Learning from past stories of success: values, skills, and attitudes as key determinants of first year postsecondary education completion among Nunavimmiut in Montreal

by

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree M.A. Geography

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September 2019

ABSTRACT

Postsecondary Education (PSE) is a key determinant of health. Despite evidence of academic ability, Indigenous youth have the lowest PSE attainment rates of any other cultural or ethnic group. While there is a growing body of literature on barriers to graduation for Indigenous students, many institutions continue to struggle with how best to retain first year students—a critical year in setting the foundation to graduation. This is in part driven by limited research on determinants or strategies for success. Looking retrospectively at the experiences of Nunavimmiut students in their first year through semi-structured interviews and through textual analysis of public Facebook® posts, this thesis adopts an asset-based approach and identifies three key determinants for first year completion—values, skills, and attitudes.Values were elements of the PSE experience which were meaningful to students and included factors such as personal growth and healing, whereas skills were tools and competencies for success such as study skills and goal setting. Attitudes were ways of thinking or feeling towards PSE such as fostering a sense of belonging. For existing student services or those just starting out, this study provides a road map for increasing Indigenous student retention in the first year. It does this through identifying both three broad concepts supporting student success as well as concrete actions within each area which have proven helpful to past students. In addition, this study found that values, skills, and attitudes supported retention through helping students build a 'sense of place' in the PSE environment. These findings may prove useful to addressing student retention by reframing the issue as a question of "what builds sense of place on campus?" This project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Nunavik's school board, Kativik Ilisarniliriniq, McGill University, and John Abbott College.

RÉSUMÉ

L'éducation postsécondaire est un facteur déterminant de la santé. Même s'ils font preuve d'aptitudes académiques, les jeunes autochtones ont les taux de réussite postsecondaire les plus bas comparativement aux autres groupes culturels ou ethniques. Bien qu'il existe une documentation de plus en plus importante sur les obstacles à l'obtention d'un diplôme pour les jeunes autochtones, plusieurs institutions peinent à trouver des moyens de retenir les étudiants de première année – une année critique pour poser les fondements qui mènent à l'achèvement des études. C'est dû en partie au peu de recherches effectuées sur les facteurs déterminants ou stratégies de réussite. En observant de manière rétrospective les expériences d'étudiants Nunavimmiut au cours de leur première année par le biais d'entrevues semi-structurées et d'analyse textuelle de publications Facebook® publiques, cette thèse privilégie une approche fondée sur les acquis et identifie trois facteurs déterminants clés pour l'achèvement des études : les valeurs, les compétences et les attitudes. Les valeurs étaient des aspects significatifs de l'expérience étudiante tels que la croissance et la guérison personnelle, tandis que les compétences étaient des outils et des aptitudes propices à la réussite, par exemple les habitudes d'étude et l'établissement d'objectifs. Les attitudes étaient des manières de penser ou de ressentir envers les études postsecondaires, comme encourager un sentiment d'appartenance. Cette étude se voit un guide sur la rétention d'étudiants autochtones de première année tant pour les services aux étudiants existants que ceux qui sont en développement. Elle y parvient en identifiant les trois grands concepts qui favorisent la réussite des étudiants et en soulignant des actions concrètes dans chacune de ces catégories qui ont été utiles aux anciens étudiants. De plus, cette étude a révélé que les valeurs, les compétences et les attitudes ont favorisé la rétention en aidant les étudiants à développer un sentiment d'appartenance dans le milieu postsecondaire. Ces résultats pourraient s'avérer

utiles dans la rétention d'étudiants en reformulant la question pour s'interroger sur ce qui encourage un sentiment d'appartenance en milieu scolaire. Ce projet a été approuvé par le comité d'éthique de la recherche de la commission scolaire du Nunavik, Kativik Ilisarniliriniq, par l'Université McGill et par le Collège John Abbott.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Nancy Ross for being a pillar of support, positivity, and sage advice from start to finish of this degree.

To my co-supervisor, Dr. Mylene Riva, your expertise conducting research in Nunavik has been invaluable. Thank you for always having your door open when I needed, and for all your advice and encouragement along the way (including it all here would require an appendix in itself).

To Joanna Katrina Cooper, who worked as a research assistant on this project, your passion for improving educational outcomes in your community has been a critical source of inspiration and energy. Believe me when I say that without your hard work and dedication this project would not have been possible.

To the research participants, and particularly the students, thank you for sharing your stories.

To McGill Student Services, this project would not have been possible without the support of your talented and dedicated staff.

To my high school teachers, who provided me with the tools academically, spiritually, and emotionally, to succeed in postsecondary education.

Finally, to my family and friends for their relentless encouragement along the way, and for just plain putting up with me being so far from home for my studies.

Acknowledgement to the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), for funding obtained to conduct this research through the Graduate Master's Award, to the Department of Geography for funding attained through the Graduate Excellence Award and invaluable TA opportunities, and to Dr. Ross and Dr. Riva for the provision of stipend funding from their personal research grants.

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TERMINOLOGY

CEGEP: Pre-university College in the province of Quebec and the entry point of postsecondary education studies for Quebec residents including Nunavimmiut. Acronym for "*Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel*".

KATIVIK ILISARNILIRINIQ (KI): The school board of Nunavik providing postsecondary education sponsorship for Nunavimmiut pursuing studies in Montreal. Formerly known as the Kativik School Board (KSB).

NUNAVIK: Inuit homeland comprising the northern third of the province of Quebec.

NUNAVIMMIUT: A collective term for the people inhabiting Nunavik.

QALLUNAAT: A term used by Nunavimmiut for non-Inuit or "white people".

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

PSE: Postsecondary Education

PSI: Postsecondary Institution

CONTENTS

1.1. Background

Disparities in educational attainment and the social determinants of health are a key driver of the health gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012; King, Smith, & Gracey, 2009; Marmot et al., 2008; Mitrou et al., 2014; Preston, 2008b; Reading & Wien, 2009; Richmond & Ross, 2008; Shankar et al., 2013). Numerous studies draw a positive relationship between education and health, with ample evidence to support the claim that highly educated individuals live longer, healthier lives (Baker, Leon, Smith Greenaway, Collins, & Movit, 2011; Conti, Heckman, & Urzua, 2010; Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003). Despite being recognized as a key social determinant of health by the World Health Organization (WHO), in recent decades, education has received relatively little attention in the health policy agendas of "highly schooled" societies like Canada, where the median level of educational attainment is a high school diploma or higher (Baker et al., 2011; Glouberman & Millar, 2003). While high levels of educational attainment at the national level may have pushed the public health focus away from this key social determinant of health in recent decades, education continues to be an important entry point for improving the health of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and around the world (Reading & Wien, 2009; Thibert, 2007).

Canada recognizes three Indigenous groups with distinct histories, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs dating back to 5000 years before colonial contact. These groups include First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. As a result of ongoing legacies of colonialism and cultural genocide, Indigenous Peoples in Canada experience a wide range of social and health issues including low rates of educational attainment and high rates of chronic and infectious diseases (Adelson, 2005; Gordon & White, 2014; Mitrou et al., 2014).

According to the Community Well-Being Index calculated by Statistics Canada, rather than improving over time, the gap in educational attainment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians (2/3 weighted for high school completion, 1/3 weighted for university degree completion) has grown considerably since 2001(Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2015). Among Indigenous communities, addressing this education gap is seen as a priority issue, not only as a potential driver of "collective wellbeing", but also as a means to provide youth with the skills and credentials to challenge oppression and succeed in contemporary Indigenous communities (Anuik, Battiste, & George, 2010; Battiste, 2002; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Holmes, 2006).

Rates of educational attainment vary widely in Canada, with the lowest rates of both high school and PSE completion concentrated among Inuit living in Nunavik, in Northern Quebec (see table 1). According to the 2016 census, 59.0% of Inuit ages 25-64 living in Nunavik did not hold a high school diploma, while 24.8% held a PSE diploma or degree (trades and apprenticeships represented the majority of PSE certifications, and 2.9% were at the CEGEP, college, or university level). When compared to the minority non-Inuit population living in Nunavik, 2.7% had not completed high school while 87.6% held some form of PSE certification, with a larger share of certifications at the CEGEP, college, or university level (54.1%). The gap in educational attainment between Inuit and non-Inuit in Nunavik is partly driven by non-Inuit moving North to fill jobs for which local people lack the credentials, particularly at the PSE level. Filling jobs in Northern communities with Inuit employees is linked to several determinants of health including higher income and a sense of purpose and autonomy (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017). For this reason, increasing the number of PSE degrees held by Inuit in Nunavik is an important step towards improving the health and well-being of the population.

Table 1. Highest Certificate, Diploma, or Degree Ages 25-64, by Geography and Indigenous Identity, Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population

	INUIT			REGISTERED OR TREATY INDIAN*		NON-INDIGENOUS			
	Nunavik**	Inuit Nunangat***	Outside Inuit Nunangat	On Reserve Canada	Off Reserve Canada	Nunavik	Inuit Nunangat	Quebec	Canada
NO CERTIFICATE, diploma, or degree (%)	59.0%	52.9%	23.2%	39.1%	11.2%	2.7%	4.3%	13.3%	11.5%
SECONDARY (high) school diploma or equivalency certificate	16.3%	16.0%	24.4%	21.4%	23.8%	8.6%	13.8%	18.5%	23.7%
POSTSECONDARY certificate or diploma:									
ALL-Trades, Apprenticeship, CEGEP, College, University	24.8%	31.2%	52.4%	39.5%	65.0%	87.6%	81.8%	68.1%	64.8%
ONLY- CEGEP, College or University	2.9%	19.1%	39.7%	27.8%	54.2%	54.1%	73.8%	48.3%	54.0%

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016264; * As defined by the Indian Act and Collected by Statistics Canada- The field "Total- Aboriginal Identity" was used for calculations, **Nunavik is the Inuit Homeland in Northern Quebec, comprising the upper third of the province; ***Inuit Nunangat is the homeland of Inuit of Canada. It includes the communities located in the four Inuit regions: Nunatsiavut (Northern coastal Labrador), Nunavik (Northern Quebec),the territory of Nunavut and the Inuvialuit region of the Northwest Territories. Note: All computations, use and interpretation of these data are entirely those of the author.

Historically, postsecondary institutions (PSIs) in Canada were not designed to support the unique needs of Indigenous youth. It was not until the early 1960s that attending a PSI in Canada ceased to be tied with the loss of Indigenous status for students registered under the Indian Act (Hinge, 1981). For this and other reasons, it is not surprising that in spite of evidence of academic ability, research has shown that Indigenous students consistently face the lowest completion rates of any cultural or ethnic group (Anonson, Desjarlais, Nixon, Whiteman, & Bird, 2008; Freeman & Fox, 2005; Mendelson, 2004; Statistics Canada, 2011, 2018). Calls to improve PSE outcomes for Indigenous youth, notably through the recommendations of Truth and Reconciliation Commission, has led to recent implementation of Indigenous support services on Canadian campuses. In the current wave of effort to implement support services for Indigenous students, it is important to study "what works" as presence of these services alone will not guarantee student success. (Bingham, Adolpho, Jackson, & Alexitch, 2014; Rodon, Lévesque, & Kennedy Dalseg, 2015).

Through a special program organized by the Kativik School Board in Nunavik, Kativik Ilisarniliriniq (KI), roughly two dozen Inuit students arrive on the island of Montreal every year to attend CEGEP—pre-university college unique to the province of Quebec, and a prerequisite for further studies at the university level. This is a group of students who have overcome numerous obstacles to complete high school in a place where high school completion rates are among the lowest in the country (Statistics Canada, 2018). Despite their past success, however, it has been suggested that many will fail to complete their CEGEP program. According to data provided by the Kativik School Board, of the students registered at the beginning of the fall 2016 (n=89), winter 2017 (n=71) and fall 2017 (n=126) semesters (both new and returning students attending college and university in Montreal and surrounding areas), roughly a quarter of those students dropped out sometime during the

semester. This is true even after the implementation of key supports by KI including specialized advising, tutoring, counselling, financial, extracurricular, and housing services. Similar to non-Indigenous populations, the challenges associated with transitions and adjustment are particularly concentrated within first year, and first semester students in particular, leading to early drop out. This is significant as first year completion is critical to setting the foundation to graduation. While data is not kept on what year of study students leave school, anecdotally we know that first year dropout continues to remain high for students coming from Kativik Ilisarniliriniq. For example, from talking to students we know that the 2017-2018 school year at John Abbott College was a below-average year for first year completion. Of the 15 students who started in the fall, only 3 remained at the end of the school year in the spring. While first year retention rates are known to vary from year to year it was generally agreed upon by students and staff that first year dropout had been abnormally high among this group of students.

While studies look at the barriers to PSE success for Indigenous students, this approach neither provides concrete solutions nor serves to build feelings of encouragement or positive reinforcement among students(Devlin, 2009). This study focuses on the experiences of those students from Nunavik who have successfully completed at least one year of studies in Montreal, and the factors that determined their successful college experiences. Understanding the experiences of students who are successful in completing their first year of studies may be helpful in providing insight into strategies to support other Inuit and Indigenous students undergoing significant transitions in social and cultural environments to pursue PSE (Devlin, 2009).

1.2. Objective

The overall objective of this study is to increase our understanding of the conditions of first year PSE completion for Indigenous youth. This objective is operationalized in the context of Nunavimmiut youth (Inuit from the region of Nunavik, Northern Quebec) moving from remote fly-in only communities to Montreal for college-level (CEGEP) studies. While successful transitions to PSE are complex and determined by many factors of self (factors students arrive with in PSE) and support (resources students have access to once arriving in PSE), as laid out in the literature review in Chapter 2, this thesis will focus predominantly on factors of support, or those that are modifiable by PSI professors and support staff. The exception here is a consideration of student dispositions and attitudes, a factor of "self", that is arguably heavily influenced by mentorship and advising, and thus can be considered as a modifiable factor once students arrive in PSE. This objective will be addressed by answering the following research question: From the experience of past students and staff, what have been key themes in determining successful first year experiences in postsecondary education? In addition, to better understand the role of geography in student success, the discussion chapter of this thesis will explore the relationship between key findings of this study and concepts of 'sense of place'.

1.3. Outline of Chapters

While the first chapter serves to introduce the thesis and provide background for the study, chapter two reviews the current body of knowledge on factors of self and support which promote Indigenous student success in Canada, the United States and Australia. The aim of this review is to paint a broad picture of the intertwining factors influencing PSE

retention, and to help the reader navigate the large body of literature on this topic. Chapter three provides a description of the methods utilized for this study, while chapter four provides the final results of thematic analysis through a thematic map and description of key themes, drawing on participant quotes to illustrate findings. Chapter five concludes by re-iterating and interpreting key findings, and exploring these in relation to the geographic concept of sense of place. Finally, practical and methodological implications of this study are discussed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Placement in Health Geography

For Indigenous students, particularly those from small, remote communities, pursuing postsecondary education requires a change in geography and a relocation from home. This relocation from home, and the rich sense of culture and community associated with tight-knit Indigenous communities has been attributed as one as the major causes for student dropout (Bonnycastle & Prentice, 2011; Carr-Stewart, Balzer, & Cottrell, 2013; Preston, 2008a). The field of geography has long used the concept of 'sense of place' to describe the feeling of being at home and secure in a geographic location, arguing that feelings of belonging for a given place, especially the place where one was raised, serves as an important anchor for individual identity and well-being (Hay, 1988; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996).

Traditionally, this 'sense of place' hinges on the need for regular physical contact with that place, just as regular contact is essential to maintain other relationships (Hay, 1988; Pretty, Chipuer, & Bramston, 2003; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). Recent approaches to cultural geography have emphasized the importance of everyday places, our homes, our schools, and our communities, in maintaining physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health (Wilson, 2003). This more recent approach to understanding sense of place may be helpful in understanding why some students are able to succeed in PSE despite being so far from home. Given the past importance that has been placed on geography in student success, in the discussion chapter, this thesis is interested in exploring how factors of success identified in

this study relate to concepts of sense of place, and the role of geography in student success more broadly.

This project is also linked to the broader work of healthy geography. Health geographers are perhaps best known for their focus on the social determinants of health, and how variations in social conditions (for example, access to healthy food, adequate housing, and quality education) translate into visible geographic inequalities in health (Gatrell & Elliott, 2014). Education is known to be a key social determinant of health, and gaps in educational attainment in Indigenous communities have long been linked to inequalities in health outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Reading & Wien, 2009; Shankar et al., 2013). By focusing on improving gaps in educational attainment for Indigenous youth moving away from home for PSE, this study situates itself within both the body the literature on sense of place as well as the larger body of geographic research addressing health inequalities and the social determinants of health.

2.2. Theories of Indigenous Student Success

Current theories on the determinants of PSE success hinge on Tinto's concepts of social and academic integration into the campus environment (1987). These principles, in turn, serve to shape the types of supports and services offered to students in their first year. On the academic side, this traditionally includes services like advising, tutoring and financial support, and on the social side this includes everything from housing programs, to counselling services, and extracurricular activities. While the concepts of social and academic integration have been found to be widely applicable across groups of different ages and ethnicities, other areas of Tinto's model have been found to be less generalizable. According to Tinto's model, social and academic integration require a dramatic shift to independence

and a disconnection of students from their prior, pre-PSE lives. This disconnection from family and community seems incongruent with Indigenous models of health where community connectedness is considered critical to maintaining a strong sense of self and well-being(Richmond & Ross, 2008).

Schooler's Native American College Student Transition Theory (2014) draws attention to the unique struggle Indigenous first year students' face in their first year of studies (see figure 1). Maintaining a strong connection to culture and community while also attempting to integrate into an independent PSI environment is not easy, and students must find a balance that works for them. Schooler identifies six developmental phases students 'experience' in navigating this balance.

In the first phase, remembering history, students work to develop a positive view of PSE, often having to overcome negative views of western institutions held by friends and family members. In this model then, a positive view of PSE is thus considered an important determinant of success. In the second and third phases, learning to navigate, and moving towards independence, students learn to reconcile the community-oriented culture in which they were raised with the independent requirements of the PSI. While maintaining cultural values is important to student success, so too are meeting the academic requirements of western PSIs which place a high value on independent work. Building on the previous stages, in phase four, students build trust and relationships with staff and other college staff as a way of tapping into their interdependent roots. While PSI classrooms are typically quite large causing students to feel anonymous and unimportant, getting to know professors on a one-on-one basis outside of class can help students to feel more connected to the campus environment. In the fifth stage, as students become more comfortable on campus, they often reach out to cultural resources such as Indigenous student centres which help ground them in

their identity. A strong sense of identity is widely thought of as critical to student success. In the final stage, developing a vision for the future, students develop community-oriented career goals as a way of creating a solid link and bridge between their PSE experiences and their cultural identity. Indigenous students are more likely to have community-oriented goals for the future when compared to their non-Indigenous peers who typically have more independent career goals.

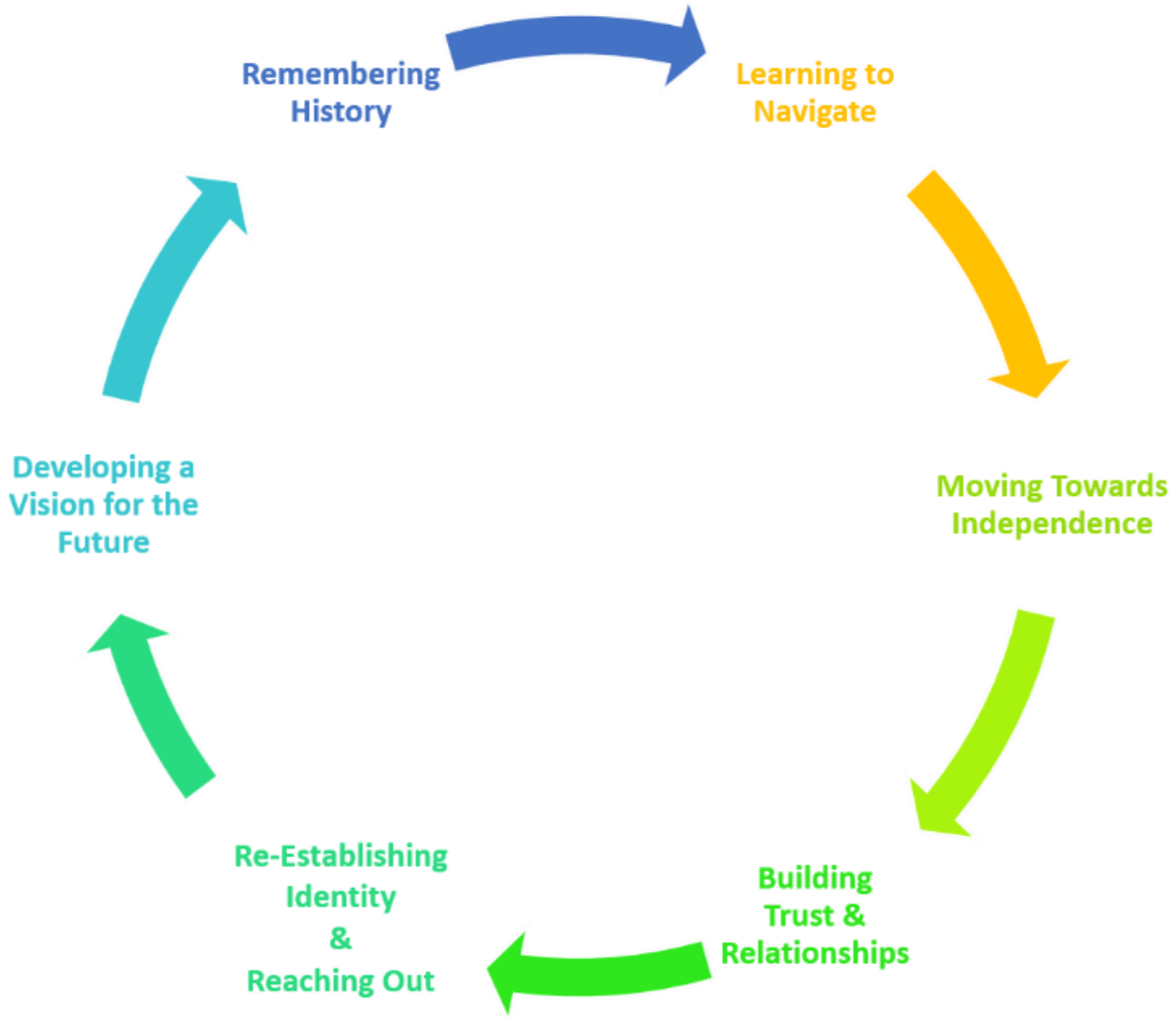

Figure 1. Native American Student Transition Theory (Schooler, 2014).

While Tinto's model is useful for understanding the ultimate outcomes of a successful transition process (academic and social integration), Schooler's model sheds light on the process by which these outcomes are achieved. In both models, discussion of the determinants of PSE adjustment, and what helps students move through the various stages of the transition process are tangential. Schlossberg's 1995 Transition Theory, and specifically her concepts of "self" and "support" are useful in filling this gap. According to Schlossberg's theory, determinants of successful transitions can be divided in to two broad categories of self and support (1995). Applied to the context of PSE, factors of self can be thought of as everything students bring with them to PSE, while factors of support are the resources that students have access to once they arrive in PSE. In this section, I draw on these two concepts to organize a review of studies examining the factors which influence adjustment to PSE for Indigenous students in Canada, the United States, and Australia. This aim of this literature review is to serve as background context for the current study and guide the creation of a conceptual framework and interview grid.

2.3. Factors of Self & Support

'Student success' is a complex outcome driven by many determinants. Borrowing on Schlossberg's key theory on major life transitions, these determinants can roughly be divided into two categories —factors of 'self' and factors of 'support' (1995). Factors of self refer to those which students bring with them to their PSI such as family and community background and personal attributes such as age and sex. Factors of support are all the resources and services students have access to once entering their PSI. Schlossberg's concepts of self and support were used a means of organizing a review of past literature on Indigenous student success in Canada, the United States and Australia for this thesis, and thereby helping to

situate this study's questions within the broader literature on what contributes to the success of Indigenous students in PSE. Figure 2 summarizes the key concepts found via this literature review. Conceptually, concepts related to factors of self can be thought of as a small circle entirely encompassed within a larger circle representing factors of support. This is because factors of self are thought to influence interactions with PSE supports.

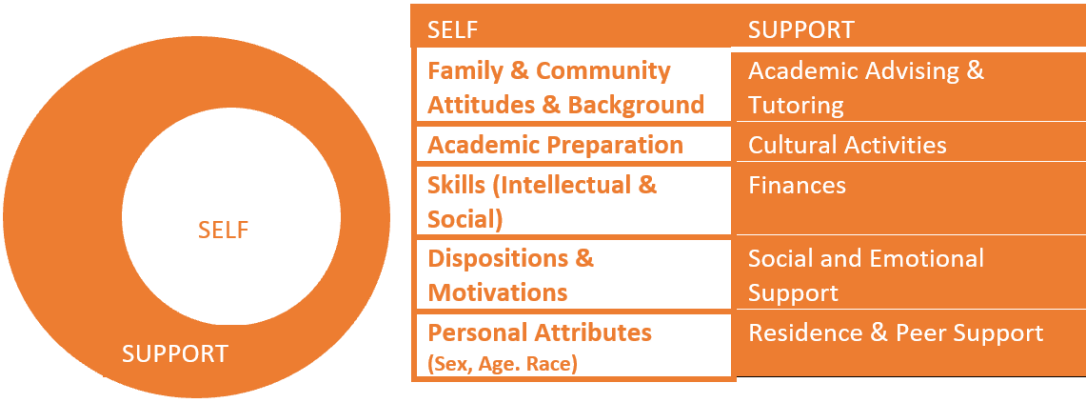

Figure 2. Summary of key concepts supporting Indigenous student success based on past research.

While both factors of self and support reviewed here are important in understanding success in PSE, this study focuses predominantly on factors of support, which are perhaps the more modifiable factors. The aim of this focus is to inform changes that can be made by student services and PSIs to improve completion outcomes in the first year. For example, it is not possible to change the high school education that a student received, but one can work to improve services like academic advising and social and emotional support once students arrive in PSIs.

Factors of Self. Students come to PSIs with a set of supports that are unique to them as individuals and that will in turn affect their ability to succeed in the first year. These include family and community background, intellectual and social skills, high school

educational experiences, and dispositions and personal attributes (such as sex, age, and race). The most commonly discussed factor of self in past research is family and community. Family and other community members close to students affect academic success through a variety of pathways. For example, the language spoken at home has been linked to academic performance, and in particular, the amount of exposure to the language of PSI instruction (Anonson et al., 2008). Students with a family member who has attended postsecondary are also more likely to have been encouraged to practice good study habits and to read more in their leisure time, both of which help prepare students for PSE. Attitudes towards school are another important determinant of success heavily influenced by family. "Fostering a college-going culture and attitude should start from an early age" and families play a large role in influencing the value students place on their academic experience (Brayboy & Maaka, 2015). It is logical that students whose parents are supportive of their pursuit of higher education will be at an advantage to those whose parents do not want or are afraid for them to attend PSE. This is particularly true when we consider the central role family plays in decision-making for Indigenous students. Studies of non-Indigenous populations in the United States have shown that perceptions of social support prior to leaving for college, or how supported students expect to be when they arrive, positively influences student adjustment (DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield, & Fiore, 2012). Students with a parent, sibling, or other family member who has attended college are also likely to experience a smoother transition than first-generation students (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno, & Solyom, 2012; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). This is because students who have witnessed someone close to them go through the transition process will have a better idea of what to expect than other students, and will also have someone in their immediate circle to turn to for advice when needed (Brayboy et al., 2012). It's important to note that while family support has been found to be key for many students, this is not universally true. A study exploring the determinants of success for

Indigenous female college students in Canada and the Southwestern United States found that a lack of family support in some cases could provide motivation for students to work hard and succeed in their studies(Bingham et al., 2014).

Each student arrives in PSE with a unique set of intellectual and social skills which are thought to predetermine their ability to succeed. In addition to a student's concrete abilities in these two spheres, internalized perceptions of a student's own intellectual and social skills with reference to the wider student body has been thought to influence transitions (Guillory, 2009). A study of First Nations youth transitioning from reserve-run elementary schools to public high school found that students felt so far behind and unprepared for the academic demands in public schools that they reported feeling "not smart enough" to compete with their non-Indigenous peers regardless of their true academic abilities (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011).

High school educational experiences are widely thought to set the foundation for PSE success. In past research on non-Indigenous students, high school grades are considered to be a strong predictor of successful transitions to college. Imbedded in this predictor, however, is the assumption that obtaining high grades in high school requires the mastery of skills critical to PSE success such as time management and good homework and study habits (Macan, Shahani, Dipboye, & Phillips, 1990). In reality, these skills may not have been expected of Indigenous high school students as a condition for academic success, particularly in Indigenous communities where the "social pass", or promoting students to the next grade level without prerequisite skills is a common practice (Anonson et al., 2008). Thus the rigour of a student's high school experience may be a better indicator of successful transitions than grades alone(Brown & Kurpius, 1997). For this reason, it has been found that secondary

school success as traditionally measured by grades is not as strong a predictor of PSE achievement for Indigenous students(Davis, 1992).

Another important factor of self is dispositions and motivations. Literature on at-risk high school students has shown that resilient students possess certain temperamental characteristics and attitudes which are supportive of student success (McMillan & Reed, 1994; Montgomery, Miville, Winterowd, Jeffries, & Baysden, 2000). A study of successful African-American male engineering students in a predominantly white institution in the south-eastern United States found that students possessed certain 'personality characteristics' associated with persistence. In this population, "prove-them-wrong-syndrome" was a term coined to explain how the personality of these students was such that rather than giving up when their intellectual capability was doubted or slighted by peers or professors, they actually became more motivated to succeed via a desire to "prove their critics wrong"(Moore Iii, Madison-Colmore, & Smith, 2003).

Personal attributes such as gender, race, health status and the presence or absence of learning disabilities are all unique traits which students bring with them to PSIs with implications for persistence. Female students are more likely to graduate from PSIs than males, and this is particularly true among Indigenous groups (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2015). At the University of Alaska, Kleinfield and Andrews found that among Alaska Natives , female students were three to five times more likely to complete a PSE degree than their male counterparts(2006). They concluded that traditional retention strategies including increasing college preparedness and support services were not enough to retain male Indigenous students. Rather, efforts needed to be undertaken to better align PSE with traditional male cultural roles and community values(Kleinfeld & Andrews, 2006). Additionally, research on male Inuit students has shown that when schooling is seen as a

trade-off to participating in on-the-land activities, this can significantly reduce the appeal of education(Berger, 2014). When we consider that female Indigenous students are more likely to have dependents to take care of on top of their academic responsibilities and may face gender-based discrimination, the fact that they persist at post-secondary education a higher rate is curious (Bingham et al., 2014).

Discrimination based on race, both real and perceived, impacts the educational experiences of Indigenous students(Currie, Wild, Schopflocher, Laing, & Veugelers, 2012). Students who do not look Indigenous may choose to hide their identity from professors out of fear of potential discrimination or that they may be seen as less capable in the classroom. While this may sometimes work to the advantage of students, other times it may act as a barrier to accessing resources targeted at supporting Indigenous students on campus.

The physical and mental health status of students may also play a role in college adjustment. Access to healthcare is limited in remote Indigenous communities, particularly in the North, and many students arrive on campus with unaddressed health issues that may interfere with their studies(Anderson, 2015). Not only do many Indigenous students arrive on college campuses with pre-existing and unaddressed mental health issues, but these can be aggravated by the stresses associated with college academics. This may in part explain the findings of a Statistics Canada report on the 2012 Aboriginal Peoples Survey which showed that Inuit men who had completed PSE were almost twice as likely as those who had only completed high school to report experiencing mental distress, with rates of 21% versus 12% respectively(Anderson, 2015). While stress and its relationship to mental health is thought to be a major predictor of dropout in non-Indigenous populations, this topic goes virtually unaddressed in the literature on Indigenous PSE students(Fisher & Hood, 1987).In a similar vein, learning disabilities often go undiagnosed and untreated in Indigenous communities.

Unaddressed, conditions such as ADHD, can pose serious barriers to academic success for students who may be lacking the skills to cope with their condition. This is particularly true in the context of a more demanding academic environment such as PSE where previously undetected symptoms may be aggravated (Restoule et al., 2013).

Factors of Support. Most PSIs in Canada offer first year students a number of resources and supports to assist them in their transition. In addition to services offered to all students, many Canadian institutions offer a separate set of services tailored specifically to the needs of Indigenous students often through an Indigenous resource centre on campus. Among the most common categories are academic advising & tutoring, cultural activities, financial supports, social and emotional supports, and residence life programming.

Academic advising is considered to be a critical support for new students. Navigating the academic requirements of any PSI can be complex and overwhelming. This is particularly true for Indigenous students who may be experiencing culture shock and/or where the primary language of operation of the institution is their second or even third language. Academic advisors play an important role in making students feel comfortable or that they 'belong' on PSE campuses. Best practices in terms of supporting first year Indigenous students include assigning new students dedicated counselors with knowledge of Indigenous communities and taking a proactive approach to support through mandatory weekly advising appointments(Brown & Kurpius, 1997). Others have emphasized the critical role of combining academic advising services with career/life planning to help bridge the link between academia and students long-term career goals (Habley & McClanahan, 2004).

Having a space where Indigenous students can participate in cultural activities is a key determinant of student success and well-being (Anonson et al., 2008; Fraser, Vachon,

Arauz, Rousseau, & Kirmayer, 2012; Kirmayer, Simpson, & Cargo, 2003; Kirmayer, Brass, & Tait, 2000; Qaujimajatuqangit, 2012).A recent study examining the factors that support Aboriginal student success in higher education conducted at Mount Royal University in Calgary found that PSIs that housed an Indigenous student centre to promote culturally specific activities and resources led to higher levels of student engagement in academic and social activities and ultimately resulted in lower PSE dropout rates(Gallop & Bastien, 2016). Participation in activities such as powwows, potlucks, and outings, help build a network of Indigenous peers and creates a sense of belonging among students that ultimately contributes to higher levels of student retention(Martin & Kipling, 2006). Outside of the classroom, Indigenous students struggle with social pressures to "act white", or adhere to the behaviours, values and practices of the dominant culture (Anonson et al., 2008; Bingham et al., 2014). Cultural centres thus provide a safe space for students to "be themselves" and connect with students experiencing similar issues which can be extremely helpful in creating a sense of "community" for students and reducing feelings of isolation and alienation(Guillory, 2009).

Financial resources and perception of access to financial resources are critical to the adjustment of Indigenous students. In communities where attaining a high school diploma is the exception to the norm, "paper credentials" beyond a high school diploma are not required for many job positions, and students may actually be turning down attractive, well-paying jobs in the short term to pursue postsecondary studies(Berger, 2014). Additionally, if a student chooses to pursue some form of employment during their studies to cover expenses, this can place a significant strain on their ability to keep up with their demanding course work(Bingham et al., 2014).

Social and emotional supports are another major category of supports offered to new students to assist with the transition to PSE. Services such as counselling and psychiatric

services should be sensitive to the unique values held by Indigenous students and the challenges that these can pose to PSE transitions. For example, Indigenous students tend to value family and community responsibilities over academic ones(Bingham et al., 2014). Best practices on how to fulfil these responsibilities when away from home are often not discussed before students move for PSE (Bingham et al., 2014; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Restoule et al., 2013). Research at the University of Saskatchewan has shown that family issues and responsibilities "create special distress for Aboriginal students because even when they move away, students are expected to react and assist in family crises when they arise" (Anonson et al., 2008). This is especially problematic considering the strict attendance requirements in many university programs which don't allow for much time away from campus (Anonson et al., 2008). In addition to commitments to extended families, a study of Indigenous nursing students at the University of British Columbia found that 50% of participants had between one and three children to look after, and that 25% were single parents(Martin & Kipling, 2006). A Northern nursing program in Saskatchewan, where retention rates for students are 13.6% higher than the provincial average, has found that supporting Indigenous student success requires a certain level of flexibility on the part of faculty for students' family demands (Anonson et al., 2008). By allowing students to make up missed class time when a student, for example, is required to travel home to a remote reserve for a funeral, the nursing program is able to retain many students who would have otherwise dropped out (Anonson et al., 2008). For these reasons, it has been suggested that supporting Indigenous students in their transition to colleges and universities requires PSIs to recognize, and accommodate the unique importance of maintained connection to family for Indigenous students(Bingham et al., 2014; Sue & Sue, 1990).

Student residence life programming is a major entry point for supporting students via creating spaces for peer support through communal living. Peer support from older

Indigenous students has been found to be particularly helpful in facilitating transitions to PSE for Indigenous students (Martin & Kipling, 2006). Indigenous students are often the first in their family to attend university and may lack the kind of educational role models that have been found to be critical to supporting the success of non-Indigenous students (Anonson et al., 2008). A study examining the factors that support PSE retention rates among Native American College students found that while there are many determinants of student retention including family support, faculty and staff warmth, reliance on spiritual resources, and the ability to cope with racism, supporting all of these could be met through fostering mentorship relationships for Indigenous students(Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003). Similarly, in British Columbia, a study examining the determinants of postsecondary retention for graduate students in the province identified the need for a culturally relevant peer-support program as a means of mentoring, recruiting, and retaining Indigenous graduate students (Pidgeon, Archibald, & Hawkey, 2014). Mentorship and spiritual advising can look very different for different groups of students. Indeed, an equivalent to the word "mentorship" doesn't exist in most Indigenous languages (Sinclair & Pooyak, 2007).

As reviewed in this section, there are several factors of self and support which have been found to promote Indigenous student success. As will be seen in the next section, however, one of the challenges with many of these studies is a focus on deficits.

2.4. Deficit Theorizing

While research on the determinants of PSE success for Indigenous students exists, studies on this topic, with a few notable exceptions (see (Anonson et al., 2008; Montgomery et al., 2000) focus predominantly on barriers to PSE success and drivers of student dropout.

This “Deficit theorizing”, Devlin argues, with a focus on the negative and stereotypical barriers facing Indigenous students, not only fails to highlight best practices that can actually be used to support students, but can actually be detrimental and unhelpful through promoting feelings of inadequacy among students (Devlin, 2009; Gorinski & Abernethy, 2007). For this reason, this study aims to address the “glaring need for studies with a strong focus on what helps indigenous students succeed” by taking an asset-based research approach to understanding student success as outlined in the next chapter (Devlin, 2009).

3. STUDY DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participatory, Action-Oriented and Asset-Based Approaches

Participatory Research (PR) engages community members as collaborators in the research process with the end goal of "taking action or effecting social change" (L. W. Green et al., 1995; Macaulay et al., 1999). By involving community members in all stages of the research process—from study design to the reporting of results, a PR approach recognizes the valuable cultural and traditional knowledge community partners bring to the table(Cochran et al., 2008). This has been shown to increase both the relevance of research questions asked, and the strength, transferability, and use of findings (Jagosh et al., 2012). PR is 'action-oriented' in that there is a specific intention throughout the project to not just produce academic research findings, but results and recommendations that can be used by community partners to address the issue being studied(Small, 1995).

In addition to grounding itself within the principles of PR described above, this study borrows from approaches in community and international development, and specifically Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). ABCD was born out of critiques that development projects often failed to meaningfully engage with the communities they were seeking to help and that this resulted in ineffective responses to community challenges (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003; McKnight & Kretzmann, 1993). Similar to Participatory Research, an Asset-Based approach is participatory and action-oriented, and places equal emphasis on the process by which results are created as the end product of a project.

What distinguishes an ABCD approach from a typical PR approach is a focus on "assets", or a communities' strengths and resources, including past positive experiences addressing the issue of interest. According to an ABCD approach, by focusing on what is already working in a community , rather than on a community's barriers or deficits (as is typically done by development workers and researchers), we can home in on existing effective strategies that are culturally relevant and come from the community.

Within an ABCD approach, the role of a development worker (or outside researcher in this context) is to be a "catalyst" of change (Bergdall, 2003). An ABCD approach recognizes that community members are experts in their own realities, and, as a result, more often than not, the answers to community issues can be found within the community (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). ABCD recognizes, however, that people are busy, and do not always have the time or energy to come together in one space to discuss and amalgamate thoughts and ideas on a specific issue—a process that can be essential to highlighting and determining best practices. Within an ABCD approach, the role of an outsider then is to "catalyse" the synthesis of community knowledge through: 1) contributing time and energy to create space for discussions on a topic of interest to take place through methods like interviews and focus groups; and, 2) to help make sense of the discussions facilitated through identifying key themes, often through thematic analysis and methods similar to those used by qualitative researchers (Bergdall, 2003).

While ABCD approaches are more often used in practice, for identifying and addressing on-the-ground development issues, there are multiple synergies between these approaches in the academic sphere. Building on these synergies this thesis is rooted in the common elements of participatory and action-oriented research with the addition of an asset-based approach. While this approach remains to be widely used in research, scholars from

Australia studying Indigenous PSE success have argued that that identifying key strategies to promote equity in higher education for Indigenous students requires a focus on "what works" through "leveraging the experience of hundreds of successful Indigenous students"(Devlin, 2009).

Of note, while an ABCD approach has proven to be an effective way of creating positive, action-oriented recommendations and change, one of the major limitations of this approach is that it is not a widespread way of addressing issues. The way in which we currently think about challenges as a society means that we are much more used to talking about what "doesn't work" and what are the barriers and challenges we are facing than our "assets" or what is working well. For this reason, it is inherent that projects applying an ABCD approach will be dotted with discussions of ongoing barriers and challenges, despite a desire to focus on effective strategies or "assets" held by the community. The challenge, then, as a researcher is to keep a strengths-based approach in the data collection and analysis process. This is particularly true during the interview or focus group process where the role of the researcher is to consistently orient the conversation back towards a focus on the effective resources raised by participants or how past challenges were overcome, while also giving due credit to the ongoing challenges revealed by community members.

3.2. The Philosophical Hermeneutic Tradition

In order to get at the experiences of successful students and the factors or "assets" that helped them complete their first year of studies, data collection and analysis for this study was grounded in the philosophical hermeneutic tradition. The term 'hermeneutic' has been used since ancient Greece to mean "interpretation"(Vandermause & Fleming, 2011). Philosophical hermeneutic phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology which aims

to generate meaning and the understanding of experience (Crist & Tanner, 2003; Vandermause & Fleming, 2011). This tradition is rooted in a relational ontology, which recognizes the role of relationships in understanding human experience, and therefore holds as a fundamental assumption that meaning is constituted in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee (Crist & Tanner, 2003; Schwandt, 2000). Understanding is seen as "produced" through dialogue and negotiation between the interviewer and the interviewee, rather than "created" or "reproduced" by an interpreter (Schwandt, 2000). The narrative text that emerges from the interview is thus a "fusion of ideas" (Vandermause & Fleming, 2011). The interviewer is actively engaged in the production of meaning through dialogue, and is thus a "co-creator" of findings (Crist & Tanner, 2003; Schwandt, 2000). In this way, the philosophical hermeneutic interview is a distinctive form of questioning which lends itself to qualitative research inquiry.

3.3. Setting of the Study

The Kativik School Board (KSB), or Kativik Ilisarniliriniq (KI) as it is now referred to since 2018, was established through the signing of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA) in 1975. In addition to having jurisdiction over elementary, high school and adult education programs in the 14 Inuit communities which make up Nunavik, KI is responsible for distributing post-secondary sponsorship to beneficiaries of the agreement through KI's department of Post-Secondary Student Services.

Among the majority Inuit population, high school completion rates in Nunavik are among the lowest in Canada. According to the 2016 census, 59.0% of Inuit ages 25-64 living in Nunavik did not hold a high school diploma. High school completion in this population is a struggle for many due to the combination of widespread social issues, and the lack of

qualified teachers in the North (Tait, 2008). For this reason, it is considered to be only a very special group of students who typically are academically quite gifted who move on to postsecondary studies. Despite evidence of academic ability however dropout rates remain high, translating into low PSE completion rates as reflected in the Canadian census. In 2016, 24.8% of Inuit held a postsecondary diploma or degree, with 2.9% of these at the CEGEP, college, or university level (Statistics Canada, 2018) . While sponsorship packages from KI provide the financial support including flights to and from home communities and accommodation in the form of student residence or apartments, as well as a small allowance to cover food and expenses, PSE completion remains a struggle for students. The situation of Nunavik is unique as no current literature looks at the PSE experiences of a group of Indigenous students who are fully financially sponsored for tuition, living expenses and flights as part of their studies. While ensuring financial support is argued as key to promoting student success in previous studies from Inuit Nunangat, this case suggests that the story is much more complex than finances alone (Rodon et al., 2015). As dropout rates among Nunavimmiut college students remain high despite access to financial aid; this highlights the need for additional understanding of the determinants of successful Inuit student transitions.

The populations of Nunavimmiut communities (see figure 3) range from around 300 residents in Tasiujaq to roughly 2,500 in Nunavik's capital of Kuujjuaq. It is not uncommon therefore for students to have grown up well-acquainted with much, if not all of their community members, and for students to be accustomed to living in a tight-knit cultural community where the predominant language spoken at home for many is Inuktitut. Since there are no CEGEPS (pre-university colleges in the province of Quebec) in Nunavik, students wanting to pursue PSE are required to move as far as 1900 kilometres away from their remote, fly-in only communities, to pursue their studies in Montreal. In the province of

Quebec, CEGEPs are the entry point to PSE, offering a variety of two year pre-university diplomas and three year vocational diplomas.

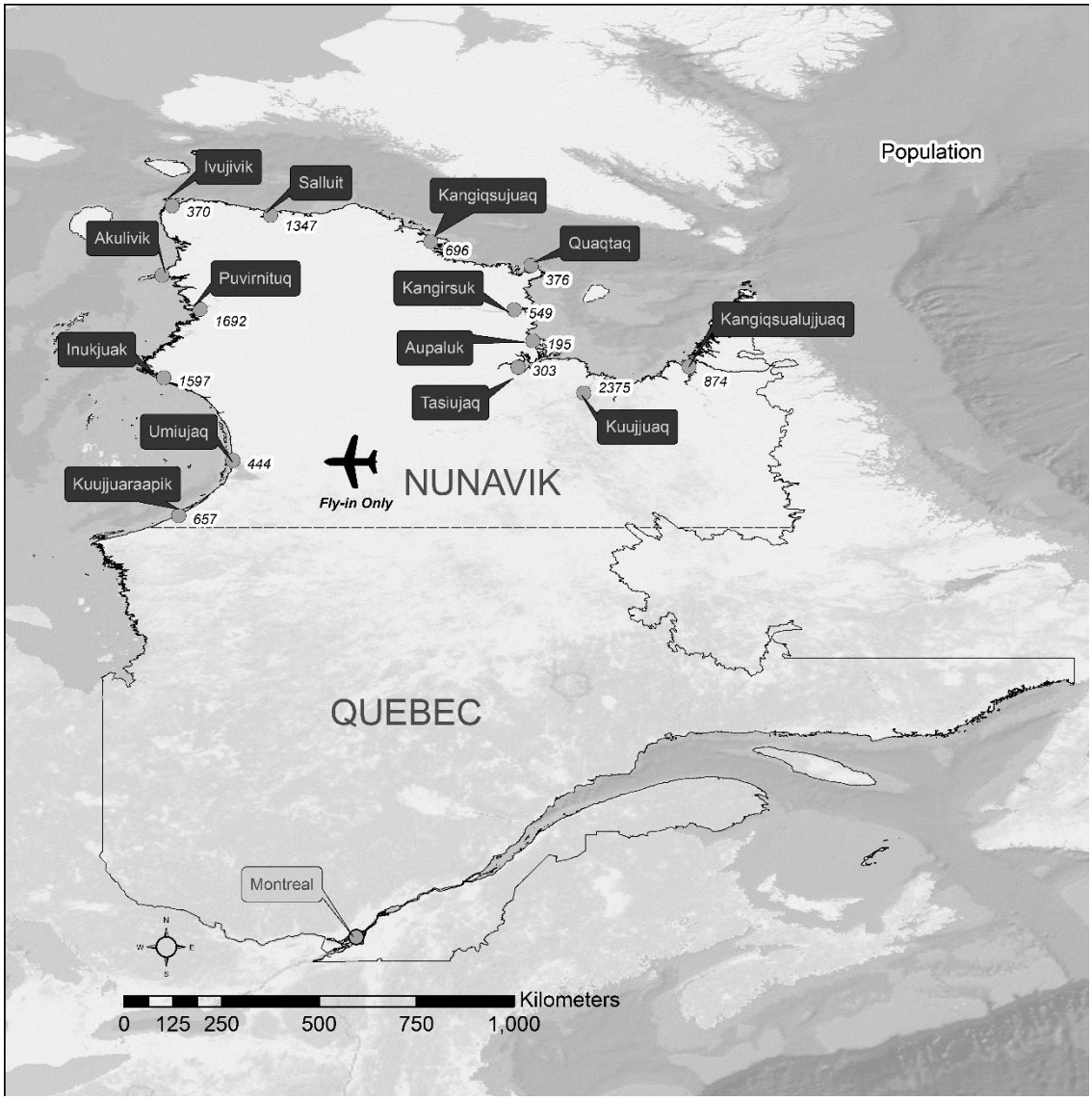

Figure 3. Map of Student Participants' Home Communities. Data from: Esri, Garmin, USGS, NPS.

In addition to financial supports, the school board also provides a range of student services, particularly in the first year. While students can study at the institution of their choice, to ease the transition, they are encouraged to attend one of two CEGEPs/ pre-university colleges in Montreal where an Inuit student residence has been created. At both

John Abbott College (English) and Marie Victorin (French) a communal house or residence known as “Inuttalik”, which roughly translates to “where the Inuit are”, is operated by the school board. There is a cook in the residence that prepares dinners for the students, and a staff person who eats dinner with the students and stays overnight at the residence in case of emergencies. Of note, this staff person has a separate day job unaffiliated with student services and is not present in the residence during the day. At John Abbott College, the residence resides within one half of a duplex home in walking distance of the college. The other half of the duplex is home to KI’s offices of Post-secondary Student Services which offers a variety of services to all students from Nunavik studying in the South. This includes tutoring services, some which may be group tutoring sessions for first year students taking the same course. There are also academic counselors and social workers available to students. In their first year of studies, each student is assigned either a counsellor or social worker with which they are required to meet once a week just to ‘check in’ and to touch base on any challenges they may be experiencing with the transition to CEGEP. There are also several study rooms for student use in the building to use on a drop-in basis including a computer lab and printers.

Another initiative put in place by the school board is the College Preparatory Program (CPP). CPP is a two-week program where students arrive before the fall semester to become acquainted with the college campus at John Abbott College and Montmorency. The purpose of the program is to acquaint students with their cohort of fellow Inuit students, explore the campus to feel more familiar finding classes, and practice study skills and essay writing to help prepare students for the semester ahead. As one staff member put it “…we give them a little bit of a preview of what to expect and kind of try to guide them in how to keep organized and stuff, we started something new this year where they go camping so that they

kind of get to know each other on a fun level, not just like in school, um, because we're all from different communities, a lot of the times you start kind of forming bonds with people you know, right off the bat, and some, not everybody has that, so, when you go off and do something fun and you're forced to like interact with other people it really does promote like you putting yourself out there, a lot of our young students, our Inuit students are very shy, not all of them mind you, but a lot of them are, so I feel like it's helped them a lot on the social front and making them feel more comfortable, and it's kind of a nice welcome" (Staff 14).

3.4. Data Sources

This study drew on several data sources to triangulate determinants of first year success, where triangulation is the practice of using more than one method to collect data on the same topic for validation and cross-verification purposes. One-on-one semi structured interviews were conducted by the primary investigator with students (n=14) who had completed at least one year of studies at John Abbott College and non-students (n=6) with experience working closely with several cohorts of PSE students, including current and former staff of KI and PSE professors. On average, interviews lasted 47 minutes, with a range of 29 to 71 minutes. Data was recorded on a handheld recorder, transcribed verbatim in Express Scribe, and analyzed in NVivo Version 10. Data were scraped manually from public Facebook pages in which students from Nunavik described their experiences moving to Montreal through one-on-one peer interviews which were conducted in person and then typed up and posted to Facebook. The creation of these posts was a postsecondary-student-led initiative aimed at encouraging other, particularly younger, students from Northern communities to attend college. The text from these Facebook posts was imported into NVIVO. Identifying features in the posts, including the names and home communities of

students' peer- interviewed, were removed. Posts (not including comments made on posts) averaged 454 words with a range of 107 and 759 words. The posts (n=22) included the questions posed to students in the peer interviews and the answers that were provided. It is unclear if, or to what extent, the answers of students in these posts were edited in transcription to Facebook. It can be reasonably assumed, however, that if a student disagreed with what was posted, it could have been edited to reflect the true intentions and meaning behind that student's answers. This is common practice on online platforms and implies a certain degree of trustworthiness in the data.

3.5. Ethics & Procedures

This project received formal Ethics Approval from Kativik Ilisarniliriniq (KI), McGill University and John Abbott College (JAC), see Appendix A. Ethics approval to conduct interviews with students studying at College Montmorency was also obtained, but due to unforeseen research delays, no participants were recruited from College Montmorency. Results were first presented to KI prior to dissemination.

The project was explained to the interview participants, including the risks and benefits of participating to the study. They were then given the opportunity to ask any questions. Once all questions had been answered, participants were asked to sign the consent form, and were given an additional paper copy to take home if they decided to review it after the interview was over. Signed consent forms were stored in a locked cabinet at McGill University. Participants were informed that they could opt out of answering any questions they did not feel comfortable answering, and withdraw from the study at any time, including after the interview was over. Interviews were tape recorded on a handheld tape recorder and

recordings were used for transcription purposes only, after which the voice recordings were deleted. Identifying information, including participants' name, home communities, and any other potentially identifying points raised in the interviews was removed from the transcriptions before being imported into NVivo. Participants (students and staff) are referred to by random number (between 1 and 20). Identifying information was kept on a code key in a locked cabinet with the consent forms, and was therefore located separately from the digital transcriptions. All digital documents including NVivo files were kept on a password protected computer.

The use of Facebook® as described above was approved by the Ethics boards as there is "no expectation of privacy" in publicly available data on the internet. The use of public Facebook® posts was also deemed to be "non-intrusive". Each student for which data was scraped from Facebook® received a random number between 1 and 22 and are referred to as "FB students" in the thesis to protect confidentiality and distinguish from the student interview participants who were a part of the primary data collection. Interview participants were compensated with a $25 Amazon® gift card.

3.6. Participants & Recruitment

A mass email was sent to all students who had attended PSE through the Kativik School Board (KI) informing them of the study. Students were also recruited via posters in the student services building at John Abbott College and through snowballing. A Nunavimmiut research assistant in PSE studies in Montreal was hired to assist with all stages of the research process. In the recruitment phase the assistant played an important role in explaining the project to Nunavimmiut youth, who were then asked to contact the principal

investigator directly if they were interested in participating in order to ensure confidentiality. The assistant also played an important role in reaching out and explaining the project to youth who are perhaps typically shier than their peers, and wouldn't respond to a poster ad on their own, in order to build comfort and familiarity with the project and to include a more diverse group of youth as participants.

Participants were 14 students who had completed their secondary studies in Nunavik through KI and had completed at least one full year of studies (within the past five years) at John Abbott College in Ste-Anne-De Bellevue, located on the western side of the island of Montreal (see figure 4). Ste- Anne- De-Bellevue has a population of roughly 5000 people and is located 31 km to the west of downtown Montreal.

It was important to include students who had completed at least one year of CEGEP because the majority of drop outs occur in the first year of study, and therefore experiences in the first year of studies are considered to be highly predictive of degree completion and persistence (Hawley & Harris, 2005; Tinto, 1987). Furthermore, research has shown that while Indigenous students are more likely than non-Indigenous students to take breaks in their study, even for students who take a semester or more off, first year completion has been associated with an increased likelihood of returning for studies and graduating from PSE. The five-year time frame was chosen to permit sufficient recall of events—the more time that has passed since a student's completion of first year of studies, the less likely they are to remember the details of their transition.

Determining the number of interviews to conduct is always a difficult decision in qualitative research. For this thesis, student participants were recruited to the study until a saturation of themes was reached through iterative thematic analysis (J. Green & Thorogood, 2013). To contribute additional perspectives to understanding the overall research aim, and to

provide context to the study, this study included interviews from six key informants including professors and counselors, who work closely with students from Nunavik at John Abbott College and KI. Staff participants were recruited via a mass email sent on behalf of KI and with snowball sampling.

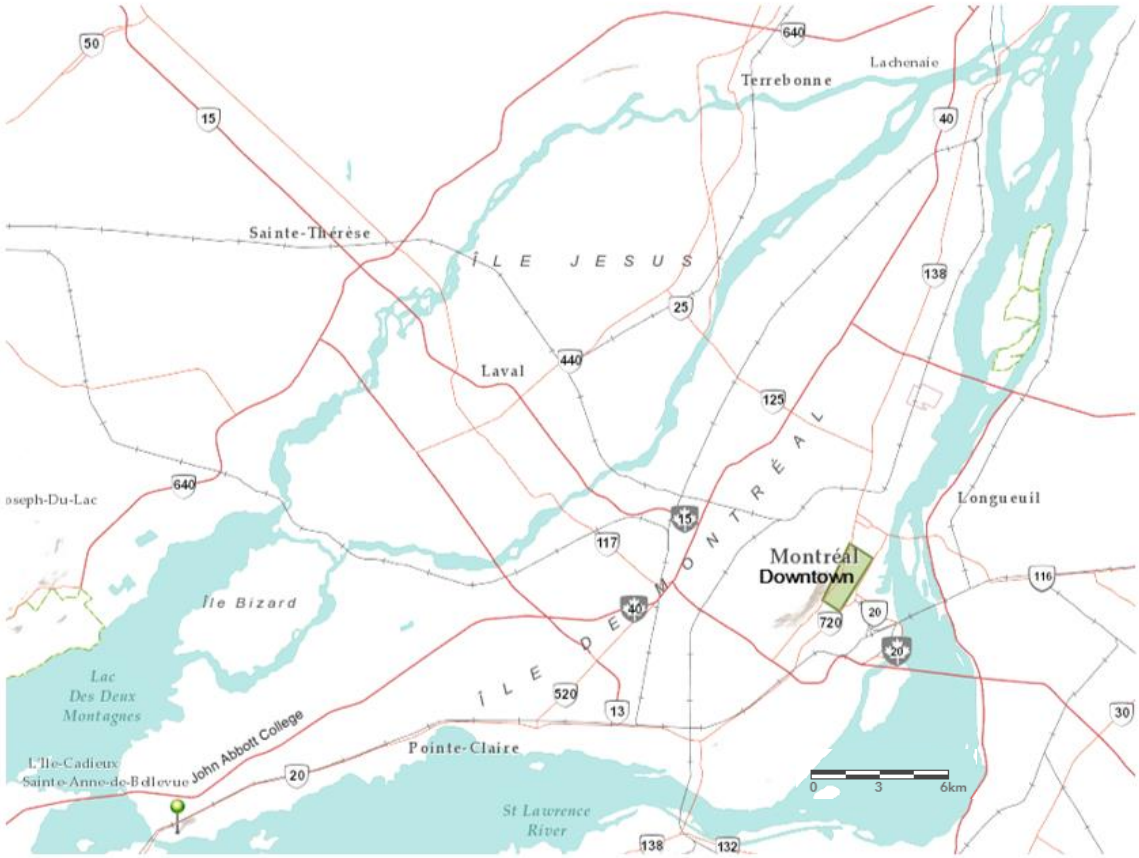

Figure 4. Location of John Abbott College, Island of Montreal. Data from: Esri, Garmin, USGS, NPS.

Across the 14 student participants, seven of the 14 communities of Nunavik were represented. Of the fourteen students, five were male, and nine were female. Three of the students had graduated CEGEP and were currently pursuing university studies in Montreal, one was in their final semester or of CEGEP and in the process of applying to university, and two were on a break with an intention to return to college. The rest of the students were on track to complete either their second or third year of studies. Of these students, many

expressed needing to complete an additional year of upgrading—the completion of courses that students from the South would have taken at the high school level in order to qualify for their program of choice. This was particularly true for students studying in science programs and extended the length of a typical CEGEP program.

3.7. Data Collection

Interviews with students were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide comprised of 13 questions (see Appendix B for interview guides). In line with the hermeneutic tradition, questions were open-ended in order to allow for flexibility and to elicit desciption and dialogue (Vandermause & Fleming, 2011). The guide was divided into three parts, addressed sequentially. Questions one through four consisted of the first part of the interview. These questions were designed to build rapport and collect information on student backgrounds or 'factors of self' of participants. Questions one and two asked where "home" was for students and what year and program of study students were enrolled in (to ensure eligibility for the study and a diversity of academic programs represented). Questions three and four asked students about their plans for the future, five and ten years from now, as well as their motativions for pursuing their studies. These questions aimed to collect information on factors of self including family and community attitudes (conversations around motivations and goals were commonly tied to conversations around family and community backgrounds), intellectual and social skills (students often related their motivations and goals to their skillsets and particiularly past academic perfomance), and general dispositions and motivations.

Questions five through nine consisted of the second part of the interview. These questions aimed to help students to reflect on the supports which helped them succeed in PSE using a retrospective lens. Questions five and six asked students to broadly comment on their experience moving to Montreal, with the interview returning later to significant challenges they faced, and the ways in which these challenges were overcome. Question seven asked about support received from friends and family to understand how and to what extent support from friends and family interacted with the use of student services. Question eight zeroed in on time students took away from PSE, or considered taking times away, to understand what supports they felt were lacking and resulted in them leaving, or conversely, what supports helped them maintain their enrolment despite a desire to leave. Finally, question nine asked students to define a "successful" college experience. This question aimed to facilitate conversations both around key supports from students' time in PSE and key values held by students.

Questions 10 through 13 consisted of the third part of the interview and adopted a future-oriented lens to allow students to further reflect on what supports were most helpful in facilitating student success. Question 10 asked students to "imagine" that they were at their graduation ceremony and talk about who they would thank for helping them get there. Questions 11 and 12 asked students what advice they would give new students and what new supports they would recommend. Finally, question 13 gave students the opportunity to address any points they felt were important to their PSE experience but not otherwise covered in the interview.

Interviews with non-students were similarly divided into three parts. Questions one through three were designed to build rapport and collect general information on participant backgrounds to contextualise responses and confirm that participants were suited to take part in the study (i.e., had several years' experience working closely with PSE students from

Nunavik). Question four asked participants about their work as a means of generating discussion on the supports delivered to students and student needs, while question five built on this discussion by asking about the challenges faced by students in Montreal. Based on their experiences, questions six through eight aimed to gather information on what, in their view, has helped past students suceed with an aim for these response to generate recommendations for future students.

Interviews were conducted in a private space. For students this was either in a study room in the library at McGIll University's MacDonald Campus located next door to John Abbott College, or in a study room at the Kativik School Board residence. Interviews with staff were conducted in participants' offices.

3.8. Data Analysis

This study employed a qualitative inductive thematic analysis through successive readings of interview transcripts using a hermeneutic circle (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). According to this methodology, "immediately after informed consent is obtained the interpretive process begins"(Vandermause & Fleming, 2011) . During reading and re-reading of the interviews, thematic and in vivo codes or "nodes" were created in NVivo Version 11 and then grouped into distinct themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once the themes were chosen, the coded data extracts within each theme were re-checked to ensure "internal homogeneity" within themes and "external heterogeneity" between themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Three major stages of analysis guided this research project. In the fall of 2017, during the first stage of analysis, Facebook® posts were coded and grouped into themes. The codes which made up each theme, and key decisions made, were meticulously tracked to be

revisited in the third stage of analysis. It was recognized that these codes may later prove to be potential subthemes, or even higher-level themes when analysed in conjunction with the interview data. In the spring and summer of 2018, in the second stage of analysis, data from interview transcriptions was similarly coded and grouped into themes following Braun & Clarke's methodology. After the first and second stages, two separate thematic maps were generated based on these preliminary stages of analysis.

In the third stage (late summer and early fall, 2018), the two sets of findings from the first and second stages were analysed together for common themes and ideas, and to search for higher level relationships between themes. Redundant themes were combined and those with minimal evidence were removed or demoted to subthemes. This process resulted in a final map made up of 11 themes composed of several sub-themes. All coded data extracts associated with each theme were then revisited in NVivo to insure internal homogeneity within themes and external heterogeneity between themes.

3.9. Trustworthiness

Several measures were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of this study's results. Trustworthiness first and foremost came from "a systematic and disciplined approach to the research plan and the interview itself"(Vandermause & Fleming, 2011). Measures taken to ensure the internal validity, or credibility, of results included prolonged field engagement and close proximity to the data—all interviews were conducted, transcribed and analysed by the primary investigator. Negative case analysis, or the deliberate search for exceptions to resulting themes during analysis, was used as a means of ensuring internal credibility of findings (Patton, 1999). Quotes from participants were used throughout the results to maintain proximity to student voices. Interview transcripts were sent via email to all

participants as a form of member-checking, inviting participants to add, retract or clarify any content provided (Mero-Jaffe, 2011). No participants opted to make changes to their transcripts. Contextualization of results through describing the setting of the study and the unique programming and services available to students from Nunavik was done to allow for external validity or transferability of results (Horsburgh, 2003). An audit trail was maintained to ensure the reliability, or replicability of findings, in addition to triangulating data from different sources including Facebook® data, staff interviews, and student interviews (Rodgers & Cowles, 1993).

3.10. Investigator Assumptions and Positionality

According to Heideger and Gadmer, key thinkers within the philosophical hermeneutic tradition, having preconceptions about a topic is inherent to being human. Attempts to bracket or eliminate preconceptions is not only unachievable but absurd (Gadamer, 1975). Recognizing my own personal biases and positionality as a white, relatively privileged, graduate student, I took particular care throughout the research process to reflect on how my own background and past experiences with the formal education system may be shaping the design, data collection, and analysis and writing stages of this thesis. During the interviews in particular, I placed special emphasis on searching for meaning and understanding that may be different from my own by probing for further explanation in participants' answers— as a default I assumed that I didn't understand what participants were telling me and always asked for further explanation. As much as my positionality may have introduced bias, my experiences moving away from home for studies also allowed for increased rapport during the interview process. These shared experiences provided a platform to connect and relate to students which created a sense of comfort and ease that allowed for

young people to open-up about their experiences and participate in the kind of co-creation of knowledge through dialogue which is essential to this methodology.

4. RESULTS

Overview

Thematic analysis resulted in three primary or over-arching determinants of first year student success. These three determinants represent groupings of repeated concepts and ideas raised by students as being key to their past success in PSE. Since these determinants are made up of groupings of similar concepts and ideas, they are meant to be understood and interpreted in both the context of their component parts, and the larger body of findings.

Figure 5, below, shows a thematic diagram overviewing this study's results with "student success" as the phenomenon of interest at the center of the diagram. Stemming from the center, are the three primary themes identified in this study— values, skills and attitudes. These primary themes provide the broadest overview of concepts raised in the one-on-one interviews and Facebook® posts. Moving towards the outside of the diagram, and away from the center, the circles decrease in size to represent the hierarchy of themes, with secondary themes (medium size circles) in grey and tertiary themes (smallest circles) in colours. Tertiary themes provide the greatest level of detail and most closely align with the direct responses of participants. While primary themes help to conceptualize the broader determinants of success for students, tertiary themes provide the most concrete level of evidence or potential means to support the primary and secondary themes identified through future policy interventions or efforts by student services.

To explore each of these themes in depth, this chapter is divided into three sections—each dedicated to one of the three primary themes—Values (4.1), Skills (4.2), and Attitudes

(4.3). In each section the primary theme is first defined before delving into a description of each of the secondary themes contributing to the larger section theme, drawing on quotes from both primary and secondary data sources to illustrate meaning. The description of tertiary themes are intertwined throughout both as a way of explaining the primary and secondary themes, and as means of exploring more in depth questions asked of the dataset, for example: what builds trust and relationships for students?

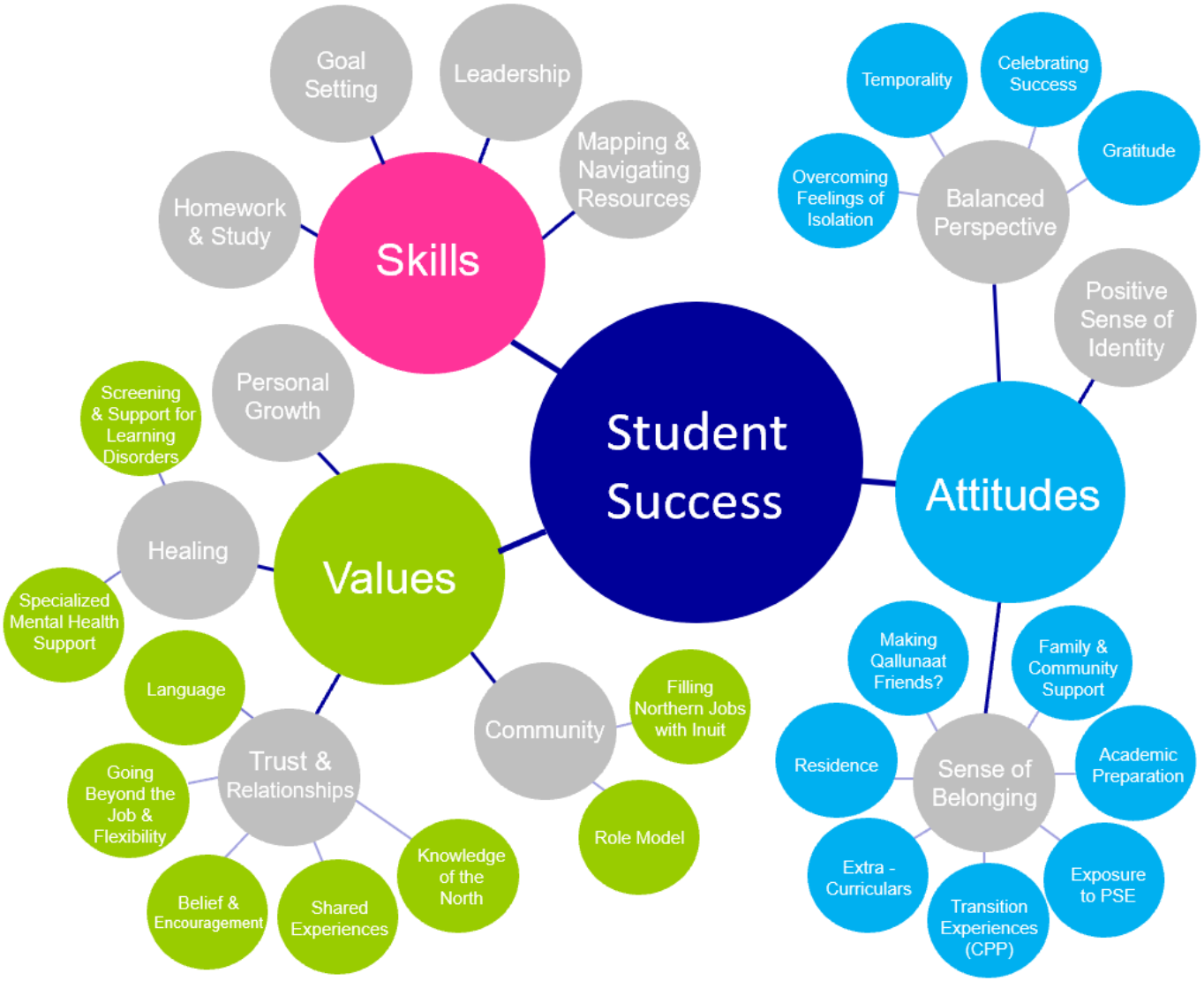

Figure 5. Overview Map of Results of Thematic Analysis

4.1. Values

When students talked about why they wanted to pursue PSE, and/or stay enrolled despite challenges, they talked about elements of the PSE experience that they valued or aligned with aspects of life that were important to them. Values then can be thought of as non-academic factors which are meaningful to students and serve to motivate and shape decision-making regarding PSE. While not traditional factors of support such as academic advising or counselling, they describe the principles and philosophies which are ideally reflected in how these services are delivered. Values identified among students included personal growth, healing, trust & relationships, and community.

Personal Growth. Students emphasized opportunities for personal growth as an element of their PSE experience that they valued. Personal growth can be thought of as all 'non-academic' motivations for pursing higher education. Opportunities for personal growth which motivated students included gaining independence from one's family, the opportunity to learn about self, including personal "strengths and weaknesses", and a general desire to "experience life in the South".

> I motivate everyone who is capable to finish their high school and to try out college. It is an amazing experience, you learn so much about yourself that you never knew and at the same time you keep surprising yourself with all that you can accomplish. (Facebook® Student 6)

In the case of the Facebook® data, when students were asked what they learned in PSE, discussions of personal growth far outnumbered discussions of academic gains. This serves to demonstrate the importance or value students place on personal growth as part of

their PSE experience. As one student explained, while academics may be the reason students come to PSE, in light of the overwhelming culture shock and stress of school, it's the non-academic opportunities that "keep" students enrolled.

> You start to need something to actually keep you here, if you're just here and just doing school and going home, school, home, school, home, that does not work at all, you actually need something to keep you here. (Student 11)

Healing. Healing was another key value for students. Healing can be loosely defined as the need to work through and learn to cope in a healthy manner with both pre-existing traumas and conditions (including depression and anxiety) and recent tragedies happening back home (such as the loss of a friend or family member by suicide). As participants explained, students "bring what's going on at home with them to school" which, without proper support can cause some to be "too traumatized to learn" (Student 2). In a similar vein, one staff member emphasized that this value needs increased recognition in how services are delivered to students:

> Learning can only occur if the person is not so traumatized that they can't learn…trauma and healing should be the fundamental basis of everything.
>
> (Staff 16)

Despite being important to students, however, it seemed as if most student felt that healing could not take place within the PSE environment. As one student explained: "I took a semester off because I needed to focus on myself and heal" (Student 10). From the interviews, two key factors that seemed to be driving this sense that students needed to leave school to focus on healing were 'burnout' and a lack of specialized mental health services in PSIs. 'Burnout' referred to the fact that many students felt overwhelmed with the academic

course load, and specifically the need to catch up to their peers, leaving little time to tend to their health and well-being. As one student put it:

> I was [so] overwhelmed…I stopped taking care of myself, I stopped exercising, which was a big thing when I was a teenager, so I let that go, I let myself go…so in two semesters I decided to go back home and start working. (Student 8)

The majority of students felt like it was challenging to heal in PSIs without specialized mental health services. One notable exception was a student who described access to specialized psychiatric and counselling services as her main reason for staying enrolled in PSE. For most students however, in spite of the counselors put in place by KI, there was a repeated stated need for more support in this area:

> I found that for me, even with all the extra help and support to sort of push you towards your goals, it was just hard to stay motivated to do anything…there isn't much help [up North] for like depression, or for ADHD or any other mental disorders…and I feel like it sort of stems from that…I feel like there's a lot to support in that department. (Student 7)

When unable to access culturally sensitive services through the school board, one student sought help at her PSI but faced additional challenges including being told that there was "nothing wrong" with her. Other students described similar experiences with non-Indigenous counselors at the college who were unsympathetic and/or lacked understanding of their particular struggles coming from Northern communities and the cultural importance placed on healing. It was for this reason that students across the board expressed the need for more Inuit counselors.

> [Seeking help at my college counseling services] didn't really go well cause she said you know, there's nothing wrong with you, why are you even here?" …I was so shocked, I didn't go back. (Student 13)

Trust & Relationships. A key value for students was trust and relationships. In the absence of trusting relationships with staff, students were not likely to use or take full advantage of the student services and supports at their institution. While the students interviewed in this study were quick to emphasize the importance of the relationships they held with individual staff members, they also felt that many of their peers withdrew because these same relationships were lacking. For example, students described instances of their peers not attending scheduled meetings because they didn't "trust strangers" in support roles and/or attending mandatory meetings but not following the advice they were given due to a lack of trust.

This is interesting given that mandatory weekly meetings with first year students are in place for exactly this purpose- " to foster relationships with staff" (Staff 3). In other words, weekly meetings did not necessarily translate into trust building. To better understand what builds trust and relationships for students interviewed, a subset of the one-on-one interviews and Facebook® posts where students described positive relationships with staff including professors, and counselors (academic and social workers), was analysed for re-occurring themes. Five themes emerged from this analysis and are described below: Knowledge of the North, shared experiences, belief & encouragement, going beyond the job, and flexibility and language.

Knowledge of the North. Several students described feeling more comfortable approaching a support person if they knew they had experience working in the North. Those

with Northern experience were perceived as understanding "how Inuit are" and the challenges students face back home. This in turn gave students a sense of comfort and ease not felt with staff who had never worked in an Inuit community. One student recalled that receiving advice from only Southerners in his first year was really difficult to relate to since these people had never "[grown] up in [his] high school" (Student 5). Part of the challenge in building trust and relationships was not just limited to the number of staff with Northern experience, but also a lack of knowledge on the part of students of the actual backgrounds of the staff. In the absence of knowing staff backgrounds, students "assumed" a lack of Northern knowledge. For example, as one student put it:

> There's three employees at the office, that um, aren't from here, that have lived up North and the rest are white and it's kind of difficult because I don't know, I don't know their personal lives, but I just assume, which is really bad, but I just assume that they were raised here, and that they went to school here and they just found a job here, but it's like very difficult because we come down here alone. (Student 2)

Shared Experiences. Shared experiences was another important theme raised as helping build trust and relationships. When students were asked to share stories of a particularly influential staff member or professor, they placed a great deal of emphasis in their narratives on not just what that person did for them, but how they came to trust and have a relationship with that staff member in the first place. Shared experiences that helped build connections between students and staff included moving from a small town to a city for PSE, completing PSE as a single mother and sharing Indigenous ancestry. As one student put it:

> I don't know what the other students did, but with me I didn't go to an academic counsellor, there was one teacher I really liked, one of our first English classes,

> and she was very kind, I think she had a bit of Mohawk in her blood, so she knew what it was like and I felt like I could connect with her so whenever I had a hard time with one of the homeworks, I went to her, but that wasn't often, but it helped. (Student 8)

In addition to building relationships between students and staff, shared experiences created an important bond between students. Students stressed the importance of relationships with older Inuit peers in their first year as persons they felt they could look to for advice. What facilitated trust in these instances was the shared experience of moving away from home for PSE. Because of the importance of the shared peer-student experience in building trust and relationships, several students suggested having more Inuit students involved in formal advising roles:

> There is no better relationship than a student-to-student relationship, and I guess that's why a lot of people trust me, like with what program they want to get into or, like all these things… maybe if KI started having students help other students that would be helpful and more efficient. (Student 3)

Belief and Encouragement. One factor which students attributed to building trusting relationships with staff was belief and encouragement. Many Nunavimmiut students described spending the majority of their lives being "babied" academically and/or being made to believe that they were not capable of academic success. For this reason, belief in their abilities as demonstrated by staff through their encouraging words and actions helped build trusting relationships that motivated them to use student services in place. In contrast, encountering staff who were not encouraging, reminded students of past negative educational experiences up North. These encounters were described as disintegrating the trust they held in student services. For example, students described peers who stopped seeing their academic

counselor after being told that a course they were interested in taking was "too hard for them" (Student 8). In instances such as these, the way in which their counselor provided them with advice made them question whether the staff member really believed in them and prevented them from coming back for further support. As one staff member put it:

> It's important to recognize that students are already often arriving in our offices with feelings of 'I can't do this' and 'it's too hard for me' and that these feelings need to be actively challenged through unconditional belief that they can do it. There's a lot of negative self-talk happening… some of them are stars in all their classes, so, just encouragement, break down the overwhelming tasks, one at a time, get them to work on one, work with them on a piece of homework, see you can do it, that kind of stuff, just unconditional belief. (Staff 18)

Going Beyond the Job & Flexibility. Students expressed increased trust towards staff who demonstrated a desire to "go beyond the job" through demonstrating flexibility to Inuit needs and schedules and being present outside of office hours. Coming from the North, many students described being apprehensive about the motivations of white workers based on past negative experiences where they felt that staff were "just doing their job" and didn't care about Inuit of the community in which they worked. Flexibility with meeting times and appointments including interacting with students in informal settings like in the hallway of the school, after class, or in the residence, were concrete actions students described as increasing the trust they held in staff members.

Language. Language played an important role in facilitating trust and relationships. Specifically, participants emphasized the importance of students and staff speaking the same language, and the role of non-verbal forms of communication in service delivery. Because student services are offered in English for example, students expressed the challenges of

receiving services in their second or even third language (after Inuktitut and/or French). Many students struggled to connect with staff in English as they felt it much easier to express themselves in their own language. As one student put it:

> I don't really have a strong relationship with the workers right now, um, ya, there like more Inuit workers that were working there my first semester but a lot of them are not Inuit anymore and I feel like I express myself better in my own language and I can't really do that with like a non-Inuk ya know. So it would be very helpful if they had Inuit counselors." (Student 6)

Challenges with communicating in another language were only amplified in the context of what students described as Inuit being a "shy people". Talking about their challenges, especially with a "stranger" was described as being particularly difficult for many Inuit. While currently student services are primarily offered in a verbal, one-on-one format with staff, there was some indication from the interviews that a more varied approach to communication, integrating non-verbal avenues of support, with students may be helpful. For example, several students spoke about a written assignment in one of their courses where they had the opportunity to share about their transition to PSE. In these cases, writing was considered to be an easier, more comfortable, way of expressing their thoughts and emotions, and thus connecting and building relationships with staff.

Community. For students, a desire to "help [their] community" (Student 13) ,and be a positive influence for younger generations of students, influenced both decisions to pursue PSE and stay enrolled despite challenges. Nearly all students identified having community-oriented goals for pursuing PSE, and described these as helping them "wake up with a sense of purpose" in the morning (Student 5). Several students explained that when they were struggling with school or thinking about going home, what helped them stay was being

"reminded" of their community-oriented goals, or why they came to PSE in the first place. For example, one student described how being reminded of the value she placed on community by her counsellor was helpful to her when she was struggling with academic work load and being away from home:

> She would just remind me why I'm here, why did I come here in the first place, what I'm still doing here, what do I hope for the future and like, I'm really into, um, social issues in Nunavik and improving them and stuff like that, and she just gets me talking about some issues that we face up North and then she gets me all riled up in how I can help with them and change them and stuff like that and then she reminds me why I came here in the first place, why I'm still doing this. She lets me forget about the struggle at the moment and then just like the goal you know, she reminds me what the goal is and that helps me like keep going.
>
> (Student 9)

Being a role model for younger siblings and community members back home was a major source of motivation for many students. As one student explained, "I want to be an example for my nieces and nephews, but I could extend it to all youth and adults. If I can do it, you can too." (Facebook® Student 16). While a desire to give back to community and be a role model was identified as a driver of student success in many cases, it was also seen as a potential barrier to success by placing unnecessary "pressure" and stress on students. For this reason, caution should be placed in considering it universally helpful for students. This was particularly true for students from smaller communities with few or no PSE graduates. As one student explained:

> It adds a lot of pressure when people say you're gonna be the first Inuk to do this. Just ignore those because those are unnecessary pressures that you don't need. Take all the support you want but don't add more pressure to yourself. (Facebook® Student 2)

Summary: Values. This section reviewed four key drivers of student success which can be grouped under the larger theme of values. Personal growth, healing, trust & relationships, and community were all elements of the postsecondary experience that students valued. When students felt that these values were reflected in services and supports they associated these with positive experiences and increased feelings of motivation. In this way values were key in assisting students complete their first year of studies.

4.2. Skills

Participants identified several key skills supporting student success. For the purposes of this study, skills can be defined as tools and competencies which can, theoretically, be learned through workshops, training opportunities, and repeated practice. The promotion of skills falls within factors of support for student success, and differs notably from factors of self, such as academic and emotional intelligence. The latter are thought to be less malleable upon arrival in PSE, and thus less likely to be acquired. Skills articulated by participants included Homework and Study Skills, Goal Setting, Leadership, and an Ability to Map & Navigate Resources.

Homework & study skills. Homework and study skills were repeatedly cited as key to student success. When compared to their non-Indigenous peers, Inuit students consistently felt "lost" in how to manage their time and meet academic expectations outside of the

classroom. This included the ability to routinely complete homework and readings and prepare for exams. Students believed that homework and study skills were key to PSE success and found that supports in place to help them develop these skills, such as academic counselors and tutors were essential:

> I was just lost, like lost, lost, lost [when I arrived in PSE] because I wasn't prepared, all the reading and writing, but I managed because I reached out to tutors, academic advisors, I tried reaching out to anyone possible, and I still do that…KI hooked me up with tutors, I used their academic counselors to help me get through assignments and all those things. (Student 20)

It's important to note that students in this study saw their ability to complete homework and effectively study as a skill rather than marker of intelligence or academic ability. This is important because as one student described, a lack of preparation in this area was easy to attribute to feelings of being too "stupid" to succeed in PSE. For this student the recognition that they lacked the tools, or the skills to succeed, and not the intelligence, helped them to keep going in their studies. This student did offer the view, however, that some students may have dropped out for falsely believing the opposite was true:

> I knew there was going to be homework but I didn't know there was going to be THAT much homework, and I had homework like every single day, and going from like no homework to that, it was like when will this end, like when do I get a break, um, it was tiring, and like, even just reading, I was not used to reading all the time… I blamed myself [for struggling] because I thought I was an idiot, like why am I so stupid? Like what the hell? Like I'm trying, but like, why is this so hard… it took me awhile to realize like, the education level that I was given [was insufficient], like I always knew, but I didn't know… I had to live through

> it you know?… if from the beginning you're not given the tools to succeed, how can you succeed?...Looking back, I could have just accepted that...omg I'm dumb, I'm stupid, like eff, this is not for me, maybe some people have dropped out because of that. (Student 9)

Mapping & navigating resources. A key skill identified by students was the ability to map and navigate resources. What appeared to be a common factor across the students in this study, was an acute awareness of not just the resources available to them, but also which ones would best meet their needs in different situations. In a sense, students in this study had 'mapped out' what resources they could turn to in different scenarios and were skilled in navigating the resources available to them. For example, students emphasized the importance of knowing who they could turn to for emotional support when they were struggling with school. For some students this was a family member, but for others this was a counsellor or a peer. In a similar vein, students talked about the importance of having a designated "emergency call person" for different issues, for example, if they got lost using the bus system:

> If you know that you have someone that you can depend on while you're here, like if you straight off the bat say you're my emergency call person I think you're good. (Student 2)

Students described mapping and navigating resources as a process that they learned over time. Knowing who they could turn to in which situations "evolved" as they moved through PSE, and particularly their first semester of studies. Once students knew who to turn to and in which situations, students expressed feeling more confident in their ability to

succeed. One student described several steps in the process of identifying their support system, demonstrating the often 'trial and error' process of mapping support:

> I remember when I was having a hard time, when I was crying and it was too hard and I felt like giving up, I couldn't call my parents, because when I tried to call my mom and cry to her, and I just needed some sort of words of encouragement or something she'd be like, why are you struggling like this, come home, why are you doing this to yourself, come home, you can get a job here, any job, come home, and then I learned not to call her because that's not helping me, and then I tried to call my sister, like, I'm struggling, it's hard, bla bla bla, I don't know what the hell I'm doing and my sister would be like you know, no one's going to judge you if you just come home, no one's going to judge you for quitting, just come home, ya know....and I'm like, okay, you're no help either [laughter]…(Student 9)

Goal Setting. Goal setting was an important skill for PSE success. Setting and working towards goals served to keep students motivated, even when they were struggling. Goal setting was also one of the key recommendations participants gave when asked if they had any advice for future students. In particular, students recommended breaking down larger goals into more manageable "chunks". For example, one participant emphasized choosing a program of study as a first "step" to working towards the larger goal of gaining a PSE diploma:

> It's a pretty good idea when you get to CEGEP to orient yourself, give yourself a goal right away, if you go into this not knowing what you want to do, a good step

you know is what program do you want to enter, and then, push yourself to go into that program. (Student 11)

Students also emphasized the importance of sharing their goals with others such as their peers and counselors. Sharing goals allowed members of their support network to provide "emotional support" by "reminding" them why they pursued PSE in the first place when they felt like giving up or going home. Therefore goal setting was most effective when students didn't just practice setting and pursuing goals on their own, but also shared these goals with others such as staff members at student services. For example, one student explained how it was useful for them to have their counsellor be aware of their goals:

> I'd go to [student services] for emotional support, I'd be like, I want to drop this course, or I want to quit art, I don't want to hand in that paper, but then ya know, [my counsellor] and I would have a talk, she [would] remind me what the goal is and that help[t] me like keep going…. and then I'd be like okay, I can do this, I can do this. (Student 9)

Leadership. Involvement in leadership activities was identified by participants as promoting success. Leadership can be thought of as a sort of 'umbrella' skill which encompasses a collection of smaller skills such as event planning and community outreach. Students described developing and practicing leadership skills through being involved in organizing cultural, sports, and mentorship activities for new students. For example, one program that was identified as supporting student success was the Youth Fusion Program. Youth Fusion is a non-profit organization based in Quebec that aims to lower dropout rates through placing youth in leadership roles to organize activities for their peers. At John Abbott College, several Inuit students have been hired by the program in the past to plan events and

activities for not just Inuit but all Indigenous students on campus. Examples of activities organized by students in leadership roles have included beading and cooking workshops. Leadership skills developed through programs like these were seen as promoting retention through building self-confidence and giving students a sense of purpose beyond school. As one staff member put it:

> [Students involved in Youth Fusion] are driven and they are confident and they are going out there and looking for the most wonderful opportunities now and they're getting them…I've been told that before they had this initiative, they didn't have that kind of confidence… so they seem to really have blossomed in this role. (Staff 1)

Summary: Skills. Skills are tools and competencies identified by students as critical to academic success. This section reviewed four key skills identified by students: homework and study skills, mapping & navigating resources, goal setting and leadership skills.

4.3. Attitudes

Participants described several attitudes which helped them succeed, where attitudes can be thought of as ways of thinking or feeling about PSE. Three common attitudes identified were having a balanced perspective on challenges, a strong sense of belonging, and a positive sense of identity. In the words of students, attitudes encompassed everything to do with the student "mindset":

> The advice I would give for secondary students who maybe want to attend college is to go for it, not to give excuses for yourself when it gets hard, um, to believe in yourself, and to not give up when it seems impossible because it is possible, it's just the mindset that you have to change. (Facebook ® Student 8)

Balanced perspective on challenges. One key attitude which participants emphasized was having a balanced perspective on challenges. Students expressed the importance of contextualizing challenges within the positive experiences of PSE, rather than focusing solely on the negative. While most students characterised their transition to college as a difficult one, describing struggles such as needing to adjust to a faster pace, a more intense homework load, and more life responsibilities, the context in which these conversations take place is worth noting. When describing the challenges associated with PSE, students were quick to emphasize that while difficult, the challenges associated with their studies were more than made up for by the benefits of pursuing higher education. This was true even when it came to serious life challenges such as being away from a sick family member or struggling with a mental illness triggered by the stress of a PSE far away from home. As one student put it:

> I wouldn't change my decision to come here because I've gained a lot more than I've lost, and the mental illness I have only makes me more determined to keep going. (Facebook® Student 18)

To better understand specific strategies or distinctive types of 'self-talk' students used to arrive at a balanced perspective on challenges, excerpts of the dataset where students spoke about the pros and cons of their experiences moving to Montreal, and emphasized the positive aspects of attending PSE, were analyzed for key themes. Results showed that key strategies which helped students build a balanced perspective on challenges included

recognizing that they were not alone in adjustment challenges, recognizing the temporal nature of their challenges and celebrating successes.

Overcoming feelings of isolation. When they were struggling, one way in which students were able to develop a balanced perspective on challenges was through recognizing or acknowledging that they were not alone in their challenges adjusting to PSE. A common experience described by students was feeling as if their Qallunaat (or non-Inuit) peers were breezing through their transitions from high school to PSE with little difficulty. This created a sense of being alone in their challenges which made the challenges feel unsurmountable. While widely recognized that students coming from isolated Northern communities are not as objectively academically prepared as their peers(Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami), perspectives regarding this gap in preparedness, where students felt completely underprepared compared to their peers created a one-sided perspective of challenges which was not helpful. When asked to comment on this phenomenon, one staff member said that while students are without a doubt underprepared, they "have nothing to compare it to which doesn't help, like they think everyone else is 100% prepared" (Staff 18). For example, having an unbalanced perspective, and feeling that they were alone in their adjustment challenges, led to students to feel like they "shouldn't" need to ask for help because they "should be able to do this" (Student 2). Recognizing that they were not alone in their adjustment challenges allowed students to develop a more balanced perspective, and to overcome their hesitation to seek out support services in place which ultimately helped them to succeed in PSE studies. As one student put it:

> For any university student the academic demands are always going to be stressful and hard but you've just got to do it, you know, you can't expect the homework is going to do itself, and if it's difficult and you have resources around you, use

> those resources, and that's what I did, I used KI, KI hooked me up with tutors, I used their academic counselors to help me get through assignments and all those things, but for sure it was the academic transition that was the most difficult part of the adjustment for me. (Student 20)

It's important to note that while recognizing that they were not alone in their challenges was helpful in creating a balanced perspective for students in this study, it was definitely easier to foster in some academic subjects over others. As one student put it, " [I had an] easier time getting help for something like calculus because everyone struggles versus reading and writing where it's less socially acceptable to be so behind" (Student 11). Therefore, while this strategy was helpful for students, it was somewhat limited to common aspects of the PSE education adjustment experience such as the increase in pace, workload, and stress associated with higher education.

Temporality. Another way in which students developed a balanced attitude was through focusing on temporality. Breaking down their goals into smaller chunks of time (for example taking school one week or semester at a time) and realising that school was "temporary" and would not last forever was seen as helpful. Looking forward to semester breaks, and focusing on the present, were also temporal strategies students used to overcome focusing on the challenges of PSE. As one student explained, by focusing on the present and taking school one step at a time, they were able to avoid much of the stress that comes with the idea of moving away from home:

> I was only expecting to be here for a while, like a super short while, so I didn't have any expectations out of it, I wasn't nervous because I wasn't going to be here for long, I wasn't nervous because the thought of moving here wasn't even in my head, and, um, I wasn't overwhelmed with the school work because I knew that it

was just temporary, that I wasn't going to be here for longer than two weeks but then I ended up staying and then a year later, um, that's when I decided that it was too late to go home...and then that's when school became hard, when I knew that I was gonna graduate in the end, and not go home. (Student 3)

Another temporal strategy one student used to overcome homesickness was to focus on home as the present. In other words, their temporal focus was on the here and now. The student explained how they coped with distance from home by focusing on the welcoming nature of the people and the memories and progress they were making in the current moment:

> The transition from [Nunavik] to living in Montreal, to me, isn't that bad. Everyone is welcoming. I feel right at home. I regret to say this but [Nunavik] to me, isn't what I see as home anymore. Sure, all the people I really love are there, but I see home as the present. And presently, I'm making memories and progress. If you think of all the things you miss in your hometown, you're bound to become homesick. Home is where the heart is in and my heart is in it to succeed. (Facebook® Student 18)

Celebrating successes. Another way in which students helped maintain a balanced perspective on their challenges was through celebrating successes. In particular, when school was difficult, most students reminded themselves that they had already beat the odds by graduating high school. One student motivated themselves by remembering how far they had come just to get to where they are:

> I want to be a part of that tiny, 10-20% that doesn't drop out, I want to go all the way. So, when I get up in the morning, even though I really don't want to go to my class, I'm just like, you made it this far, how much farther can you get? Is this where you stop? And I just like talk to myself and I'm like is this seriously where

> you're gonna stop, are you seriously just crack under the pressure now, like look how far you got, so, ya, basically, I'm an egg under a billion books, so, mmm, I just want to fight against the odds. (Student 2)

Staff also echoed the importance of celebrating past successes:

> I always try to remind them how proud they should be at this point, I mean, even if they feel like they haven't accomplished a lot, they have, ya know, so they have a lot, and they should be proud of that, and for me that's something that you need to hang on to if you want to continue. (Staff 14)

Others reminded themselves of a test or class they were succeeding in or had in the past excelled at despite being challenging, and the "satisfaction" that came from studying and seeing a good grade (Facebook® Student 15). While all students found PSE to be a large leap from high school, students really felt accomplished when they worked hard and did well, and this was a feeling that many tried to hold on to when they were struggling. As one student wrote:

> All that hard work I put through is so surreal, it's so exciting and yet so nerve racking and it's so overwhelming. Ahh I did this. I want everyone to feel that way. (Facebook® Student 2)

Sense of belonging. One important attitude identified for success was sense of belonging. This meant it was important for students to think and feel like they belonged in the PSE environment. One of the main reasons students gave for their peers leaving PSE and withdrawing from courses was feeling that postsecondary education was "not the place for them". To further explore concrete factors that helped students develop a sense of belonging, extracts of interviews where students talked about feeling at place in PSE were analysed for

common themes. In addition to homework and study skills explored in 4.2., extracurricular activities, transition experiences, Inuit student residences, and family and community support were found to be key themes supporting sense of belonging.

One of the factors that helped build a sense of belonging for students was involvement in extra-curricular activities. Extra-curricular activities built sense of belonging via creating a "sense of community" (Student 3). Transition experiences, or the first few weeks of PSE also played a role in creating sense of belonging. In particular students named the College Preparatory Program (CPP) as playing an important role in building sense of belonging. Run by the school board, CPP is a two-week program where students arrive before the fall semester to become acquainted with the campus at John Abbott College, get to know their cohort of fellow Inuit students and practice study skills and essay writing. Students felt more confident after doing this program since they had the opportunity to "practice" for college. However, many noted that while this was helpful, the kind of academic preparation they needed to be truly successful would have had to have come from high school.

The student residence where all first year Inuit students are housed together by the school board was repeatedly raised as helping students feel that they belonged and providing a "sense of community" away from home. As one student put it "there's a sense of community at the Residence and at the Aboriginal Centre, and being Inuit we need that, so we have the support we need" (Facebook® Student 6). Another explained how the residence "helps with homesickness because they understand, you're not alone" (Facebook® Student 17).

Family and community support also played a big role in contributing to students thinking and feeling that they belonged in PSE. In particular, students felt that being directly told that they belonged by friends and family helped them feel that PSE is the place for them.

For example, one student described how he was always told by his brother that he belonged in school:

> [Growing up] he told me like "you're a golden boy, you don't smoke, you don't drink, you don't do anything, you know you have a job or whatever and you go to college. (Student 17)

Other students described similar experiences in primary and secondary school of being told that they were a "goody-two-shoes" or a "brainiac" and belonged in a PSE environment. Most of the students interviewed had grown up being told that they were going to attend a PSI. In a similar vein, another factor that helped students develop a sense of belonging in PSE was through excitement and support from friends and family. As one student put it:

> My parents were excited because they never had a chance to like finish college or university, I feel like a lot of students that come down here, their parents are like scared for them, or they don't want them to go down South to go, you know finish their postsecondary education, and um, I was lucky enough to have very supportive parents. (Student 7)

Positive sense of identity as Inuk. Another factor which helped students feel a sense of belonging in PSE was having a positive sense of identity as Inuit. When coping with challenges in transitioning to life in PSE, students would remind themselves of the positive characteristics of Inuit culture which set them up for success. For example, when they were struggling, one student would tell themselves that she was capable of overcoming the obstacles ahead of her because "Inuit are amazingly perseverant and intelligent" (Facebook® Student 16). Others talked about how learning about the history of Indigenous Peoples in

their PSE courses and their strengths helped them feel more driven and capable of completing their studies. While not all students directly associated characteristics of perseverance and determination with being Inuit, these were repeating themes whether Inuit were mentioned or not: As one student put it:

> Even though I went through many struggles adjusting, with homesickness and living a whole new lifestyle, with perseverance and determination I became capable of accomplishing a lot in school. (Facebook® Student 15)

Summary: Attitudes. Participants described several attitudes for success. Attitudes are a unique category of determinants in that they can be thought of as ways of thinking or feeling about PSE, and are not a concrete resource or support. Attitudes identified in this section were a balanced perspective on challenges, sense of belonging and a positive sense of identity as Inuit.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Principal Findings

This study aimed to increase our understanding of the determinants of successful high school to postsecondary education transitions for Indigenous youth. There are many determinants of success for first year Indigenous students. Factors such as culturally sensitive counselling and academic advising, and comprehensive financial support have been well established elsewhere as critical to student success. While important, ongoing high dropout rates suggest that these factors are more of a starting point for ensuring student success. One of the clearest examples of this is students arriving to Montreal from Nunavik, Northern Quebec, to complete their CEGEP (pre-university college) studies through sponsorship from the Kativik School Board (now Kativik Ilisarniliriniq or KI). Despite major costs associated with PSE such as travel and housing being covered for students, and access to specialized tutoring, advising and counselling services provided, first year dropout rates remain high.

With many of the material barriers to accessing postsecondary education removed, the case of Nunavik provides a unique opportunity to explore what additional factors are needed to support student success. Through in-depth interviews with past students who have successfully completed their first year of studies, Facebook® data, and key informant interviews with staff, this thesis identified three key determinants of PSE success.

The first key determinant was values. Values were elements of the PSE experience which were meaningful to students and shaped decisions regarding continued enrolment in PSE. Values identified by participants as key for postsecondary success included personal

growth, healing, trust and relationships, and community. Despite their importance to Inuit students, participants felt that these values were often at odds with their PSE environment, and that this disconnect was one of the reasons that many of their peers had dropped out or gone home. In contrast, students included in this study reported experiences of seeing these values reflected in the services offered to them and provided examples of how this provided motivation to stay, particularly when they were struggling with adjustment challenges. The second key determinant was skills. Skills included tools and competencies which participants identified as supporting their success such as homework and study skills, goal setting, leadership, and an ability to map and navigate resources. The third and final determinant was attitudes. Participants felt several ways of thinking and feeling about PSE were important for student success. These included having a balanced perspective on challenges, building a sense of belonging on campus and fostering a positive sense of identity.

5.2. Interpretation of Principal Findings

The identification of values as a key determinant of student success is perhaps unsurprising. It has long been recognized that the Canadian education system privileges European knowledge and values, and that this creates complex structural barriers to Indigenous student success (RCAP 1996). For example, several studies have explored the challenges Indigenous students face in adhering to the values, and beliefs of the dominant university culture, describing challenges associated with learning to "act white"(Anonson et al., 2008) and the need to follow a "double curriculum" which honours both cultural and academic education (Waterman, 2007). Similarly, others have described the challenges of PSE by characterizing academia as a "bicultural experience' where academic success requires

fluency in both dominant and Indigenous cultures (Bingham et al., 2014) and the "negotiation of cultural identity" in the classroom (Burk, 2007). The predominant difference between discussions of the role of values in student success in academic research and those raised by participants was the level at which they were discussed. Discussions of the incongruence in values between Indigenous students and PSIs in academic writing were mainly described as structural problem that could only be addressed through serious pedagogical and cultural changes to the operation of PSIs. Student participants, on the other hand, spoke about the role of values on more of a personal, everyday level. Students brought with them a set of values to PSE, including personal growth, healing, trust and relationships and community, which they viewed as influencing their everyday success. The more these values were reflected in their interactions with student services, for example, the more they were likely to describe these interactions as helpful or supportive of them staying in PSE. This implies that work can be done at a smaller scale, at the level of student service delivery, to incorporate student values as a means of promoting success, alongside much larger and slower projects of changing university structures and operations to integrate Indigenous values.

Of the four values identified by participants, personal growth and healing were arguably the most novel findings. Despite students and staff placing a great deal of emphasis on the personal growth and healing aspects of PSE, neither are reflected in the literature on Indigenous student success. The fact that former students emphasize personal opportunities for growth suggests that Nunavimmiut youth consider this an important leverage point in motivating students in their studies. Further evidence to this is that the personal opportunities for growth associated with PSE were more prevalent in the Facebook® posts which are targeted at prospective PSE students who are perhaps undecided about attending PSE. This is not surprising when we consider that the vast majority of this population has lived most if not all of their lives in remote, tight-knit communities, where extracurricular activities and

opportunities for personal improvement and learning may be limited due to factors such as limited resources and high staff turn-around. While arguably all young adults moving away from home for PSE are to some degree driven by non-academic motives, these personal motivations were emphasized by student participants, and sometimes the sole focus of discussions around retention in higher education. When students are struggling academically, progress on non-academic goals can create a sense of "positive overall sense of self" that may otherwise be lacking (Harter, Whitesell, & Junkin, 1998). Having a strong sense of self is an important driver of academic retention (Harter et al., 1998).This suggests that tracking, supporting, and talking about the personal growth goals students bring with them to PSE may lend itself as a strategy for promoting student success. While opportunities such as weekly activities in the community and small scholarships for students to, for example, join a gym, have been implemented by KI, there is currently no formal encouragement or recognition of the skills and experiences students are gaining through activities such as these—a potential missed opportunity to support students. For these reasons, increasing recognition of the value students place on personal growth in the delivery of student services and supports, could be a key strategy in reducing dropout rates and promoting student success.

The central importance of healing for students is congruent with generally accepted knowledge that poor mental health can be a serious barrier to academic success (Eisenberg, Golberstein, & Hunt, 2009). For this reason, increasing culturally appropriate resources for Indigenous students could be a strategy in honouring the value students place on healing in their PSE experiences. While the vast majority of participants felt that that resources for mental health and wellbeing were lacking in PSE, for one student in this study, access to specialized psychiatric and counselling services while attending PSE was actually a main reason for staying enrolled. This suggests that while resources in place are important, they may not at this time be properly tailored to best meet the needs of the majority of students,

and further work is needed to better align student services with the value placed on healing by students.

The results of this study suggest that an increased emphasis on values of personal growth and healing in service delivery may be beneficial to student completion rates and retention, and at the very least, warrant further research and attention by academics and PSE service professionals. Potential avenues to support healing as identified by the tertiary themes in this study included support and screening for learning disorders and specialized, and culturally relevant, mental health support. Unlike healing, avenues to support personal growth were not identified in the interviews. Greater recognition of the value placed on personal growth by students could potentially include the identification and tracking of personal goals alongside traditional academic goals in counselling and advising sessions in student services. In addition to helping students feel that their values are more reflected in their academic experiences, monitoring and celebrating successes in personal areas of growth important to students (such as learning to navigate a large urban transit system or making new friends) may serve as a source of motivation and accomplishment that may be lacking at times in light of academic challenges and thus prevent dropout.

In highlighting the importance placed on trust and relationships and community in student success, this study builds on a larger body of evidence arguing for the importance of these values in student service delivery (Bingham et al., 2014). That students had an easier time building relationships with those with Northern experience, is not surprising, especially in the context of first year transitions where students repeatedly described experiencing feelings of culture shock and foreignness in their new environment. Even if staff had knowledge of the North, however, students weren't always aware of the backgrounds of staff. This suggests that supporting values of trust and relationships not only requires staff

members to increase their knowledge of the North, as argued elsewhere, but also to increase opportunities for students to learn about the backgrounds and experiences of staff members.

Language was another important factor identified in supporting the value of trust and relationships. Currently, most student services are offered verbally in a one-on-one format and in English, students' second or third language. Relationship building was identified as being facilitated through increasing access to Inuktitut speakers in student services, and opportunities for written reflections, rather than just verbal interactions with staff. While in-person communication is widely considered to be important for relationship building, this finding suggests that integrating written reflections, for example, before counselling or academic advising appointments and then discussing those reflections with staff may be helpful in overcoming barriers associated with language. In this way, tertiary themes such as knowledge of the North and language as identified by participants in this study provides insight into simple, cost-effective efforts, that can be made to help better reflect these values in service delivery.

The second key determinant of student success in PSE identified through hermeneutic analysis was skills. A commonly discussed barrier to PSE success in academic research is a lack of preparation and academic rigour at the high school level (Hardes, 2013; Restoule et al., 2013). No doubt, as with non-Indigenous students, a lack of preparation at the high school level leaves many Indigenous students underprepared for the academic demands of PSE. As a result, there is often a "catching up" process that needs to take place to get Indigenous students on a similar level with their peers in regards to abilities in homework and studying. This need to catch up, as demonstrated in this study's findings, is often interpreted by students as being too "stupid" to succeed. What is unique about the findings of this study is that participants identified deficits in homework and study preparation as actual "skills" that could be learned rather than shortcomings in intelligence. When students focused on

homework and studying as skills that they could learn, rather than indicators of personal deficits, they were able to move forward with their studies. This highlights the importance of framing abilities in homework and studying as actual skills that can be learned in order to encourage students.

Homework and study skills were only one of four key skills identified by participants as being critical to PSE success. Based on their past experiences, participants described mapping and navigating resources, goal setting and leadership as other skills that helped them succeed in their PSE journeys. Students' own emphases on mapping and navigating resources, goal setting and leadership are interesting given their potential ease of implementation and impact, as well as the current lack of attention paid to these factors in published studies. While typically the focus of student services is to provide students with as many resources as possible and assume that uptake of these services will naturally follow by virtue of their existence, this was largely found not to be the case in this study. For students in this study, making the most of the resources available to them meant actually taking the time to 'map out' which services were useful to them and in which scenarios, based on their unique needs and experiences. While this was done rather informally by successful students, this is a process that could be easily facilitated in a workshop format with future students. A workshop-type atmosphere, or simply an on-paper exercise may, for example, provide a structure for students to reflect on the resources available to them, and plan for future challenges. An activity like this could also double as providing a window into the unique support systems and mechanisms of individual students for staff and counselors to better support students. This is perhaps particularly true in light of conversations from staff who have expressed feeling "road blocked" in supporting students in the past when they knew a student's parents were not being supportive. More than one student in this study spoke about

lacking family support but continuing in their studies through finding alternative avenues of support.

In a similar vein, students identified goal setting as key to their successful PSE experiences. Like resource mapping, goal setting, and learning how to set and work towards attainable goals (often referred to as SMART goals – see below), is a skill that can be taught to students at low-cost and may be a small step that could be made by student services to help foster student success. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-bound, and is an acronym widely used across fields, including psychology, to identify the elements of a goal which can set a person up for success(Locke & Latham, 1990). While the students in this study were likely not formally trained in SMART goals, they clearly demonstrated a strong level of skill in this area. Opportunities to build leadership skills, by, for example, organizing social activities and outings for younger students played an important role in building up the self-confidence of students and should be more widely encouraged.

The third determinant identified as being important for success in PSE was attitudes. In academic writing on non-Indigenous student success, attitudes have been discussed as a key piece in understanding student performance in PSE environments. Attitudes refer to "a student's positive attitude toward the specific act of studying and the student's acceptance and approval of the broader goals of a college education" (Credé & Kuncel, 2008). There is a general consensus among scholars that degree attainment "may be less dependent on academics and more influenced by other competencies such as non-cognitive or psychosocial factors" (Sommerfeld, 2016). Inventories which include attitudes towards higher education alongside other key factors such as study habits and skills, have been found to be more

predictive of academic performance than previous indicators such as standardized testing and high school grades (Credé & Kuncel, 2008).

In identifying attitudes as a key determinant of success based on past student experiences, this study brings attitudes to the discussion and literature on Indigenous achievement. In the past, this topic has received relatively little attention, perhaps out of a fear of downplaying the more structural and deep-seated barriers to academic success Indigenous students face such as a lack of academic preparation at the high school level. Arguably, highlighting attitudes may seem to put the onus for success on students. It is important to note that attitudes are but one piece of a larger puzzle of understanding student success, and particularly understanding it from a student perspective.

In looking at first year student experiences, participants identified three attitudes or thinking styles which they considered important in helping them stay enrolled in school, particularly when they were struggling and considering withdrawing from their program of studies. The first was having a balanced perspective on challenges. In this way students, demonstrated a common attitude or tendency to contextualize challenges within the positive experiences of PSE, rather than focusing solely on the negative. This contrasts a commonly known 'unhelpful thinking style' in psychology known as 'black and white' or "all or nothing" thinking (Beck & Beck, 1995). Black and white thinking is associated with focusing only on the negative in a given situation, often causing people to give up or lose motivation in light of a goal (such as graduating from a PSI) even when progress is in fact being made. Reassessing situations like this is similar to current thinking around mindfulness or cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) (Beck & Beck, 1995).

Sense of belonging was another important attitude identified—it was important that students thought and felt that attending a PSI "was the place for them". While several factors

contributed to sense of belonging, what stood out was that nearly all the participants were directly told by friends and family that they belonged in PSE. This suggests an increased need to encourage and tell students at all levels of education, before and after coming to college or university that they belong. Research among Indigenous graduate students at the University of British Columbia has shown the importance of culturally relevant faculty-student mentorship programs as building "sense of belonging" for students (Pidgeon et al., 2014).

While the number of Indigenous faculty members is still limited at many institutions, peer-support programs may be an important short-term strategy in building sense of belonging. Based on the literature, one of the factors which I expected to find as contributing to sense of belonging was integration into the wider campus community. With the exception of two students (one on Facebook® who described gaining a multi-ethnic group of friends in PSE, and one in the in-person interviews), most reported having few or no non-Inuit friends. Many felt that that they had made several attempts to make friends with classmates and were ultimately unsuccessful, leading to feelings of "alienation" and a lack of sense of belonging. Further research may be warranted to address this issue further, and events could be potentially put in place at the Inuit student residence to invite non-Inuit to come and do activities therefore helping build bonds between students.

The final attitude identified was a positive sense of identity as Inuk. Students who were educated in their culture leaned on factors such as Inuit being perseverant and determined people to motivate them and build confidence when they were struggling. Knowing this could be potentially helpful in supporting future students through student services by reminding them of their strength as Inuit which make them capable of success. This finding also gives credence to the importance of cultural programs which teach about Inuit identity as part of the PSE curriculum, such as the newly implemented Nunavik Sivuniksavut (NS) program in Montreal, modelled after the successful Nunavut Sivuniksavut

program in Ottawa (Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000).

5.3. Determinants of Success & Sense of Place

This health geography thesis was rooted in the concept that 'sense of place', or the feeling of being at home and secure in a geographic region, could play an important role in the success of Indigenous students (see section 0). The primary pathway for this relationship was well-being. Past studies have looked at both the relationship between sense of place and well-being and the role of student well-being in academic success and retention.

What the results of this study show however is that key determinants of success identified by students could just as easily be thought of as key determinants of sense of place. In this study, the two were synonymous. Factors that determined PSE success for students were factors that helped students achieve a 'sense of place' on campus. While the concept of sense of place is inherently deeply intertwined with concepts of wellbeing through impacts on factors such as stress and mental health, emphasizing wellbeing as an intermediary in the relationship between 'sense of place' and student success is superfluous. If we want to conceptualize what helps Indigenous students succeed, an alternative way to think about this is to ask "what helps students build a sense of place on campus?"

5.4. Some Practical Implications of this Study

Based on real student experiences, this study outlines areas of intervention at three different levels, starting from broad concepts or approaches and narrowing in on concrete

actions which have proven helpful to students in the past. This roadmap reinforces concepts emphasized elsewhere, such as the importance of trust and relationship building and a focus on community. It also serves to highlight new potential avenues to support student success including a need for increased emphasis on personal growth and goal setting in student service delivery. It is not meant to be a one size fits all solution but rather to shift the conversation about improving student service delivery to considering key areas of support which have been identified as important for success from a student perspective. All Indigenous communities are different, and all students are unique in their backgrounds and experiences. However, it is widely established that Indigenous communities share many common values as well as experiences within western educational institutions. This suggests that the primary themes identified in this study as key determinants of student success, namely values, skills and attitudes, may be more generalizable and applicable across cultural groups than the themes identified in this study at lower levels which may be more applicable to Inuit. As seen in section 2.3. of this thesis, factors of support which help students succeed in PSE are typically thought of in terms of services such as academic or emotional counselling. From the participants in this study however, it was clear that what made services effective was tied to a different set of determinants outside of our current framework for thinking about student success. The results of this study suggest then that values, skills and attitudes are key concepts that should be added to our conversations, planning, and understanding of what helps first year Indigenous students succeed.

The results of this study have practical implications both for Indigenous student services and wider efforts to support PSE adjustment and retention. Determinants of PSE success in this study were synonymous with factors which helped build ‘sense of place’ for students. From a policy perspective, this signals the importance of efforts aimed at creating a sense of place for students, both in the design and delivery of services. More specifically, the

three key determinants identified in this study were values, skills, and attitudes. The identification of these determinants serves as an important reminder that providing concrete resources such as advising and tutoring services is necessary, but not sufficient for student success. Rather, how these services are provided, what values they reflect, and what skills and attitudes they promote must also be considered. In conjunction with previous research and literature these findings help expand our framework of thinking, and potential areas of intervention and planning when creating strategies and resources to support Indigenous students in PSE. The findings of this thesis have both short and long-term policy implications. In recent years there has been a large push for a university in the North to overcome barriers related to geography and cultural separation that lead to many Inuit dropping out of PSE in the South. For students who may never benefit from a Northern university, this thesis provides short term solutions for supporting students in pursuing PSE until such an institution is built. However, as noted by students in the interviews, due to the inherently smaller size of any potential Northern university as compared to postsecondary institutions in the South, there will always be students leaving for specialized programs who may benefit from the results of this study.

5.5. Methodological Implications

This study drew on participatory and action-oriented approaches through the involvement of Kativik Ilisarniliriniq (KI), throughout the entire research process, from question development and ethical approval, to results dissemination, as well as through the hiring of an Inuit youth as a research assistant. These key methodological choices aimed at increasing the strength, transferability, and use of findings (Jagosh et al., 2012). Data for this study included one-on-one semi-structured interviews with students and current and former

staff of KI and PSE professors and Facebook® posts. The use of Facebook® data to triangulate results, and thus build rigour into this study, was a unique and cost-effective way of harnessing insights, particularly when working with a young adult population. Because youth often feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts virtually than in a face-to-face interview, social media platforms are an avenue to connect with community knowledge while controlling for certain levels of social desirability bias that would be seen in traditional data collection tools such as a survey or interview. When it comes to the field of student success, as well as other youth-oriented fields such as mental health promotion and suicide prevention, platforms like Facebook® are increasingly being used by communities to collect experiences and share stories among community members. While this data is technically 'publicly available', because it was not necessarily produced to be shared or found by those outside the community, any use of Facebook® data, particularly when working with Indigenous communities should always seek ethics approval for use by the community associated with the page or group found online. While ethics approval from communities is critical, it is worth noting that leveraging the types of community-driven data found online and used for this study may actually be a less-invasive than more traditional research methods. For this reason, it may actually provide more favourable means of conducting research when working with Indigenous communities, particularly when it paired with tools like in-depth and key informant interviews to verify meaning and contextualize results.

5.6. Strengths & Limitations

In addition to working in partnership with the school board and an Inuit youth research assistant, a key strength of this study is its asset-based approach to understanding student success, with a focus on what has worked for past students. By studying how degrees

are obtained in spite of significant challenges, this approach responds to calls from other scholars to shift the research agenda from a focus on barriers to studying the experiences of successful Indigenous students(Devlin, 2009). In contrast to past studies, this approach provides a road map of potential interventions for improving educational outcomes (Devlin, 2009).

As with any qualitative study, the possibility for selection bias is a potential limitation. Students who are shier may be less likely to volunteer to participate to be interviewed (Collier & Mahoney, 1996). This is a concern in qualitative research when the goal is to get at a breath of different student experiences. Attempts to mitigate this potential limitation included the inclusion of Facebook© posts, and the involvement of a Nunavimmiut research assistant to help explain the project to fellow students. Both of these strategies were used to increase the level of comfort with participation, and thus attempt to include students who may otherwise feel too shy to participate.

Traditionally, qualitative research has focused on in-depth studies of particular people and places with little concern for generalizability, or the ability to draw broad inferences from results to other settings (Polit & Beck, 2010). Recognizing the importance of translating qualitative research into practice, the ways in which qualitative research can be generalized are increasingly being discussed (Polit & Beck, 2010). Two models of generalization are helpful in understanding how the results of this study may be applied elsewhere- Firestone's models of analytic generalization and case-to-case transfer or transferability (Firestone, 1993). According to Firestone's model of analytic generalization, a key strategy in generalizing qualitative research is "higher-order abstraction" (Firestone, 1993). Higher-order abstraction essentially calls attention to the fact that in the course of rigorous qualitative analysis, researchers distinguish between information that is relevant to many or all participants in contrast to experiences which are unique to individual participants (Ayres,

Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003). This means that the themes identified through qualitative research are credibly generalizable by virtue of a rigorous research process and inductive thematic analysis. In the context of this study, this implies that primary themes identified, as representations of the broadest concepts and ideas applicable to students, are the most generalizable to other groups, followed by secondary and then tertiary themes.

Case-to-case transfer on the other hand draws attention to the diverse historical, cultural, social and economic circumstances of Indigenous Peoples by highlighting that the more similar two groups are (determined through thick description), the more generalizable results may be. With this model in mind, results from this study may be most applicable to Inuit students from other land claims regions who are culturally similar to students in this study, as well as other Indigenous students who share in experiences moving from tight-knit and remote cultural communities to urban areas for postsecondary education. Another interpretation may be that while values, skills and attitudes are important determinants of success for most students, their meaning and how they are used is ultimately up to the interpretation of individual communities based on their own beliefs, practices and experiences. It's important to remember that for Indigenous students in Canada, educational reform will not be solved by a singular "sweeping policy"(Chandler & Lalonde, 2004, 2005).

5.7. Some Final Thoughts

Educational attainment is increasingly being recognized as an important social determinant of health for Indigenous communities (Anuik et al., 2010; Shankar et al., 2013). Despite an increase in Indigenous students on PSE campuses, and a growing body of literature on student experiences in higher education, "many institutions are still struggling

with how best to overcome the obstacles identified in the literature" (Tomaszewski, Powell, Gallop, London, & Gyles, 2011). Past research has identified experiences in a student's first year of PSE studies as "critical" to understanding persistence until graduation (Tachine, Cabrera, & Yellow Bird, 2017).

Looking retrospectively at the experiences of students from Nunavik, and taking an asset-based approach, this study identified three key determinants of success—values, skills, and attitudes. The results of this study show that these three determinants can also be thought of as factors which help build sense of place for students. This provides an alternative way to address the question of Indigenous student success by reframing it as a question of "what builds sense of place on campus?" For existing student services or those just starting out, this study provides some readily-adoptable strategies for increasing Indigenous student retention in the first year through identifying both broad concepts—values, skills, and attitudes, and concrete actions which have proven helpful to past students. For example, a key value for students was trust and relationships. In the absence of trusting relationships with staff, students were not likely to use or take full advantage of the student services and supports at their institution. Strategies for increasing trust and relationships identified in this study included enhancing knowledge of the North on the part of staff, focusing on shared experiences, an emphasis on belief and encouragement in service delivery, and going beyond the job and flexibility.

In responding to this study's overall objective of increasing our understanding of the conditions of first year PSE completion for Indigenous youth, this thesis identified three primary themes, 11 secondary themes, and 20 tertiary themes contributing to student success. Further research focusing on understanding the experiences of students who are successful in completing their first year of studies may serve to validate and expand on the results of this

study, potentially providing further insight into strategies to support other Inuit and Indigenous students undergoing significant transitions in social and cultural environments to pursue PSE.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethics Certificates

McGill

Research Ethics Board Office
James Administration Bldg.
845 Sherbrooke Street West. Rm 325
Montreal, QC H3A 0G4

Tel: (514) 398-6831
Fax: (514) 398-4644
Website: www.mcgill.ca/research/researchers/compliance/human/

Research Ethics Board I
Certificate of Ethical Acceptability of Research Involving Humans

REB File #: 84-0717

Project Title: Determinants of Nunavummiut Postsecondary Success

Principal Investigator: Madeleine Pawlowski

Department: Geography

Status: Master's Student

Supervisor: Prof. Nancy Ross

Co-Supervisor: Dr. Mylene Riva

Approval Period: **September 20, 2017 to September 19, 2018**

The REB-I reviewed and approved this project by delegated review in accordance with the requirements of the McGill University Policy on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Human Participants and the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct For Research Involving Humans.

Deanna Collin
Ethics Review Administrator, REB I & II

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* Approval is granted only for the research and purposes described.
* Modifications to the approved research must be reviewed and approved by the REB before they can be implemented.
* A Request for Renewal form must be submitted before the above expiry date. Research cannot be conducted without a current ethics approval. Submit 2-3 weeks ahead of the expiry date.
* When a project has been completed or terminated, a Study Closure form must be submitted.
* Unanticipated issues that may increase the risk level to participants or that may have other ethical implications must be promptly reported to the REB. Serious adverse events experienced by a participant in conjunction with the research must be reported to the REB without delay.
* The REB must be promptly notified of any new information that may affect the welfare or consent of participants.
* The REB must be notified of any suspension or cancellation imposed by a funding agency or regulatory body that is related to this study.
* The REB must be notified of any findings that may have ethical implications or may affect the decision of the REB.

JOHN ABBOTT
CEGEP/COLLEGE

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Name of Applicant: Madeleine Pawlowski

Institution: McGill University

Title of Project: Determinants of Nunavimmiut Postsecondary Success

Certificate Number: JACREB201714

Valid from date to date: November 23rd, 2017 - November 23rd, 2018

Email: madeleine.pawlowski@mail.mcgill.ca

The members of the John Abbott College Research Ethics Board have examined the application and consider the experimental procedures as outlined by the applicant to be on acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human participants. Please note that this certificate is only valid for work with John Abbott students, staff, and faculty. A final report summarizing the findings should be submitted to John Abbott College within six months of the completion of the study. This approval of research ethics does not guarantee that CEGEP John Abbott College will provide access to any institutional services, such as Data Mining.

Co-Chairs: Laura Shillington and Shireef Darwish

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Kativik Ilisarniliriniq

9800 Cavendish #400
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REGISTERED
BY EMAIL

Thursday, October 26th, 2017

Madeleine Pawlowski,
Master's degree candidate,
Department of Geography,
McGill University.
madeleine.pawlowski@mail.mcgill.ca
438.883.2091

Subject :Letter of approval for the research proposal entitled Determinants of Nunavimmiut Postsecondary Success in Montreal

Mrs. Pawlowski,

First, once again, thank you for your interest in doing research in Nunavik.

By this letter, I have the pleasure to inform you that your research proposal has been aceepted by Kativik Ilisarniliriniq's Council of Commissioners, on October 19th, 2017, resolution number # CC 2017-18-6.

Here are the comments related to your proposal formulated by the Research Review Committee and the Council of Commissioners, please take good note of these.

- We appreciate the fact Madeleine wrote: "I hope to discuss methods of dissemination directly with KSB to better fit their expectations and rich understanding of their communities and their youth." and we will support her to find the right format.
- We appreciate that she planned to present the results to the school board before any public dissemination.

- We appreciate her participatory approach, especially the fact that 1 or 2 Nunavimmiut Student Research Assistant(s) will support her in every step to come in her research.
- We appreciate that she planned to discuss with the school board ethical considerations regarding Nunavimmiut Student Research Assistant(s) to ensure that their relationship to participants does not bias the results or violate the confidentiality of the interview participants.
- We would like her to extend her research to Nunavik Sivunitsavut.
- We would like her to consider Joseph Flowers work.

Please, also, take note that the school board requests a progress report from you each two months. This report must be addressed by email to the Research Manager, myself: yasmine.charara@kativik.qc.ca

Also, please note that you must inform the Research Manager of any change in the research proposal, even if this could lead to the withdraw of this approval.

Finally, note that this approval is valid for a year. Afterward, if you need more time, you will have to submit a request for an extension.

Please be assured, I will stay available to support you and guide you when necessary throughout your research.

Thank you in advance for all the work you will be doing to help us reflect upon how to better support Nunavimmiut students in their transitions to CEGEP.

Sincerely,

Yasmine Charara,
Research Manager,
General Administration,
Kativik Ilisarniliriniq.
yasmine.charara@kativik.qc.ca
819.964.1136

Appendix B: Interview Guides

B1. Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Students

1) What's your name and where is home for you?
2) What year and program of study are you currently enrolled in?
3) Where do you see yourself in the next five years? The next ten?
4) What motivates you to pursue your studies?

5) Tell me about your experience moving to Montreal for CEGEP?
    a. What was challenging?
    b. How did you overcome these challenges?
6) Tell me about your first year in Montreal?
7) How did your friends and family feel about you coming to college?
8) Did you ever take any time away from your studies for any reason?
    a. If yes, why?
    b. If no, did you ever consider it?
9) How would you define a "successful" college experience?

10) Imagine you are at your college graduation, who would you thank for helping you get there?
11) What advice would you give current high school students hoping to attend postsecondary?
12) What new supports would you recommend are implemented for future students?
13) Is there anything we didn't talk about that you feel was important to your PSE experience?

B2. Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Non-Students- Staff at KI and Professors

1) What's your name and where is home for you?
2) What is your job title?
3) How long have you been working with students from Nunavik?

4) Could you tell me a little about your work?
5) What is life in Montreal like for students?
    a. How is it different than in high school?

6) What resources do you consider most helpful in supporting students' transition from Nunavik to Montreal?
7) What new supports do you recommend are implemented?
8) What advice would you give to current high school students hoping to attend postsecondary?