154).

The story begins with the Four Chiefs, Black Bear, Saskatoon Berry, Spring Salmon, and Bitterroot, coming together to discuss the question of how the people-to-be would survive and what they would eat. The statement can be seen as a theoretical framework asking what people require to survive. The Four Chiefs are seen as a metaphor

for a system-wide balance of principles that will guide actions. In essence, the question is one of sustainability and survival and the question will always be – how will the future generations survive in balance with the rest of community, including the land.

In the case of this dissertation, the question central to my thesis is identified in terms of Aboriginal identity and education experiences within the whole system. The story is about “relationships” and the roles and responsibilities to ensure that the system can sustain life in the case the educational life of the Aboriginal student. The story concludes with Black Bear, being the oldest and therefore representing wisdom and enduring stability, stating that it will lay down her life to sustain the People-To-Be for future generations. The rest of the chiefs follow Black Bear’s leadership and state that they will do the same. The new problem is then how can Black Bear be brought back to life. All of the creatures and chiefs sing songs to bring it back but none are successful. This paradox represents a system-wide problem that arises and becomes a catalyst for implementing the Enowkinwixw process by which to view response by the whole system. The Enowkinwixw process is emphasized through the Four Chiefs story. As *syilx* scholar, Dr. Cohen (2010) notes:

Enowkinwixw was used traditionally to address and resolve issues of serious concern to the community. It is not based upon conflict or debate: it is, rather, a clarifying, strategic planning, and unifying process, an organizational model. The challenge is not to convince others of your position. The challenges and the responsibilities are to contribute understanding to the collective and to consider and include the feelings and viewpoints of all others, and as a group come to the best possible solutions for the whole community, and the future generations (p. 114).

The process provides a theoretical framework through which to view the separate the components of Aboriginal education experiences within a system that will influence possible respectful solutions to education as a community-based problem. The ultimate

aim of the process is to arrive at a consensus and balance that identifies the principles that must be accepted and respected for the process to be successful in achieving balance for the Aboriginal student, the subject of the research.

The first principle of the process is that all members/parts in a system represent diversity of purpose signified by the Four Chiefs who are arranged in an oppositional dynamics model. The second principle of the process is to view the diversity as oppositional in dynamics and thereby to view information from all participants as connected to the problem. The third principle of the process is to view the dynamics of opposition as a clarification of essential specifics in the system to ensure that the information being provided is understood as a view of an entire system and its impacts on the “problems” to be examined. The fourth principle requires the information be unbiased in preserving the whole system view. The fifth principle involves a whole system process to view the clarifications of the specific components through a diversity of communication tools. The sixth principle is to bring a system-wide understanding about the topic as a theory concerned with balance for the subject at hand. Although the answer has not yet been found all participants understand the framework and the specifics through which information is examined. The final principle then is to view the process of finding solutions through the components of the whole system.

The Enowkinwixw process as Indigenous theory establishes a framework for “who” has responsibility in the question. It clarifies the question, develops a four-pronged dynamic oppositional perspective to clarify the question, and begins a process to envision what the question could be to reach a consensus about where the imbalance occurs and its impact on the problem. The vision finally provides a strategic model pathway to restore

balance to the whole system. The process exists in what the *syilx* Indigenous people refer to as a *tmix^w* view and balance is achieved through clarification of the dynamics within the system in order to begin moving towards the vision to achieve the central goal of balance in the educational *tmix^w*. Armstrong (2009) adds that each oppositional view moves closer together until the central goal is reached. The steps are crucial for my theoretical framework in which oppositional dynamics in the circle can be resolved if they have been understood how they impact the system as a whole, and that every aspect of the self can move towards positive resolution and balance.

tmix^w

The fullest concept of *tmix^w* is associated with the underlying cultural complex concept of reality reaching outward as far as the mind can reach is perhaps the most significant aspect of historical *syilx* philosophy.

(Armstrong, 2009, p. 151).

The connection of people to family, community and the land (or *tmix^w*) is presented through a nested system lens. From the perspective of speakers of *nsyilxcen*, its meaning is in the trans-literalized root images which expresses *tmix^w* (Armstrong, 2009). This is placed into an image such as a circle that has many inseparable concentric rings as presented in Figure 1. The central concept in Enowkinwixw expresses the *syilx* epistemology that humans live and function inseparably within these spheres of influence, within their own specific and unique identity (Armstrong, 2009). Ultimately, *tmix^w* is seen as the intertwining of knowledge of the known world around an individual, family, community, and the place where the individual lives (i.e. the land, or *tmix^w*).

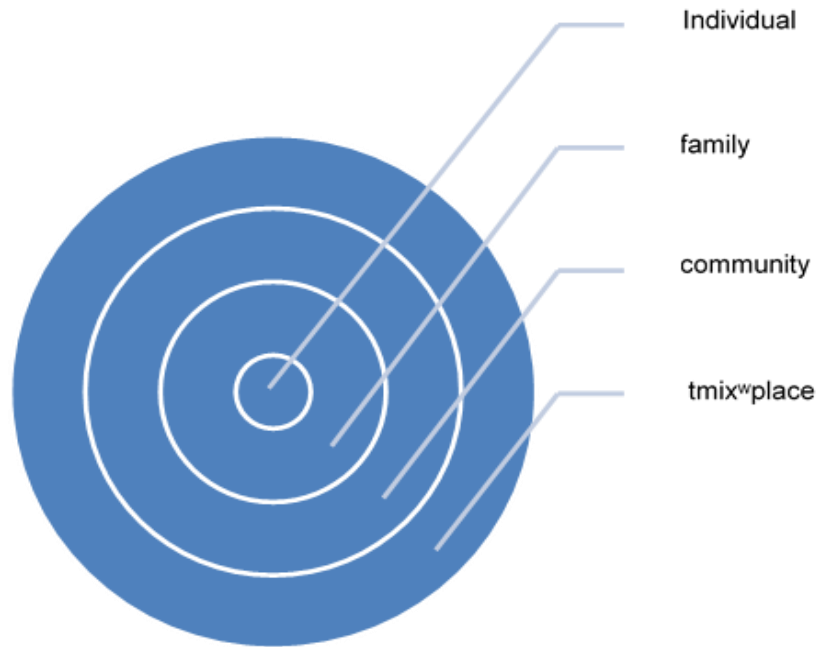


Figure 1: Enowkinwixw: four parts nested view.

Cohen (2010) provides that the *yelmixwem*, the Okanagan term for chief, suggests that leadership means knowing the community, as the Four Food Chiefs knew each other and their communities, so that the right people or strands can be brought together when needed.

In summary, I privilege the use of the Enowkinwixw process with the Four Chiefs story to arrive at new knowledge about the state of Aboriginal post-secondary education in BC in relation to the proposed questions which would provide some answers to questions that have long been asked.

For the theoretical research framework to be considered, I asked myself the following questions: could I see the education system as having the ability to regenerate itself and that we are not the centre of the education system, merely a part of it, just like being torn from the land, people are torn from the system? If so, then, we are the system and therefore have an innate need and responsibility to support the system to achieve

balance? What does this do to Indigenous people who have been marginalized from the system?

My argument is centred on the assumption and premise that the solutions to Aboriginal education are situated in reversing assumptions that the problem is positioned in the Aboriginal student as an individual rather than in the education system. Indigenous people are embedded in, and experience their lives as part of a system. It is in the system that we will find answers to the Aboriginal education question.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Finally, the three other Chiefs said to Skəmxist, “You are the oldest and wisest among us. You tell us what you are going to do.” Skəmxist said, “Since you have all placed your trust in me, I will have to do the best I can.” He thought for a long time and finally he said, “I will give myself, and all the animals that I am Chief over, to be food for the People-To-Be.” Then he said to Nti?tyix, “What will you do?” Nti?tyix answered, “You are indeed the wisest among us. I will also give myself and all the things that live in the water for food for the People-To-Be.” Sp'im, who was Chief of all the roots under the ground said, “I will do the same.” Siya? was last. Siya? said, “I will do the same. All the good things growing above the ground will be food for the People-To-Be.” Chief Skəmxist was happy because there would be enough food for the People-To-Be. Skəmxist said, “Now, I will lay my life down to make these things happen

(Armstrong, 2009, pp. 359-360).

This research uses a mixed methods approach. I conduct a standard survey questionnaire based on the three time frames identified in Chapter 1. I use a *syilx* Indigenous methodology of a four-part nested whole system view to examine the results of the survey and the literature related to the Enowkinwixw: Education as *tmix^w* framework. It includes Indigenous Identity, External Aboriginal Policy, Indigenous Control of Education, and the Indigenous Community.

I use a questionnaire to gather qualitative and quantitative data. I also apply the Enowkinwixw nested-view methodology to view the literature and survey results in relation to the research questions. This study focuses on students currently attending the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology. The research will present new findings on a parts-to-whole view of the system based in a four parts system-based model found in Indigenous pedagogy.

First, the research must address the relationship to Aboriginal student success and how it originates in ‘Indigenous Identity’. In this context, I contend that ‘Indigenous Identity’ (II) is a necessary factor of success and must exist in community-based

educational settings, and the methodology must be designed to address the need for it. Second, the research must include the gathering of data from NVIT Indigenous students. Finally, the research must generate sets of interrelated projects to facilitate the building of a body of knowledge, and to encourage intellectual interactions between the research and the students.

The methodology was designed to investigate how Aboriginal post-secondary students attending NVIT, who have not had a positive experience in high school and who later returned to higher learning, succeeded in their studies. I use the term “paused-out” to refer to students who have left the K-12 school system for one reason or another and later returned to post-secondary school to resume their education. The methodology is prefaced with the concept that Indigenous ways of knowing and syilx Indigenous Knowledge (IK) provides a model to examine issues at the community level. The method surveying NVIT students who come from across the province investigates their experiences from within the setting of engagement in higher learning. NVIT is selected as an opportune site to investigate Aboriginal education in that it models Indigenous educational principles (Billy-Minnabarriett, 2012) and enrolls Indigenous students from approximately two-thirds of BC’s First Nations communities in any given year (Table 1).

Table 1: Bands by Fiscal Year

	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16
Within BC	134	122	129	133	124	118	117
Outside BC	6	8	8	9	8	8	7

Source: NVIT – At a glance (2016).

Cohen (2010) proposes the spider web to use as his model of IK and to show how everything is connected. He commences his assertion by displaying the interconnectedness

of Okanagan stories and how they are all pivotal in teaching understanding about the environment, thereby teaching about the community, the family, and the self (Cohen, 2010). Cohen (2010) states that, “Okanagan ways and theorizing therefore inform the research, plans and relationships throughout” (p. 33). What he has done is forge a new methodology to understand the value of wholeness in Indigenous communities.

Littlebear (2000, p. 84) states:

The “spider web” of relations ensures that the welfare of the group is the most important thing in Aboriginal societies. The value of wholeness tells the members that, if all do their parts, then social order will be the result. It is as though everybody is a “cop” and nobody is a “cop.” If the whole is maintained, then beauty, harmony and balance result.

Cohen (2010) places the child at the centre of his web. He utilizes a child-centred model inside a spider’s web to show how the web binds all together. In essence, every time one web string is tugged or pulled upon, the ripple effect is felt throughout the web. Cohen’s (2010) model of the web is seen as an excellent educational model to support Indigenous knowledge in an educational setting. The indigenous methodology introduced displays the responsibility we all have as *sqilx*^w to live harmoniously in our environments as significant in those webs and to work together towards a better future. The responsibility is taught in stories and meant to guide future actions. The Four Chiefs story that I use as a basis for the methodology is inextricably linked to all research outlined in the thesis.

In Indigenous oral tradition, repetition of stories is a key to reinforcing important lessons and for finding new meanings from the stories (Archibald, 2008). She draws from cultural studies, suggesting that teachers in Aboriginal institutions must have a comprehensive knowledge of cultural practices and First Nations traditions/IK and use

their position and power to include IK in their educational field/pedagogy. As a *syilx* person, I wish to use the *syilx* or Okanagan story of how food came to the Okanagan people to illustrate how knowledge gained from research can be disseminated. The information will form the basis for the Indigenous methodology in reviewing the topic of post-secondary students who return to their studies at NVIT after an unsuccessful attempt at a previous educational setting. By utilizing a systems-based inquiry approach methodology rather than examining single aspects of the educational experience, I am able to construct and provide a holistic approach to addressing the educational experiences and needs of Aboriginal students.

***syilx* Indigenous Pedagogy of Enowkinwixw as Methodology**

The pedagogy of a parts-to-whole methodology reviewed and utilized for this research is found with the *syilx* Indigenous story, the Four Chiefs. In order to move towards the development of a parts-to-whole view nested in four polarities one must first understand the story and the teachings in it.

The Four Chiefs story as abstracted in Chapter 3 is taught to *syilx* children today. It is an old story that carries many meanings for contemporary issues and yet it holds a special place in the epistemology of Okanagan people from time immemorial. It is important because it shows a process for dialogue in decision-making, known as the Enowkinwixw process, which is a traditional model (Figure 2) to develop a consensus through inquiry, brought about by relying on the oppositional dynamics that equally represent all members of a community. The problem or question that the Four Chiefs needed to address was, “How would the People-To-Be survive?” By using as a lens to

situate opposing views the central question can be resolved taking into account the relational aspects of the whole.

In the story, Black Bear displayed leadership by sacrificing her life and the life of all four-legged creatures for the survival of the People-To-Be. The other food chiefs followed the example and made the sacrifice. The four food chiefs represent all humans in the environment and in that way represent the People-To-Be in all aspects of struggle for survival. In addition, the Fly plays an important role in the story resolution and is an essential part of the framework.

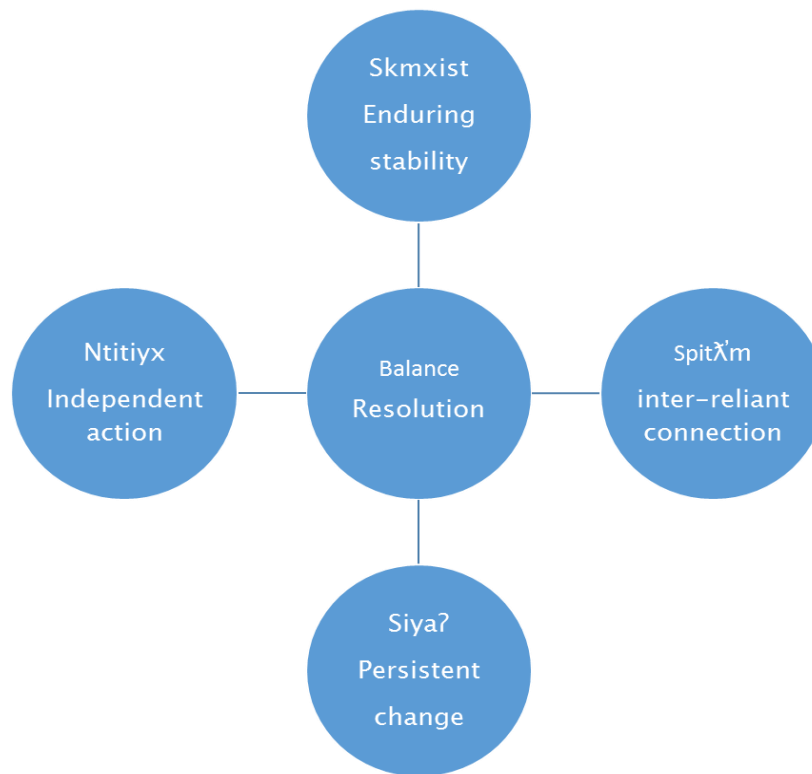


Figure 2: Enowkinwixw oppositional dynamics model.

Fly was a miniscule member of the community and of little importance. Nevertheless, Fly was the only member of the community able to revive Black Bear through its song of gratitude for Black Bear's sacrifice. An important question to ask

oneself here is why did the song of Fly bring Chief bear back to life? As Armstrong (2007) describes, the entire community was not present at the Enowkinwixw so only when Fly participated did we have the entire voice of the community (p. 9). Thus, Black Bear reaffirmed that even the most insignificant member of the community might have the most powerful song. The story concludes that the People-To-Be have the necessary nourishment to sustain communities and they will always be grateful for the sacrifices made by the Four Chiefs, singing songs of gratitude for the sacrifices. The story is about our connection to the land and how we, as the People-To-Be, must treat the land and all things related to the land, with the utmost respect. The duty of the Four Chiefs was no different from any Chief, to intertwine and coil the many strands of *tmix*^w into a united direction toward the balance and regeneration. The story contains a very important environmental ethos that Armstrong (2009) related. It also provides the basis for the development of the model to determine and address the deficiencies in the educational system to create spaces for Aboriginal learners to assume their responsibility to build a better community.

Indigenous epistemology as a methodology is tied to an individual's relationship to place or land, which in the Okanagan language, is called *tmix*^w. Battiste and Henderson (2000) emphasize the importance of the primacy of place when considering epistemology. The dynamics that are used in the Enowkinwixw process are based in the Four Chiefs story. The Four Chiefs story serves as a basis to explain the methodological concepts. In essence, the theoretical framework for the thesis explores the Four Chiefs story as a method template over the relationship of self to place or land, and examines that relationship in the realm of post-secondary education and Aboriginal students' perception of self-worth. As an Okanagan Nation member I feel honoured and obligated to use this

powerful framework, which has been used by Okanagan communities since time immemorial.

The Enowkinwixw process serves as a model for a pedagogical methodology and as a process, it teaches a dialogical process to achieve balance and resolution. Resolution can only be achieved when the polar views are expressed by ‘all’ members of the community, including Fly, as described by Armstrong (2007, p. 9):

it’s said that the circle couldn’t be whole, and they couldn’t bring life back to the entity, until the very smallest one, that everyone was excluding, no one wanted around, and no one thought was useful for anything--was just a pest. Of course, it was an insect and everyone said ‘you don’t have anything to offer. What are you going to offer us, you’re just a pest?’ But, finally, they ran out of options; there was no one there who could resolve the problem, and the little insect came back and said, ‘will you give me a try?’ And they said, “okay.” So once the insect sang its power song-in the story the insect sang and completed the whole circle. And that’s what was necessary. Without that small input from that being it wasn’t complete. Once that input, the minority person’s interests, in other words, were brought into the circle, and everyone included and embraced that minority person, and everything was whole, the last piece was in place. So nothing can be whole unless that last piece is in place, unless the minority voice is there. And that’s what makes the difference, to wholeness and whole community.

The Four Chiefs serves as a vehicle to allow my Four Chiefs to gather and dialogue on important community issues; what are the shortcomings in the educational system; what are the realities of Aboriginal people who have paused-out then return to school; and what factors influence a successful educational experiences? The research provides the ‘fly’ an opportunity to stand up in the community to complete the circle of resolve.

The concept of *tmix*^w serves as an Indigenous epistemology in terms of the connection of all things in nature to each other. *tmix*^w, if described using literal imagery, would be seen as the spreading out as an intertwining of all knowledge around individuals

and communities. In reality, the oppositional dynamics model organized as an Enowkinwixw process in the Four Chiefs story poses the central question: “How will the People-To-Be survive and what will nourish them?” To answer this question, we must explore the concept of *tmix^w* and the relationship of *tmix^w* with the Four Chiefs story. The result is a description of a new framework for post-secondary education and Aboriginal people. As an educator, I have strong views about the BC K-12 education system that has so many Aboriginal students struggling to graduate and pursue education for a better life.

My focus has shifted over the years to include Aboriginal students who decide to return to school after years of working, being unemployed, or raising a family. This represents a large population in BC and is the subject of much discussion. I believe that students who have not experienced a positive high school experience return to school for reasons like needing to be a supporter and role-model in their family, and to “make something” of themselves. Although these motivations are not related to their reasons for dropping out, Aboriginal students are beginning to return to school in larger numbers. The decision to return to school seems to be supported in the educational settings by instructors and staff who instill hope and encouragement in the students to realize that they are capable of succeeding in their educational journey.

The questions I employ echo the desires of the late Grand Chief, Gordon Antoine, one of the founders of NVIT, as mentioned in Minnabarriet’s (2012) dissertation: “NVIT exists to help improve the quality of life for the people of the Nicola Valley” (Billy-Minnabarriet, 2012, p. 61).

How the People-to-Be will Survive in the New *tmix*^w

The Four Chiefs story is the central model on which my methodology is built. To relate the story to the research, the Four Chiefs are identified as representing all aspects and community members needed to address the central research question. The original characters in the Four Chiefs story take on new characteristics in the framework. The Enowkinwixw oppositional dynamic framework from Armstrong (2009) is used as the foundation, and the original four-part nested view model, the core of the *tmix*^w, is the “individual.” In my model, the core becomes the central questions in the oppositional dynamic framework. The original question that brings together the Four Chiefs in the Okanagan story is similar to the question that brings them together in my framework; how will the people-to-be survive and what will they eat? Some additional explanation of the new “Chief” attributes is warranted.

Black bear – Indigenous Identity

Indigenous peoples throughout the world have sustained their unique worldviews and associated knowledge systems for millennia, even while undergoing major social upheavals as a result of transformative forces beyond their control. Many of the core values, beliefs, and practices associated with those worldviews have survived and are beginning to be recognized as being just as valid for today's generations as they were for generations past. The depth of Indigenous Knowledge rooted in the long inhabitation of a particular place offers lessons that can benefit everyone, from educator to scientist, as we search for a more satisfying and sustainable way to live on this planet

(Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005, p. 9).

The first chief in the story located on the north cardinal point is Black Bear, representing enduring stability and wisdom and is seen as having the Elder voice. For the research framework, Black Bear is figuratively represented as Indigenous Identity.

Regardless of the centuries of colonization and assimilation, Indigenous Identity in Aboriginal people has been present and ever available for providing leadership and guidance, just as Black Bear had enduring stability. Maggie Kovach (2005) presented the ideas of numerous Indigenous authors who describe the Indigenous ways of knowing.

The Indigenous way of knowing is a fluid way of knowing derived from lessons transferred from one generation to the next through storytelling, where each story is alive with the unique qualities of the storyteller. The way of knowing emerges from traditional languages that emphasize verbs, gathered through dreams and visions with natural ways and thoughtfulness. According to Battiste (2000), Indigenous ways of knowing arise at the interconnections between the human world, and spirits and inanimate entities. Black Bear, represented as 'Indigenous Identity' in the realm of post-secondary Aboriginal education, is an enduring and stable concept receiving the utmost respect from all community members. As in the oppositional dynamics model presented by Armstrong (2009) 'Indigenous Identity' must have an appropriate and welcomed "opposite" to induce and create balance.

Indigenous identity teaches people how to live through stories and in the praxis of 'Indigenous Identity' and 'External Aboriginal Policy', 'Indigenous Identities' across this country have been disrupted by colonization and what exists currently is a hegemony of tension. 'Indigenous Identity' is in a constant juxtaposition of hegemony in the policies implemented by our governments. 'Indigenous Identity' self-sacrifices as a model to External Aboriginal Policy to sacrifice for the betterment of the entire educational *tmix*^w.

Saskatoon Berry – External Aboriginal Policy

In 1984, near the beginning of the Aboriginal constitutional talks, the federal government had given funding to the Assembly of First Nations to conduct a major national consultation on education. The study, *Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision of Our Future*, strongly advocated the sovereign right of First Nations to control all aspects of their education, and emphasized the importance of higher education in achieving self-determination

(Stonechild, 2006, p. 72).

Positioned on the south cardinal point of the oppositional dynamics model of the Four Chiefs is Saskatoon Berry, represented as a welcomed persistent change (Armstrong, 2009). In the research framework, I consider the concept of persistent change as External Aboriginal Policy. In terms of Aboriginal post-secondary education, Aboriginal people have struggled to work with policies used by the federal and provincial governments to control and manipulate educational practices. External Aboriginal Policy can be said to represent funding and rules governing the funding of education whereas Indigenous Identity at the opposite cardinal point represents the spiritual worldview of Indigenous people.

As indicated by Stonechild (2006) in *The New Buffalo*, Aboriginal people have struggled for every bit of funding to advance our communities. The perseverance of Aboriginal leaders has resulted in substantial gains in regards to higher learning and education in general (Saul, 2014). Evidence for the constant lobbying for gains in education can be seen in BC through the efforts of the First Nations Education Steering Committee's pursuit for balance and equity for Aboriginal children in the province (FNESC, 2008). In BC, the Ministry of Advanced Education (2004) has worked extensively with First Nations to plan and implement action plans targeted towards

Aboriginal K-12 and post-secondary students. The BC government has a longstanding history of collecting data on the transition of Aboriginal students in both the K-12 public system (MoE, 2015) and the post-secondary system (AVED, 2015).

The federal government uses policies to guide the actions of its constituents, and policies are considered institutional for the continuance of the country. For the past several decades, a slow movement has occurred towards developing policies that will ensure Aboriginal people have the opportunity to access education. Stonechild (2006) sees the movement as trivial, compared to how the treaty process of 150 years ago ought to be respected. Furthermore, the movement has come only from the continual pressure from Aboriginal leaders. Federal and provincial policies have continually had the outcome of eliminating Indigenous identity but through the efforts of Aboriginal leaders, policies are gradually being developed with an understanding of the importance of 'Indigenous Identity'.

Salmon – Indigenous Control of Education.

The challenges of finding more equitable means of delivering Aboriginal post-secondary education and of building Aboriginal self-government capacity will be a major test of government's resolve to bring about major improvements in the lives of Aboriginal peoples

(Stonechild, 2006, p. 138).

Located on the western cardinal point and a natural oppositional dynamic to the interdependency of the Indigenous Community or Bitter Root is the Salmon, represented in the research framework as Indigenous Control of Education (ICE). ICE was born of the natural reaction to pull away from creations of the federal government similar to the drafting of the "White Paper" in 1969. The independent action is at the core of ICE. The External Aboriginal Policy Chief wanted to eradicate the Indian Act to create "equality" in

Canada and to remove the Indian from the child, but it was seen as a dramatic dissolution of Indian rights by the First Nations leaders (Stonechild, 2006). Nevertheless, the question at the centre of the four cardinal points seemed to be falling away if the imbalance continued. In return, the National Indian Brotherhood wrote the “Red Paper” to stop the process from continuing. The Red Paper contained a section called, “Indian Control of Indian Education,” which was released in 1972.

Since then, federal and provincial governments have been put on notice that the education of Aboriginal children was the responsibility of the Aboriginal community and nothing less would be tolerated. More recently, the imbalance seems to be continuing with such examples as the failed Kelowna Accord and the Idle No More movement (Saul, 2014).

ICE relies on the support of Indigenous Identity and the Indigenous Community and External Aboriginal Policy but remains independent in terms of addressing the educational opportunities of Aboriginal people from an independent lens position. The Ministry of Advanced Education and the Ministry of Education in BC have indicated that they may be willing to act respectfully by moving Aboriginal communities towards self-determination in regards to education, though the federal government has not yet shown such flexibility (Saul, 2014).

The Indigenous Community is a natural and welcomed opposite of ICE because we witness the tension between political hegemony experienced in the Indigenous Community in relation to the holistic, cyclical attributes of interdependence identified in that same Aboriginal community. ‘ICE’ can be seen as an integrated approach to working

with the whole student and community rather than the individual student. “ICE” becomes a welcomed opposite to the Indigenous Community Chief represented as Bitter Root.

Bitter Root – Indigenous Community

So how, in one of the richest, most progressive countries in the world—where non-Native youth seem to have the world at their fingertips—is this allowed to happen? Even Ottawa has admitted Canada’s Aboriginal population has essentially become entrenched as second-class citizens. In a federal government study comparing Aboriginal communities to the United Nations’ Human Development Index, an international measure of quality of life, Canada ranked eighth, between the U.S. and Japan. The Inuit population, meanwhile, ranked 63rd, slightly better than Libya, while First Nations reserve communities ranked 72nd, on par with Romania

(McMahon, 2014).

Opposite of Indigenous Control of Education is Chief Bitter Root. According to Armstrong (2009), Chief Bitter Root is represented as being holistic and having cyclical attributes of interdependence identified in a community relying on and nurtured by relationships, both familial and community based. In my research framework, the interdependence of relationships symbolically represents the Aboriginal community that has experienced much transition and upheaval over the past centuries through colonization and governmental policy (Stonechild, 2006). Bitter Root figuratively represents an interdependent anchoring and a positive adaptive and nurturing process (Armstrong, 2009, p. 284). The reserve system in Canada has meant that First Nations people have systemically become wards of the government with little voice for self-determination in their own communities (Saul, 2014). The struggle for education from an Aboriginal community perspective has been a long one. Stonechild (2006) asserts that First Nation communities have long lobbied the then Department of Indian Affairs to uphold its treaty obligations and support First Nations students who are able and willing to pursue higher

learning. This exemplifies the interdependent nature of the Aboriginal community to rely, lobby, demand, and justify its existence from all three Chiefs to exist in a balanced format.

The first Aboriginal individual to request direct support from the federal government to pursue a medical education at McGill University was in 1908. His lobbying for support was interesting, though his reason for receiving medical training represents those who are from First Nations communities wanting to pursue higher learning. Joseph Jacobs wanted to become a doctor in order that he might return to his community, serve his people, and to advance the education of his community members (Stonechild, 2006). The extrinsic motivation for Aboriginal community members to serve their communities is an indicator of the strong desire to look to the important relationships that exist in the Aboriginal community. Today, Aboriginal communities across the country are representative of developing nations (McMahon, 2014). Despite the turmoil from policy and poverty, a direct result of the hegemony of the federal government, Aboriginal community leaders see education as a necessary vehicle to advance the persistent change in their communities (Kirkness, 1992).

‘Indigenous Control of Education’ and ‘Indigenous Community’ create an oppositional dynamic that allows for the free flow of dialogue and sharing necessary to achieve balance and regeneration. The natural oppositional dynamic allows the Enowkinwixw process to address my central questions.

All four of the education chiefs play pivotal roles in ensuring we achieve balance and regeneration in the world of education. Just as in the natural world, education also endures birth, growth, sacrifice, and death in a cyclical manner. The regeneration of the education system is paramount to the achievement of balance in the system.

I have presented the Four Chiefs from the Okanagan story as a new methodology targeted towards the education of Aboriginal people. The four oppositional dynamic figures have worked together and apart for many decades in a slow moving display of give and take. Similar to the original story, real leadership is needed to achieve balance and resolution for the question: “how will the People-To-Be survive in the world of post-secondary education?” I now ask readers to think back to the original story of the Four Chiefs and how they had to come together and reach a consensus to balance the problem that affected the entire community. The issue introduced in this thesis also concerns the entire community and will require an Enowkinwixw for its resolution.

A New Understanding

Armstrong (2009) indicates that a story can contain powerful messages that can empower communities and the people to work together and build a sustainable and respectable environment. As an educator and Okanagan community member, I wish to present the research framework as close as possible to the original story.

A long time ago the Four Chiefs came together to discuss an important question. The Chiefs had gathered to commence an Enowkinwixw. Of the Four Chiefs, Black Bear was represented by Indigenous Identity (II) (Figure 3), known for enduring stability and having a firm grasp on the traditional. Opposite to Indigenous Identity was the External Aboriginal Policy (EAP), representing Saskatoon Berry. By its nature, EAP had exerted its political will against II since the coming of the Europeans, but has since remained a picture of persistent change, mixed with youthful enthusiasm, giving and taking from the identity of the Aboriginal people. Both II and EAP were always in a dance of oppositional tension; II’s dependable methods were balanced by EAP’s persistent change and

innovation. The other two Chiefs were Indigenous Control of Education (ICE), representing Spring Salmon, and Indigenous Community (IC), representing Bitter Root. Like Spring Salmon, ICE was a perfect rendition of independent action; always moving towards a goal and always following the same path year after year, towards self-determination. ICE was best known for having an independent value, understanding that in order to meet the needs of Aboriginal students; it must act independently of other models of education.

The Four Chiefs needed to answer the question: how can the People-To-Be survive, with respect to the new *tmix*^w, post-secondary education. Just as *tmix*^w provides for the people’s sustenance and nourishment, post-secondary education provides for their access to economic opportunities and self-reliance.

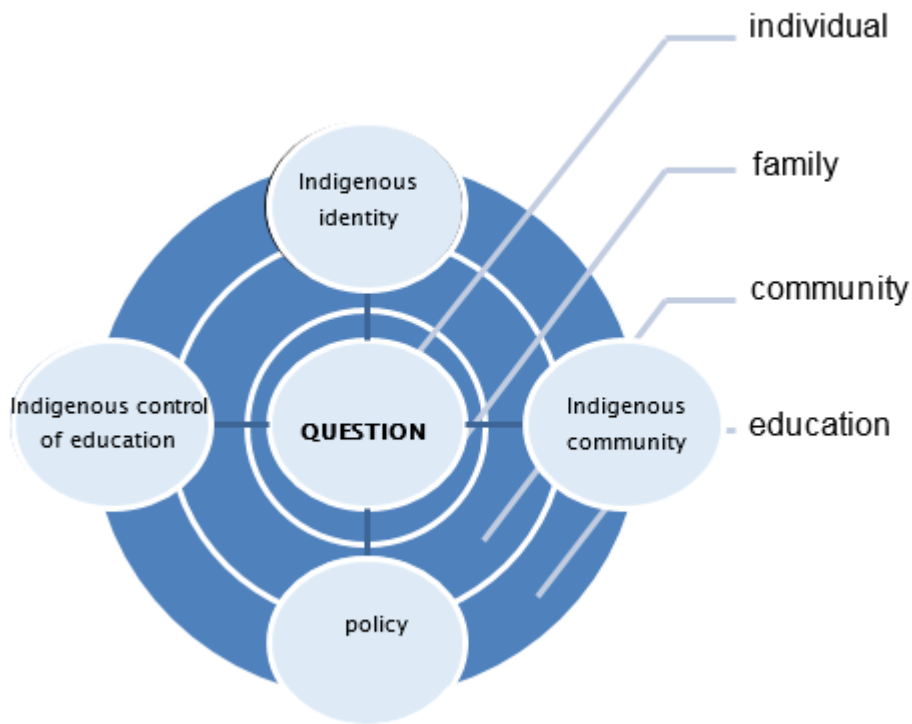


Figure 3: Enowkinwixw: four parts nested view – education as *tmix*^w.

Thus, the introduced framework becomes a new story titled similar to the original Four Chiefs Story.

Four Chiefs: Education as *tmix*"

How a Balanced Education was given to the People.

In the world before this world, all creation talked about the coming changes to their world. Now they had to decide how the People-To-Be would have access to and success in the world of post-secondary education. There were four Chiefs:

Indigenous Identity, Chief for all memories and echoes that teach children who they are;

External Aboriginal Policy, Chief for all procedures and practices that define boundaries and opportunities in Indigenous education;

Indigenous Control of Education, Chief for all those managing or wanting to create a space for Indigenous values and beliefs in education; and

Indigenous Community, Chief for all of the Aboriginal communities across the land.

They held many meetings, asking one another many questions.

Finally, the three other Chiefs said to Indigenous Identity, "You are the oldest and wisest among us. You tell us what you are going to do." Indigenous Identity said, "Since you have all placed your trust in me, I will have to do the best I can." She thought for a long time and finally she said, "I will give myself, Indigenous Identity and all the community members that I am Chief over, to be food for learning for the People-To-Be." Then she said to External Aboriginal Policy, "What will you do?"

And External Aboriginal Policy answered, "I will also give myself, External Aboriginal Policy and all the policies for which I am responsible the flexibility to make changes as necessary; to support the People-To- Be."

And Indigenous Control of Indian Education said, "I will do the same."

And Indigenous Community said, "I will do the same. All the interdependent relationships that we experience as Indigenous Community will be made to support the People-To-Be."

Indigenous Identity said, "Now, I will lay my body down to make these things happen."

All those who were vested in the answers to the questions gathered and sang songs to bring her back to life. That is how they helped support each

other in that world. They all took turns singing, but she did not come back to life.

Finally, Fly came along and she sang, “You gave me Indigenous Identity, she cried, you gave me Indigenous Identity.” Her song was powerful. And Indigenous Identity came back to life.

And Fly then told the Four Chiefs, “When the People-To-Be are here and they employ all you have sacrificed for them, they will sing this song. They will cry their thanks with this song.”

Indigenous Identity then spoke for all of the Chiefs, “From now on, when the People-To-Be come, when all new students enter post-secondary settings, everything will have its own Indigenous song. The People-To-Be will use these songs to help each other as you have helped me.”

That is how a new paradigm was introduced to Aboriginal education. That is how teachings were given to our people. That is how giving and helping one another was taught to our people. That is why we respect even the smallest and weakest for what they can contribute because they may have the most powerful song to sing...

(Personal Story, 2015)

A New Framework for Education

The Enowkinwixw Oppositional Dynamics Model (Figure 2) also depicts the opposition between intellect and emotion, and between physical impulse and ethical/spiritual restraint in individuals which can result in internal imbalance and external chaos. For the framework to be viable, the figurative aspects must illustrate the model. The central theme is the need to be balanced, and specifically the oppositional dynamics in the struggle must be balanced to resolve the issues that affect the communities. Indigenous Identity is a dependable sage, an enduring concept that evokes a gentle grandmotherly warmth. Opposite to Indigenous Identity is External Aboriginal Policy (EAP), which has a good reason to be seen as persistent change.

‘EAP’ is seen as a welcomed persistent change that represents the physical reality of the world in which Indigenous communities exist governed by the Indian Act and legislation that controls every aspect of Indian people. Indigenous Control of Education

(ICE) is representative of Spring Salmon and Independence. Indigenous Control of Education must be independent of all other educational settings in order to ensure that the learning environments created by 'ICE' are conducive to the wants and needs of the Indigenous community.

Opposite of Indigenous Control of Education, the Indigenous Community has endured centuries of colonization and systemic racism and constantly looks to be dynamic and innovative to rebuild itself with an ever-changing manner. Relationships are of primary focus with the Indigenous Community and the interdependent nature of relationships is what motivates the 'IC'. 'ICE' is a relatively new concept born from Indigenous Identity and the Aboriginal Community, and it has continuously struggled with the needs and wants of External Aboriginal Policy. In my methodology, the dance involves all of the Chiefs who are trying to Enowkinwixw to support future Aboriginal post-secondary students. The question, how will the People-To-Be survive and what will they eat, naturally becomes: what are the shortcomings in the educational system in relation to culture and Indigenous identity; Indigenous community, external Aboriginal policy, and Indigenous control of education; and what are the realities of Aboriginal people who have paused-out of the K-12 system then return to post-secondary; and what factors influence a successful educational experiences?

Essentially, what changes are necessary in post-secondary Aboriginal education to create places that reflect the needs and desires of the Indigenous community and Indigenous identity? The answer to the question comes from the leadership of 'Indigenous Identity', who sacrifices herself for the sake of future Aboriginal post-secondary students. The symbolic gesture is not done lightly given that many educational systems have failed

Indigenous children and adults. What would this sacrificial action of a leader look like? It would resemble the powerful role played by 'Indigenous Identity' in our communities and the post-secondary places of learning. Public post-secondary schools have already begun to follow the example of 'Indigenous Identity' self-sacrificing for the betterment of future Aboriginal post-secondary students.

The Indigenous Adult Higher Learning Association (IAHLA) exemplifies 'Indigenous Identity' and Indigenous Control of Education in' its work with provincial and federal governments to support community-based education for Aboriginal adults. If we can envision the Four Chiefs as I have portrayed them in this thesis, the model may help create the necessary changes for future Aboriginal post-secondary students. In being self-sacrificing, Black Bear still needed to be brought back to life. The songs and tears from all community members honoured Black Bear's sacrifice, but in the end, only Fly's song and honour returned Black Bear to life, also bringing balance to the community. Fly's role is pivotal in the Four Chiefs story, as it is in the research framework.

Fly

When considering the original story as a model for the framework, I also need to consider the last character. Fly is the miniscule, insignificant member of the community that is relatively unseen in the original Four Chiefs story. Fly sang a powerful song to honour Chief Black Bear. In the research framework, Fly also appears in the new *tmix*^w of Adult Aboriginal post-secondary education. Fly naturally symbolizes an adult Aboriginal student enrolled in post-secondary training after a not-so-successful educational experience prior to returning to school.

What is Fly's powerful song, how is it learned, and where does it come from? This research is focused on Aboriginal students who are enrolled at NVIT and volunteered to share their educational experiences. Most of the students who attend NVIT come from First Nations communities across the province and their home communities are near towns like Hazelton, Prince Rupert, Bella Coola, Williams Lake, Lytton, and Lillooet, among many others. These areas are generally situated in the province's lowest ranked communities in terms of provincial health indices. The ranking of health indices (Table 2) is derived from factors such as education, poverty, crime, and family dynamics. Overall, the students who attend NVIT are the miniscule and largely unseen products of communities that have been damaged from centuries of political hegemony, domination, poverty, and hopelessness.

Table 2 is a list of local health areas that are rated from the worst to the best, in terms of the overall socio-economic indices. The table only includes the 20 lowest-ranked regions, most of the survey respondents come from these regions.

The students who participated in the study provided information in an honest and ethical manner. The particular view I sought was the students' recollections about the moment when they realized that they could be successful in their studies. Most of the respondents were emphatic about remembering the moment in vivid detail. Their stories were like songs bringing Indigenous Identity back to life after its self-sacrifice.

Table 2: Worst Socio-Economic Health Regions in BC (2012).

	Local Health Areas*	Index	Rank
53	Upper Skeena	0.96	1
32	Hope	0.89	2
52	Prince Rupert	0.79	3
49	Bella Coola Valley	0.79	4
29	Lillooet	0.75	5
88	Terrace	0.74	6
27	Cariboo - Chilcotin	0.74	7
56	Nechako	0.74	8
70	Alberni	0.73	9
31	Merritt	0.71	10
85	Vancouver Island North	0.59	11
50	Queen Charlotte	0.52	12
28	Quesnel	0.50	13
66	Lake Cowichan	0.50	14
30	South Cariboo	0.46	15
13	Kettle Valley	0.45	16
57	Prince George	0.44	17
55	Burns Lake	0.41	18
80	Kitimat	0.40	19
78	Enderby	0.35	20

Without the songs of Fly or the songs of marginalized people, we would not be able to have a circle of resolve to continue advancing Aboriginal people in education. Fly's song was powerful. The qualitative research of marginalized Aboriginal adult learners can prove to be the missing piece of knowledge necessary to address shortcomings in educational settings.

The Four Chiefs Indigenous Identity, External Aboriginal Policy, Indigenous Control of Education, and Indigenous Community, have begun the Enowkinwixw process to determine the fate of the People-To-Be who will populate the adult learning centres in BC. All agree that ‘Indigenous Identity’ is self-sacrifice in the Indigenous model of leadership. Consequently, all community members must sing in appreciation of ‘Indigenous Identity’ for its selfless act, and show respect to bring it back to life. Despite all attempts, none of the songs are successful, until Fly appears and sings a powerful song for it, who comes back to life. The Four Chiefs can then continue supporting the “students-to-be” as they gain access to places of higher learning.

Canada is witnessing a large number of Indigenous people entering post-secondary schools and excelling in their chosen fields (Saul, 2014) and the emerging talent will likely shape our communities in positive ways. Given that the participants in the study are Aboriginal post-secondary students who have come from the lowest socio-economic regions of the province, the Four Chiefs must continue to Enowkinwixw to promote the new educational *tmix*™ and ensure that it is a vibrant and welcoming place for Aboriginal students.

In the new framework used in this research, Fly still has a crucial position. Where, and from whom did Fly learn its song? Generally, songs are learned in places that are open and welcoming, where dialogue and debate is encouraged. In my story, Fly may have learned its song in the classrooms of any school having a cornerstone of belief that Indigenous Control of Education (ICE) is needed for success. When the features of ICE are independent of other places of learning in terms of structure and thought processes, the collusion of ‘Indigenous Identity’, ‘External Aboriginal Policy’, and the ‘Indigenous

Community' allow for ICE to create the welcoming spaces in an independent manner. In a personal relationship model, the relationship between the instructor and students creates a space where students can develop their inquisitive minds and adventurous spirits. In the thesis, student feedback is analyzed in terms of the new theoretical framework.

Questionnaire Process

The data collection method for this study was in the form of a questionnaire. It contained 28 main questions that were related to three time frames: educational experiences prior to deciding to come to NVIT, their transition and motivators for wanting to return to school, and their current educational experiences. As the questions were designed for Aboriginal students who have paused-out of the K-12 education system I needed to be sure that the questions would not make the participants uncomfortable. Therefore, the underpinning question is how students were nourished in order to survive in the system.

In the questionnaire, I asked respondents about what they thought and how they felt and in many of the questions what they knew and what they experienced. To ensure that the research was “safe” and authentic, several considerations were implemented. Consideration was shown in regards to who the participants were and how they were chosen. Participants could withdraw from the process at any time.

The participants volunteered to answer the questions and the surveys were administered by a colleague at NVIT. The participants in the study were adult students enrolled in NVIT. Most participants had not completed high school and were enrolled in “up-grading” or “access” types of programs, while others had completed high school and were enrolled in upgrading level programs, while others were enrolled in college level

courses after having completed upgrading courses. The target participants were Aboriginal, although all who expressed an interest were welcomed to do so. In the research, I wished to gain insight from at least 30 participants. I conducted my research with 60 participants. Of the 60 participants 48 self-identified as Aboriginal and 12 self-identified as non-Aboriginal. I only use the data from the Aboriginal participants given that my research relates to the experiences of Aboriginal students. All participants were enrolled at NVIT, a public post-secondary school with an Aboriginal mandate. A survey administrator solicited participants by inviting classroom groups to participate in the survey.

The survey administrator was responsible for introducing the research topic and describing the importance and relevance of the study. Participants were asked to sign a waiver at the commencement of the process, which also included information about the research. The research was introduced and once the participants had signed the waiver, the survey administrator introduced the process for completing the survey. Students were in one group for the process. The survey administrator asked the participants to complete their surveys on their own and not ask questions of other participants. The researcher remained in the room to answer any questions they might have had. Upon completion of the survey, the participants were provided with refreshments and drinks to acknowledge their time and energy. The participants were provided with the survey administrator's contact information in case they had any follow-up ideas.

NVIT enrolls approximately 80% Aboriginal students coming from the lowest socio-economic areas of the province, therefore, I often state that we have been working at “ground zero”, so to speak, of Aboriginal post-secondary education. I often refer to this

area as the dark underbelly of Aboriginal education. With this in mind, the experiences of Aboriginal students at our small Aboriginal mandated institute can be closely monitored to provide some key findings to address the recognizable gaps in the educational experiences of Aboriginal post-secondary adults.

With a participant list that included self-identified Aboriginal participants and self-identified non-Aboriginal participants I was struck with a question of whether or not I would be wise to separate the data based on ethnic background. I opted to separate the data for demographical purposes on the experiences shared by the participants prior to entering NVIT. I realized that the data may present different findings based on ethnic background and I wanted to explore that, although, I have remained true to my research question pertaining to Aboriginal students enrolled in post-secondary school.

Chapter 5: Results

Because the great Chief Skəmxist had given his life, all of Creation gathered and sang songs to bring him back to life. That was how they helped heal each other in that world. They all took turns singing, but Skəmxist did not come back to life. Finally, Fly came along. He sang, “You laid your body down. You laid your life down.” His song was powerful. Skəmxist came back to life. Then Fly told the four Chiefs, “When the People-To-Be are here and they take your body for food, they will sing this song, they will cry their thanks with this song”

(Armstrong, 2009, p. 361).

I am well aware of my responsibility for representing the perspectives of individuals who have been marginalized by the education system at the K-12 and post-secondary levels. The ethical concerns for representing privileged information are discussed in this chapter. While the stories told are those of the participants, the analysis of their organizational structures, ideas, and words were carefully mapped for the purposes of this dissertation on the educational experiences of students attending NVIT. The goal in organizing the participants’ stories of educational experiences was to adopt a framework that would offer transparency in the analysis but incorporate the richness of the transliterated stories by leaving blank spaces for respondents to share their stories. In this chapter, I will commence with providing the findings of the research and will conclude with the educational narratives of participants as they relate to the original research questions.

The survey consisted of 28 questions that explored the participants’ educational experiences prior to arriving at NVIT, followed with questions related to their educational experiences while attending NVIT (Appendix 1). In this portion of the chapter, I will present the raw findings and present some of the emerging themes in the data.

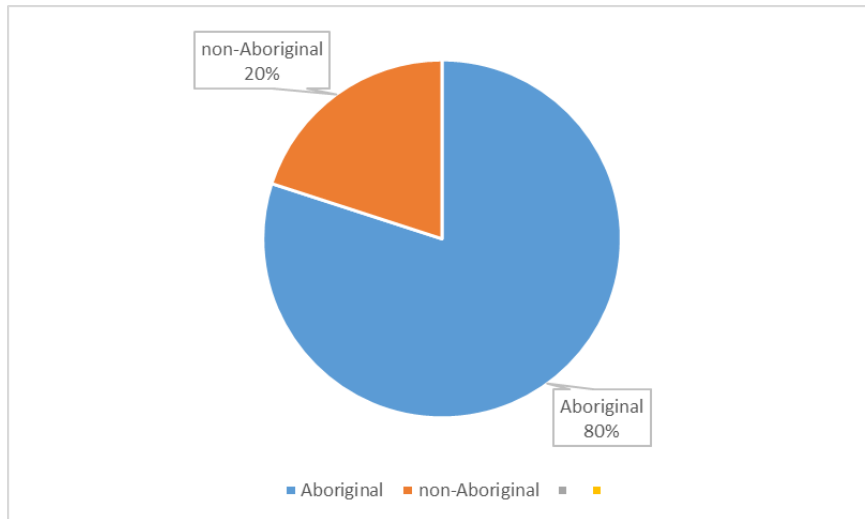


Figure 4: Identity.

The survey totals 60 participants, 48 identify as Aboriginal and 12 as non-Aboriginal (Figure 4). As my dissertation is only concerned with Aboriginal experience, I use only data from the Aboriginal participants.

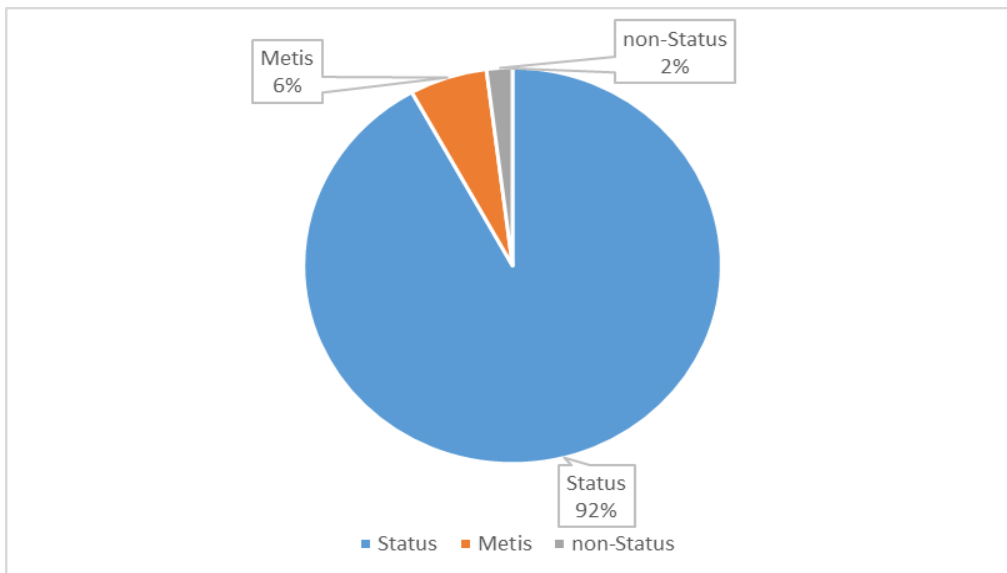


Figure 5: Aboriginal identity.

Of the Aboriginal participants, 46 indicated that they were status Indians, one indicated that they were non-status and one mentioned that they were of the Metis nation, and none indicated that they were Inuit (Figure 5).

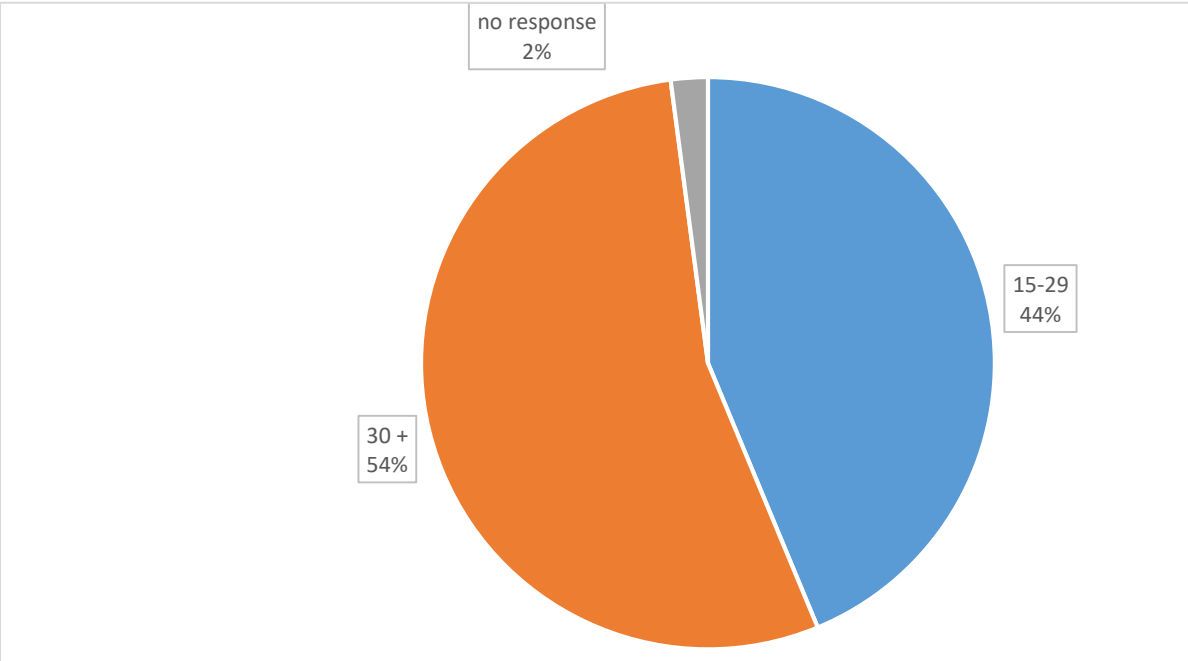


Figure 6: Age.

The participants in the survey were all ages ranging from 18 years old to an extreme of 57 years of age (Figure 6). Interestingly, 16 participants were between the ages of 19-22 years of age and 16 participants were older than 40 years of age.

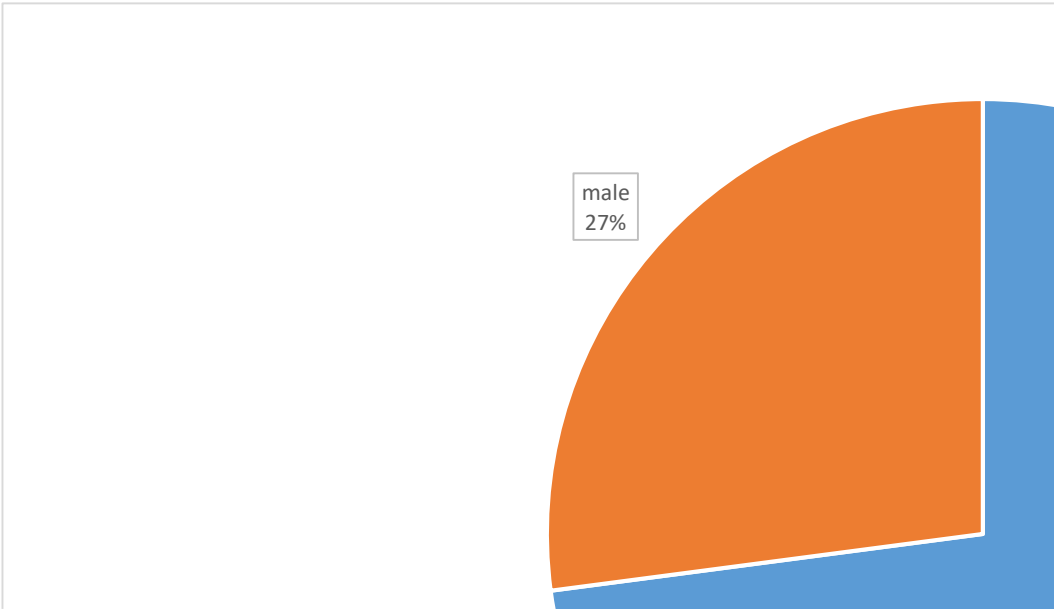


Figure 7: Gender.

73% of the survey participants were females and 27% of the participants were males (Figure 7). These percentages correspond with NVIT's overall ratio of females and males.

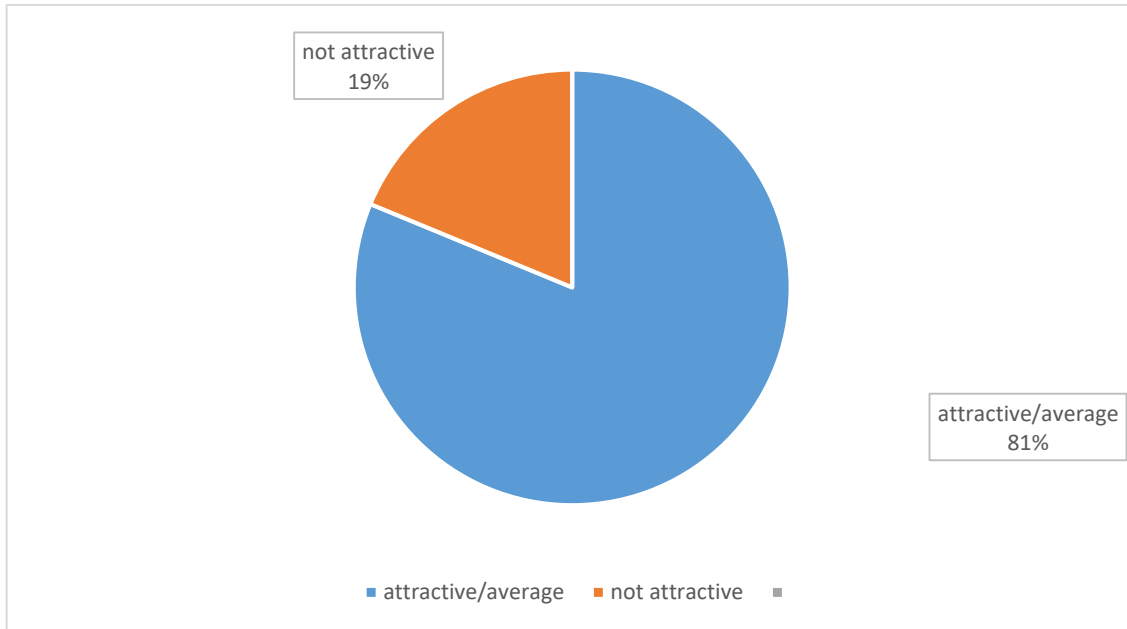


Figure 8: Physical appearance.

When asked about their feelings towards their physical appearance almost 82% of participants felt that they were attractive/average (Figure 8).

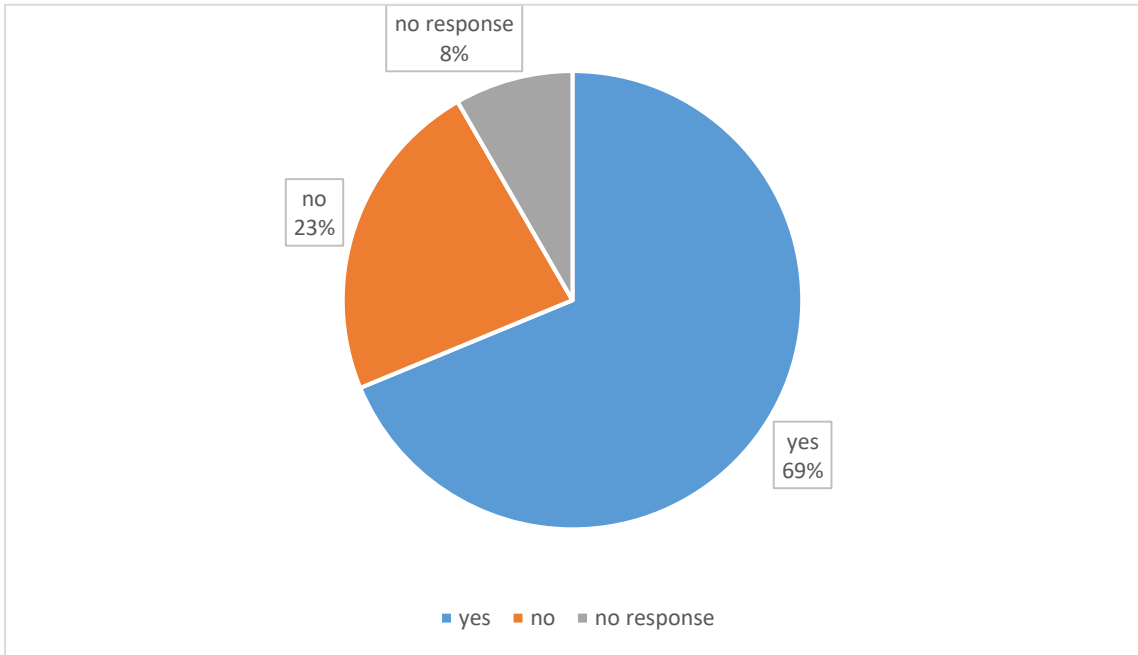


Figure 9: Sense of humour.

69% participants felt they were humourous.

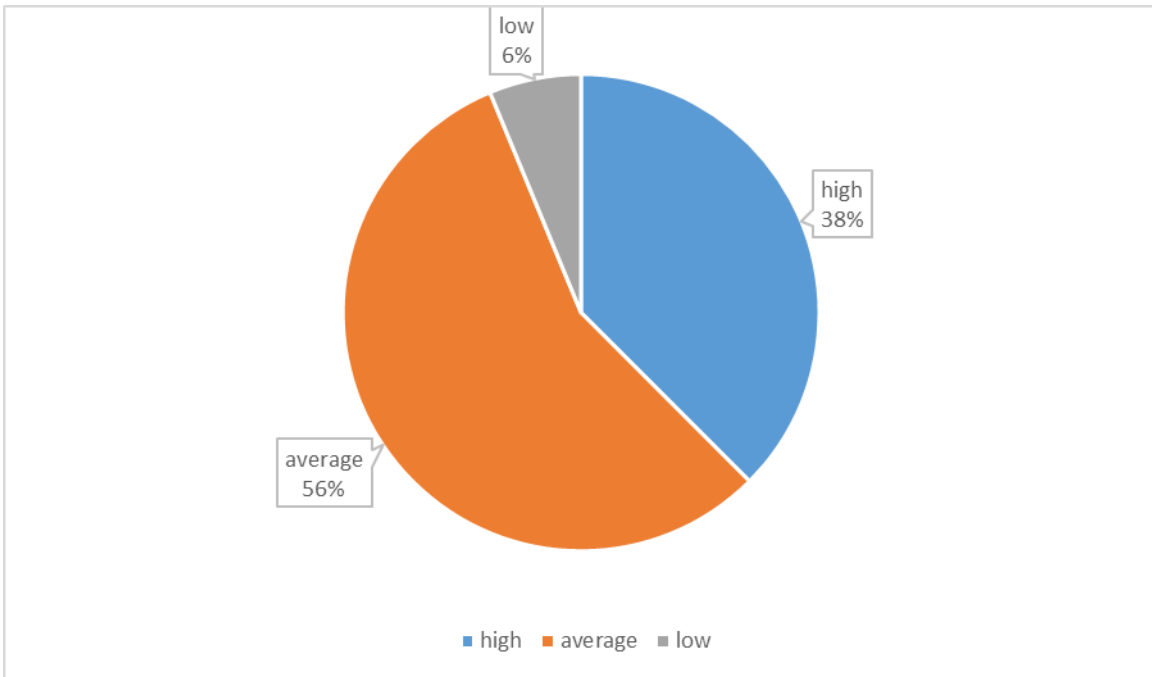


Figure 10: Ability to learn.

94% participants felt that they were average or high in terms of ability to learn (Figure 10).

Students shared that they attended high schools locally as well as the local Band operated schools in the Nicola Valley. They also shared that they attended high schools from north central British Columbia, Northwest British Columbia, Northeast British Columbia and the lower mainland region of British Columbia. A majority of the students originated from outside of the Nicola Valley. Only Aboriginal students listed Band operated schools as places they attended K-12. The Indian Bands identified by the participants included Indian bands from the regions offered in the previous question.

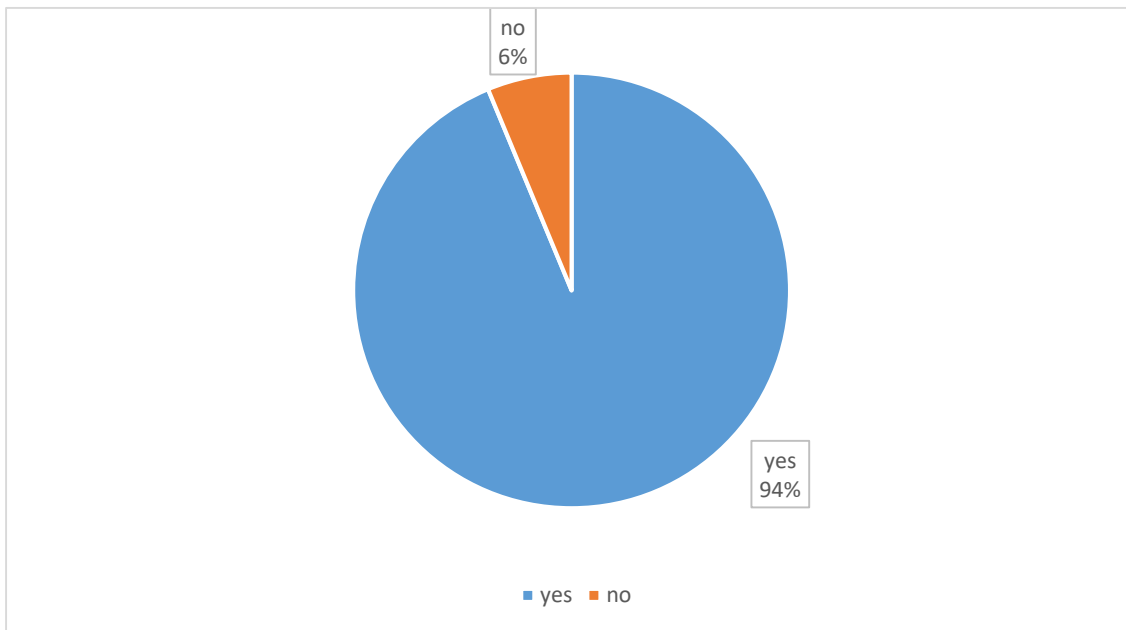


Figure 11: Residential school.

Forty-five participants shared that they themselves or someone from their family had attended a residential school. This equates to 94 percent of Aboriginal students having a family member who attended residential school (Figure 11).

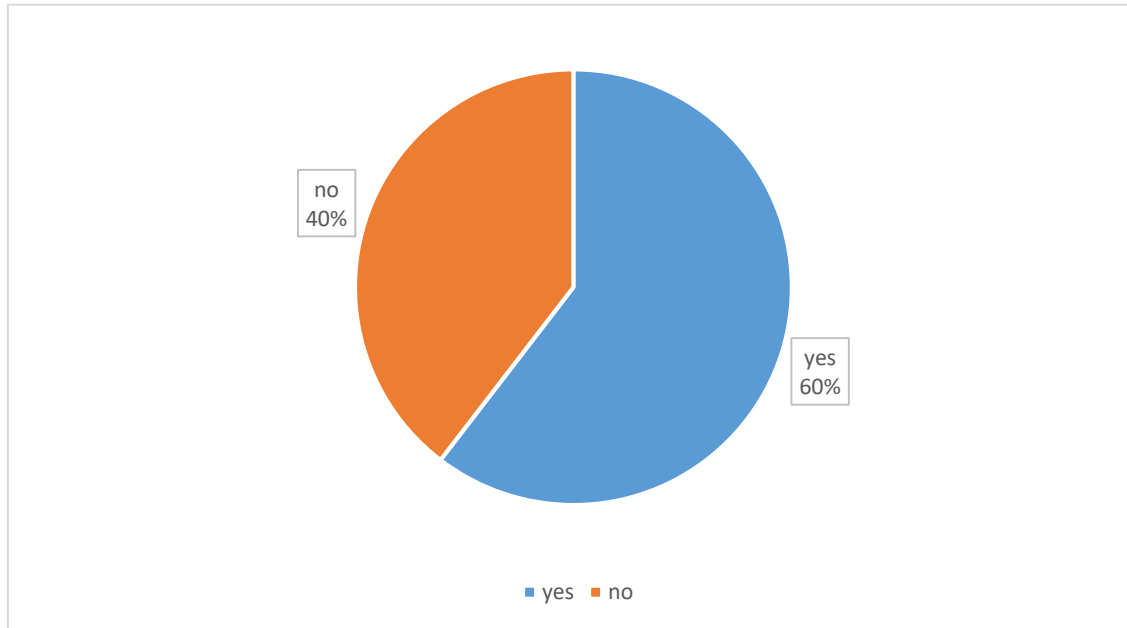


Figure 12: Graduation diploma.

In terms of how many participants indicated whether they had received a graduation diploma, 60% indicated that they had (Figure 12). However, when asked how old they were when they left school only a handful of students indicated that they were 17-18 years old. In addition, when asked what grade students were in when they left school, once again, students indicated that they did not understand the question because most students indicated that they were in grade 8-11 when they left.

When asked what was important to them when they left school most participants indicated a balance between family and friends.

All survey participants shared examples of their most memorable educational experiences along broad themes encompassing a supportive environment, family and peer support, rich cultural experiences, and supportive educators. These broad themes link to the four broad themes I introduced in the methodology chapter. These include Indigenous Identity: Rich Cultural Experiences; External Aboriginal Policy: Supportive Educators;

Indigenous Control of Education: Supportive Environment; and Indigenous Community: Family and Peer Support.

In relation to Indigenous Identity: Rich Cultural Experiences. Aboriginal participants shared many examples where their identity was present in the school and acknowledged as important and valuable. Some of the responses that support the Indigenous Identity quadrant included:

I liked that we had a First Nations education person who arranged special informational meets for the first nations (participant 17)

I had some good teachers that were really helpful and supportive, that would complement me. And make me feel like I was doing a great job. First Nations art was where I felt the best (participant 18)

When I attended Aboriginal Planning & Training and received an A grade (participant 42)

Learning about the talking circle in my Indigenous Studies program at (Name) College. I was quiet in high school and rarely raised my hand in class to speak. The talking circle taught me I had a lot to share and I discovered I could synthesize other people's thoughts into my own and express them well. Also positive was encouragement by my program leader to act on ideas and pursue extracurricular endeavors. I ended up hosting/facilitating a talking circle radio show on our local college radio station because I enjoyed sharing and learning in the circle so much (participant 3)

These experiences shared the unique impacts that the participants recalled related to seeing themselves in the school and curricula.

The second theme emerging relates to the question of recalling joyful experiences in previous educational settings relate to 'Policy': Supportive Educators role that educators have played in the lives of these participants. The theme, situated opposite to Indigenous Identity, is a welcomed oppositional dynamic. Some of the responses include:

My most positive educational experiences are when I have a good clear concise interested instructor that makes any subject fun and interesting to learn (participant 4)

My grade 10 Math teacher, (Name) didn't give up on me and I was able to pass the math class with a B grade (participant 11)

From what I can remember the most positive educational experience I had was when my French immersion teacher in grade 10 told me that I was very fluent in French and at the top of my class in speaking the language (participant 19)

Excelling in P.E. personal goals. Teacher willing to push students who wanted it. A handful of teachers spoke with authentic care and got to know us (participant 25)

I had a psychology teacher in my Grade 11 and 12 years who changed my outlook on learning. His way of teaching allowed me to absorb way more material than in any other class. Most of the things I know about psychology, I learned from his class (participant 33)

The third emerging theme is named Indigenous Control of Education: Supportive Environment. The theme, as indicated in the theoretical framework, is situated where Salmon is located and is emblematic of Independence. In this theme, several common responses from participants include:

I was able to take courses to be a Teacher's Assistant, where I was able to showcase my strong interest that I wanted to help others help themselves (participant 1)

Very family orientated. A lot of cultural aspects with going to a Band school. Learned firsthand about aboriginal peoples (participant 15)

Was once I was most motivated to go to school, I found that I did have a good support system in place to help me graduate while attending the (School) - I had one teacher that I was able to approach about helping me to learn and understand what was expected of me, if not for her then I don't think that I would be sitting here today. My Favorite Education place was (School) the teachers were exceptionally nice and extremely helpful and understanding they didn't see you as less than them, but as future helpers to society (participant 6)

The small class sizes and more of a one on one with teachers. The location of the school (participant 21)

In grade 10 I was inspired by fellow student and obtained the honour roll for the first time, I went on to receive honour roll status 3 out of 4 times (participant 32)

My most positive educational experience was when I started attending (School). The instructors as well as my fellow students were the kind of people I needed to be successful in finally excelling with my high school courses (participant 47)

These types of responses speak to the level of support the participants recalled in their educational experiences. The responses echo the feeling of belonging to the school through peers, teachers and Aboriginal culture.

In relation to the last quadrant, Aboriginal Community: Family and Peer Support, participants shared memories of having strong family and peer support networks that lead to successful experiences in high school. This quadrant is associated with the inter-reliant connection of relationships. Some of these memories include:

Taking a First Nations Studies class. Being a Peer Tutor. Being in Stage Craft. Grade 11 Boarding Parents (participant 9)

When I went to (Name) High School in (town), I felt like I finally fitted in with my friends. I felt like I was popular. I was in this agriculture class with (Name)... she was an awesome teacher... I liked that class because it was a subject I felt I fit into, I liked it. It was about gardening and gaining knowledge on different types of things you can grow. I cannot remember having any problems during that class (participant 10)

First Semester, I met new people and we became very close. We had study groups together, and spent a lot of time working together. It was a good experience (participant 16)

My most positive educational experience was from grade five through seven, I moved to a new school in Vancouver's West side and felt accepted and had lots of fun with my new friends (participant 23)

Friends, and basketball (participant 44)

Another theme that emerged from the data was also evident in the next question where students were asked to share negative experiences. Participants shared their most memorable negative experiences in high school and they follow along the same general themes that have emerged from the previous question although with an adverse version.

The themes include Indigenous Identity: a school void of Rich Cultural Experiences replaced with racism; 'Policy': Unsupportive Educators; Indian Control of Indian Education: Non-Supportive Environment; and Aboriginal Community: a lack of Family and Peer Support.

In relation to Indigenous Identity: a school void of Rich Cultural Experiences replaced with racism, participants shared some of the following:

A teacher, (Name), used to put the best looking white girls at the front of the class and if you weren't rich, pretty or smart you were ignored. I was the only Aboriginal in class and I was put in the back row (participant 12)

Going to public school and experiencing racism (participant 16)

Some teachers don't give a darn if you want to learn or not. If you ask, you are considered disruptive and stupid. It didn't occur to me at the time they might be racist, as most of that kind of discord went over my head. But that could have been partially the issue. Mostly, if the students were not quick and high-class they did not get the time of day from most teachers. Especially in the academic courses. I got lowered into vocational studies without even being aware of what that meant (participant 26)

I was constantly bullied and faced racism when I was in school, which led me to dropping out (participant 48)

When I was attending (School), my sister and I were the victims of a lot of racism. This made attending my everyday classes very challenging and eventually became one of the factors on why I left the public school system (participant 49)

When participants were asked about their worst educational experiences, they shared memories involving 'Policy': Unsupportive Educators. Some of the memories include:

My grade 12 English teacher failed every paper I wrote. He told me I would never succeed. I had the help of other teachers and he still failed those papers. I received 43% in class and 82% on the provincial final exam. He made me not want to try and made me feel like an idiot (participant 13)

I got into a debate with an instructor over intergenerational trauma suffered by First Nation students (participant 17)

the most negative experience I endured in high school, was part of the reason I dropped out, I had failed my science 9 course, and had to retake it in second semester, and my teacher brought me in front of the classroom and said " now class, would you like to pass this class, or fail and end up like her?" (participant 20)

Taking any type of math course, because I was not good at math. Even more negative, being insulted by instructors. For example, being called an "airhead" by a female instructor. Having the giggles and being an airhead are two different things but I'll never forget having a professional be so judgmental toward me (participant 22)

When my Principal made me go before the class and do my math work on the blackboard - it was cruel - and embarrassing (participant 43)

In regards to experiences related to Indian Control of Indian Education:

Unsupportive Environments, where the participants did not feel supported in their school, some of the responses included:

my most negative educational experiences are when I genuinely do not understand and I am struggling the whole way through (participant 6)

High school was a literal nightmare. I was depressed, anxious, and upset the entire time. For the first three years, though, I managed to appear well adjusted and happy (participant 15)

In grade 12 I had to give a speech and had no previous public speaking skills and left in tears (participant 33)

My father passed away one month before my grade 12 graduation, and while most teachers were empathetic and understanding, there was one specific teacher who seemed not to care. As a result, I ended up failing the last term of that class. However, due to my high grade in the previous term, I ended up passing with a C- overall. That was the first time in my life that I ever saw an F on my report card (participant 34)

I was streamed into the course loads where it was less academically focused such as communications rather than English literature, and essentials math rather than applied or principles of math. This heavily impacted my interest or desire to further my education after high school graduation. Also, during my time in high school, I wanted to enroll into the psychology course so that I could pursue an education in the Social Work field but was told by Personal/Career planners that I would not succeed in this course or in Social Work for that matter. This forced me into taking Trades programs such as wood work, drafting, etc. where I had no interest or desire to pursue a career (participant 2)

In relation to Aboriginal Community: a lack of Family and Peer Support, participants shared memories that speak to a feeling of isolation due to a lack of support.

Some of the responses include:

Had a bad influence in school so that set back in school (participant 8)

Felt invisible, like nobody cared... because they didn't (participant 47)

Staying with a horrible Boarding Parent for grade 12. (She was also my school's First Nation's Counselor). Being four hours away from home (participant 10)

Home life was very stressful, as I didn't get along with my step mother, and my partner was insecure when I was at school. First, at (Community), my life was stressful because my step mother stressed me out, and made me not want to go home... And in (School) High school, it was my partner who stressed me out...(participant 11)

In elementary school I was bullied every day from grade 3-6/7. It was horrible and the staff only compounded things by suggesting that I was encouraging the situation. I was suspended once for verbally defending myself. I am still angry and hurt by these experiences to this day and deeply distrustful of authority as a result (participant 24)

My first year of high school was grade 9 and that was my toughest year of high school. I got bullied by the kids in grade 11 and 12 and it really messed up my self-esteem and confidence for a while. I always had a lot of friends but when grade 9 came around I lost touch with most of them so I felt very lonely. Things got better once I started grade 10, I made new friends and joined the basketball team (participant 28)

The negative memories of school lead to the next question regarding the perception the participants had in relation to the perception the participants felt the schools had of them as students.

When asked about what their teachers thought about their abilities to do well in school 75% of the participants felt that the teacher had a positive thought about their abilities. Likewise, only 58% of participants felt that the teacher feelings about their abilities were important.

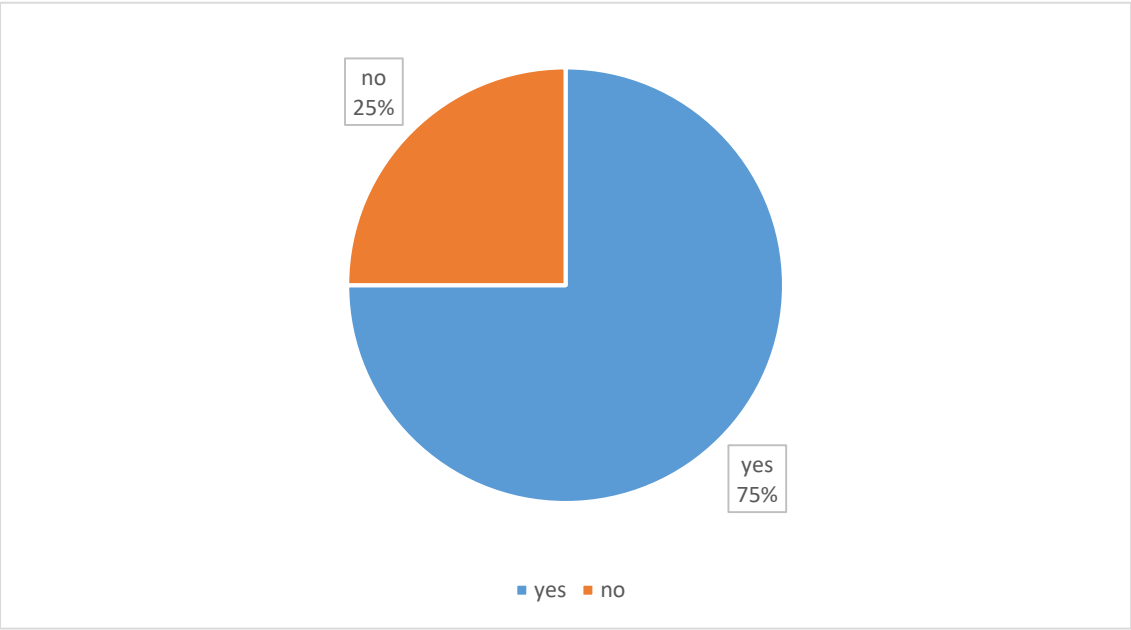


Figure 13: Education importance in home.

When the participants were asked if they felt education was an important concept in their homes, 36 of the 48 said that it was (Figure 13). 75% of participants shared that education was important in the home.

The participants were also asked to describe their feelings towards their abilities in various subject areas. For example, in math, 69% of participants felt that their ability was strong. Additionally, in reading, 85% of participants felt that they had a strong ability in that area. Sixty-nine percent of the survey participants felt that they exhibited strong study skills and 90% of the participants felt that they were excellent in physical education. When asked what their favourite subject was in school participants chose equally between all subjects including reading, math, P.E., art, social studies, and just slightly lower in science. Some responses offered under “other” included that “never a subject, always was

the teacher that made a class my favourite class (participant 1); and “Okanagan Language/culture class (participant 4).

When asked what were your career goals when you left K12 educational system, participants varied from a precise goal in mind to an unknowing response based on the age of the participant in high school. Some of the career goals of Aboriginal participants included “I had no idea what I wanted to do once I graduated from high school. No career goals at the time” (participant 10); another participant added, “to become a Youth Outreach Worker” (participant 18). Additionally, another added, “I didn't really picture life after high school before I graduated. I am 19 and currently going back to post-secondary school to find out what I want to do” (participant 27). Still other participant responses included not really understanding or knowing what they had planned to do upon leaving school.

Didn't have any at the time, I was young and naive, went with the crowd because of my home environment at the times wasn't a good one (participant 7)

I left high school with NO idea of what I would like to do. Ten years later....here I am at NVIT because I figured it out! (participant 20)

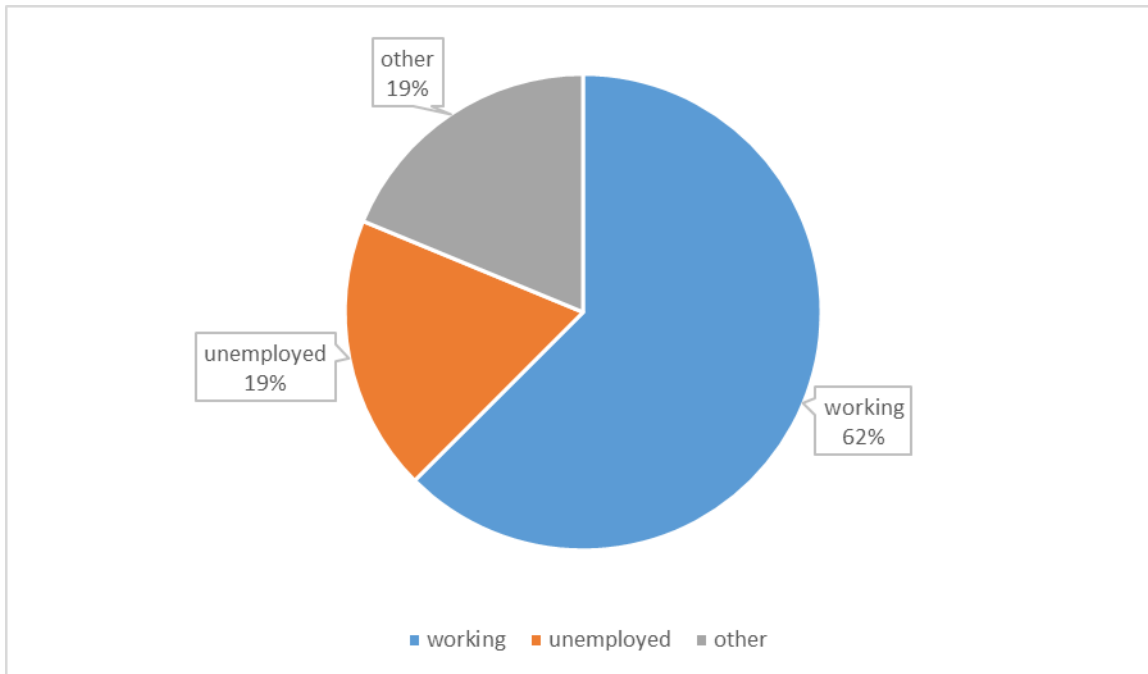


Figure 14: Activity since leaving school.

When asked what they have you been doing since leaving high school 63% indicated that they were employed while only 19% indicated that they were unemployed during this transition period (Figure 14). An additional 19% listed “other” in response to the same question. Some of the “other” responses included:

Volunteering in various communities (participant 1)

Raised children and return to job skills training then eventually school (participant 11)

I was unemployed, but babysitting for a few people, I also went back to school for a short time, and then dropped out again (participant 12)

Worked as a hairdresser for several years, then when I became a single mother I had to find a job that I could support my babies. I began working in Indian country, and was able to provide a decent living for my family for several years, till recently (participant 26)

When the participants were asked what courses they are enrolled in presently responses included English, Math, Science, Indigenous Studies as individual courses.

Additionally, under “other” some participants indicated programs that they were enrolled

in included Social Work, Aboriginal Early Childhood Education, Trades, and Criminology.

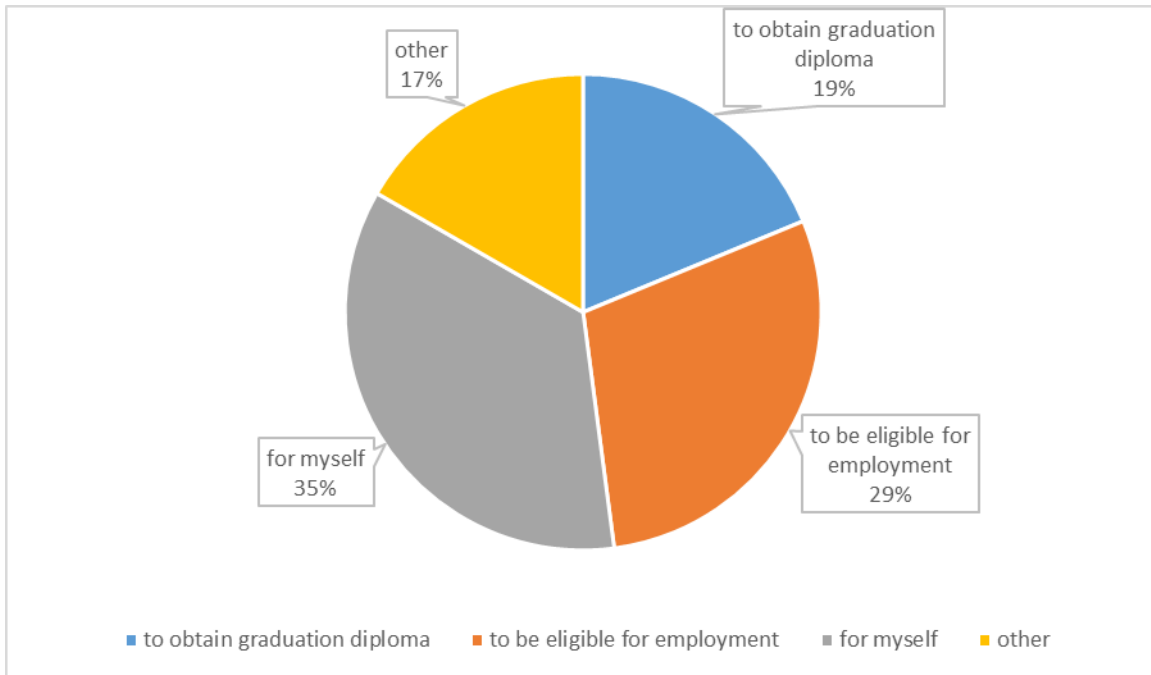


Figure 15: Reason for returning to school.

The student participants were asked to the best of their recollection, what circumstances lead to the choice to return to school (Figure 15). Only 19% of participants indicated that the reason was to obtain a graduation diploma. A further 29% indicated that they wanted to return to school to become eligible for employment. A very interesting finding is that 35% of participants returned to school for personal reasons including “to be of service to my fellow residential school survivors (participant 4); “to be a role model for my son (participant 9); and

My children needed to get their high school diploma, so when we were able to get the IRS Personal Credits we went looking for an institute. Also, I desperately want to go to university to get a degree. I'm tired of living below the poverty line (participant 19)

When asked if anyone from their home or community spoke to them about returning to school the responses included:

After high school graduation, many of my family members and friends encouraged me to pursue my education but I kept falling back into the place where I felt not capable of succeeding in the Social Work field (participant 1)

Yes! my mother and also my past clients from my Aboriginal Life Skills classes highly recommended that I be more trained for them to share their deeper hurts and pains without always referring them to other people all the time-so here I am struggling to get more educated by people who to me put us down when in my mind they should be happy that we are trying to be of service for our people of the past to bring them to them to the now of today (participant 6)

My education would e-mail me the sponsorship package year after year. I went back to school after high school for a year and a half and then dropped out. I returned after 10 years of graduating grade 12 (participant 7)

I had my mom always tell me to go back to school. But I would have to say my son made a huge change in me because I was no longer living for myself, I am living for the both of us and I truly just want to give him the world (participant 17)

My family is all about keeping the future generations moving forward and evolving with the times as well as maintaining the traditions of our past, education is an insurance that the future generations will be taken care of and we have the necessary means to fight for our people (participant 42)

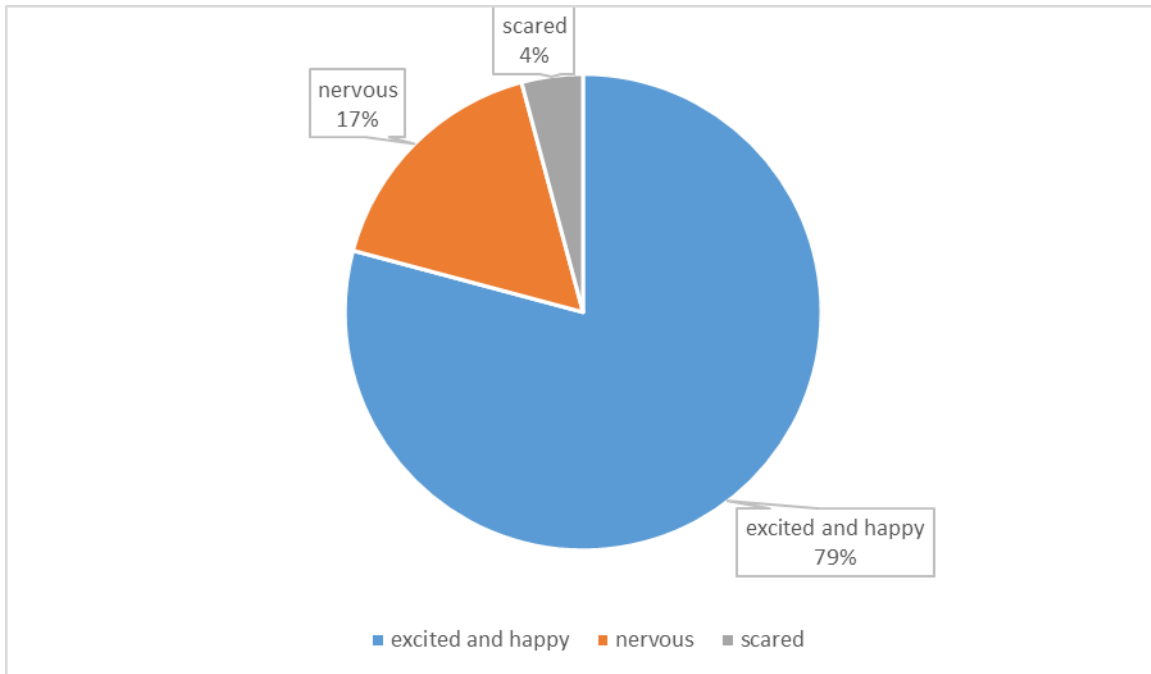


Figure 16: First day of school.

Participants shared their feelings about their decision to return to school (Figure 16). Almost 40% indicated that they were excited and happy. An additional 54% indicated that they were nervous and scared. Some of the participants indicated that they were “All of the above!” (participant 49). Another indicated that she was “worried about being able to keep up with still so many stressors affecting my life” (participant 29).

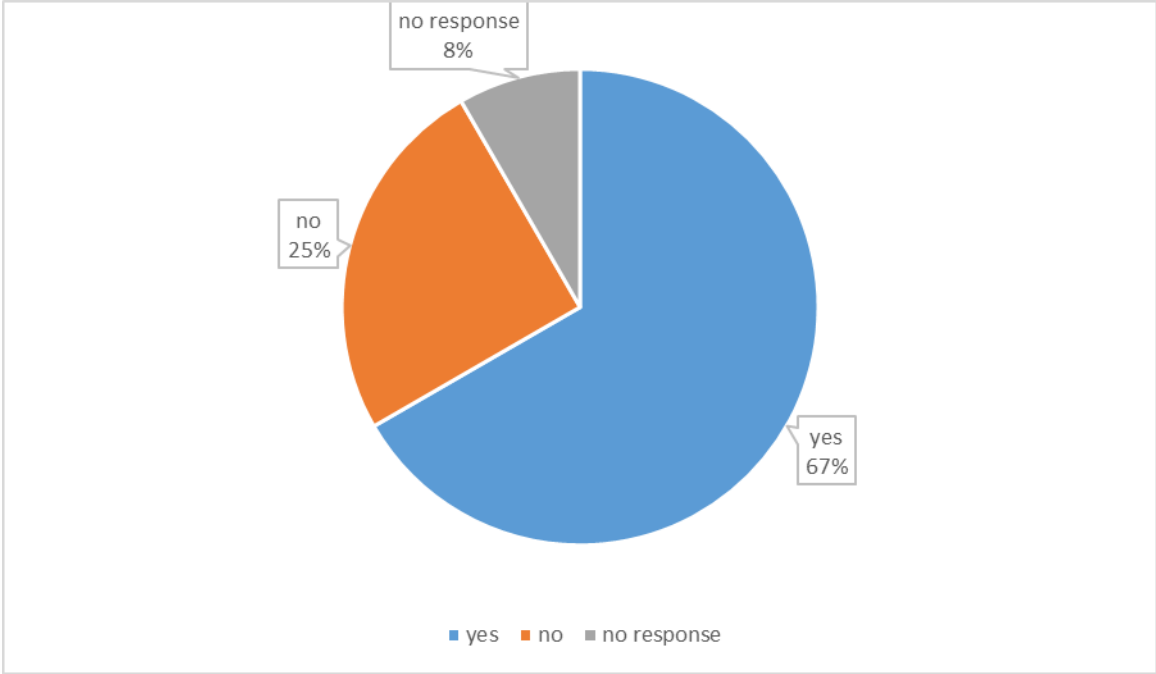


Figure 17: Ability to do well.

When asked about their first class and if they felt they had the ability to do well 67% of the students felt that they did have the ability to do well (Figure 17).

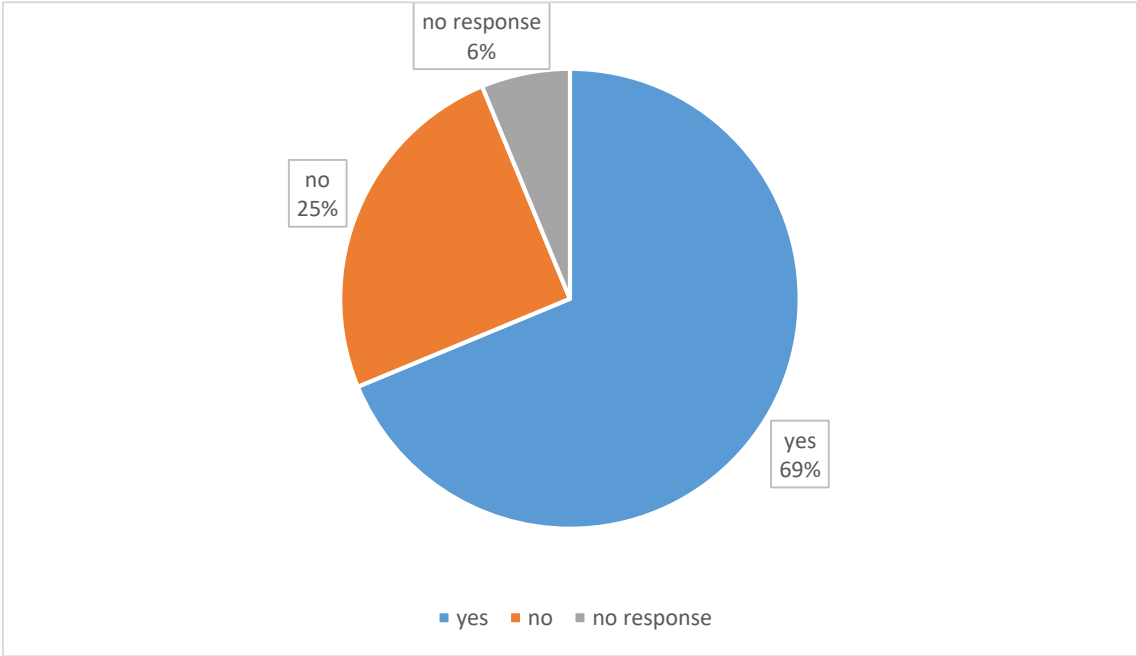


Figure 18: Skills to do well.

When the participants were asked if they felt they had the necessary skills to be a good student 69% of students felt strongly about this (Figure 18). Additionally, when the participants were asked to discuss how they felt their abilities were in certain subject areas, 69% indicated that they felt confident about their abilities in Math. Eighty-three percent felt confident about their abilities in Reading, 79% felt that they had the necessary study skills to do well in school, and 67% felt very adequate in relation to their skills in Art. Finally, approximately 70% of participants indicated that their abilities in Literature/storytelling and P.E. were adequate to excellent.

Participants were also asked to share how long they have been registered in classes. Almost 70% indicated that they had attended for two years or less while 30% had been registered in classes for more than two years.

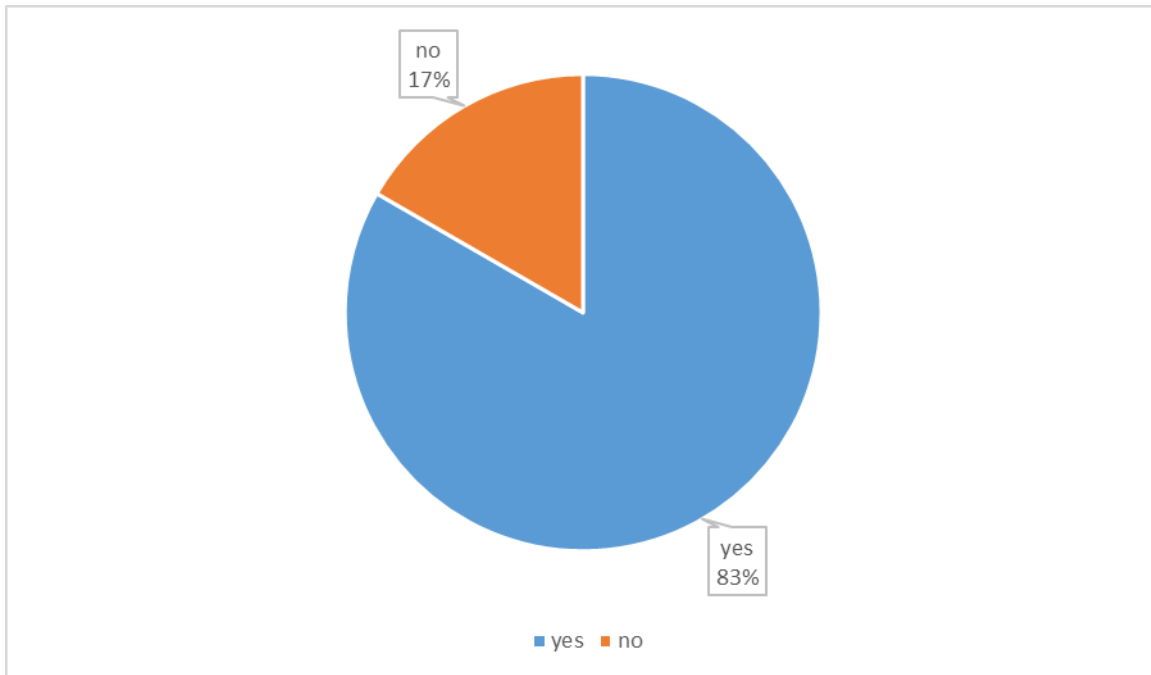


Figure 19: Realization.

Students were then asked if they ever came to the realization that they had the ability to be great students (Figure 19). Interestingly, 83% of Aboriginal participants

vividly recalled the moment. Subsequently, they were asked when they had this realization what was the relationship with your instructor. The most common selection made by students indicated that the instructor understood the students and that the instructor liked the student and the feeling was mutual.

In addition, one student indicated that they felt welcomed in class and some shared that “my instructors have made me feel very confident in my abilities to learn” (participant 9). While another shared that, “I felt respected and my instructors understood that I had a life outside of school and sometimes that life could take over” (participant 52). When asked to describe their life outside of school when they had the realization that they could be great students the participants shared that their life was great and that their family supported them. Some students indicated that they had a lot of time to focus on their studies and others shared that they enjoyed their lives. For example, some students shared, “I have good schedule of my time; and being able to balance my family time and homework time” (participant 8), while another shared:

As a single mom I knew I needed further education so that I could provide for my children. I had no family support, and the people around me told me I would never amount to anything. I was angered & used that to show them I can, and I did (participant 21)

The participants were then asked about their plans in regards to education. Almost 63% indicated that they had plans to further their training beyond the programming they were currently studying. The remainder had plans to seek employment.

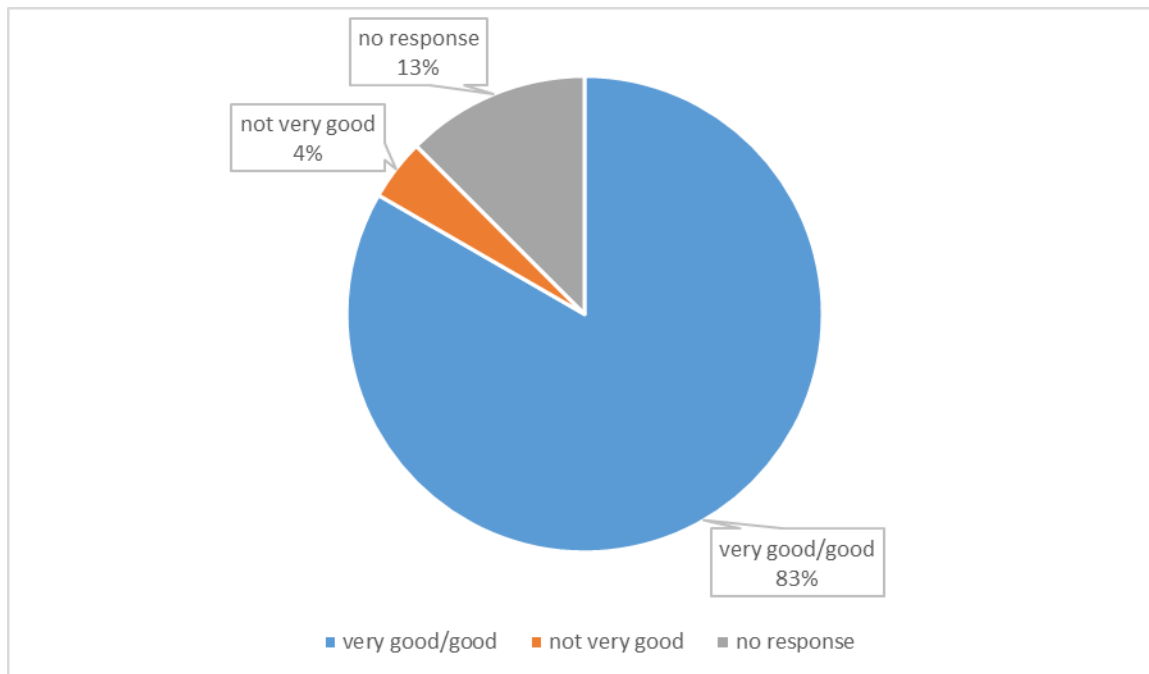


Figure 20: Ability to achieve goals.

When asked how they felt about their ability to achieve their goals 83% indicated that they felt strongly about this (figure 20).

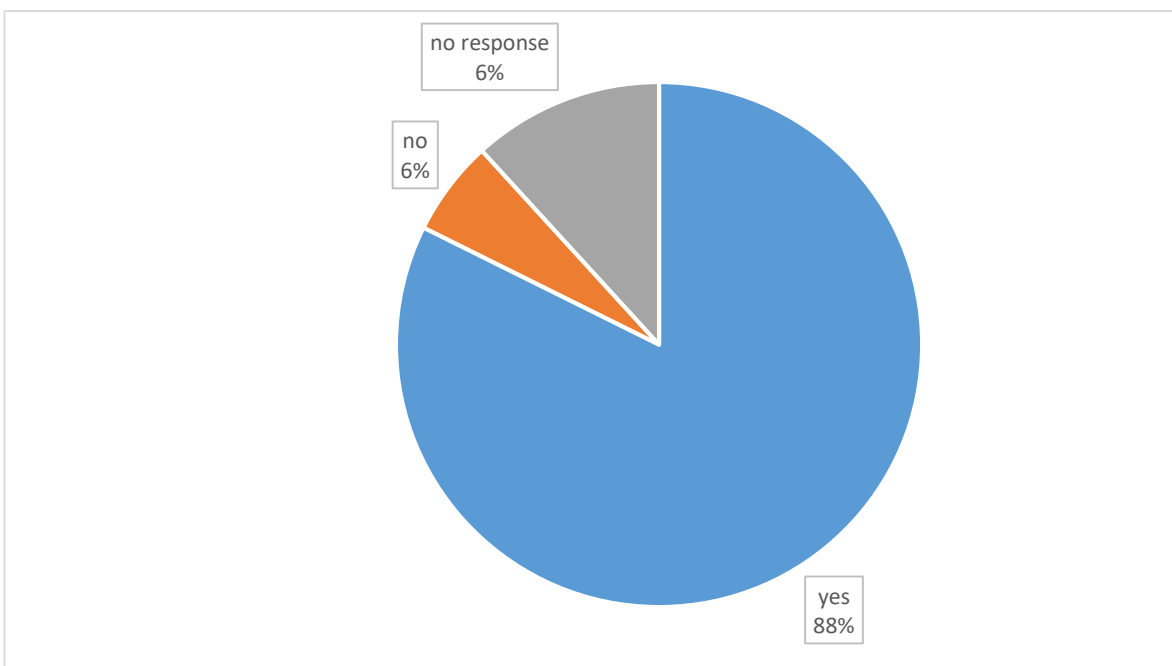


Figure 21: Capable of achieving goals.

In addition, when participants were asked to comment if they now felt capable of achieving their goals 88% of participants felt that they were capable of achieving their goals (Figure 21). The participants were finally asked if they wanted to share any additional information.

Students shared quite lengthy thoughts in regards to this last question. In the discussion and analysis chapter I will discuss the implications of these comments as they have proven to be quite powerful.

All my life I have struggled to maintain my grades and attendance for school because there was no support, and I was bullied on a daily basis. It was also hard with my dad in and out of my life causing chaos in the family; I didn't feel secure at my home or at my school. I'm finally at a point in my life where I can push myself and create the environment I need to thrive in. I'm excited and nervous for the education in my future (participant 25)

I am grateful for the Indigenous Institute I am attending right now. I attempted to get my adult dogwood at another college, but was unsuccessful, as it was not a safe, welcoming environment for me. I knew it wasn't the environment for my daughters either. We are now coming to school together to get our adult dogwood diplomas. I needed a place where they felt comfortable and safe, too, as their high school experiences presented many challenges and they both left the regular high school system feeling unwanted and pushed out (participant 24)

Confidence is huge! The teachers and staff all are very supportive of that concept and really make you feel confident and accepted. The people of this community made me feel the same way. The people at my practicum also made me feel accepted and worthy (participant 21)

I have had an amazing and sometimes stressful at times, experience. But so far it all has been great! I am so glad I have returned to further my education! I wish I could have done it sooner but then I think that if I did return sooner I would not have my amazing little boy that really pushes me to keep my head up and keeps me going! (participant 10)

Demographic Summary

NVIT's student body has a very similar composition as that of the survey participants, with 79.95% of the students self-identifying as Aboriginal and 20.05% self-identifying as non-Aboriginal. The participants who self-identified as Aboriginal offered further details with 92% identifying themselves as status Indian, and 8% identifying themselves as non-status and Metis (Figure 5).

When participants shared if they or someone in their family had attended residential school, 94% answered yes (Figure 11). This is a very interesting and suggestive number as it indicates the level of students attending NVIT who have experiences with the residential school system through themselves or through family members. As I have indicated in the introduction and literature review, too many Aboriginal Canadians are not sharing the same educational experiences and successes as their counterparts in this country. Given the scope and magnitude of the effects of residential schools on Aboriginal communities, these research participants will provide

some very informative data to disseminate and share with the academies across this country. Therefore, the implication for educational settings serving Indigenous students is that if Aboriginal students are attending respective institutions, then consideration must be given to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2012) recommendations.

In terms of gender, 73% of the participants identified themselves as female and 27% identified themselves as male (Figure 7). For the sake of comparison, demographic data for NVIT indicates that 72% of the students are female and 28% are male.

The survey participants represented a range in age from 15 years to 35 years and older (Figure 6). Students at NVIT tend to represent an older range of ages, as is the case for the participants of the study. The data serves to mirror the demographic of NVIT students in terms of gender and age and mirrors the racial breakdown presented at NVIT, as well.

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, my target survey participants were Aboriginal adult males or females who had not completed high school. Accordingly, 60% of the Aboriginal participants indicated that they had completed high school and received a graduation diploma (Figure 12).

When the participants were asked their age and the grade they were in when they left school, only 23 participants responded to both questions. Because the question may have been confusing or unclear, the researcher performed some follow-up questions to clarify the results.

Of the participants, 38% had not completed high school with their peers. Nevertheless, the respondents had clearly misunderstood the survey question as they indicated that they had received their graduation diploma after receiving upgrading at

various educational facilities. In summary, 48 Aboriginal NVIT students provided demographic information about their educational experiences. In the following sections, the emerging themes that were derived from the participants' experiences are described for their previous educational settings and for NVIT.

In conclusion, the results section displays the data provided by the participants. The analysis and discussion portion of the next chapter explores the responses presented with insight and inquiry to arrive at the conclusions that will serve Aboriginal education.

Chapter 6: Analysis and Discussion

Then Skəmxiist spoke for all the Chiefs, “From now on when the People-To-Be come, everything will have its own song, and the People-To-Be will use these songs to help each other as you have helped me.” That is how food was given to our people. That is how songs were given to our people. That is how giving and helping one another was and still is taught to our people. That is why we must respect even the smallest, weakest persons for what they can contribute. That is why we give thanks and honour to what is given to us

(Armstrong, 2009, p. 362).

In this research, from the survey responses it was clear that participants are located within the “new” *tmix*^w of education and display the polarities necessary for achieving balance so that all future “People-To-Be” or *sqilx*^w in education will survive.

The analysis is viewed through lens of the four themes of the framework in three distinct time frames: the first part encompasses the recollections of participants on the topic of education prior to the decision to return to school; the second part encompasses their transition and reasons for wanting to return to school; and the third concerns their experiences while studying at NVIT and what factors could contribute to a sense that they could achieve their goals. The analysis is guided by the three research questions.

What are the Shortcomings in the Education System?

Some responses were examined through the lens of the ‘External Aboriginal Policy’ quadrant of the research framework. Policies do not always lead to negative experiences, although for First Nations people in the colonial history of Canada it has a profound effect on the marginalization of Aboriginal peoples (Stonechild, 2006).

Aspects indicate impacts of past residential school trauma, either directly or trans-generationally. As shown previously in Figure 11, 94% of the survey respondents

indicated that someone in their family had attended residential school. Only one respondent mentioned attending residential school as being her worst experience.

Sigh... the residential school was extremely negative for me, the teachers didn't see us as human, but, rather, dirty little savages that knew nothing and had to unlearn what it meant to be First Nations. They did everything to demean us and who we were as First Nations people. I am extremely fortunate that I was stubborn and that I am still capable of speaking my language. I have yet to become the strong First Nations woman that my grandmother and mother were (participant 9)

Survey results indicate that one of the shortcomings in the education system is the racism of low expectations and systemic and implicit racism that were prevalent in the student experiences. They also indicate that another shortcoming includes that many of the participants experience bullying both from school personnel and from fellow classmates.

The Auditor General of British Columbia (2015) addressed the success of Aboriginal students in BC's public education system as having racism of low expectations. Some participants refer to these experiences in public schools:

I was streamed into non-academic courses and this really impacted my desire to pursue higher learning, in fact I was told that I could not take a psychology course because I was not university material (participant 2)

This sentiment was not uncommon, for example:

I was put into vocational classes without even knowing what that meant (participant 26)

My principal made me go in front of the class and do a math problem. I didn't know how to do the work and he kept me there and pointed out all the mistakes I made. I wished I could disappear (participant 43)

Some participants felt they were marginalized for their choice or freedom to be a complete student.

I was put into lower level math classes and I did not like that. I told my mom and she did not care so I just went to school a bit longer until I had enough (participant 23)

As a First Nations person who attended a public secondary school, I found it very difficult to be able to have the freedom of choice in my course selection. This eventually led me to believe that I was not capable to further my education (participant 1)

Other students indicated how they were the targets of racism:

My sister and I were the target of a lot of racism in high school. This made attending everyday very difficult and challenging and eventually became the reason for dropping out (participant 49)

I felt invisible, like nobody cared... because in my mind they did not (participant 47)

I was the only Aboriginal student in the class and I was put in the back row... if you were not smart or good looking, or whatever, you were not put in the front row (participant 12)

I got into an argument with an instructor over the intergenerational trauma suffered by First Nations students. I left school soon after... I didn't belong there (participant 17)

High school was a very hard time for me, I struggled until I finally dropped out. I always felt that if my teachers spent a little more time with me I could have done better, I would have felt their support rather than their discouragement (participant 54)

A number of participants revealed their worst experience in relation to the racism they experienced in school.

I experienced racism throughout schooling (I was raised off reserve) and there were only two other Aboriginal students in the high school. One of the boys committed suicide in grade 9... 'You'll survive' that's what I always remember hearing my mother say (participant 5)

The statements illustrate feelings of not belonging and of being alienated from school. Saul (2014) points out that, as a country, Canada has failed miserably to educate its citizens on the true history of the relations between French and English Canadians and Aboriginal people. These sentiments echo the claim (Archibald, 2008) that the colonial assault on Aboriginal children was being continued by public education. Other students told of their experiences involving bullying by students and teachers or having few positive experiences outside of school.

The following responses reflect the participants' sense of alienation and loss based on their experience of marginalization at school and at home. These statements underline the instability of persistent change symbolized by Saskatoon Berry through the loss of epistemic knowledge in the Indigenous community.

High school was a literal nightmare, I was depressed, anxious, and upset the entire time. For the first three years, however, I managed to appear well adjusted and happy. The fourth year I dropped out (participant 15)

This participant did not point to a specific reason for the unhappiness, only that it resulted in the participant leaving school early. Another student gave an example of feeling shamed in the classroom.

The most negative experience I had in school was when I failed science 9 and the next year I retook the class. At the start of the course the teacher had me stand at the front of the class and said to the students that they could do well in the class or end up like her (participant 20)

The survey results also suggested that students experienced impacts from shortcomings related to home stresses. A participant indicated feelings of loss when the participant's family moved to another community and then lost all contact with friends.

My most negative experience in education was when we moved and I lost all contact with my friends at my old school. At my new school I was bullied and ended up dropping out within one year of arriving (participant 25)

These comments reveal a variety of experiences in connection with being bullied and isolated; students can feel alienated by school employees or by other students (Brown, 2004). Some participants mentioned that some of their most negative education experiences began at home:

Home life was very stressful, as I did not get along with my stepmother and my partner was insecure when I was at school. Both my stepmother and my partner stressed me out and I decided it would be easier to quit school than to continue (participant 11)

I would describe myself as being numb, shut down and lost as a result of not feeling supported at home (participant 17)

The participants commented about being marginalized by the education system and by their families at home. Although the students had many fond memories of the relationships with teachers, coaches, and significant adults at schools, their negative memories echoed a similar sentiment: school was a place where students could be shamed and bullied. Many of the participants did not return to school for several years, as exemplified by their current ages and many of the participants returned to school as older adults (e.g. older than 21) (Figure 6).

The experiences of the participants in education prior to coming to NVIT revealed a range of emotions from the exhilaration of success to the despair of complete loss and alienation. They remind us of people's resilience (Brown, 2004). The feedback above explored the students' self-perception of their self-esteem and self-image, and generally reflected the positive attributes of successful individuals. In terms of responses to questions pertaining to self-perception the percentage of students who felt a positive reaction to the questions ranged from 69% to 92%. Nevertheless, as described by others in the literature review (see Parent, 2011, and Pidgeon, 2008), many students still have difficulties with completing their studies. The educational experiences of the participants appear out of balance, with some positive events being fondly remembered along with many negative events. In the Four Chiefs model, educational experience is not in balance for the students, in a situation that may be called out of *qwemqwəmt*.

Survey results show that the necessary attributes for students to feel good about their learning were present, and therefore the opportunity to succeed would be expected to exist. However, as shown in the literature review approximately 40% of Aboriginal

students do not complete school. Survey responses indicate that they did not lack a positive self-esteem: what they were missing was a system that failed to recognize them as Aboriginal students and having their identity acknowledged in the education system.

I did not ask participants what a successful experience in education was. Rather, I left the interpretation open to each student. Participants were asked to describe their most positive educational experience. Their responses represented the students' attributes related to Indigenous Identity (II) in the theoretical framework. The following sentiments speak to positive experiences the students enjoyed; however, they were not enough to overcome the barriers expressed earlier.

Many of the respondents described their experiences as Aboriginal students in public and Band operated schools. Several participants also told stories of how they were specifically represented in the schools:

Learning about the talking circle in my Indigenous Studies program at (a Vancouver Island school) was great. The talking circle taught me that I had a lot to share and I discovered that I could synthesize other people's thoughts into my own and express them well (participant 3)

Taking a First Nations Studies class was my best memory of my schooling (participant 9)

My best experience was having the ability to take another language class other than French (participant 29)

I liked that we had a First Nations person there to arrange special informational meetings for First Nation students (participant 17)

My favorite experience was having teachers at the school that understood me and saw me as a future helper to society (participant 8)

The recollections were important to the students as they enjoyed learning when they could "see" themselves in the curricula. Students also mentioned fond memories of instructors, friends, and classes:

My instructor changed my whole outlook on learning. The teacher's way of teaching allowed me to absorb way more material than in any other class (participant 33)

I had some good teachers that were really helpful and supportive, that would praise me and make me feel like I was doing a great job (participant 18)

In grade 10, I was inspired by a fellow student and obtained the honour roll for the first time, I went on to receive the honour roll on three of the four report cards (participant 32)

From what I can remember, the most positive educational experience I had was when my French immersion teacher in grade 10 told me that I was very fluent in French and that I was at the top of the class in speaking the language (participant 19)

These comments speak to implications for schools to ensure authentic relationships between students and instructors, which foster opportunities for students to experience supportive environments. The relationality of Indigenous communities reflect these findings (Armstrong, 2009). The participants referred to positive experiences where they had a strong connection to their Aboriginal traditions. These responses demonstrate the strong support network of the students, with their school and friends, and family, representing the independent qualities of Indigenous Control of Education.

The following student recollections refer to the positive relationships between students and teachers. The responses about positive experiences are examined through the lens of Indigenous Control of Education (ICE) and represent the independent qualities of the education system that works together to achieve balance.

One of the students referred to having a self-awareness of his learning path while another provided a comment about their instructors:

My best memories happened when I realized I was motivated to go to school and found that I did have the necessary supports in place to help me graduate (participant 6)

My most positive educational experiences are when I had good, clear, concise and interested instructors that made the subject interesting and fun to learn (participant 4)

What are the Realities of Aboriginal People who Return to School after Pausing-out?

For the Aboriginal respondents, the time from when they attended high school to when they attended NVIT varied, in an average of about a 12-year span. During the gap, most Aboriginal participants said that they were working. Some of the other activities that were mentioned by the respondents included “Volunteering in various communities” (participant 1), “Being a full-time mom” (participant 26), “Raised children and return to job skills training then eventually school” (participant 11), and “Going to school and working and caring for family” (participant 14).

These types of responses indicate that the Aboriginal participants left school, volunteered in their communities, and raised children. Many of the participants did some work for their respective Indian Bands in “Work Opportunity Programs” which allow members to work for several weeks and then collect unemployment insurance for a short time. A few students mentioned that they were dependent on the welfare system.

Survey results indicate that feelings related to self-image when deciding to return to school were varied. The beginning of the survey explored the experiences of students in high school in relation to their self-confidence. Approximately 81% of the Aboriginal respondents felt that their physical appearance was attractive or average, while only 19% felt they were unattractive (Figure 8). When asked about their athletic ability, 65% of the Aboriginal respondents felt that they were good at sports. When asked about their sense of humor, 69% of the Aboriginal respondents said that they had a good sense of humor (Figure 9). These statements imply that the Aboriginal participants had a positive self-

awareness in terms of being able to see humour in their lives. When asked about their ability to learn in high school, 94% of the respondents felt that their ability was average to high (Figure 10). These statements suggest that the Aboriginal participants felt confident in their abilities to learn materials in a school-based setting.

Finally, when asked if education was an important concept at home, 75% of the participants indicated that education was an important concept at home (Figure 13). The data has important implications for all institutions because it must be taken seriously that the home of the Aboriginal student views education as an important aspect to the well-being of the child. I found that the Aboriginal students in my research did not exhibit a lack of self-esteem. They exhibited a strong sense of identity. The five questions above were asked to determine the participants' feelings about their self-esteem and self-worth while they attended high school. The results show that the students had a positive self-image about their physical and mental capacities. The students also had support from home.

Responses indicate that some of the negative attitudes of students resulting from their high school experiences impacted them long after they left school, although the students also had a strong and persistent desire to continue moving towards post-secondary studies to help their communities through gainful employment. The data have some strong implications in that the Aboriginal students may not be aware of this inner desire to help their communities and that these students have a "longing" to be a supporter of communities. Responses indicate that despite the strong feeling experienced by students to help their communities, many of the participants still had a persistent doubt that they had the necessary skills and drive to achieve this goal.

After high school graduation, many of my family members and friends encouraged me to pursue my education but I kept falling back into the place where I felt not capable of succeeding in the Social Work field (participant 1)

I have attempted several post-secondary institutions, but dropped out every time (participant 23)

In high school, I was invisible and most people thought I was worthless due to my race. I had a lot going on at home and this affected my school day. I left school because I felt the best thing for me at that time was to work. I hated high school and except for one teacher, I didn't have many good experiences (participant 8)

I believe as a First Nations person, I was not treated fairly or equally as the other non-First Nations students in high school and this had a direct impact and caused myself to feel less than (participant 1)

Results indicate that some of the participants were motivated to return to school based on their economic situation. Many of the students who participated in the study indicated a desire to work or pursue higher education, as well as revealing that the transition may have been difficult due to their previous educational experiences.

After high school, I did not have any career goals since I was led to believe that I did not have the potential to further a career in the Social Work field. In grade ten, when we took a mandatory career and personal planning course a survey was used to showcase our interests to help find a career best suited to your personal ability and interest. This helped me make the decision to return to school (participant 2)

As a single mom, I felt that I had to go to school so that I could provide the best I could for my child (participant 42)

In fact, in my mother's community I had already achieved education higher than most of the band administration. They wanted me to work there after graduation. My father and step family were content to be farmers and despise learned people. Community Elders and academic advisors were the first to talk to me about higher education (participant 23)

My children needed to get their high school diploma, so when we were able to get the IRS (Indian Residential School) Personal Credits we went looking for an institute. Also, I desperately want to go to university to get a degree. I'm tired of living below the poverty line (participant 19)

Some participants indicated other reasons for returning to school (Figure 18). Only 19% of the Aboriginal respondents decided to return to school to obtain a credential. The

primary reason for returning was related to gaining employment or satisfying personal ambition.

Many students transitioned from low-skilled employment to raising children before finally deciding to return to school. A motivating reality was to be a role model for their children. For some, their child or children was the driving force for their desire to pursue higher learning.

I had my mom always tell me to go back to school. But I would have to say my son made a huge change in me because I was no longer living for myself, I am living for the both of us and I truly just want to give him the world (participant 17)

My family is all about keeping the future generations moving forward and evolving with the times as well as maintaining the traditions of our past, education is an insurance that the future generations will be taken care of and we have the necessary means to fight for our people (participant 42)

I decided that I wanted and needed to get my education. My mom was a strong supporter of school and encouraged me to get my education (participant 9)

Other students had champions at home and role models who were constantly supporting their choice to return to school.

A cousin of mine lived with us for a while. She had a Master's Degree and I felt so motivated to go because of her (participant 13)

I had my mom always tell me to go back to school. But I would have to say my son made a huge change in me because I was no longer living for myself, I am living for the both of us and I truly just want to give him the world (participant 17)

My mom, sister and myself agreed that this is now the time to finish my school, I don't want to work minimum wage for the rest of my life (participant 41)

These responses shed light on the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for pursuing post-secondary education. In short, many of the participants wanted to improve their quality of life, for themselves and for their children. Of note in these responses is that many singled out female role models or female family members who strongly supported and encouraged the decision. The maternal role in the Aboriginal community is a strong

influence and points toward supporting female advocates for the Aboriginal community. I experienced the same drive from my own mother and grandmothers.

Furthermore, the participants experienced both anxiety and excitement upon deciding to return to school. When asked to talk about their decision to return to school most of the Aboriginal participants recalled feeling happy, excited, and somewhat nervous about their decision. Some of the students feared that their decision to return might involve similar experiences from when they were in high school.

I was nervous and scared about my decision because I did not want to have the same experience as I did in high school where I was streamed into courses that others thought was a better fit for me. Also, being an older student who has graduated a number of years before many of other students, I felt out of place because there was age differences within the classroom and made me feel that I should have already graduated from college or university (participant 1)

On my first day of school I would be nervous as I wasn't sure how I was going to do (participant 2)

Terrified, scared and extremely anxious just from past experiences... I had made life difficult-it still is at times (participant 7)

I was excited and scared at the same time. I have been out of school for 10 years and wasn't sure I remembered how to write papers? I wasn't sure if I was going to pass any classes or fail them? (participant 8)

Some participants did not know what to expect and they felt like they were being pulled along without control of their lives. Others still had negative feelings and self-doubt.

On my first day at school I thought that I would be excited, but nervous at the same time. I would have thoughts like 'am I going to do well?' 'Am I going to fail?' 'I don't deserve this, I have done too much wrong in my life to deserve goodness,' 'will people like me?' I will be nervous because I had never known that I had goodness in me, I never knew that I could achieve anything (participant 20)

I had all the expected nervousness, etc. but more than anything I was thrilled at the opportunity. I didn't even know common folk like me were also able to go to school. I thought only rich people – or very smart people were able to do that, and I was neither. I had no idea how professionals achieved their goals. They were just different people (participant 24)

I felt a little intimidated, unsure, and out of place, because of my age and maybe I did not belong here (participant 31)

Expressively, Aboriginal students who remarked about their ability to do well in school, approximately 67% felt that they would do well (Figure 17). Almost the same percentage of Aboriginal participants felt that they had the necessary skills to be a good student (Figure 18). Obviously, the students had decided to return to school and had allowed their positive supportive feelings to overcome any negative feelings they might have had. The internal Enowkinwixw process reveals the importance of the factors counter-balancing the negative when examined as a dialogical construct. Balance had been achieved with their decision to enter post-secondary studies.

What Factors Influence Successful Educational Experiences?

After the students had attended post-secondary school for various lengths of time, their feelings about their abilities and self-worth became expanded. One of the questions of the survey was whether participants realized that they had the ability to be great students (Figure 19).

Almost 83% of the respondents realized they had the ability to do well. Of the 17% who did not feel qualified, most were first-year students enrolled in an employment skills program and had been at school for less than two months. The students' "realization" was further explored to fill the gap in knowledge in this aspect of Aboriginal education. The participants did not have extensive experience in educational settings, and yet they felt that they could be great students. The participants were asked to describe the moment when they felt they had the ability to be great students.

A factor that influenced successful educational experiences showed that when students were situated outside their comfort zones with positive encouragement they did

well. Of importance is the length of the comments and the detailed examples given by the Aboriginal participants in response to the survey questions.

I was in the College Readiness program in a Math 050 course. I first felt that my ability to succeed in any course was very poor, if at all. The instructor encouraged my determination and dedication to my studies and led me to believe that I was more than capable of passing the course, but, that I could do it with great success. After receiving some of the assignments, tests, and exams back I finally came to a place of realization and acceptance that I could further my education and pursue a life that I wanted. This happened because the instructor created a place that I decided to step into. That is, the instructor encouraged me to take risks with my learning and to not be afraid to take risks. This led me to launch full-time into my learning. I was encouraged to come to the front of the class and present my mathematical thinking without the shame associated with making mistakes. I was encouraged to present my ideas with confidence and to accept the findings of a math problem as probable and not as judgemental (participant 1)

Another student commented about an instructor who challenged her to explore her past in order for her to move forward.

I was a single mother in East Vancouver and decided to attend college. I didn't think I could do well because I dropped out of another college. The instructor in my STSC 101 class changed my life. One assignment we had was to tell the story of my life. This was for a college prep course, so I first thought, why are we doing this? I was afraid because I grew up in poverty and with a great deal of poverty. I soon realised that the instructor wanted us to look at our past and to dissect it. It was a very difficult thing to do, however, the instructor was with me all the way. He let me know that my past will always be a part of me, but that it would never need to imprison me. That statement changed my life. I know what I want to do and I am very capable of doing whatever I want (participant 21)

Of importance is the fact that the students experienced powerful lessons for their personal development that had nothing to do with course content, it was related to the instructors who could see the barriers to the students' success and challenged those barriers.

An additional factor revealed from the survey results is that encouragement to persevere and work hard is a motivator for success. While some participants felt they could accomplish anything, others felt that they were just average and needed continuous

support and encouragement. This perceived reality is a significant aspect related to why students may choose NVIT as a school of choice.

I don't feel like a great student. I feel like a slow learner and it takes painstaking efforts for me to learn the smallest details. I am a decent student. I will never say I am a great student; decent student is more suitable. But aside from being a student, any realization that made me feel like I could do something there was always support behind it. Somebody was always rooting for me and that made all the difference (participant 6)

I finally was accepted to Urban First Nations Education Centre and after the first semester I realized I was not stupid; I was capable of doing well in class (participant 11)

Seeing my GPA for the first time was so uplifting it made me feel like I can do anything! And it makes me think about the possibilities for the future! As well as getting assignments in that I would stress quite a bit over, getting them in and getting good marks made me feel like all that stress and hard work paid off and that I am on the right track (participant 18)

The students realized that when they made a concerted effort in their studies, they could see a tremendous outcome. Some of the participants realized that they could only be considered excellent students by receiving very good grades.

The moment I realized I was a great student was when I started to receive my grades back, with awesome feedback from my instructors, I did extremely well in ALL my courses (participant 19)

I was doing my bachelor of Child and Youth Care... I felt passionate about what I was learning. The faculty was supportive. I felt empowered (participant 33)

Another factor indicated that a strong relationship with faculty lead to success.

Some Aboriginal students said that some of their instructors were more positive than others.

When I received encouragement from my instructors and received positive feedback on my papers when teachers challenged themselves to help us learn as validated and compassionate participants, we generally performed because we wanted to and were thrilled that instructors were able to help us bring out our own wisdom. Not all instructors do that. Some are stiff shirts who do not teach well (participant 23)

Other Aboriginal participants suggested that their motivation was encouraged from within themselves.

I realized that I have the ability to be a great student during the summer after completing my diploma in Criminology. I realized that I wanted more out of my school career, and knew that I had the drive and ambition to change others' lives (participant 32)

I was writing an essay for my Strategies for Success course, the topic was my hero, as I began to research and find who my hero was I realized that I had a talent for writing, people had told me in the past that I was good at writing but never truly believed it until I read my essay in front of my class (participant 46)

The participants enjoyed a strong relationship with their instructor when they realized they could be great students. Most participants felt welcomed in the class, understood by the instructor, and liked by the instructor. Some Aboriginal participants felt that their relationship with their instructor assisted their growth as students.

My instructor provided a sense of belonging that promoted my future development as a student and I felt respected, and that the instructor took time to hear my concerns and explained my concerns so that I could move forward (participant 21)

Positive feedback was important to us, and all students were invited and welcomed to participate – so it was a group experience. The instructors have made us feel very confident in our abilities to learn (participant 38)

Another factor indicative of success was how participants responded to barriers. When asked to describe their life outside of school when they realized they could do well, all the participants, said they felt supported by family and friends equally.

Many of the Aboriginal participants indicated that receiving funding had a minor role in their realization of being a great student. Other extrinsic motivations seemed to be more significant in contributing to their feelings.

Wow. Being a single mom and learning about cycles of violence and addictions and under the wing of cultural healers and FN community assisted me in wanting to change how my life was. Circumstances were difficult but I did it anyways (participant 11)

As a single mom I knew I needed further education so that I could provide for my children. I had no family support, and the people around me told me I would never amount to anything. I was angered and used that to show them I can do it, and I did (participant 21)

These comments are especially encouraging when considering the question about the participants' thoughts on their ability to achieve future goals (Figure 21). Some participants shared stories of choosing educational opportunities based on safety and identity.

I am grateful for the Indigenous Institute I am attending right now. I attempted to get my adult dogwood at another college, but was unsuccessful, as it was not a safe, welcoming environment for me. I knew it wasn't the environment for my daughters either. We are now coming to school together to get our adult dogwood diplomas. I needed a place where they felt comfortable and safe, too, as their high school experiences presented many challenges and they both left the regular high school system feeling unwanted and pushed out (participant 24)

Nearly 87% of participants felt good or very good about their ability to achieve their goals. One student commented about this:

I know I can achieve my future goals; I just need to get through self-doubt (participant 49)

I ran into stumbling blocks but picked myself up and continued on, because giving up isn't me. I start something...I complete what I started (participant 4)

All my life I have struggled to maintain my grades and attendance for school because there was no support, and I was bullied on a daily basis. It was also hard with my dad in and out of my life causing chaos in the family; I didn't feel secure at my home or at my school. I'm finally at a point in my life where I can push myself and create the environment I need to thrive in. I'm excited and nervous for the education in my future (participant 25)

A school should be preparing students at a high school level for post-secondary education. My first time at college I struggled with school because I knew nothing about MLA or APA style, because I was not taught it in high school. I took a few years off from school because it became too much, it was not until I was struggling in life, that I saw the need to return to school to further my education. I visited a past college instructor and she asked, "Hey, what you been up to?" Then she stated, "Hey, apply for this program, go back to school! (participant 5)

It is not easy to find a career path when one does not know their personal path (participant 15)

I like it! It is exciting to know that I am that much closer to achieving my goals and gaining lots of knowledge (participant 7)

The implications for post-secondary schools, faculty and retention support indicate that although the students have a sense that they are well on their way to achieving goals, they have a lingering self-doubt that can make the whole school experience seem fragile and in need of constant support and monitoring.

Obviously, most of the participants have overcome their self-doubt since they consider themselves capable of achieving their goals (Figure 21). Almost 82% of the respondents indicated that they feel confident about attaining their goals.

Through education and sobriety life is so much better (participant 6)

My schooling is very important to me and I know that I can achieve my goals (participant 26)

I have struggled hard, throughout my life, and had to find my path myself. I am so grateful to have a second chance to make things right and continue getting the education I deserve and want (participant 11)

I think that some personal life skills would be helpful in school as well as including student success as a part of the curriculum (participant 22)

I made a list of things that had to be met before I would leave my place of work to attend college. 1. Acceptance letter. 2. Band funding. 3. On-campus daycare. 4. Affordable housing. 5. Child care subsidy approval. If one of the listed items was not met I was not going to attend college. Thankfully, all came to reality (participant 12)

Confidence is huge! The teachers and staff all are very supportive of that concept and really make you feel confident and accepted. The people of this community made me feel the same way. The people at my practicum also made me feel accepted and worthy (participant 21)

A significant factor is that many participants indicated that having an overall supportive environment can make an important difference. Support was realized in many areas such as the school environment and family members.

Support is the most important thing in education and in all endeavors in life. It is very difficult to do things without support and it takes great inner strength to do so. When a teacher (whichever form they take, parent, friend, stranger, no matter) illuminates the path and walks with you along the way it is much easier to open the doors along the way that lead to the experience of those moments of big and small realizations (participant 3)

I have had an amazing and sometimes stressful at times, experience. But so far it all has been great! I am so glad I have returned to further my education! I wish I could have done it sooner but then I think that if I did return sooner I would not have my amazing little boy that really pushes me to keep my head up and keeps me going! (participant 10)

College is very supportive, especially the support staff in the library and Student Success Centre (participant 13)

Best choice I ever made in my life was to return to school so I thank my sister for that advice (participant 14)

I believe that family support is a huge factor in achieving educational goals (participant 19)

In summary, the survey results indicate that the shortcomings in the educational system include effects of trans-generational residential school experience, varying forms of racism, and stresses generated from home. Shortcomings were also expressed as overshadowing events that lead to despair in the system and ultimately failure. For example, even if the participants experienced some fantastic events, the negative events were far too overwhelming to overcome at that time in their lives.

Survey results indicate that the realities of Aboriginal students who paused-out and then returned include that they do not a low self-esteem in relation to their feelings about themselves or their abilities. Results did indicate, however, that topics such as anxiety, self-doubt, and fear were constant realities.

Lastly, in conclusion, the factors that influenced successful educational experiences included students being supported to move outside of their comfort zones,

having a supportive relationship with faculty and a supportive environment outside of school.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In the world before this world, before there were people, and before things were like they are now, everyone was alive and walking around like we do. All creation talked about the coming changes to their world. They had been told that soon a new kind of people would be living on this earth. Even they, the Animal and Plant people would be changed. Now they had to decide how the People-To-Be would live and what they would eat...

(Armstrong, 2009, pp. 358-362).

The answer to the question, “How would the People-To-Be live and what would they eat?” presented in the traditional Okanagan *captikʷl* story of the Four Chiefs has come full circle. Some answers to the question of how Indigenous students might thrive in the future in the post-secondary world are provided through a story as a cyclical pedagogy used by Indigenous communities (Archibald, 2008). The Okanagan story is a means to view contemporary Aboriginal post-secondary student situations and their struggles as a lens to examine the way forward to achieving balance across the K-12 and post-secondary educational system in British Columbia.

This research is focused on the educational experiences of Aboriginal students who did not enjoy success in their K-12 education and later returned to pursue their respective educational paths. The core research questions reiterated below provided the focal point for the survey questions and the conclusions reached: a) what are the shortcomings in the educational system; b) what are the realities of Aboriginal people who have paused-out of the K-12 education system then returned to post-secondary; and c) what are the factors that influenced successful educational experience?

Shortcomings in the Education System

Shortcomings in the education system are identified through the analysis of surveys. Results indicate that most Aboriginal people in public educational systems have had family members who endured the residential school system in this country. Based on results of the qualitative findings there is limited awareness, lack of understanding, and little appreciation of the impact of residential schools and the history of trauma in educational settings. Although a great deal of effort has been made in recent years since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) the data clarifies that not enough is being done. School organizations can benefit from exploring how they may make their employees aware of this aspect of Canadian history and the effects of transgenerational trauma prevalent in Aboriginal communities and therefore in the Aboriginal student body. I can, therefore, conclude, that an understanding, knowledgeable, and empathetic faculty would result in better learning environments for Aboriginal children and adults in educational settings.

Another identified shortcoming indicates that racism of low expectations may be a factor experienced by Aboriginal students in the public education systems in being singled out because of their Indigenous identity. This form of prejudice still exists whereby some school personnel do not see the potential of students based on assumptions that Aboriginal children do not do well. The shortcoming is that educators do not have the benefit of training and the ability to be responsive to the historical realities of Indigenous people. In addition, educational systems do not resource professional development for educators to a level of awareness of the lived experiences of Indigenous people. When looking at the worst educational experiences, some students shared that racism directed at them by

faculty were often realities. Other students shared stories of being embarrassed and bullied. Some respondents were resistant to such experiences. I can conclude that structures are not in place to address discrimination in the schools to ensure safe learning environments for Aboriginal students. In addition, Aboriginal families are not resourced and equipped to advocate for students. They do not have access to interactive training sessions with school personnel on practices that promote appropriate support mechanisms.

Another deficiency based on the qualitative findings is related to parents not having the knowledge on how to advocate and support students in relation to problems they may face. The lack of home support for students is detrimental to a group who may already feel marginalized by the education system. The shortcoming is that the K-12 school lacks the understanding and tools to work effectively with the home to address any potential barriers to a successful learning experience for Aboriginal students. Schools lack training practices to support school personnel to communicate with Aboriginal parents respectfully and relevantly so that they may understand the educational system. There is a serious gap in the school system working progressively and respectfully to assist the Aboriginal community to support their students to succeed and to understand the educational system.

Another inadequacy identified in the literature review section on Policies and Practices: K-12 to Post-secondary is that the lack of historical knowledge about Aboriginal people in Canada contributes to them not enjoying success in education. This systemic measure of racism has continually imbalanced Indigenous communities in everyday life and in particular, in education. In addition, the literature indicates that systemic policy measures were designed to hinder Indigenous communities from advancing through

education, their linguistic, and epistemic visions. Although in recent years the BC government has worked with Indigenous people in the province to improve access and support for the linguistic and epistemic vision of communities, I conclude that much work is still necessary in order to bridge the gap between a mindset of awareness to one of understanding and empathy.

Furthermore, such efforts have not reached a large portion of the intended recipients. The literature section on Policies and Practices: K-12 to Post-secondary reveals that thousands of Aboriginal people have not successfully completed high school or have overcome the barriers to entering the economy. Unfortunately, there is limited awareness of the excellent scholarly research regarding Indigenous pedagogy and epistemology in relation to addressing educational concerns for Aboriginal people. In particular, awareness of studies pertaining to Indigenous communities from a systems-based view, reflective of the importance of story-telling as an important aspect of the transmission of knowledge is much needed. What this signifies is that Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies are not seen as vital and valuable aspects of the educational system moving forward.

In summary there are serious shortcomings within our educational system that Aboriginal students continue to face and these barriers must be addressed to support new educational models that empower Indigenous student success. Positive actions can be implemented that will result in constructive experiences for all Aboriginal students. A significant finding in this analysis presented information regarding Aboriginal student experiences that were remembered fondly by research participants. The conclusion is that it is possible to implement impactful strategies to address barriers to success. A review of the survey data and literature confirms that Aboriginal education in Canada and in

particular BC is in crisis, however, this study has shown how the use of Indigenous pedagogy to transform the educational system can result in positive experiences for Aboriginal people in education.

Realities of Aboriginal People who Return to School after Pausing-out

An analysis of the data illustrate that Aboriginal people who have paused-out and then returned to school do not have low self-esteem problems. In fact, the opposite is true; they are very confident and have a positive self-image. The data reveals that self-doubt of many students is often confused with low self-esteem. The survey respondents shared the student reality is that they experience anxiety, fear and excitement in relation to their decision to return to school, however, the data did not show that this was not a result of low self-esteem. A reality of Aboriginal students transitioning to post-secondary school is feeling both excitement and a high level of anxiety at the same time. Post-secondary schools do not focus on or understand that the de-escalating of anxiety will result in greater excitement for Aboriginal students. What this indicates is that educational settings and Aboriginal organizations that support students considering post-secondary training need to be mindful and aware of this student reality so they are not deterred by their feelings of anxiety. A positive approach to the student reality to make the transition need not be apprehensive.

Based on my findings, an additional reality experienced by returning pause-out Aboriginal students is that most return to school with a desire to join the economy to help their community. The inner desire to help communities is extremely strong, and that both Indigenous communities and post-secondary schools are not fully aware of these desires and their role in supporting this motivator of students. I can conclude that Aboriginal

educational departments and post-secondary program departments are lacking ways to connect this reality to the reason Aboriginal students want to return to further training to direct their community's needs.

A further reality is that Aboriginal people who transition to post-secondary training do so to be role models for their children and family members. The literature section on Indigenous Epistemology and Pedagogy concludes that the Indigenous community worldview is relational and that the significance of the nuclear and extended family is very important and often overlooked in mainstream educational settings. I also determine that schools are lacking in understanding this as a reality in terms of connection to the community. Aboriginal students in transition to post-secondary institutions would be drawn to environments that reflect their values of being connected to their entire community.

The analysis shared that a high number of single parent students struggle to make the decision to return to school because of the daunting challenges and barriers that will need to be overcome. As evidenced in the findings, educational settings are not sharing opportunities and supports specific to single Aboriginal parents deciding to pursue an education.

Post-secondary schools are lacking in recruiting and retaining Aboriginal students by not promoting how their respective schools can accommodate and support Aboriginal students who are parents and by reflecting a greater understanding of the importance of the extended family. Analysis concludes that this is a very important decision for single parents and that schools do not promote a positive image towards supporting Aboriginal students with families.

It is clear that the transition to post-secondary schools for Aboriginal students who have dropped out of the K-12 and return to post-secondary settings is fraught with emotion and feeling. The longing to return to school is strong because of a desire to assist their communities in the rekindling of linguistic and epistemic visions. The systems-based reality of Indigenous communities is a strong motive for Aboriginal students wanting to be role models for their families. What I can conclude from these concepts is that the inner desire to help communities through joining the economy is very real for Aboriginal students.

In summary, as indicated in the literature, if all of our civic institutions are Indigenous and deeply rooted in Indigenous identity then the idea is comforting because it suggests that the current system is truly unbalanced because all of Canada's institutions have forgotten from whence they came. Although we have deep Indigenous roots in our civic institutions, we have marginalized the very community of our origin.

Factors that Influence Successful Educational Experiences

The data analysis reveals that when students were situated outside of their comfort zones with positive encouragement, they did well. I can draw from this that positive encouragement is a necessary factor to influence success. In particular, data clearly shows that where students are encouraged to take risks, faculty need to be made aware of encouragement as a factor of success.

Another factor indicated in the survey is that when students earned high marks through hard work they felt like they achieved success. Programs are lacking an environment of high expectations for how hard work can be and should be the measure of success and that faculty play a critical role in how hard work is evaluated and encouraged.

Literature within Policies and Practices: K-12 to Post-secondary supports that Aboriginal students are often placed into “easier” programs without consideration to the factor that they want to have high academic standards in a supportive environment to achieve success.

However, even in a supportive environment, analysis reveals that students need support to overcome external barriers, significant ones being childcare, finances, and unstable home environments, in order to achieve success. Educational settings with the necessary supports for Aboriginal students help to overcome the barriers they may encounter. Factors indicate that good supports include counseling and financial aid orientations, and workshops on assistance available in the school and extended community.

To conclude, survey results clearly demonstrate that Aboriginal students attending educational settings do not have necessary Indigenous identity reflected in their support system for a community’s epistemic and linguistic visions. A factor of success for the participants was being able to see themselves in the curricula and having the ability to learn their Indigenous language and culture. Educational settings ensuring that Aboriginal students are able to fully grasp their identity and feel supported while doing so, achieve higher levels of success.

As seen through the Enowkinwixw systems-view lens used for this inquiry, I can conclude from the shortcomings, realities, and factors an imbalance exists in all of the systems-based lenses. These include, a) Indigenous Identity (II); b) External Aboriginal Policy (EAP); c) Indigenous Control of Education (ICE); and d) Indigenous Community

(IC). Aboriginal students who have paused-out and then returned to school exhibit an imbalance in these quadrants in relation to their educational experiences.

A significant conclusion that emerges from the view of External Aboriginal Policy is that without appropriate policies in place that engage the Indigenous Community in providing Indigenous Control of Education many of the shortcomings, realities, and factors will not change. The primary conclusion becomes clear that without Indigenous Control of Education, the appropriate measures to include community in shaping culture, identity, and appropriate supports cannot be realized. An important supposition materializes in that the Indigenous Community is the only source of strengthening culture, identity, policy, control, and important measures in the educational experience. Without the Indigenous Community realizing how important it is to take control and reorganize how it re-imagines the educational experience of its Aboriginal students, nothing will change.

In conclusion, in the absence of comprehensive curricular and programming changes that include durable supports inclusive of culture, identity, and awareness of trauma by teachers, programmers, the community, and policy makers, nothing will change. As evidenced through analysis of the survey results, the importance of relatedness to the whole community is critical in the achievement of greater measures of success in Aboriginal adult students.

The conclusion presented through Indigenous theory and methodology is consistent with and asserts the educational social constructivist theory that envisions a shift from a focus on the teacher to a focus on the student and the relational context the whole system surrounding the student. The student participants clearly identified that what

is important to them is that Indigenous values of respect, responsibility and accountability which will allow for reflexivity, ethics, and dialogue results in collaboration, engagement, and transformation within their community. The relational context between the instructor, the student, and the family allows the student to become an active member in the knowledge construction process as a part of their own Indigenous community and territory. I have demonstrated that the nested-system seen through the lens of education is a *syilx* model of social constructivism.

Limitations of the Research

The scope of this research entailed gathering information from students at NVIT, and although I invited the students to volunteer in the study, not all students participated. Thus, the findings may not accurately represent the entire student body. I would have wanted to gather the experiences of all Aboriginal students attending all post-secondary schools in BC. I also pondered how many other questions I would have wanted to ask the participants. I would have asked: who inspired you to chase your dreams and what did they do to inspire you? I would have asked their faculty if they could recall moments where they knew that the students had realized their potential. As a community, NVIT is well versed in understanding the general atmosphere of the school based on student involvement and student inquiry. I would like to have asked all employees at the college what their thoughts were to their responsibility in building a better quality of life for Aboriginal people. Perhaps these questions can be explored in a further study.

Throughout this research, I have explored many questions that I have pondered over the last two decades of professional experience. As a consummate learner, I still have many questions that remain unanswered. In my tenure as Dean of an Aboriginal post-

secondary school, I have had many opportunities to talk with thousands of students about their aspirations and hopes for their futures. Generally, Aboriginal students want to gain an education in order that they will have the skills to return to their communities and help their people. What motivates them to do this? Some of the first Aboriginal people who attended university in Canada during the mid-19th century wanted to become educated to return home and assist their communities. A similar sentiment exists today. Again, what is the motivation? Is there a means to prove the inner voice theory that indigenous people have an inner drive to assist the community? Does this inner drive come from the teachings of Indigenous stories?

Aboriginal students seem to have a deep Indigenous Identity that is part of the *tmix^w* they hold, and the responsibility to intertwine in a common direction towards balance and regeneration. Our Indigenous epistemology and stories supports the idea. Do the students have this innate desire to help their communities to become balanced without knowing the source of their longing? Further research is needed to explore this concept.

In regards to the perceptions of faculty members who have created places for the students to step into and join the twining, some appear to be unaware of the students' feelings on the matter. If they knew the effect of the space they created, would they change their method of teaching? Are faculties even aware that they have such a profound impact on the lives of the students they serve? Again, further study is warranted in this area.

Finally, Canada was founded in the relationships between Indigenous people and European immigrants. Somewhere along the continuum of the relationship, Canada's Aboriginal population became marginalized and they have struggled to regain their proper

place as the cornerstone of the country. What role do the educational institutions play in re-imagining Aboriginal people as an integral aspect of Canada?

A Note for Fly (Participant Students)

The participants in this study have proven to be powerful Flies. To the current Flies who have sung a powerful song, you are responsible for the educational *tmix*^v continuing to regenerate and balance well into the future. You should continue singing in honour and being thankful for the sacrifices made by Indigenous Identity and the other three Chiefs that they may continue to intertwine in a common direction towards a balanced future for imminent learners. You are now capable of achieving your goals, which may have been an internal longing for a very long time. Your community has instilled in you a desire to work from inside the community to achieve these goals in a balanced way. As community members, please remember to always stand up and be heard, offer your experiences and never stop asking questions. Keep up the excellent work!

To the Flies of the future, please understand that to sing your song you must first step forward and take your place in the community and in the educational *tmix*^v. This will take much strength and courage to overcome the barriers in your way. Just as the current Flies long to help their community, you also have an internal drive to do the same. You have an inner responsibility to accept and give yourself to the feeling. The feeling is real and has been perpetuated through your community relations and the stories that have been handed down, generation after generation. The longing you have to join the community in efforts to build a better community is instilled through the enduring stability of your grandparents. Seek out this Indigenous knowledge and fully understand that it is yours.

When future Flies decide to go to school, they are letting the entire community know that they are ready to assume the responsibility to intertwine together in the common direction towards balance. I want to thank all participants in the study and emphasize again my intention to honour their words. The syilx Indigenous pedagogy employed has proven to be the optimum model to describe and address the research questions. Indigenous Identity should always be self-sacrificing in presenting leadership for a better way to achieve balance. Our Aboriginal communities have always shared and modelled how we ought to interact with other communities.

As community members, we all have the responsibility to stand up and take our place in the community. It is our responsibility to commence twining together in a common direction. From the research, an Indigenous epistemology can provide the guidance and the direction for addressing unresolved questions.

I consider the research to be my way of standing up in the community and gathering the bits and pieces of coyote so that one day we will be whole again. Coyote is still napping but slowly and surely, we are gathering up the bits and pieces of him so we will be able to understand who we are and what our collective responsibility is to ensure our communities will be whole and healthy.

Final thoughts

In summary, this research demonstrates that in order for me to use *tmix^w* as a basis for the framework I had to see education as having the ability to achieve balance and to regenerate. Similar to the Enowkinwixw model we are not at the centre of *tmix^w*, we are merely a part of the *tmix^w* landscape of spheres of influence and dynamics. As such, we all have a responsibility to work together towards a common goal of balance and

regeneration. Schools can assist this reality by understanding more about the need Aboriginal communities have in relation to Indigenous epistemologies and language revitalization. The students' comments underline how they have achieved and are moving towards balance and regeneration. It is the responsibility of governments and educational institutions to acknowledge this responsibility to work together towards balance and regeneration.

Education can promote the learning ability and self-confidence of Aboriginal people and offer an opportunity to improve their quality of life. In order to accomplish this, education programs must be re-imagined and transformed to meet the needs of Aboriginal learners at all levels. To contribute to the transformation of the educational system this dissertation, inclusive of a review of related literature and student experiences in their learning environments, concludes that policies must be very considerate of the marginalization of Indigenous people in this country and in the educational system. A critical aspect of this transformation is ensuring that Indigenous communities have support in building epistemic and linguistic goals into reality.

This study highlighted shortcomings in the educational settings revealed by study participants. The negative experiences related to a lack of Indigenous identity, lack of supportive policies, and a deficiency of a supportive environment resulted in an "unbalanced" educational outcomes. Participant feedback relating to the transition to post-secondary displays many aspects of uncertainty and a sense of excitement and anxiety. Family members, community supports, and wanting to join the economy to help their communities are the most prevalent motive in supporting the reason to return. Finally, attending a school like NVIT afforded the participants a supportive environment that

understood their anxieties and fears and encouraged participants to take risks and work hard to overcome barriers.

References

- Agbo, S. A. (2004). First Nations perspectives on transforming the status of culture and language in schooling. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 43(1), 1-31.
- Alcorn, W. & Levin, B. (1998, July). Post-secondary education for Indigenous populations. Paper presented at the International Congress on Social Welfare, Jerusalem, Israel.
- Retrieved from ERIC database (ED 423098)
- Andersen, C. (2008). From nation to population: The racialization of Métis in the Canadian census. *Nations and Nationalism*, 14(2), 347-368.
- Archibald, J. (1998). Creating power in the land of the eagle. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 22(1), 1-2.
- Archibald, J. (2001). Sharing Aboriginal knowledge and Aboriginal ways of knowing. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 25(1). 1-5.
- Archibald, J. (Q'umQ'umXiiem) (2008). Indigenous storywork: Educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Archibald, J., Selkirk Bowman, S., Pepper, F., Urion, C., Mirenhouse, G., & Shortt, R. (1995). Honoring what they say: post-secondary experiences of First Nations graduates. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 21(1), 1–247.
- Armstrong, J. C. (2000). Let us begin with courage. *Ecoliteracy: Mapping the Terrain*. Berkeley: Learning in the Real World.
- Armstrong, J. C. (2004). Natural Knowing-Schooling and Sharing the Okanagan Way. *Resurgence*, No. 226, 10-11.

- Armstrong, J. C. (2009). *Constructing indigeneity: Syilx Okanagan oraliture and tmix^wcentrism* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Greifswald. Univ. Germany).
- Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC). (2005). *Meeting the needs of Aboriginal learners: An overview of current programs and services, challenges, opportunities and lessons learned*. Retrieved from http://www.accc.ca/wp-content/uploads/archive/pubs/200507_Aboriginal.pdf
- Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC). (2011). *Moving forward: National working summit on Aboriginal posts-secondary education*. Retrieved from <https://www.univcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/aboriginal-moving-forward-report-summit-dec-2010.pdf>
- Auditor General of British Columbia (2015). *An Audit of the Education of Aboriginal Students in the B.C. Public School System*. Retrieved from https://www.bcauditor.com/sites/default/files/publications/reports/OAGBC%20Aboriginal%20Education%20Report_FINAL.pdf
- Barnhardt, R., & Kawagley, A. O. (2005). Indigenous knowledge systems and Alaska Native ways of knowing. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 36(1), 8-23.
- Battiste, M. (1998). Enabling the Autumn Seed: Toward a decolonized approach to aboriginal knowledge, language and education. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 22(1) 16-17.
- Battiste, M., (Ed.). (2000). *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

- Battiste, M. (2004, May). Animating sites of postcolonial education: Indigenous knowledge and the humanities. CSSE plenary address in Manitoba. Retrieved from https://www.usask.ca/education/people/battistem/pdf/csse_battiste.pdf.
- Battiste, M. (2013). *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit*. Saskatoon, SK: Purich Publishing Ltd.
- Battiste, M. & Henderson, J. Y. (2000). *Protecting Indigenous knowledge and heritage: A global challenge*. Saskatoon, SK: Purich Press.
- Battiste, M., Bell, L., & Findlay, L. M. (2002). Decolonizing education in Canadian universities: An interdisciplinary, international, Indigenous research project. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 26(2), 82-95.
- Bowlby, J.W. and K. McMullen (2002). At a Crossroads: First results for the 18 to 20-year-old cohort of the youth in transition survey. *Statistics Canada Catalogue No.* 81-591-XPE. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED505449.pdf>
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2015). How are we doing? Aboriginal performance data. Retrieved from <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/performance.htm>
- Brown, F.L. (2004). *Making the classroom a healthy place: The development of affective competency in aboriginal pedagogy*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia).
- Cajete, G. (1994). *Look to the mountain: An ecology of Indigenous education*. Durango, CO: Kivaki Press.
- Castellano, M.B., Davis, L. & Lahache, L. (2000) *Aboriginal education: Fulfilling the promise*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

- Cherubini, L. (2014). *Aboriginal Student Engagement: Educational Practices and Cultural Sustainability*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Cohen, Bill (2001). The spider's web: creativity and survival in dynamic balance. *The Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 25, 140-148.
- Cohen, Bill (2010). *School failed Coyote, so Fox made a new school: Indigenous Okanagan knowledge transforms educational pedagogy* (Doctoral Dissertation, UBC).
- Daschuk, J. (2013). *Clearing the plains: Disease, politics of starvation, and the loss of Aboriginal life*. Regina, SK: University of Regina Press.
- Deer, F. (2008). *Teachers and principals' perceptions of citizenship development of Aboriginal high school students in the Province of Manitoba: An exploratory study* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Saskatchewan. Canada).
- Deer, F., DeJaeger, A., & Wilkinson, L. (2011). *Canadian post-secondary education and aboriginal peoples of Canada: Preparation, access, and relevance of post-secondary experiences*. (Final Report). Winnipeg, MA: University of Manitoba.
- Retrieved from
<http://www.ideas-ideas.ca/sites/default/files/sites/default/uploads/general/2015/sshrc-ksg-deer.pdf>
- Durkheim, E. (1951). *Suicide, A study in sociology*. New York: Free Press.
- Evans, M., McDonald, J., & Nyce, D. (1999). Acting across boundaries in Aboriginal curriculum development: Examples from northern British Columbia. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 23(2), 190-205.

- First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC). (2008). *Aboriginal post-secondary education in British Columbia: A place for Aboriginal institutes*. Retrieved from http://www.fnesc.ca/publications/pdf/Policy_Bkgrd_Paper_May08.pdf
- Gehl, L. (2010). From cognitive imperialism to Indigenizing “The Learning Wigwam”. *Indigenous voices, Indigenous research*. 11-25.
- Hall, D. E. (Interviewer) & Armstrong, J. (Interviewee) (2007). *Native Perspectives on Sustainability: Jeannette Armstrong (syilx)* [Interview transcript]. Retrieved from the Native Perspectives on Sustainability project website: www.nativeperspectives.net.
- Hunt-Jinnouchi, F. (2011). *Transitions from aboriginal-controlled post secondary institutes to public post secondary institutions*. Adult Education Research Conference. Paper 44. Retrieved from <http://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2011/papers/44/>
- Kavanagh, B. (Ed.) (2008). *Aboriginal post-secondary education in BC: A place for Aboriginal institutes*. West Vancouver, BC: FNESC.
- Kitchenham, A., Fraser, T., Pidgeon, M., Ragoonaden, K. (2016). *Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements: Complicated Conversations as Pathways to Success*. Retrieved from http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/aboriginal-education/research/aeaa_report.pdf
- Kirkness, V. J., & Barnhardt, R. (1991). First Nations and higher education: The four R’s – respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 30(3), 1-15.

- Kovach, M. (2005). Emerging from the Margins: Indigenous Methodologies. In Leslie Brown and Susan Strega (Eds.), *Research As Resistance Critical, Indigenous, and Anti-Oppressive Approaches* (19-36). Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press.
- Littlebear, L. (2000). Jagged worldviews colliding. In Marie Battiste (Ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* (84-99). Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Malatest, R. A., & Associates, Ltd. (2004). *Aboriginal peoples and post-secondary education: What educators have learned*. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.
- Manuel, G. & Posluns, M. (1974) *The fourth world: An Indian reality*. Toronto: Collier-Macmillan Canada.
- Mendelson, M. (2006). *Aboriginal people and postsecondary education in Canada*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy.
- Ministry of Advanced Education (AVED). (2004). *Aboriginal post-secondary education and training policy framework and action plan: 2020 Vision for the future*. Victoria: BC: Ministry of Advanced Education (AVED). Retrieved from http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/post-secondary-education/aboriginal-education-training/aboriginal_action_plan.pdf
- Ministry of Advanced Education. (2015). *Post-Secondary central data warehouse standards report: aboriginal identity*. Victoria, BC: Ministry of Advanced Education. Retrieved from <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/post-secondary-education/data-research/aboriginalstatus.pdf>
- Moodley, K. (Ed.) (1992). *Beyond Multicultural Education International Perspectives*. Calgary, AB: Detselig Enterprises Ltd.

- National Indian Brotherhood. (1972). *Indian control of Indian education: Policy paper presented to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development*. Ottawa: National Indian Brotherhood.
- Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT). (2016). *At A Glance*. Merritt, BC: NVIT.
- Nieman, M.M. & Monyai, R.B. (2006). *The educator as mediator of learning*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Office of the Auditor General of Canada. (2004). *2004 November Report of the Auditor General of Canada. Chapter 5 Indian and Northern Affairs Canada – Education program and postsecondary student support*. Retrieved from http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_200411_e_1124.html
- Ormrod, J. E. (2004). *Human learning*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Overton W. F. (Ed.) (2010). *Biology, cognition and methods across the life-span*. Volume 1 of the *Handbook of life-span development*. Hoboken, NJ.
- Parent, A. (2011) "Keep us coming back for more": Urban aboriginal youth speak about wholistic education. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 34(1), 28-48,104.
Retrieved from
<http://ezproxy.lakeheadu.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1011297397?accountid=11956>
- Parkin, A. & Baldwin, N. (2009). *Persistence in post-secondary education in Canada: The latest research*. (Research Note #8) Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation.
- Peterson, C.; Park, C. (1998). "Learned helplessness and explanatory style". In Barone, D. F.; Hersen, M.; VanHasselt, V. B.. *Advanced Personality*. New York: Plenum Press. pp. 287–308.

- Peterson, C., Maier, S., & Seligman, M. (1993). *Learned helplessness: A theory for the age of personal control*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Pettit, J. L. (1997) *To christianize and civilize: Native industrial schools in Canada*. (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, University of Calgary. Canada).
- Pidgeon, M. (2008). Pushing against the margins: Indigenous theorizing of “success” and retention in higher education. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 10(3), 339-360.
- Preston, J. P. (2008). The urgency of postsecondary education for aboriginal peoples. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 86, 1-22.
- Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. (1996). Vol. 1-5. Ottawa, ON: Canada Communication Group Publishing.
- Richards, J. (2012, February 27). Putting the ‘system’ in education for on-reserve students. *Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/putting-the-system-in-education-for-on-reserve-students/article549009/>
- Richardson, C., & Blanchet-Cohen, N. (2000). Postsecondary education programs for Aboriginal peoples: Achievements and issues. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 24(2), 169-184.
- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. (1996a). *Gathering Strength*, 3. Ottawa, ON: Minister of Supply and Services (Author).
- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. (1996b). *Gathering Strength*, 4. Ottawa, ON: Minister of Supply and Services (Author).
- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996c). *Royal commission report on*

- Aboriginal peoples Education. [Vol. 3.5] Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.
Ottawa.
Minister of Supply and Services.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25*, 54-67.
- Sankhulani, L. (2007). *Gender Issues in Aboriginal Learning*. University of Saskatchewan, Aboriginal Education Research Centre, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and First Nations and Adult Higher Education Consortium, Calgary, Alberta.
Retrieved from
https://aned.sd61.bc.ca/edsrvs/ANED/educationalResources/StudentSuccess/Gender_Issues_in_Aboriginal_Learning.pdf
- Saul, J. R. (2008). *A fair country: Telling truths about Canada*. Toronto: Penguin Books.
- Saul, J. R. (2014). *The comeback: How Aboriginals are reclaiming power and influence*. Toronto: Viking Books.
- Scardamalia, M. (April, 2002). Creative work with ideas: A luxury? Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, New Orleans, LA.
- Simpson, L. (2001). Aboriginal peoples and knowledge: Decolonizing our process. *Canadian Journal of Native Studies 21*(1), 137-148.
- Smith, G. H. (1997). *The development of Kaupapa Maori: Theory and praxis* (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation). University of Auckland, Auckland, NZ.
- Smith, G. H. (2000). Maori education: Revolution and transformative action. *Canadian Journal of Native Education, 24*(1), 57-72.

- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. London: Zed Books.
- Statistics Canada (2012). How Statistics Canada Identifies Aboriginal Peoples. Retrieved May 30, 2012, from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/12-592-x/12-592-x2007001-eng.htm#a2>
- Stonechild, B. (2006). *The new buffalo: The struggle for Aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada*. Winnipeg, MA: University press.
- Surgenor, P. (2010). Constructivism & Social Constructivism. *UCD Teaching and Learning Resources, How Students Learn 4*, 1-8.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015). *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*. Winnipeg, MA: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Retrieved from http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf
- Wesley-Esquimaux, C., & Smolewski, M. (2004). *Historic trauma and healing*. Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation.
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: indigenous research methods*. Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing.

Appendix 1

Student Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the survey. The questions I will be asking will ask you to recall certain memories regarding your high school experience as well as your experiences in adult upgrading.

Please answer the following questions to the best of your recollection.

Knowing yourself: Tell us all about you!

How old are you?

15-19

20-24

25-29

30-34

35-44

What is your gender?

FEMALE

MALE

Let's start with what you felt about yourself as a high school student.

How did you see yourself as a teenager? (Circle all that apply)

a) How did you see your physical appearance?

Attractive

Average

Not Attractive

b) What was your athletic ability?

Good at sports

Not athletic

c) How was your sense of humour?

Good

Not very humorous

d) What hobbies did you have?

Computer games

Singer

Fishing

Hunting

Artist

No talents

Other _____

e) What did you consider your aptitude or ability to learn was?

High

Average

Low

Tell me about you where you went to school:

1. What school and district or what Band School did you attend high school?

2. Are you Aboriginal? If yes, are you a status Indian? If yes, what Band and First Nation are you from? (For example, I am a member of the Upper Nicola Band of the Okanagan First Nation)

3. Did you or anyone in your family ever attend residential school?

Yes or No

4. How many Indigenous students attended your school?

Less than 5%

10-20%

20-30%

30-40%

Greater than 40%

5. Did you complete high school and receive a graduation diploma?

Yes or No

6. How old were you when you left school?

13

14

15

16

17

18

Other

7. What grade were you in when you left school?

8

9

10

11

12

Other

8. When you left school what was important to you?

Family

Friends

Other _____ -

9. Please share your most joyful educational experience to the best of your memory.

10. Please share your most awful educational experience to the best of your memory.

11. What do you think your teachers thought about your abilities to do well in school?

They thought I was above average

They thought I was average

They thought I was below average

12. Do you feel it is important what a teacher feels about you as a student?

Yes or No

13. Was education important in your home?

14. When you were attending high school what do you think your abilities were in relation to math?

(1-weak; 5-strong)

1 2 3 4 5

reading?

1 2 3 4 5

study skills?

1 2 3 4 5

Art?

Shop classes?

Literature/story telling?

P.E.?

15. What was your favourite subject in school?

Reading

Math

Art

Science

PE

Social studies

Shop classes

Other _____

16. What were your career goals when you left K12 educational system?

17. How old are you now?

19-22

23-29

30-34

35-39

Older than 40

18. What have you been doing since leaving high school?

Working

Unemployed

Helping family

Other _____

19. What courses are you enrolled in presently?

English

Math

Science

Social studies

Art

Other _____

20. To the best of your recollection, what circumstances lead to the choice to return to school?

To receive my graduation diploma

To be eligible to have a job

For myself

Other _____

21. Did anyone from your home or community speak to you about returning to school?

If so, please explain who and what the discussion was about.

22. How did you feel about your decision to return to school? Please explain and describe your feelings.

I was excited and happy

I was nervous

I was scared

Other

23. On your first day as a new student can you please describe your thoughts and feelings about that first day?

I was excited and happy

I was nervous

I was scared

Other

24. On your first class, were you feeling that you had the ability to do well?

Yes or No

25. Did you feel that you had the necessary skills to be a good student?

Yes or No

26. Now that you are enrolled in course(s) what do you think your abilities are in relation to math?

(1-weak; 5-strong)

1 2 3 4 5

reading?

1 2 3 4 5

study skills?

1 2 3 4 5

Art?

Shop classes?

Literature/story telling?

P.E.?

27. How long have you been in school since your return?

Less than a year

1-2 years

More than 2 years

Other

Please share with us your experiences as a great student:

28. Did you ever come to the realization that you did have the ability to be a great student?

Yes or No

Please describe the moment that you had this realization

29. What was the relationship you had with your instructor(s) at the point of the realization that you were or could be a great student? (Please circle all that apply)

I liked my instructor and (s)he liked me

We talked all the time

My instructor(s) understood me

I felt welcomed in the classroom

It was a normal class

Other _____

30. Please describe your life outside of school when you had the realization that you were or could be a great student. (Please circle all that apply)

My life was great

My family supported me

I had lots of time to focus on my studies

I enjoy my life

Other _____

31. What are your future plans in regards to your school work?

I plan to continue my studies

I plan to leave school and seek employment

Other _____

32. How do you feel about your ability to achieve your goals?

Very good

Good

Not good

Not very good

Other _____

33. Do you now consider yourself to be capable of achieving your goals?

Yes or No

Do you want to share any additional comments?