Puzzles rather than Answers: Co-Constructing a Pedagogy of Experiential, Place-based and Critical Learning in Indigenous Education

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Abstract

This research examines the current educational challenges facing First Nation students of northern Canada, through the exploration of two experiential and place-based educational programs. These programs of study are presently being applied in the public school system (primary and secondary) of the Yukon Territory and in two Cree and Dene Nation reserve schools in northern Alberta.

The collaborative research draws on observations and participants' descriptions and insights to address three principal questions: How do students, educators and community members interpret the field of experiential and place-based education? In what ways can educators and community members share values and practices to create more purposeful classroom praxis? and, How can current educational systems redefine its practices to address Indigenous needs, as well as improve student engagement and success?

The primary objective of this action research is to discover which elements of experiential and place-based education lead to greater engagement of Indigenous students and improved educational outcomes. The results of comparative case studies indicated many similarities among the factors leading to greater engagement of Indigenous students in the two programs. Through a recursive process of data analysis, specific themes emerged that were deemed crucial to both experiential initiatives. I explore those themes through the participants' voices. They are: the importance of *Partnerships* within the community; the application of alternative forms of *Evaluation*; the use of *Field Studies* to deliver curriculum and engage students; an incorporation of *Indigenous Culture and Knowledge* in many aspects of the educational context; and the issues of *Sustainability* that include alternative structures and scheduling of the experiential programs. Finally, specific suggestions are made for building on current experiential and place-based educational research and practice.

Résumé

Cette recherche examine les défis éducatifs actuels auxquels font face les étudiants des premières nations du nord du Canada, par le biais de l'étude de deux programmes éducatifs expérientiels et basés sur le lieu. Ces programmes d'études sont présentement appliqués par le système public (au niveau primaire et secondaire) du territoire du Yukon ainsi que dans deux écoles de la nation Cree et de la nation Dene, dans le nord de l'Alberta.

Cette recherche collaborative puise à même les observations, descriptions et connaissances des participants afin de répondre a trois questions principales De quelle façon les étudiants, éducateurs, et membres de communauté interprètent le domaine d'éducation expérientielle et basée sur le lieu? Quelles sont les manières par lesquelles les éducateurs et membres de la communauté peuvent partager leurs valeurs et pratiques afin de créer une classe pratique plus déterminée ? De quelle façon le système éducatif traditionnel peut redéfinir ses pratiques pour répondre aux besoins des autochtones tout en améliorant l'engagement des étudiants et leur succès?

L'objectif premier de cette recherche appliquée est de découvrir quels éléments de l'éducation expérientielle et basée sur le lieu mènent à un engagement accru des étudiants autochtones et améliorent les résultats scolaires. Les résultats d'études de cas comparatives ont démontré plusieurs similitudes parmi les facteurs menant à un engagement accru des étudiants autochtones dans les deux programmes. Par un procédé récursif d'analyse de données, des thèmes spécifiques ont émergés, lesquels ont été considérés décisifs aux deux initiatives expérientielles. J'explore ces thèmes à travers la voix des participants. Ces thèmes sont : l'importance de partenariat à l'intérieur de la communauté, l'application de forme alternative d'évaluation, l'utilisation d'observation sur le terrain afin de livrer le curriculum et d'engager les étudiants, une incorporation de la culture autochtone dans plusieurs aspects du contexte éducatif, les questions de durabilité des programmes expérientiels et la structure alternative et l'établissement des calendriers des programmes. Finalement, des suggestions

spécifiques sont offertes pour ajouter à la recherche et pratique de l'éducation expérientielle et basée dur le lieu.

Acknowledgements

This research project was a culmination of many people's dedication, hard work and commitment to improving the local educational context. I am humbled and eternally thankful for the support that all the participants associated with this project provided over the last three years.

First and foremost I would like to thank the participants and the northern communities for welcoming me into their lives and sharing their experiences and stories with me. I am indebted to many people in the Yukon, from communities such as Whitehorse, Carcross, Teslin, Haines Junction, Old Crow and Watson Lake. Also to my friends in Northern Alberta from both Kehewin First Nation and Cold Lake First Nation. I am compelled to single out the students and educational staff associated with the five schools that gave so much of their time and support. They are: Kehewin Cree Nation School, Le Goff School, Wood Street School, Selkirk Elementary and Ghùch Tlâ Community School. My time in these communities would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of my two community collaborators: Bob Sharp and Roger McDonnell. I am a better educator and person because of your commitment, courage and humility in sharing your successes and struggles.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

With the increase in land claim agreements, renegotiation of treaty rights and local control of resource development, the quest for self-governance by Indigenous [1]people is a motivating factor for improving education. This direct control and involvement leads to issues of preservation and sustainable development of their resources. There is a great need to reconnect schools with their communities, so as to provide opportunities for students to contribute to their community and also benefit from the opportunities before them.

Experiential and place-based initiatives have become a major factor in education, as many Indigenous communities move toward greater autonomy and self-determination: to encourage students to be aware of, and feel responsible for the lands their ancestors have traditionally occupied; and, to better prepare and encourage the students for employment opportunities that exist within Indigenous territories and beyond.

This research examines the current educational challenges facing First Nation students of northern Canada, through the exploration of two experiential and place-based educational programs. These programs of study are presently being applied in the public school system of the Yukon Territory (Experiential Programs in Whitehorse and surrounding communities, YT), and in two Cree and Dene Nation reserve schools in northern Alberta (Community-Based Experiential Education Program in Kehewin and Cold Lake, AB).

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[1] "Indigenous" refers to the conditions, rights, and way of life of many groups, cultures, communities and peoples who have a historical continuity or association with a given region or parts of a region before its subsequent colonization or the formation of a Nation-State. I do not wish to insinuate by the use of a single reference that Indigenous people can be classified by one term that excludes each group's specific and particular identity. I have learnt that not only are there definite relations and nuances within Indigenous Nations but they are explicitly specific within each community and reserve. The historical specificity and variability of culture and its synchronous interaction with many other diverse environmental and social structures create specific identities amongst groups that are not to be trivialized by a single term.

These programs utilize experiential and placed-based initiatives to address the lack of success and disengagement amongst Indigenous students in formal schooling by promoting a holistic form of education that values the importance of 'place' and the role of cultural knowledge. The primary objective of this research is to discover which elements of experiential and place-based education lead to greater engagement of Indigenous students and improved educational outcomes. In summary, these two programs are practical applications of experiential education and critical theory as praxis.

I worked with the two community collaborators to develop the following questions as the general focus of this study:

1) How do students, educators and community members interpret the field of experiential and place-based education?

2) In what ways can educators and community members share values and practices to create more purposeful classroom praxis?

3) How can current educational systems redefine its practices to address Indigenous needs, as well as improve student engagement and success?

Background

The current state of Indigenous education in Canada is unacceptable (Assembly of First Nations [AFN], 2005). "The majority of Indigenous youth do not complete high school and rather than nurturing the individual, the present schooling experience typically erodes identity and self-worth" (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, p. 434). The lack of Indigenous cultural knowledge and perspectives in the school curriculum has been identified as a significant factor in school failure amongst Indigenous students (Cajete, 1994; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Kirkness, 1998). These findings have prompted calls for an increase in research that addresses the need for incorporating Indigenous cultural knowledge and methodologies in public school curriculum to

enhance and support classroom learning for Indigenous students. As well, dominant-culture English and/or French teachers need to discover effective ways to integrate Indigenous cultural knowledge into their teachings of the regular curricula of formal schools (Barnhardt, 1999; Kanu, 2005).

Chapter Descriptions

I describe, in Chapter 2, how I became interested in the context of Indigenous education. I explore *My Positionality as a non-Indigenous Researcher* and consider some important factors that I have found when conducting research with Indigenous communities and peoples. As a non-Indigenous researcher involved in Indigenous research, I am cognisant of my positionality and therefore, I attempt to unveil my research motives through self-study methodologies and the interconnection of personal narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Through the process of remembering and telling my lived experiences, I formulate meaning. This process is emotional, and is what guides my thinking and actions (Hampton, 1995a). I chart my epistemological journey, as I have developed principles that represent this emotional understanding and have guided this research in Indigenous education (Deloria, 1997).

To clearly establish the context in which I conducted this study, I provide, in the next chapter, an overview of some issues related to *Indigenous Education in Canada*. Chapter 3 is a summary of the writings of mostly Indigenous scholars with respect to the past, present and future of Indigenous education in a Canadian context (some non-Indigenous scholars are also cited as they support Indigenous education as a goal of self-determination). As a non-Indigenous researcher, I believe it is crucial, and ultimately my responsibility, to develop an understanding of Indigenous education as articulated by Indigenous scholars. Issues of identity, self-determination, local control, community, culture and a return to a traditional, holistic model of education are investigated.

In Chapter 4, I build upon the theoretical lens which frames this study, by exploring the areas of *Constructivist Learning, Experiential and Place-based Education.* This chapter is an academic review of the fields of experiential and place-based education, and provides some current alternative education models that have offered solutions to some of the issues facing Indigenous students.

In Chapter 5, I explain how I undertook this study. It begins with a description of the guiding principles of this study, including the research questions. I then explain the chosen research *Methodology,* detail my role as an active observer in this study, and describe the nature of the interview process and the field notes which comprised the bulk of the study's data. It is in the voices, perceptions and interpretations of educators, students and community members (hermeneutic phenomenology*),* with respect to the fields of experiential and place-based education, that I locate this research. The research participants are the true practitioners of these alternative programs in a northern Indigenous context.

While Chapter 5 focuses on the specifics of how this study was conducted, Chapter 6 describes the study's context. In this chapter, I provide details about the environment which shapes the subject of inquiry, and provide an in-depth, *Comparative Case Studies* analysis of the two varying settings. A rich description of each program is then provided from the participants' perspectives. Specific program elements (identified by the participants) that lead to Indigenous student engagement and educational success are highlighted. Each case study also provides a description of barriers and challenges that exist in the implementation of such alternative programs.

In Chapter 7, I identify key *Findings* emerging from the research data and explore how these themes, grounded in the application of experiential and place-based education, contribute to the success of Indigenous students. I begin this chapter by addressing one of the three major research questions that provided the focus of this study: How do students, educators and community members interpret the field of experiential and place-based education?

The balance of this chapter is devoted to answering the remaining two research questions set out as the general focus of this study: In what ways can educators and community members share values and practices to create more purposeful classroom praxis? and, How can current educational systems redefine its practices to address Indigenous needs, as well as improve student engagement and success?

Through a recursive process of data analysis, several themes have emerged. I explore those themes through the participants' voices as they relate to the two research questions above. It is through these stories, their similarities and differences that I hope to provide scope and depth to this study.

I conclude the dissertation in Chapter 8 with a synopsis and discussion of the implications that the two alternative models of experiential and place-based education might have for the success of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in terms of personal, social and academic development.

Chapter 2:

My Positionality as a non-Indigenous Researcher[2]

In this chapter I explore some important factors to be considered in conducting research with Indigenous communities and peoples. As a non-Indigenous researcher involved in Indigenous research, I am cognisant of my positionality and therefore believe it necessary to unveil my research motives. I have chosen to do this through the use of self-study methodologies and the interconnection of personal narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Through the process of remembering and telling some of my lived experiences through narratives, I formulate meaning (Hampton, 1995a). This process is emotional and is what guides my thinking and actions. Through this task I have developed principles that represent my emotional understanding that has guided this research in Indigenous education (Deloria, 1997).

Questions from Academia

After spending eight years teaching in Whitehorse, Yukon (1996-2004), I returned to McGill University to pursue my graduate studies in education, focusing on curriculum studies. This teaching experience focused mainly on delivering experiential programs developed to engage disenfranchised students – many of who were First Nations. I was initially greeted in the academic community with much interest in my experience and work in experiential learning, and its place in Indigenous education. Many of my colleagues and professors took the time to discuss the subject and listen to my story. Yet as time progressed and my research interests started to evolve, I began to encounter

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[2] An earlier version of this chapter has been previously published in: A. Churchill (Ed.), *Rocking Your World: The Emotional Journey into the Critical Discourses*. AW Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers. Please see O'Connor, K. B. (2008a) in *References* for further information.

sometimes subtle and other times blatant warnings from concerned colleagues of my positionality as a "white guy" interested in Indigenous issues. The more extreme response was: "You can't do this work, you're not Indigenous." Over time I came to understand the primary questions as: "Why are you interested in Indigenous education?" and "What are your motives as a non-Indigenous researcher?"

My initial reaction to these questions was one of puzzlement. In my teaching positions up North, while my work had not been unchallenged, no one before had questioned my motives. My puzzlement was followed by resentment. Resentment that I was being asked to justify my passion after thirteen years of hard work in which I had tried to help a group of students achieve success within a system that was failing them. Now I was being asked to justify my motives for this work, which seemed to me to be very transparent and straightforward.

I returned to academia to expand my knowledge base with regards to experiential and place-based education, and to research its impact in Indigenous education. The answers to the questions about what motivated me to pursue education topics in Indigenous education seemed very simple to me, I had taught Indigenous students for eight years, and I had concluded that the regular school system in the Yukon was failing many students, but most importantly, it was failing Indigenous students, who seemed to be most negatively affected. I was fortunate to be involved in research and development of experiential programs addressing many of the needs of the Yukon First Nations. As these programs were being implemented, I witnessed the success of some Indigenous students. I then returned to academia to help promote this type of education at the post-secondary level, so that new teachers could be exposed to this "alternative" style of education. To me, it seemed simple and clear.

Many of the people who questioned my intentions were non-Indigenous, and I resented their implications that I had a hidden agenda or that because of the colour of my skin I had no understanding or license to speak about Indigenous education.

After leaving my position in the Yukon and returning to McGill, I began working with various Indigenous bands and teachers across northern Canada (e.g. Yukon First Nations, Cree, Dene, and Inuit) with regards to implementing experiential and place-based programming in schools. The people (mostly Indigenous) with whom I worked in the North rarely questioned my positionality and, except for some "white guy" jokes, were mostly interested in my experience in alternative education and not my colonial heritage or the colour of my skin. Yet the institutional academics questioned my involvement. I was confused and became very frustrated.

With the support of my supervisor, I began my journey in answering the questions posed to me that sought specifically to better understand my interest and motivation as a non-Indigenous person in Indigenous education and research. I started to answer these questions by first trying to better understand them. I did this by looking at a number of texts that deal directly with three main concerns as outlined in the next three sections.

Politics of Knowledge

Colonial structures that support positions of power and dominance have been in existence for over a hundred years. These colonial structures are politically motivated. Tuhiwai-Smith (Maori) [3](1999) refers to colonial influence as the "colonization of the mind" (p. 59): a system of organization, classification and promotion of a new pro-colonial form of knowledge that attempts to abolish old conflicting practices and to promote power and domination by the ruling nation. It is a concept similar to Richard Darville's "social organization theory" (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 54) that is best described as the process of gaining and controlling power through organizational forms of knowing, or more simply put: "power through knowledge". Cook-Lynn (Sioux) (1996) speaks to the

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[3] The reference to tribal affiliation is done to respect and honour each person's heritage as an Indigenous person. Please refer to "Indigenous" footnote in Chapter 1-Introduction, p. 1 for further explanation on this subject.

political structure involved in Indigenous research as she quotes Dr. Beatrice Medicine (Sioux), an anthropologist and a scholar:

> Native people living in the contemporary world are usually the last to know and have something to say about what is being published concerning us. This is whether the work is in history, anthropology, psychology, education or fiction. Recently, much social science or grant applications have emphasized that the projected research is a result of 'tribal council approval'. In many cases, these councils do not inform the poor and powerless people in the hinterlands of the reservations, who are the captive objects of such studies. (Medicine, as cited in Cook-Lynn, 1996, p. 67)

The present dominant research ideology tends to place the accumulation of Western knowledge ahead of the interests of the Indigenous person being studied. In the last five decades, researchers have been (and to a large extent, are still) governed by the values and systems of the Western academic structure. Taking the stance that the Western way represented a normal, rational and true form, researchers entered Indigenous communities and judged them lacking in many of the so-called canons of civilized behaviour. These political institutions are guided by Western social beliefs that diffuse the notion of differing cultures and thus lead to failing grades for many Indigenous communities when compared to Western standards. As long as researchers report back to a colonial centered institution that diminishes the values and beliefs of Indigenous people on the basis of comparison that aligns difference with a failing effort, there will remain what Alfred North Whitehead describes as "misplaced concreteness" (Deloria, 1997, p. 221).

Weber-Pillwax (1999) refers to a similar action as "unconscious irresponsibility" (p. 37), which is the basis for excusing callous and unlawful acts by researchers against Indigenous peoples.

The commonly accepted explanation for these 'irregularities' in conduct
is always couched in terms that imply a misunderstanding of a good
intent, therefore, it is argued, since there was no malicious intent, what
we have is a case of unconscious irresponsibility. So easily is the criminal
rendered innocent and the victim(s) powerless! (Weber-Pillwax, 1999, p.
37)

No matter what legitimate motives are present, it is difficult to deny the
pressures involved that may affect the social and political perspectives of the
benefactors (Weber-Pillwax, 1999). "Research is not an innocent or distant
academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a
set of political and social conditions" (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, p. 5).

As I began to appreciate the complexity of how knowledge is produced
through research and the power that the researcher has in deciding what
knowledge gets produced, I began to appreciate the importance of questioning
the motivation of outsiders doing research and the potential impacts this research
can have on a community.

Impact of Research

As I explored critical discourses further, I came to appreciate how the
impact of research at the community level must be explored. This is a crucial
theme that must be recognized as many researchers, similar to federal and
provincial government agencies such as social services, are in and out of family
homes and communities. Researchers from different projects and research teams
can create a revolving door of intrusion, without showing any "collective
responsibility" for the blanket effect their involvement has upon the social and
personal lives of the participants and their community. In some cases, this has
created a deep sense of resentment on the part of the participants towards any
form of research or scholarly involvement in Indigenous communities (Tuhiwai-
Smith, 1999).

Alfred (Mohawk) (1999) spoke with a Kwa'kwala'wakw woman with respect to social workers in Indigenous communities. She used the analogy of a bike wheel and the placement of its spokes with respect to the many social problems and their supposed solutions. She argued that there is a need for everyone to understand where the spokes need to go, with each person responsible for the replacement of at least one spoke. If this occurred, a collective solution could be found. She blamed social services for creating more spokes and placing them all on one side of the wheel, fragmenting the process. She reminds Alfred that they are not Indigenous spokes, and there is an imbalance. Unless the Indigenous community is involved holistically in the process and their input is valued, the social issues that the social workers are there to address will continue (Alfred, 1999). This scenario can easily be extrapolated to researchers. It speaks to the confusing effects outside involvement can have on the Indigenous community if external values, beliefs and structures are imposed.

Ego-centricity of the Researcher

I am intrigued by a letter referenced by Cook-Lynn (1996), in which a teacher from Columbus, Ohio, wrote to the Indian Historian journal in response to an Indigenous criticism of the controversial novel *Hanta Yo* by Ruth Beebe Hill:

> What are the motives of a White teacher of Indian Lit? Some possible motives occur to me: one is nostalgia for a lost world in which virtuous people lived in close harmony with nature and the holy; another is that a study of Indian history with its tale of betrayal and genocide is useful as a form of protest against oppression… [to] reveal the dark side of American history and give the lie to unqualified celebrations of the American way; also, in an era of disillusionment with American values, many Americans are groping for new ones. What it all adds up to is that American Indians are called upon to prove some pet thesis. (Teacher, as cited in Cook-Lynn, 1996, p. 74)

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Deloria (Sioux) (1997) describes a similar concept, through the perception of the anthropologist who mistakes the natural hospitality of First Nations toward a stranger as an endorsement of academia, approval of the researcher or support of the work. "What she (the researcher) experienced was simply the hospitality of Indians toward a stranger. You can bring almost anyone into an Indian community and Indians will greet him, feed him, invite him to ceremonies, and spend time with him" (Deloria, 1997. p. 218).

A final misconception held by researchers is what is best described as "delusions of grandeur". Researchers in Participatory Action Research (PAR) can often fall prey to a false feeling of leadership and hence, control that ultimately has the researcher believing that the process relies heavily upon the researchers' involvement and decision-making abilities (Hagey, 1997; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). This leads to an arrogant approach to research, as many researchers think that the process begins and ends with their involvement without much regard for the benefit and direct involvement of the participants upon which the research was based. While referring specifically to anthropologists, Deloria (1997) comments:

> Anthros expect Indians to have the same perspective as they do, to have an objective culture that can and must be studied and that Indians themselves will study. The anthros' belief no doubt comes from the extreme materialism that has always been present in Western civilization and from their individual experiences in college and graduate school, when they had to study hard and long to master the rudiments of another culture. But knowing what others have observed about another culture does not mean that the scholar emotionally understands that culture, and this point many anthros miss completely. (p. 218)

This emotional understanding comes from the notion that all human beings, within their specific cultures, have a story that tells of their own lives as they know, see and remember them. These stories reflect human experience, and

that experience governs how one formulates meaning. This lived experience is emotional because we are emotional beings who feel. Emotion is a way of being that guides us (Hampton, 1995a). Therefore, to truly understand and make meaning of an experience, one must be affected emotionally in some way.

Having tried to explore and understand these concerns in a more complex way, I now undertook the task of trying to position myself within the web of their implications. Rather than accept my initial, simplistic, somewhat defensive response that I was doing what was best for the people whom I was interested in helping, I now sought to develop a more complex understanding and appreciation for the potential perils of the path I was choosing.

This led me to develop my own understanding about how I would come to view my involvement with Indigenous research, and my motives for working with Native communities.

Personal History

In order to develop this understanding, I have spent time reflecting on my own history in the North and the feelings I have developed towards my work. While teaching in the North, specifically in the Yukon Territory, I had the opportunity to teach many students of different cultures and backgrounds. This cross-cultural exposure brought with it the challenge to effectively relay the curriculum in a meaningful and engaging manner so as to meet the wide range of learning styles, cultural and social conditions.

Appreciating Colonialism's Impact on Education

It became evident from the beginning that many of the students, particularly those of Indigenous descent, showed a real disassociation with the current content and delivery of the curriculum. The current public educational system lacks culturally relevant programming and fails to provide meaningful and motivational experiences to help the student engage in the learning process.

Through my experience as a teacher and curriculum developer involved with Indigenous communities, I have gained insight into some possible reasons for disengagement within these particular communities. As I began to review previous research, I uncovered findings that resonated with my experiences and beliefs.

The lack of Indigenous cultural knowledge and perspectives in the school curriculum has been identified as a significant factor in school failure amongst Indigenous students (Cajete, 1999; Curwen Doige, 2003; Kirkness, 1998; Wilson & Wilson, 2002). These findings have prompted calls for an increase in research that addresses the need for Indigenous cultural knowledge to be part of the public school curriculum to enhance and support classroom learning for Indigenous students. It is also important to discover effective ways for dominant-culture English and/or French teachers to integrate such cultural knowledge into their teaching of the regular curricula of public schools (Kanu, 2005).

Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley (Yupiak), an Indigenous educator, co-director of the Alaska Native Knowledge Network, and faculty member of the University of Alaska, School of Education, explains the dilemma of Indigenous education as follows:

> The incursion of Western society on Indigenous peoples brought about many cultural and psychological disruptions in the flow of life in traditional societies. Since the inception of modern education in the villages, the curricula, policies, textbooks, language of instruction and administration have been in conflict with the Native cultural systems. The modern public schools are not made to accommodate differences in Native worldviews, but to impose another culture that is Western. This has had a confusing effect on the Native students. Alienation and identity crisis of youth and their continual search for meaning are a condition of Native life today. New images of modernity collide with traditional symbols, values and beliefs. (as cited in Emekauwa, 2004, p. 3)

As I acknowledge the influence that colonial forces and Western-style practices in educational institutions have had upon Indigenous identities, I enter my research path with the recognition that I am also a product of those colonial forces, whether I am cognisant of it or not, and bring an identity and a certain way of thinking that may not always be consistent with Indigenous worldviews.

I will refer to my position as a "non-Indigenous researcher". While I may be White, I am Canadian, of Irish descent, a proud Quebecer, English Montrealer and Northerner with a specific past and identity that aligns me with much more than "whiteness", as I believe it is the people, communities and environments that surround us that create a sense of place in which we define our identity. This principle is what guides the practice of place-based education.

Several scholars (e.g. Fixico, 2000; Steinhauer, 2003) have used the term "white" as a justification for strict and limiting classifications of entitlement towards cultural understanding and participation. They call for the exclusion of those who do not possess membership within specific cultural and racial borders. This is an important term to address as I pursue Indigenous research as a non-Indigenous person. Therefore, I use the term "non-Indigenous" to acknowledge that my genetic heritage does not involve a Native American ancestry.

With this developing appreciation for the complexity of my positionality as a "non-Indigenous" researcher, and the tangled web in which that placed me, I began to seek a deeper and stronger appreciation for my motivation. To do this I continued to try to understand my memories of my work in the North. I did this work in the spirit of Hampton's challenge:

> Memory comes before knowledge. Every person's life contains experiences and memories of these experiences. The way it works for me is that I forget those things until I unwrap them, until I actually roll out the sacred medicine bundle of my life and look for those memories. I pick them up and touch them and feel them. And each memory gives me knowledge. (Hampton, 1995a, p. 53)

To follow this advice, I attempted to "unwrap" my lived experience through a process of reflection that involves acquiring knowledge from memory. This allowed me to better understand my motives, be respectful of the values of others and created a positive relationship with the participants and the communities involved with the research activities. The following two narratives are reflections of my past teaching experiences. To protect the privacy of the individuals, all names have been changed.

My First Class

I begin by returning to a distinctive memory that involves my first full-time job as a teacher. I was a Special Education teacher responsible for a diverse class of students who were diagnosed with a wide range of educational and psychological issues, from Fetal Alcohol Syndrome to schizophrenia. I was completely unprepared to address many of the cultural and social issues that affected the Indigenous students in a Western-style public school. One student's story stands out. I still remember the day I read Randy's background history and information. I was shocked that the administration would place a student with no major learning disabilities in my class. Other than his residency at the local detention centre, Randy's previous history in school seemed quite "normal". I was told this followed protocol and to prepare a place for him in my class.

It is still gut wrenching to recall how Randy naturally tried to disassociate himself from the other students who suffered from psychological and developmental disabilities. For instance, he chose a large storage closet as his work area and, desperate for social interaction, he would dart out the door with his "guard(ian)" in tow to find other Indigenous students as soon as the school bell rang.

I was shocked, and was left feeling very naïve, when he told me how he purposely and selectively broke laws that had eventually brought him to the "local youth jail", and consequently my class. A warm place to sleep, three meals a day and lots of things to do was his take on being in jail. He was from a

remote community that he was desperate to leave, therefore getting arrested, removed from his community and placed in the local jail was his way of meeting his needs.

As I began to integrate myself more into the school population, I realized Randy was not in the minority and that his story was similar to that of many other Indigenous students. As I worked with Randy on his Individual Education Program (IEP) I realized that, besides a class on Athabaskan Language, the school provided very little Indigenous knowledge or culturally implicit activities for Indigenous students to access, nor any real process to ensure cultural context in the curriculum. My relationship with Randy and other Indigenous students who followed him had a tremendous impact on my critical awareness of the lack of current educational practices in many public schools that address Indigenous students.

Experiential Programs

As my teaching career progressed, I was fortunate to be involved in the development and delivery of semester long experiential educational programs. These were originally developed to address the lack of engagement of predominantly Indigenous students in the secondary school system. The students were selected based on their lack of motivation and engagement within their present educational environment. One of these students, Tony, was an Indigenous student from the local Yukon First Nations band. He arrived the first day with two of his cousins. I had been briefed about their families' unstable history and previous "issues" with the system. Tony came with minimal reading and writing skills and, to this day, I am amazed at how students, like Tony, can manoeuvre their way through the educational system without any effective support at addressing those basic learning skills.

Tony thrived in the outdoors. He spent most of his time trapping, hunting and just living in the open air. He was a proven leader when it came to many of the program's activities which integrated curriculum with local community-

based projects and outdoor excursions. But he was also seen as an outcast as his two cousins were not impressed by his willingness to participate in the activities and would mock him constantly about his so-called "wannabe-whiteness". Many of the non-Indigenous students left no place for him either, as he was not a great reader or writer, and was naïve when it came to social norms or the "cool" factor of the typical teenage student.

Nevertheless, Tony spent most of his time at school that semester and participated in the majority of the school projects that were held outside of school time and on weekends. He was only required to participate in one extra-curricular project, yet he was usually the first to arrive. This was a drastic change from previous semesters at the public school where, I was told, his low class attendance was a major issue. He went on to enrol in the next year's experiential program and continued on the same path of success.

When he reached the last year of his schooling, I was teaching a program designated for students with high academic achievements who had shown previous success but who had lost their path while navigating adolescence. Despite the suggestions of many teachers and administrators that Tony lacked "educational skills", I accepted him into the program. I believed the program was designed to suit someone like him as it integrated academic subjects into extended field trips that visited numerous communities and post-secondary institutions.

While Tony and I both recognized that academics would be a serious challenge for him, the many integrated components and life skills associated with this program were beneficial to him. Again, he had to deal with the scrutiny of his classmates as he struggled with most of the academic requirements. Yet when the class moved out to the field, he became the natural leader. Though he failed some of his courses that semester and learned that he had no interest in the pure and applied sciences, he graduated from high school and is currently enrolled in college with the aim of becoming a professional guide when he graduates. He hopes to bring people out on the land, possibly for hunting or

fishing trips. He feels a strong connection to his culture's traditional ways and wishes to teach others and to continue the traditions his grandparents taught him.

Tony and others who followed him proved to me that there is a place for the Indigenous student in the Western school system, *if* the system is willing to acknowledge the student's cultural differences and provide a medium to access cultural knowledge and contextualize activities. Through our many talks, Tony also helped me understand some of the difficulties and barriers many Indigenous students face within the school system and in Western communities. The social aspects of being an Indigenous student within the present educational setting are complex and debilitating for many. Tony reinforced my belief that experiential and outdoor education models can have a positive influence on Indigenous learners, by incorporating traditional knowledge, integrating subjects, and developing the connection to place as major components in the curriculum.

Developing Reflexivity

> As Indigenous researchers, we must have a clear understanding of the world view that grounds our work. With that world view embedded, we can choose the research methods, tools, or techniques that we will use. (Steinhauer, 2003, p. 78)

As a non-Indigenous researcher, I also believe there is a need to practice this principle. The narratives told in this chapter explain my motives in researching experiential and place-based educational strategies that integrate traditional knowledge, and also provide contextual learning and engagement.

My time spent with Indigenous students like Randy and Tony gave me a better understanding of the social and educational issues faced by Indigenous students in the present educational system. These experiences support the notion that a lack of Indigenous knowledge and cultural initiatives has resulted in student disengagement (Curwen Doige, 2003). Many Indigenous students see no relevance in the present curriculum that separates knowledge into parts (Cajete, 1999). As well, the current system does not present contextual programming,

which in turn leads to a sense of disassociation with the curricular content and its meaning. Indigenous ways are different from those of Western knowledge (Hampton, 1995b; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). Western knowledge separates "those areas called science from those areas called art and religion. The native knowledge base, on the other hand, integrated those areas of knowledge so that science was both religious and aesthetic" (Cordero, 1995, p.30). This form of integration provides the basis for constructivism and experiential learning.

"Researchers need to have a critical conscience about ensuring that their activities connect in humanizing ways with the Indigenous communities" (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, p. 149). I believe this process begins with respect. When I refer to the notion of respect I mean to not only show manners in the traditional way of 'please and thank you'. "Respect means you listen to others' ideas that you do not insist that your idea prevails. By listening intently you show honour, consider the well being of others, and treat others with kindness and courtesy" (Cree Elder, as cited in Steinhauer, 2003, p. 73).

Reconstructing My Positionality

The next theme of questions posed by some concerned professors challenged my understanding of the field I was entering: "Did I completely understand that I would most likely not be welcomed into the 'Indigenous Education' community?"

As a passionate educator who had aspirations of continuing my academic career at the post-secondary level working with Indigenous teachers and students in the North, this had tremendous implications for my advancement. I was warned of a possible lack of publications and employment, and the constant scrutiny that surrounded a non-Indigenous academic in the field of Indigenous education. I was even offered other fully-funded research projects that did not involve Indigenous issues to pursue in my doctoral studies. It came down to making a choice between two paths: taking a simple more straightforward non-

Indigenous path, or taking a more difficult path that would have me directly involved in Indigenous education. Again, frustrated but determined, I chose the latter.

As I have acknowledged in this chapter that my genetic heritage does not have any Native American blood, I believe it important to address the issue of my race as many researchers (e.g. Steinhauer, 2003; Fixico, 2000) have used the term "white" as a justification for strict and defining classifications of entitlement towards cultural understanding and participation.

Race and Culture as Entitlement

Alfred (1999) quotes an Indigenous academic Donald Fixico (Shawnee, Sac & Fox, Creek, Seminole) who claims that "white" people can never understand Indigenous values because they "come from a different place on earth." Fixico says: "Anglo-Americans and natives are fundamentally different. These differences in world-view and in the values that go with them mean that there will always exist an Indian view and a White view of the earth" (as cited in Alfred, 1999, p. 20). As part of Western society, strict distinctions that differentiate one race from another have traditionally been drawn. This is contrary to Indigenous traditions, which see all human beings as equal members in the social reality of the natural world. The concept of differing world views imposes important questions for non-Indigenous researchers like myself, who search for our place within the context of Indigenous research. Steinhauer (2003) suggests that "white" society holds a very different world view than Indigenous traditions and therefore, non-Indigenous researchers have a theory of knowledge that conflicts with Indigenous epistemologies which would in turn lead to harmful outcomes in research.

I refuse to accept a "predetermined" view of the world that dismisses free will and critical thinking. If we agree with Fixico and Steinhauer's view of cultures and values, then we are predetermined in our place and actions, and our view of the world is preordained. The notion of change outside the rigid borders

of one's culture would be impossible. Alfred (1999) also rejects these assertions by suggesting there is a real danger in subscribing to the notion of fixed views and cultures that cannot change. He responds:

> Fixico's polarization of Indian and European values suggests he believes that white people are incapable of attaining the level of moral development that Indigenous societies promote among their members with respect to, for example, the land. Not only does this dichotomization go against the traditional Native belief in a universal reality, but it offers a convenient excuse for those who support the state in its colonization of Indigenous nations and exploitation of the earth. (Alfred, 1999, p. 20, 21)

I am not a "wannabe-Indian who is caught up in some Indigenous Jesus movement, or some self-righteous piety … that commissions everyone to be spiritual whether they understand it or not" (Deloria, 1997, p. 213). Instead, I have principles that are similarly aligned with various Indigenous traditional teachings.

Connectedness

Through my experiences I have developed a respect for and an affirmation of the interconnectedness among all living things. I am in accord with Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) who claims that many minority group researchers value the importance of making connections and affirming connectedness. "Connectedness positions individuals in sets of relationships with other people and with the environment. Many Indigenous creation stories link people through genealogy to the land, to stars and other places in the universe, to birds and fish and animals, insects and plants" (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, p. 148). This notion of connectedness is one that I hope to acknowledge in many facets of my research. It will be a crucial theme as I endeavour to pursue research methodologies that seek community participation in all aspects of the research process, and that propel the participants towards empowerment. "Connecting is related to issues of

identity and place, to spiritual relations and community wellbeing" (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, p. 149).

The concept of connectedness also drives my interest in experiential learning, and the need for an integration of Indigenous traditional perspectives and cultural knowledge into Indigenous schools. I believe this process would be effective in addressing some of the issues that lead to the disengagement of Indigenous students in the current educational system.

One's "story" – each person's lived experience – is the basis on which one's identity is formed and creates the lens through which the world is seen. Our story is connected to place, as we seek, create and define ourselves in terms of what is understandable and attractive. Instead of creating a false sense of membership and divided unions, I think we need to start acknowledging the lived experience and communal influence that bring us together through similar social values.

Reflections

My initial resistance to the questioning of my positionality was most definitely spurred on by my own ignorance. While I acknowledged my colonial heritage, I tried to disassociate myself from it and concentrate on improving things in the present – which, I am told, is a typical "male" response. I realize now that those questions posed to me by my colleagues, such as: "Why are you interested in Indigenous education?"; "What are your motives as a non-Indigenous researcher?"; and "Do you completely understand that you will most likely not be welcomed into the 'Indigenous Education' community?" were not meant as criticisms or as the basis of divisional walls between races, but rather as a vehicle for my epistemological evolution as a non-Indigenous researcher.

I benefited tremendously from addressing these questions. The journey informed me of the specifics of the history of Indigenous education, the differing values held within not only Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems,

but between Indigenous systems themselves that include the conditions, rights, and way of life of many groups, cultures, communities and peoples. It also provided me with the tools to understand my evolution as an educator, and to put together the fragmented pieces of my experiences that determine my worldview so that I was able to make some sense of my deep commitment to Indigenous education. This critical journey also helped me develop an epistemological humility that I believe will serve me in fostering a better understanding of and relationship with other people and groups. My intentions, on the other hand, have not changed. They are, however, more informed, and therefore have a better chance of achieving success.

I do not want to leave this point without acknowledging my position of privilege. I understand because of my colonial heritage I can speak to these issues with some "ease" and have the option to take "the easier path" if I wish, while others do not have that freedom. But I do not believe that my privileged position should deter my ultimate goal of working with other educators in improving the educational setting for Indigenous students.

I acknowledge that I am non-Indigenous, yet I have a story that includes an Indigenous context and lived experiences with Indigenous people. I am also cognizant that I am a product of the colonial forces that have traditionally dismissed Indigenous methodologies in exchange for the dominant Western paradigm. My interests as an educator are in addressing the lack of engagement of Indigenous students in the current education system. This path is not an easy one.

The following chapter is a summary of the writings of mostly Indigenous scholars with respect to the past, present and future of Indigenous education in Canada. Issues of identity, self-determination, local control, community, culture and a return to traditional-holistic model of education are investigated. As a non-Indigenous researcher, I believe it is crucial and ultimately my responsibility to develop an understanding of Indigenous education, as articulated by Indigenous scholars.

Chapter 3: Indigenous Education in Canada

Introduction

This chapter examines where Indigenous education stands through both historical and contemporary views by attending to Indigenous voices. I have chosen to research and review Indigenous education from an Indigenous perspective. I believe it is crucial, and ultimately my responsibility as a non-Indigenous researcher and educator involved in educational practices within an Indigenous framework, that I develop an understanding of Indigenous education from an Indigenous point of view. As it has been previously acknowledged that "story" and a "sense of place" are crucial components within the Indigenous context (Alfred, 1999; Cook-Lynn, 1996; Ortiz, 1981), I am compelled to search out these stories through exploring Indigenous voices so that I may gain a better understanding of Indigenous education. In order to establish the context in which my research is situated, I provide, in the following pages, an overview of the history of Indigenous education in Canada. I also expand on selected issues that were found to be commonly voiced by several Indigenous scholars, educators, and the study's research participants as important topics within the field of Indigenous education.

Since European contact, there has been much debate over the education of North American Indigenous people and their success in mainstream society. Historically, this debate has mainly focused on the Aboriginal "problem" and how to encourage, but more often, force Indigenous people to assimilate into the primarily white, middle-class, Christian culture that has traditionally dominated North America, through the use of a formal education system (Adams, 1989; York, 1990). Due to the strength of retention and preservation efforts of Indigenous culture however, efforts to this end have largely been futile (Brade, Duncan, & Sokal, 2003).

The methods of assimilation have been notoriously barbaric and cruel, most notably in the residential school system. For many Indigenous people, the notion of Western formal education, as it has historically been understood, leads to the expectation that they abandon their culture and frustrated intellectualism. Bailey provides a clear reason for this: "education is legislated by a white government" (2000, p. 128). This has lead to claims that even though formal education is legally required, its value to Indigenous people is questionable (Adams, 1989).

Many Indigenous people have become familiar with, and ultimately pursue, those facets of Western culture that denote "good things" according to the dominant group, such as the accumulation of wealth and consumerism. Unfortunately, this has come at a cost. For many Indigenous people these rewards are out of reach. It is argued that success for an Indigenous person in mainstream education may mean "some form of personal amputation" (Bailey, 2000, p. 126) and, consequently, the pursuit of mainstream rewards should not be assumed to be a healthy or a valuable goal.

The current societal framework seems to dictate that "upward mobility in Canada is dictated in large part by education levels" (Brade, et al., 2003, p. 236) and, for a number of reasons, Indigenous people in Canada are not achieving the educational levels of their counterparts in mainstream society (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Indigenous dropout rates are overwhelming, fertility rates are about twice as high as the national average and the risk of suicide and risky behaviour, such as alcohol and drug abuse, is very alarming: six times the national average in Canada, and significantly higher than in the United States (Miller, 1989; Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000; Robertson, 2003; Statistics Canada, 1998a).

Present Indicators

"The current state of Indigenous education is unacceptable" (Assembly of First Nations, 2005, p. 3). The majority of Indigenous youth leave the school system without the requisite skills for employment, and without the language and cultural knowledge of their people. Rather than nurturing the individual, the schooling experience typically erodes identity and self-worth (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, p. 434). This disconnection with culture may lead to a decrease in self-acceptance. Studies of Indigenous youth found significantly lower levels of self-acceptance among those in their early teens compared with their white counterparts (Bognar, 1981). As children get older, this sense of self-acceptance becomes worse at the postsecondary stage (Harter, 1999). According to Kirkness (Cree) and Barnhardt (1991), this may be a leading cause of the historical under representation of Indigenous people among college and university graduates in Canada and the United States.

Statistics Canada (1998b) reports that even though the Indigenous population in Canada has increased their participation in educational systems and in the labour market compared to previous generations, the education gap between Indigenous people and the non-Indigenous population in Canada remains large and continues to grow. Indigenous people over 15 years old still remain half as likely as other Canadians of the same age to hold a postsecondary degree or diploma, one fifth as likely to be a university graduate, and over twice as likely to have not finished high school (Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000; York, 1990).

Indigenous students leave school before graduation at a higher rate than non-Indigenous youth (Brady, 1996; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], 1996) The Auditor General of Canada's (2000) report confirmed a number of the RCAP's findings. In 2000, only 37% of First Nations students completed high school compared with 65% of the general population. According to the RCAP, only 9% of these students would enter university; and only 3% would complete their university degree program (1996). In Saskatchewan, like

many other provinces and territories, the situation is dire. The Indigenous student dropout rate peaked at 90.5% in 1981, yet despite various interventions, the rate among Indigenous youth at age 15 remains over 60% (Melnechenko & Horsman, 1998).

Furthermore, the aging non-Indigenous population (median age of 38.8 years) contrasts with the growing younger Indigenous population (median age 20.1 years) (Statistics Canada, 2003). Tymchak (2001) has argued that "the growth in the proportion of school-aged children of Aboriginal ancestry in the provinces and territories is a fact of enormous educational significance" (p. 8).

Indigenous people often live in unacceptable conditions of neglect, malnutrition, discrimination, and poverty (Kelm, 1998). Indigenous youth face other challenges, such as single parent families, geographic isolation, poor economic conditions, and emotional and physical abuse (van der Woerd & Cox, 2003). Indigenous children from Canada and United States have the highest risk, among minority groups, to live in poverty (Adams, 1989; Clarke, 1997; Myers, 1993).

An issue which is far too common, and can potentially be even more detrimental, is the tendency of researchers and educators to "mislabel ... the conditions of poverty as the conditions of culture and its incongruence with the school environment" (Clarke, 1997, p. 63). All too familiar is the predisposition to mistake minority-group behaviour with minority culture. This misconception attributes the behaviours that are common to groups that wield little or no power, and/or live in poverty, as being an innate characteristic of that group's cultural value and belief system (Macionis, Clarke, & Gerber, 1994). It is those assumptions that blame the victim and assume that the cultural values of Indigenous people are what hinder their upward mobility into the relative affluence of the rest of society (Adams, 1989). Macionis, et al. (1994) state:

Such attitudes assume that social disadvantage stems from personal deficiency. This stereotypical view ignores some key facts: that most

poor people in Canada are white and that most members of visible minorities work as hard as anyone else and are not poor. In this case the bit of truth in the stereotype is that, proportionately, Natives.... are more likely than whites to be poor. (p. 325)

This misconception is a result of minorities, such as Indigenous, historically being offered substandard educational programs (Adams, 1989; Frideres, 1998; O'Brien, 1990; York, 1990). A 1984 report issued by the Alberta government concluded that Indigenous students "are being treated as second-class citizens by our educational system." It continued its critical examination by writing that there is "much to be done to redress the neglect, ill-conceived policies and paternalistic approach that has for too long symbolized the state of Native education" (York, 1990, p. 51).

Background/ History

To best understand the complex social issues faced by Indigenous people, "researchers are expected, by their communities and by the institutions which employ them, to have some form of historical and critical analysis" (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, p. 5). It is in response to this call for critical investigation that I include the voices and insights of various Indigenous theorists to frame this historical synopsis of Indigenous education in Canada.

Early on, the debate amongst European-Western colonizers, in regards to the people they colonized, consisted mainly of whether Indigenous people were in fact human beings and, if so, did they deserve human rights. These attitudes formed the foundation of Indian policies in 1815 (Tobias, 1976).

In the 1850s, cooperation between the government and churches was established and facilitated the expansion of residential schools. The belief was that residential schools would be effective in assimilating Indigenous children who were living in unacceptable conditions, and would separate them from their uncivilized parents and cultural traditions (Tobias, 1976). The residential schools

had disastrous outcomes, including the death of at least one quarter of the children in the schools' care (Kelm, 1998). In 1960, Indigenous people won the right to vote, which lead to the eventual demise of the residential school system (Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council, 1996).

History has shown that Indigenous peoples of North America have been, in varying degrees, consistently denied the right to control their own education since they first came into contact with Europeans. An overview of the education of Indigenous people in Canada can be best summarized in four phases, which includes varying forms of educational systems with differing policies: (1) traditional education; (2) education provided by the church and the federal government; (3) government education through a policy of integration; and, (4) local control (Charters-Voght, 1999).

Phase 1-Traditional Education

Pre-Contact—Traditional Indigenous Education

Long before Europeans arrived in North America, Indigenous people applied their own form of education. It was an education in which the community was the classroom, its members were the teachers, and every adult was responsible for ensuring that each child learned how to live a good life (Kirkness, 1998; National Indian Brotherhood, 1972). This type of education was found in all daily life,

> in relationship of one to another, in humility, in sharing, in cooperating, in relationship to nature--the land, the animals, in recognition of the Great Spirit, in the way our people thought, felt, and perceived their world. Traditionally, our people's teachings addressed the total being, the whole community, in the context of a viable living culture. (Kirkness, 1999, p. 15)

Gardner (1984) states that Indigenous education was traditionally holistic, whereby the children were taught the spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical components of their society. This traditional form of education

prepared a child to be a functional and contributing member of society. The children were taught the skills that would ensure their survival as a nation of people and a stable society (Charters-Voght, 1999).

Traditional education was based on the importance of family and the community. Learning focused on the necessities of daily living. The knowledge transferred to the young stressed the importance of observation, utilization and respect of their environment. The children were taught the importance of independence and self-reliance. Through observation and practice, children learned the arts of hunting, trapping, fishing, farming, gathering food, childrearing and building shelters. The local environment provided all the necessary tools for experiential learning (Kirkness, 1998).

Indigenous thought promoted knowledge gained through reflection on one's experiences in the world and on the land. "You don't ask questions when you grow up. You watch and listen and wait, and the answer will come to you. It is yours then, not like learning in school" (Larry Bird, as cited in Beck & Walters, 1977, p. 51). Those daily lived experiences were then re-storied for others to learn. This speaks to the re-conceptualization that occurs when making meaning from experiences (experiential education) and then passing on that meaning through story so that it may be part of a collective benefit (Graveline, 2002).

The purpose of education was to transmit an "oral culture" (Ing, 1990). Blondin (as cited in Ing, 1990) describes the important role that Elders played in the transmission of knowledge and culture:

> Elders are libraries ... their knowledge, their skills, attitudes and their experiences constitute the record of knowledge and the wisdom of the people. Their memories serve as the collective knowledge and wisdom. Education is the process of communicating this knowledge and wisdom through oral language, actions and behaviour. (p. 22)

"An ultimate value of oral tradition was to recreate a situation for someone who had not lived through it so that the listener could benefit directly from the narrator's experience" (Cruikshank, 1992, p. 339).

Many scholars (Cajete, 1994; Hampton, 1995b; Kirkness, 1999) call for a redefinition of education, which incorporates much of this traditional style of education that was promoted before European contact. Yet, it is important to note that many changes have occurred to Indigenous education since contact that have redefined the Indigenous perspective.

Phase 2- Education Provided by the Church and the Federal Government: Residential Schools

Contact—Colonial Domination

In the early 17th Century, mission schools were established by European missionaries, who believed that this would be the most appropriate way of "civilizing" the Indigenous population. In the 1800s, the concept of the day school was replaced by the residential (boarding) school. The highest recorded number of residential schools, which were located across Canada, was 80 in 1933. The enrolments ranged anywhere from 50 to over 400 students of all ages. Most residential schools were phased out in the 1960s (Kirkness, 1999).

Residential schools attempted to segregate the Indigenous children from the perceived negative influences of their family, community and culture. As one government inspector stated in the mid 1800s:

> Little can be done with him (the Indigenous child). He can be taught to do a little farming, and at stock raising, and to dress in a more civilized manner, but that is all. The child who goes to a day school learns little while his tastes are fashioned at home, and his inherited aversion to toil is in no way combated. (Indian Affairs Branch, 1879-1880, as cited in Kirkness, 1999, p. 16)

Residential schools were oppressive in nature, as generations were removed from their homes and reserves and forced into a different childhood that was contradictory to their own cultural upbringing. The curriculum in the residential schools consisted mainly of the three "R's" –reading, writing, and arithmetic. According to Ing (1990), the government's educational policy was "assimilation of the Native people into the dominant society.... The task was the systematic, formalized transmission of the dominant society's values, skills, culture, religion, and language" (p. 4-5).

Residential schools had high mortality rates among students. It is estimated that as many as 50% of the children died while at boarding school, from diseases such as smallpox and tuberculosis. Loneliness is believed to have factored into many of the deaths. Unfortunately, only recently has the true devastation suffered by many residential school students been made public. Horrific accounts of physical, mental and sexual abuse have been shared publicly as part of a formal settlement provided by the Government of Canada, which has provided monetary restitution to many of the survivors. I would like to note that while I was conducting my research, sitting in a small rural northern airport, the "official" apology delivered from the Government of Canada was broadcast on a small overhead television. Everything stopped for fifteen minutes as everyone in the airport including staff and airline crew watched the apology on Wednesday, June 11, 2008 at approximately 3 pm.

Ing (1990) reminds us of the devastating effect the residential school experience has had on the present generation of Indigenous children who now suffer from their parents' and grandparents' wounds and bitter memories of the residential school experience. She concludes, "generations of breaking up Native families have severely undermined the role of the extended family and kinship networks" (p. 6). An Ojibway Elder's experience of separation from his parents helps illuminate this:

> The timing of this separation could not have been worse. Right during
> the time from ages six to twelve, when we were shaping our values and

our conscience and really needed them, our parents were not there to support us. I also was very bitter towards my mother for sending us off to the government school and for the manner in which she did it. I resented the schools, the teachers, the government ... I am sure that all this rage gave rise to my growing desire to be a bombardier. It was the only way I could strike back at the world for all the hurts I had suffered. (McPeek, 1988, p. 10, 12)

The result of having generations of Indigenous children separated from their parents, denying them their community, cultural teachings and even their Indigenous language has had devastating effects. It is a dark period in Canadian history, and the negative repercussions it has had on Indigenous education are prevalent today. The weakening of Indigenous society as a whole can be attributed to the residential school experience. Cultural conflict, alienation, poor self-esteem, lack of preparation for jobs and for life in general, disengagement from schooling, can be traced back to the residential schools. This affects not only those directly associated with residential schools but their children and their communities (Kirkness, 1999).

There is no doubt that the residential school has imposed traumatic and complex challenges on Indigenous students, and this has led to the frustration and resistance to attend school in the structured environment that the current Western education system provides (Swanson, 2003). Some scholars (e.g. Kelm, 1998) counter that the atrocities performed in residential schools act as catalysts for Indigenous people to develop a strong sense of pride and power to resist assimilation; power to create means to preserve their identity; and power to control and survive as a community. By no means should the strength and determination of Indigenous people, demonstrated through their resistance to colonialization, mask the fact that the oppression and resulting carnage of residential schooling had debilitating effects upon Indigenous societies.

Phase 3- Government Education through a Policy of Integration

Federal Indigenous Day Schools—Integration

Gardner (1984) marks 1948 as the start of the next phase of Indigenous education, when a special federal joint committee initiated the move toward the integration of the Indigenous people into the public school system. Not unlike the colonial policy of the residential schools, the "integration movement" focused on the assimilation of Indigenous people into the dominant culture. The integration movement was not always a positive experience for Indigenous children. According to Gardner, it was implemented without much formal preparation at all stages of the educational system. Children were removed from regular classrooms and placed, often without justification, in special and remedial programs.

Kirkness (1999) critically describes the process of integration as the practice of simply having Indigenous students attend public schools. The concept of integration involved little or no consultation with Indigenous parents, bands or organizations. No particular preparation of teachers or of curriculum was made to accommodate the children of another culture. The integration concept was a continuation of government control over the lives of Indigenous people. Through the process of assimilation, Indigenous cultures were not respected, and in most cases, not even recognized; rather, Indigenous people were forced into being absorbed into non-Indigenous society. Chief Dan George in his soliloquy, *A Talk to Teachers*, made this comment on integration:

> You talk big words of integration in the schools. Does it really exist? Can we talk of integration until there is social integration ... unless there is integration of hearts and minds you have only a physical presence ... and the walls are as high as the mountain range. (as cited in Kirkness, 1999, p. 18)

According to Kirkness (1999), there has been no notable improvement in the overall achievement of Indigenous children in integrated schools. She claims

that studies on the effects of integration have shown that Indigenous children reveal patterns that can be identified as alienation and identity conflict. "The Indian child is caught between two cultures and is, therefore, literally outside of, and between both. The panacea of integration failed to provide the answer to education for Indian students" (Kirkness, 1999, p. 18).

Though most Indigenous scholars cite the negative effects integration had on Indigenous students, it can be said that the placement of day schools on reserve lands was an improvement compared to residential boarding schools. While it has been acknowledged that the "integration movement" did little to address the cultural challenges in the curriculum, children were able to participate in the life of the community and remain with parents and siblings (Kirkness, 1999).

Phase 4- Local Control: Reserve Schools

The history of education for Indigenous people in North America has consistently included repeated recommendations that Indigenous people should be able to exercise local control and self-government over their own schools. In Canada this was most effectively articulated in the 1972 policy paper calling for *Indian Control of Indian Education*. In the United States this recommendation was first put forward in the 1928 *Meriam Report*, and it has been repeated in nearly every major Native American education report and set of recommendations since then (Barnhardt, 1999).

For the purposes of this dissertation, I have chosen to focus my attention on the National Indian Brotherhoods' (now the Assembly of First Nations) policy paper calling for *Indian Control over Indian Education*. The intent of this document can be best described as the "experience of education from one of assimilation to one of self-expression and self-determination" for Indigenous people (Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000, p. xi). *Indian Control of Indian Education* (1972) heralded an era when education was seen as a way to revitalize Indigenous cultures and economies (Abele, Dittburner, & Graham, 2000) and to

redevelop how Indigenous people govern education. The National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) paper was designed to stop the integration movement in its tracks and set in motion a process of devolution in Indigenous Education (Charters-Voght, 1999). The NIB (1972) demanded "a constitutional amendment, or at the very least, the introduction of federal legislation that explicitly recognizes the inherent right of First Nations to self-government, including control over education" (p. 15). Initiatives began to emerge, supported by Indigenous groups and various provincial educational bodies, which were designed to help eliminate "barriers" between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in order to foster new relationships and educational attainment through curriculum development initiatives and educational governance options (Carr-Stewart, 2003).

Kirkness (1986) states that the Indian Control policy placed the responsibility of Indigenous education where it rightfully belonged—with the Indigenous people. The Assembly of First Nations [AFN] (1988) stated that this policy paper "firmly laid out the principles of 'control' and 'parental responsibility' as the bases for First Nations jurisdiction over education" (p. 12). Guidelines were created for the four major areas identified: responsibility, programs, teachers, and facilities and services. The policy provided "a solid philosophical direction" for Indigenous leaders and educators (Archibald, 1984, p. 35). The Indian Control policy affirmed the right of Indigenous people to educate their own children and serves as an important guide for those seeking local control (Charters-Voght, 1999).

After years of colonial control in the forms of church and government making educational decisions for Indigenous people, it finally became time for Indigenous people to reclaim the right to speak for their children, to participate actively in determining what they should learn, how they should learn, and who should teach them (Kirkness, 1998). Many Indigenous scholars and educators believe that Indigenous people are the best judges of the educational needs of Indigenous children. Charters-Voght (1999) states clearly why Indigenous

people want control over their education: "(1) existing educational policies have failed to meet First Nations needs; (2) local control will allow First Nations people to create a school environment more relevant and conducive to learning; and (3) local control can help to address First Nations' social, economic, and political problems" (p. 69).

Over the next three decades, there was "a clear shift from thinking about control in terms of authority and devolution to thinking about education in terms of self-government" (AFN, 1988, p. 15).

To conclude this examination of the history of Indigenous education, I quote Eber Hampton (Chickasaw) (1995b), in his article *Towards a Redefinition of Indian Education*, who I believe best summarizes the details and purposes of Indigenous education in five stages of a continuum:

1. Traditional Indigenous education (prior to contact);
2. Education for self-determination (involving a few test schools that were shut down by the United States government and which included Cherokee, Creek, and Yup'ik);
3. Education for assimilation (the destructive residential schools);
4. Education by Indigenous (Native educators administering a colonial-based curriculum, employing colonial methods and values); and
5. Indigenous education *sui generis*: Hampton calls this Indian education "a thing of its own kind" that is, an education that is based on the learning styles and teaching methods employed by Indigenous people in historic and contemporary times (Hampton, 1995b).

I believe that presently, stage 4 delineated by Hampton (1995b) best describes the current state of much Indigenous education. Stage 5 represents some of the modern alternative educational systems that are making positive headway and hopefully, will represent the majority of Indigenous educational institutions in the future.

Issues Arising

In what follows I have chosen to expand on selected issues that were found to be commonly voiced by several Indigenous scholars, educators, and the study's research participants as important topics within the field of Indigenous education.

Community and Family

Indigenous students' success rates in educational institutions are increased when family is involved (Epstein, 1995). Melnechenko and Horsman (1998) identify family influence as one of the major factors contributing to the educational success of Indigenous students: "Educators have come to know that there is a positive correlation between success at school and positive family influence, support, and relationships" (p. 9). Without family involvement Indigenous students are less likely to succeed in school (Bazylak, 2002).

Parental responsibility, as stated in *Indian Control of Indian Education* (NIB, 1972), recognizes that parents must enjoy the same fundamental decision-making rights about their children's education as other parents across Canada. Today many band councils and their designated authorities run the schools. Although membership on the band councils and school authorities includes parents, the intention of the policy was to include the parents of all school children in the daily shaping and running of the schools (Kirkness, 1998).

Local Control

Despite the impact of the policy paper *Indian Control of Indian Education* (NIB, 1972) and the devolution of educational control from government to Indigenous groups, there are still few Indigenous communities that have substantive (rather than superficial) systems in place for local decision making. For those communities who do have local control mechanisms in place, long-term sustainability is an issue. Many Indigenous institutions that are responsible for educating Indigenous students (K-12 and post secondary) show strong vocal support for Indigenous control, yet a true commitment to change

and implementation of more meaningful schooling is lacking. Many educational facilities, especially schools or post secondary institutions whose Indigenous faculty or staff remain in the minority and have not yet achieved critical mass, dismiss recommendations that call for this type of reform (Barnhardt, 1999).

The issue of funding has a definite impact on reform, as presently there is no known funding provided by the Canadian government to Indigenous schools for engaging the community in a process of collaboration and connection with the school. Therefore Indigenous schools are limited by federal financial support in fostering schools that reflect their own community beliefs, practices and goals, this despite a call to the Minister of Indian Affairs for "a thoughtful and action-oriented strategy for First Nation education" (Ministers National Working Group on Education, 2002, p. 3). The authors of the Final Report of the Ministers National Working Group on Education (2002) argued, "there must be a definitive and legal role for First Nations in all aspects of education, including decision-making, planning, implementation and evaluation of educational policies and programs in First Nations education" (p. 3).

Although the federal government promoted devolution of control in principle, current federal government policies are failing to meet First Nations' needs (Charters-Voght, 1999). Kirkness (1987) cites the following reasons why Indigenous control is being hindered. First, bands are only operating their schools; actual control and decision making is still attached to the federal government. Second, the Department of Indian Affairs still controls the funds for educational programs. Third, there is no legislation to recognize the legal transfer of authority to the bands. The Assembly of First Nations (1988) suggests "deficiencies in legislation, policies, and administrative practices must be amended or changed to be consistent with the goals of First Nations people" (p. 82). Kirkness (1987) claims that under the current situation, bands do not have complete control and are working as civil servants caught in federal bureaucracy. The AFN (1988) has stated that First Nations education authorities "must comply with federal directives or be subject to reprisal or loss of resources" (p. 13). This

had led to instability within Indigenous schools, a weakening of family and community support, and ultimately a transfer of Indigenous children to the provincial public school systems. The AFN claims that present funding structures are designed to keep Indigenous schools under-resourced and ultimately shift the responsibility of Indigenous education "away from the federal government to the provincial and territorial systems" (p. 13).

The ideas of complete devolution of educational powers by the federal government, and true local control and educational reform being accomplished by Indigenous groups, seem contradictory when funding is still directly administered by federal government agencies.

Identity

It has been proposed that at the heart of many of the problems in Indigenous education is the issue of identity. Issues of identity are directly related with those of educational achievement. Strong cultural identity and the retention of heritage have been identified as important factors in predicting the academic achievement of Native Americans (Brade, Duncan, & Sokal, 2003; Deyhle, 1989; Huffman, Sill, & Brokenleg, 1986; Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000). As Fitzgerald (1993) points out, "Evidence suggests that, in today's ... society, we are dealing less with the revival of ethnicity (language and custom) and more with a resurgence of ethnic consciousness (assertions of identity)" (p. 83).

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) states that:

In public schools, the absence of support for Aboriginal identities is overwhelming: no Aboriginal high school teachers; only a limited curriculum dealing with contemporary Aboriginal languages, cultures, history and political issues; an emphasis on intellectual cognitive achievement at the expense of spiritual, social and physical development; and the marginalization of youth in decision making about their education. (p. 477)

Tierney (as cited in Kirkness & Barnhadt, 1991) quotes one student who had dropped out in his first attempt at college after two semesters, and then returned to the local community college ten years later with a different cultural perspective:

I think White people think education is good, but Indian people often have a different view. I know what you're going to say--that education provides jobs and skills. It's true. That's why I'm here. But a lot of these kids, their parents, they see education as something that draws students away from who they are. I would like to tell them (at the university) that education shouldn't try and make me into something I'm not. That's what I learned when I wasn't here--who I am. And when I learned that, then I could come back here. I sort of walked away for a while and then came back. It's one of the best gifts I've ever had. But a lot of us just walk away. (p. 11)

Wilson (2001) tackles the claim that many Indigenous people suffer from an identity crisis. It is explained that many Indigenous people may be trying to negotiate and reconcile the differences between their notion of self-as-relationship and the Western individuated notion of self. He states those individuals who have the insight to recognize this difference and simply accept it without trying to make it an "either-or conflict" are liberated from that struggle.

The identity of Indigenous peoples, whose concept of self is inextricably connected to community and place, contradicts the concept of self held by many Euro-Canadians whose identity can be summarized in an independence of the individual. The self-as-relationship of Indigenous people, who understand themselves as constituted by their relationships with all living things, extends beyond the notion of self-in-relation (Wilson, 2001).

Kay (1983) describes the Indigenous student who possesses a strong sense of identity: "the Native student with a strong cultural identity and a sense of Native history is the student who remains in school longer, enjoys ... success,

and has higher aspirations in his occupational outlook" (p. 30, see also Kirkness, 1998).

Brade et al. (2003) claim that the educational system needs to include motivators, such as being taught about Indigenous culture and history, having Indigenous role models, speaking a Native language, attending fewer schools, and the presence of cultural participation. This would increase educational achievement levels in the Indigenous population. They go on to cite Kay (1983) and Kirkness (1998) who substantiate their claim that the presence of like role models, Native language(s), and family support in the educational system are all important to the realization of the educational goals of Indigenous people.

One's self-esteem and pride in one's ethnicity is directly associated with group identity (Drapeau, 1995; Fishman, 1991). Historically, images of the group (Indigenous people) have been predominantly negative. Those images that are positive in nature are usually present because they provide a purpose to the dominant society; for example, "good Indians help white people", such as Pocahontas and Tonto (Berkhofer, 1978; Cornelius, 1999; Francis, 1992). A positive representation of Indigenous people should naturally reflect the people's concept of positive identity. Conveying a positive identity to Indigenous people through education can be effectively done using the group's language, customs, and knowledge, as well as telling history from their perspective. Formal schooling has historically failed to do so (Hampton, 1995a; Hebert, 1995; Stairs, 1995).

Cultural Content

More and more Indigenous groups are attempting to integrate Indigenous cultural content into the curriculum. The intent is valiant yet, in general, minimal attention is being put into how the context affects either the process or the product. On the surface, the concept sounds good, but the reality is that it is a complex and difficult process. Wilson and Wilson (2002) compare the process with someone claiming that she or he is going to make a buffalo and rabbit stew

with one buffalo and one rabbit: it would be difficult to find the rabbit in that pot of stew. They make the point that unfortunately even with good intentions and nice sounding concepts, the power differential remains as it has since formal education began.

The evolution of current provincial curricula is developed out of mainstream Canadian society. This curriculum was originally created with its own agenda that promotes its own culture, with its own values, traditions and language. The danger arises when Indigenous cultural content is simply infused into an already dominant system, which can lead to a perpetuation of the existing problem (Wilson & Wilson, 2002). Noley (1981) says, "What we ultimately need may not be a grafting of Indian content and personnel onto European structures, but a redefinition of education" (p. 198). There is a need for the curriculum to be developed from the traditions of Indigenous cultures, not the other way around. Then Indigenous cultures should provide the basis to validate the curriculum (Wilson & Wilson, 2002).

Although it is over 35 years since the policy of *Indian Control of Indian Education* (NIB, 1972) was adopted, there is little evidence of real curriculum change. All resources are needed to realize quality education not only for the children, but for everyone regardless of their level of study. "Education into culture, not culture into education must be our practice, and we must believe the answers are within us" (Kirkness, 1998, p. 12).

With the current movement to incorporate culture-based content into the curriculum of study and the push to include various teaching methods to accommodate various learning styles, there comes the challenge to, as Couture (1985) says, "acquire an understanding of fundamental Native cultural values and to create the conditions for maintenance and reproduction of these values" (p. 7). The priority of Indigenous educators should not solely be to provide applicable delivery according to a theory based on learning styles but to address the understanding and acceptance of the knowledge paradigm from which the students make meaning (Curwen Doige, 2003). For Indigenous students to be

successful, something more than "Indigenous units" are required (Couture, 1985; Pewewardy, 1999). Couture (1985) claims that a "holistic philosophy and psychology of education rooted in traditional Native values" (p. 12) is necessary for traditional "Native learning and Western endeavour" (p. 11) to effectively interact. It is the scope to which Indigenous values are represented in the curriculum that determines the extent to which education can be culturally appropriate for Indigenous students. Much of this responsibility falls upon the classroom teacher to accept and accommodate Indigenous students in the pedagogy and speaks to the importance of effective support (Curwen Doige, 2003). This support can often be found within the student's family and/or community. It is most important that non-Indigenous teachers make these connections with the Indigenous student's community, so that Indigenous values can be appropriately presented from an Indigenous place.

Future

Educators concerned about Indigenous education might well look for factors that create success rather than continue to focus exclusively on the failure of students (Bazylak, 2002).

Eber Hampton (as cited in Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991, p. 14) delineates what he considers important towards the development of an "Indian theory of education." He lists the following as twelve "standards" on which to judge any such effort:

- S*pirituality* - an appreciation for spiritual relationships;
- *Service* - the purpose of education is to contribute to the people;
- *Diversity* - Indigenous education must meet the standards of diverse tribes and communities;
- *Culture* - the importance of culturally determined ways of thinking, communicating and living;
- *Tradition* - continuity with tradition;

- *Respect* - the relationship between the individual and the group recognized as mutually empowering;

- *History* - appreciation of the facts of Indigenous history, including the loss of the continent and continuing racial and political oppression;

- *Relentlessness* - commitment to the struggle for good schools for Indian children;

- *Vitality* - recognition of the strength of Indigenous people and culture;

- *Conflict* - understanding the dynamics and consequences of oppression;

- *Place* - the importance of sense of place, land and territory; and

- *Transformation* - commitment to personal and societal change.

This list of qualities becomes an effective standard by which many educational institutions can examine and reassess their policies and practices, so that Indigenous students' perspectives and needs begin to be addressed. This is an important first step in the transition towards Hampton's (1995b) "Indigenous education *sui generis*". Some educators involved in this project believe many of these standards can be met through the process of place-based education that uses one's locale as the basis for creating a curriculum that is contextually driven and delivered. The area of place-based education will be researched further in the next chapter: *Constructivist Learning, Experiential and Place-based Education* (Chapter 4).

Conclusion

There have been significant improvements in the educational system for Indigenous people in the last 35 years. Indigenous people have regained control over their education and have moved away from many of the assimilation policies present in the schools before the 1970's. While the legacy of residential

schools still permeates Indigenous culture with destructive effects, healing has begun and self-determination is a priority (Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000).

The concept of empowerment defines the transformation of Indigenous education toward what Hampton (1995b) describes as "Indian education *sui generis*": empowerment not only for individuals but for families, bands, nations and for all Indigenous people. There is a need for not just a different form of education, but a redefinition of education in which Indigenous peoples have input and control at all levels of the process. Indigenous educational institutions are challenged to not just provide an equal education to that of the present formal system but rather a better education: one that respects who they are; one that addresses issues of culture and language, community values and power relations; and, one that ultimately helps them to exercise responsibility over their own lives (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). It will not be an easy task, since in education every situation is unique, especially with the diversity of language, culture and histories of the many First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples (Goulet, 2001).

Educators need to stop focusing solely on "attrition" and "retention" rates while dismissing the cries to end cultural assimilation. Instead they need to find ways for Indigenous practices and beliefs to become a deep rooted and consistent part of the educational experience. There is a need to include the wisdom and spirituality of Indigenous communities and Elder's, to increase and enhance the harmony and balance that is so essential for fulfillment of this educational mission (Hanohano, 1999). It is the responsibility of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous educator in Indigenous education to listen, learn, respect and include the Indigenous perspective in all educative practices. This can be successfully achieved through seeking and engaging community support.

I am compelled to include the words of Quinhagak teacher Larry Strunk who was cited in Carol Barnhardt's (1999) paper *Standing their ground: The integration of community and school in Quinhagak, Alaska,* which imagines a positive future for Indigenous education. The following is his vision for the future in Quinhagak, Alaska:

If I were to look five years into the future, I would envision students leaving school with a sense of cultural and personal identity. They would be able to effectively communicate in both Yup'ik and English. The graduates would be comfortable in discussing complicated subjects in either language. They would feel empowered to attain more education or training, which would lead to economic development of the community and more jobs. They would be lifelong learners and good citizens. The student dropout rate would decline and the number of students who had dropped out, but who were completing GED (General Education Development) courses, would increase. Yup'ik dancing would return. The number of kindergarten students entering school speaking Yup'ik as their first language would remain above 90%. Quinhagak would become a model school of cultural diversity and achievement in a thriving community.

Every student would have at least one parent who donates 10 or more hours per year to the parental involvement program Ikayuqluta Elitnaulta (Let's Learn Together). We would continue to have supportive administration and school staff who encourage the AOTE (Alaska Onward To Excellence) process of renewing or refocusing the improvement efforts. The teachers would incorporate the parents into curriculum development and continue to have two-way conversations with each other. (p. 115)

The next chapter, *Constructivist Learning, Experiential and Place-based Education* (Chapter 4) is an academic review of educational processes that have offered solutions to some of the issues presented in this chapter. The use of these alternative forms of education has created positive outcomes with respect to Indigenous students needs. An examination of some current models is provided.

Chapter 4: Constructivist Learning, Experiential and Place-based Education[4]

The field of experiential education is continually trying to define itself in both its scope and depth. One of the goals of this research is to gain a better understanding of the field, as interpreted by its present practitioners. This chapter provides a review of specific terminology and characteristics. I begin with a theoretical analysis of its meaning and application over the last century. In addition, I have incorporated an examination of some current models, but have chosen to defer discussion of the two programs that provide the setting for my research to later chapters. Chapter 7 (*Findings*) will provide specific interpretations and practical applications of experiential and place-based education as demonstrated by the participants of this study.

While I may refer to the field as "experiential", it incorporates *constructivism* as a theory of learning and, I argue, is inextricably tied to the field of *place-based education*. Some alternative education practices offer solutions to some of the problems many Indigenous students face in formal educational institutions, and have created positive outcomes with respect to Indigenous students' needs (Grande, 2004; O'Connor, 2006). Several of these are based on the premise that we construct our own understanding of the world we live in by reflecting on our experiences. Many authors, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, cite the importance of educators' modeling constructivist approaches that engage students in interdisciplinary exploration, collaborative activity, and field-based opportunities for experiential learning, reflection, and self-examination (Cajete, 1994; Dewey, 1938; Rogers, 1969).

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[4] An earlier version of this chapter has been previously published in *TRANS* Internet Journal-Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften, Vienna, Austria: University of Vienna Press. Please see O'Connor, K. B. (2008b) in *References* for further information.

Constructivism is a theory of learning based on the premise that, by reflecting on our experiences, we construct our own understanding of the world we live in. *Experiential education* is the process of "learning by doing", which begins with the learner engaging in direct "experience" followed by reflection. *Place-based education* is an approach to teaching that is grounded in the context of community, both natural and social.

As such, this chapter is a review of alternative educational processes that have offered solutions to some of the educational issues presented in the last chapter. The use of these alternative forms of education has created positive outcomes with respect to Indigenous students' needs. An examination of some current models is also provided.

Definitions

The Nature of Experience

If we are to assume that there is a basic and intimate relationship between the processes of experience and education, then it is imperative that I begin by clarifying my understanding of the idea of experience. Like many before me, I am drawn to the ideas of John Dewey who developed a dynamic understanding of the organic connection between experience and the process of learning. Unless guided by some concrete understanding of what experience is, any form of education that is bound in life experience will include misconceptions and variations; the concrete basis for experiential learning is what discerns an educative experience from a non or mis-educative experience.

The nature of experience includes a combination of both active and passive elements. The active component of experience can be described as "*trying*", as it takes on a dynamic character of experimenting. Alternatively, the passive element of "*undergoing*" an experience has transformable qualities which evoke consequences. A motivating combination exists as one experiences'

something, one takes action upon it and then endures something in return. The measure of the value of an experience is directly related to the relationship between these two elements (*trying* and *undergoing*). Experience does not consist only in engaging in an activity. As Dewey (1916) explained:

> Experience as trying involves change, but change is meaningless transition unless it is consciously connected with the return wave of consequences which flow from it. When an activity is continued into the undergoing of consequences, when the change made by action is reflected back into a change made in us, the mere flux is loaded with significance. We learn something. (p.139)

Therefore to learn from an experience the participant must make a connection between what one does to something (active) and the consequences one receives in return (passive), be it through a positive or negative result. In such a setting, the *doing* is an act of trying as one performs an experiment on one's world to discover unknowns or test theories. The *undergoing* is the teaching and lessons as one begins to understand and make connections between things (Dewey, 1916).

Two possible conclusions can be made with regard to this interpretation of experience. First, experience is not solely cognitive; it is, in fact, primarily an active-passive series of actions. Secondly, the value of an experience is directly measured in the connection of things—provides meaning, and in what it moves forward and into—a desire to learn more.

It should be noted that the union of experience and education does not always yield positive outcomes. Some experiences can be considered mis-educative, in that their effect upon the learner detains and alters any further development of further experiences. The quality of an experience is what determines its value. Quality can be broken down into two aspects. There is the obvious and easy-to-judge aspect: is it agreeable to the learner or not? The second is its measure of influence upon later experiences. An experience's

influence is judged by a learner's sense of emotional engagement in a certain activity, which ultimately leads to a desire for future experiences. Hence a major component of education is how to best select the kind of experience that not only is directly related to the curriculum set out, but is also agreeable to the learner so they may productively connect with subsequent experiences.

Reflection or thought is evoked through the process of connecting what we do (active) and what is of consequence (passively received). A fundamental belief is that a meaningful experience is not possible without some element of reflection or thought. This is not to say that there are varying levels of reflection in experiences. For example through the "trial and error" method, we do something and it doesn't work, so we try something else and we keep trying different things until we find something that does work. From this we assume that this process is a general imperative: a "hit and miss" process. The participant derives meaning through the connection of action and result, but does not delve deeper into the "how". The details of the connection and relationship between cause and effect are missing.

On the other end of the spectrum, the practice of observation is comprehensive in its depth. The participant uses an acute sense of investigation to discern the relationship between the activity and its consequences. Therefore one is no longer at the mercy of circumstance, but has a more sensitive and acute sense of the relational aspects of act and response. We can now change the quality of an experience through thought. "Thinking in other words, is the intentional endeavour to discover specific connections between something which we do and the consequences which result, so that the two become continuous" (Dewey, 1916, p. 145). The happening is now implicit; it has an explanation and is reasonable, as many would say "there is order in the universe".

An essential principle in experiential learning is that educative processes are found when the relational aspects of experience and thought combine to produce future consequences that are recognized by the learner. It is the learner who takes on a certain form of responsibility for future consequences derived

from the present action. It is in the act of reflection in which this responsibility is determined. Reflection also implies a certain sympathy and understanding with an issue. It stirs recognition of one's place and destiny as related to the outcomes of an event.

Therefore the significance of reflection in experience is not solely found in making connections, but also in understanding the details of those connections. Reflection and thought are resolved when we discover the importance of some past or future experience to anticipate consequences.

> For we live not in a settled and finished world, but one which is going on, and where our main task is prospective, and where retrospect—and all knowledge as distinct from thought is retrospect—is of value in the solidity, security, and fertility it affords our dealings with the future. (Dewey, 1916, p. 151)

Constructivist Learning

While it may inform and influence practice, constructivism is a theory of learning, not a theory of teaching (Wolffe & McMullen, 1995-96). Constructivism is a theory of learning based on the premise that, by reflecting on our experiences, we construct our own understanding of the world we live in. Constructivism maintains that individuals create or construct their own new understanding or knowledge through the interaction between what they already know and believe, and the ideas, events, and activities with which they come in contact (Cannella & Reiff, 1994; Richardson, 1997). Students themselves make discoveries and experiment with knowledge, instead of hearing or reading about the experiences of others. Students also reflect on their experiences, thus developing new skills, new attitudes, and new theories or ways of thinking (Kraft & Sakofs, 1988). The principle of continuity of experience, as defined by Dewey (1938), suggests that "every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (p. 35). The knowledge and skills that have been acquired

through one experience now become an instrument of understanding and a method of dealing with conditions that follow.

Experiential education is a process through which a learner constructs knowledge, skill and value from direct experiences (Dewey, 1938). This definition embraces constructivist learning theory, as well as the traditional practice of learning by doing. Experiential education is the process of actively engaging students in an experience that will have real consequences (Tyler, 1949).

Constructivism is one way of thinking about how knowledge and understanding are formed, but it is not the only way. Nor are various interpretations of constructivism necessarily incompatible with one another (MacKinnon & Scarff-Seatter, 1997; Oldfather, 1994). Prospective teachers should be exposed to varying perspectives of constructivism, given the discretion to choose appropriately, and the skills to implement their choices.

Experiential Education

Tell me and I will forget.

Show me and I may remember.

Involve me and I will understand. (Chinese Proverb)

"Experiential learning" can be defined in terms of an instructional model, which begins with the learner engaging in direct experience followed by reflection, discussion, analysis and evaluation of the experience (Dewey, 1915; Tyler, 1949). The term "experience" represents "a fact or state of having been affected by or gained knowledge through direct observation or participation" (Merriam-Webster, 1993, p. 409). Tyler (1949) claims that "learning takes place through the experience which the learner has, that is, through the reactions he makes to the environment in which he is placed" (p. 64). Dewey (1938) adds "every experience is a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves forward and into" (p. 44). A comprehensive definition of experiential education found today describes "a philosophy and methodologies

in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values" (Association for Experiential Education, 2008).

There are many definitions of experiential learning, including such labels as experiential education, constructivist education, the learning cycle and project-based learning. Many claim to be "the" effective model (e.g. Kaufman, 1996; Kraft and Sakofs, 1988), yet almost all agree that we seldom learn from experience unless we reflect upon and assess the experience, assigning our own meaning and understanding as they relate to goals, aims, ambitions and expectations. From this processing of the experience come the insights, the discoveries, and the understandings that are generally referred to as experiential learning. As this processing takes place, the pieces fall into place, and the experience takes on added meaning in relation to other experiences. All this is then conceptualized, synthesized and integrated into the individual's schema of cognitive constructs which he/she imposes on the world, and through which he/she views, perceives, categorizes, evaluates and seeks additional experiences (Wright, 1970). "Learning through firsthand, full-bodied realities is the essence of experiential learning. Immediate, concrete experiences that occur outside the classroom serve to arouse observations, prompt reflection and spur action" (Kolb and Lewis, 1986, p.102).

Dewey (1938) was an early promoter of the idea of learning through direct experience: by action and reflection. This type of learning differs from most traditional educational practices, in that teachers first immerse students in action and then ask them to reflect on the experience. Paulo Freire (1970) built upon this theory of learning by promoting an educational praxis that included both action (experience) and reflection. He rejected more contemporary educational approaches, referring to them as the "banking model" of education, in which teachers deposit knowledge into the so-called "empty" depot of the student mind. In such a setting, teachers place knowledge (including analysis and

synthesis) before students. They hope students will later find ways to apply this knowledge in action.

The following is an excerpt from my personal field notes that describes my thoughts regarding Indigenous experiential education while working with a group of Cree band schools in Alberta and Quebec.

> Cree education in terms of customary rule and regulations did not involve the specialized relation of teacher and student, or even a particular time and place for the instruction to occur. In fact, most of what a person was required to know and understand in order to conduct themselves as an adult, was not even conveyed to them in words. A child or youth was exposed to this important information, less by way of spoken explanations, and more by demonstrations. A person would imitate these demonstrations repeatedly until they were able to behave or produce proper results. The whole process was explained to me as a more hands-on, "show and tell" style of education, which differs from the more passive reception of verbal instruction that remains prominent in formal schooling today. Dewey would be supportive of this process which permits approximate results and, within limits, encourages the exploration of options. (O'Connor, Personal Journal, May, 2005)

Unfortunately, and despite the efforts of many would-be reformers, reports by researchers such as Goodlad (1984) and Sizer (1984), suggest that most teaching, particularly at the high school level, still involves the teacher as a purveyor of knowledge and the student as a passive recipient. The word "student" is often interpreted today as someone who is not engaged, lacks meaningful and dynamic experiences, and is expected to passively consume knowledge directly relayed from so-called professionals. "An ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience that any theory has vital and verifiable significance" (Dewey, 1916, p. 144).

It would be a great mistake to claim that students in traditional classrooms do not also have experiences. The belief is that the nature of these experiences is largely of the wrong kind. How many students are forever shunned from educative environments because of their negative response to such practices? How many loath the learning process because of the way schooling was presented to them? How many develop a sense of boredom and monotony with learning? How many left school with little knowledge and experience to apply to the world outside school?

The benefits associated with experiential learning address the aforementioned questions. Experiential pedagogical approaches are not curriculum, but are rather means to deliver curriculum. It is not teaching a different curriculum, but rather teaching the curriculum in engaging ways, across all subject areas. Program guides and integrated resource packages encourage experiential and constructivist instructional approaches. Such instructional strategies are recommended in existing guides and resources (move away from text book delivery).

Place-based Education

Place-based education is an approach to teaching that is grounded in the context of community, both natural and social. It connects place with self and community. The field has emerged from the strong roots laid by thirty years of environmental education in North America. The term only began to appear in educational literature over the last fifteen years (Knapp, 1996; Orr, 1994; Raffan 1993), however, progressive educators have promoted the concept for more than 100 years. For example *The School and Society* (Dewey, 1915) advocates an experiential approach to student learning in the local environment: "Experience [outside the school] has its geographical aspect, its artistic and its literary, its scientific and its historical sides. All studies arise from aspects of the one earth and the one life lived upon it" (p. 91). Place-based education usually includes conventional outdoor education methodologies, to help students connect with their particular corners of the world. Proponents of place-based education often

envision it having a role in achieving local ecological and cultural sustainability (Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000). Theobald (1997) refers to "place-conscious" elementary and secondary classrooms in his book *Teaching the Commons*. He advocates using the immediate locale as the lens for disciplinary engagement in all schools across the country. In a later article, Theobald and Curtiss (2000) describe the field as "community-oriented schooling". The following is an excerpt from my personal journal which reveals my interpretations of an informal survey I provided to approximately 200 students from five Cree and Dene Nation reserve schools in northern Alberta (not conducted specifically for this research). A detailed examination of the schools' program can be found later in the dissertation (see Chapter 6). One of the survey's questions asked the Cree and Dene students to describe their feelings with regard to their community and school.

> One of the greatest social needs expressed to me in these five
> Treaty Six communities, especially among the youth, is for
> people to feel that they are part of the communities they belong
> to, and to discover a connection to the land on which these
> communities exist. Many do not. Numerous Cree and Dene youth
> feel that their communities are fragmented in the extreme and are
> unhappy, destructive places to live. This perspective, if it
> continues to go unchecked, is bound to increase for the simple
> reason that most of the population is being excluded from
> opportunities to share: a) in localized employment and access to
> disposable income, and b) in the pursuit of a "hunting way of life"
> on a regular basis. Both of these opportunities involve a sense of
> community and a place within their local environment, which
> would promote a healthy and positive sense of worth and would
> position them in the community as a productive, contributing
> member. (O'Connor, Personal Journal, November, 2005)

Place-based education provides a purpose to the knowledge and reasoning taught in schools. It provides a contextual framework for much of the curriculum (i.e. gives meaning to the studies) and engages the student in the conditions of her/his own reality. Tyler (1949) examines an educator's ability to influence the environment to promote learning: "It is desirable that the problems be set up in the kind of environment in which such problems usually arise in life. This is more likely to result in his viewing this as a real problem worth of his effort to solve" (p. 69).

Following Dewey's (1915) idea of "learning-by-doing," many experiential and place-based educators believe that the classroom education, provided by most educational systems today, falls short of achieving a meaningful connection with the social, cultural or material realities of the students they are hoping to teach. To enable a new flexible understanding, it is necessary to perceive the modern individual "as a single member of the human race with infinite variations" (Taylor, 1969, p. 3). It is difficult for students to engage with larger global issues and generalized truths without some understanding of how these topics connect to their own local issues and, more isolated truths. Therefore, our starting point is not the general and global, but the specific and local. We must respond to and address not the world, but what the world already means to a particular people, from a specific community, in a distinct locale (Carnie, 2003).

A survey of the literature on place-based education reveals characteristic patterns to this still-evolving approach that make it distinctive:

- *It emerges from the particular attributes of a place.* The content is specific to the geography, ecology, sociology, politics and other dynamics of that place. This fundamental characteristic establishes the foundation for the concept of place-based education. This concept is congruous with the research findings (see Chapter 7) which demonstrated, that for Indigenous people, a sense of place anchors their being and identity in who they are, in their relationship to

Mother Earth, and in the places that have special meaning for Indigenous groups and members (Cruikshank, 1992; Hanohano, 1999).

- *It is a multidisciplinary approach*, which is analogous to the Indigenous notion of connectedness that promotes a relational aspect to knowledge. It aligns itself with Indigenous methodologies, as integration of subjects is central to instructional practices, and it leads itself to real life issues that improve motivation (Cajete, 1994; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; University of Alaska Fairbanks, 1997).

- *It is experiential*. In many programs this includes a participatory action or service-learning component; in fact, some advocates insist that action must be a component if ecological and cultural sustainability are to result (Denise & Harris, 1989).

- *It is reflective of an educational philosophy that is broader than the "learn to earn" method*. Economics of place can be an area of study, as a curriculum explores local industry and sustainability; however all curricula and programs are designed for broader objectives. It has been suggested by many Indigenous scholars (Cajete, 1994; Hampton, 1995b; Rasmussen, 2001) that Indigenous education be holistic in nature, and strives to include learning objectives that address positive identity, self-determination, as well as cultural and ecological sustainability.

- *It connects place with self and community*. Because of the ecological and cultural lenses through which place-based curricula are envisioned, these connections are pervasive. These curricula include multigenerational and multicultural dimensions as they interface with community resources. It is ultimately in this process that Indigenous values and participation can be effectively incorporated at all levels of education (Cajete, 1999).

It is important to acknowledge the interpretations of place, as conceptualized within an Indigenous perspective, and how it is utilized in what is often considered a traditional-holistic style of education. It is my belief that the combination of constructivist, experiential and place-based approaches, as

previously described, can provide something analogous to and therefore continuous with Indigenous beliefs and practices demonstrated in holistic education.

Holistic education is a traditional practice that was used by Indigenous people in educating the young before formal education dismissed such practices. It can be best described as a pedagogical approach to educating that develops the whole child: intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically. A holistic education is not new to many Indigenous people, and is compatible with traditional tenets of Indigenous people's conceptualizations of well-being and good life (Corbiere, 2000).

The significance of place is fundamental to Indigenous epistemologies. The theme of resistance and its presence in Indigenous stories defines the very essence of the people. A person does not stand alone, but shares with other people a relationship based on a mutual understanding of life. For Indigenous people, a sense of place anchors their being and identity in who they are and their relationship to Mother Earth, as well as the places that have special meaning for tribal groups and members.

> A human person does not stand alone, but shares with other animate and, in the Western sense, 'inanimate' beings, a relationship based on a shared 'essence' of life. The significance of place, of land, of landscape, of other things in the universe, in defining the very essence of a people, makes for a very different rendering of the term essentialism as used by Indigenous peoples. (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, p. 74)

Cajete (Tewa) (1994) explains the Indigenous perspective of place in holistic education, and speaks to the concept of "interconnectedness" by saying that for "Indian people, this primary context of relationship and meaning are found in the natural environment. In a sense, all traditional Indian Education can be called environmental education because it touches on the spiritual ecology of a place" (p. 193).

Most present formal education curriculums situate the land including plants and geological formations, and animals as largely "objects" of study. Both the land and the life contained thereon are stripped of their roles as teachers or knowledge sources, and more often than not spiritual messengers are not even discussed (Corbierre, 2000).

The Indigenous process of acquiring and interpreting knowledge does not separate information into parts; instead it seeks out the connections to meaning and holism as found at the points of togetherness that begins from ones natural environment (Curwen Doige, 2003). Furthermore, Couture (1991) states:

> Non-dualistic thinking develops a physical image of the spiritual. The thoughts of the 'world' are as creatures, and processes of growth and becoming, and not as abstract concepts and explanations. Native awareness and perception is of the spiritual as belonging to this world, and not to some beyond. *(*p. 60)

A holistic form of education positions the teacher in the role of "facilitator" of learning, and guides students to local resources and experiences that, with the careful inclusion of assignments, create an engaging learning environment. Each student's input and interpersonal exchange of knowledge is deemed as important as the lesson content. The ultimate challenge for the teacher is to understand the importance of the balance between dissemination and integration of knowledge, as well its dynamic relationship to the environment in which the learner is from. It is the teacher's responsibility to find this balance and to accept the reality that learning resides within the learner, and that the resultant meaning is constructed socially. This concept is not foreign to well-established Western educational philosophy (e.g. Barnes, 1976; Dewey, 1916; Rogers, 1969) and provides a foundation to Indigenous epistemology (Cajete, 1994; Curwen Doige, 2003).

Unfortunately the use of these kind of experiential, place-based and holistic learning techniques that are used in some Indigenous communities,

courses and programs are more than often labelled unscholarly and frivolous by the more "academic" programs (Harris, 2002). "The idea of students as researchers who explore their own lives and connect academic information with their own lived experience is alien to many schools" (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998, p. 13).

Holistic educational practices promote to students a realization that their people's understanding of the world, their worldview, and their understanding of natural phenomena is as valid as Western modern education. Students are taught that knowledge is not only found in textbooks but also from the worldviews, experiences, and wisdom of their people. This comes with great challenges, especially for non-Indigenous educators, to find ways of including traditional Indigenous knowledge, a body of knowledge and wisdom that has largely been ignored, and to do so without appropriating it (Thompson, 2004).

To incorporate a holistic form of education that relies on Indigenous knowledge, it becomes essential to take into account when material will be covered. The standard school calendar is too restrictive to allow the inclusion of traditional teachings into the curricula. For example, specific legends, ceremonies and applicable activities can be discussed or performed only during certain seasons and specific times of the year (Tafoya, 1995; Tsuji, 2000); the conventional school calendar is not always receptive to community and cultural events. Similarly, certain skills and applicable curricular activities can be taught only at specific times of the year when the weather, environment and associated wildlife are conducive. Most Elders, who in many circumstances are relied upon to transfer knowledge, live in rhythm with nature and not with a school year (Couture, 1985; Taylor, Crago, & McAlpine, 1993; Tsuji, 2000).

From an Indigenous perspective learning occurs throughout the year, not only during the school calendar year and, furthermore, that learning does not occur in the confines of a school, but also at home, in the bush, and so forth. All experiences are considered learning experiences (Tsuji, 2000). Efforts must be

made to create a school calendar that is conducive to Indigenous teachings and promotes harmony to the rhythms of nature and life.

In summarizing the role holistic education has in advancing research and practice in Indigenous education, Goulet (2001) states "that education needs to be viewed holistically, that what happens in school cannot be separated from the daily lives of teachers and students or the communities where it takes place" (p. 79).

The following section illustrates some present day applications of experiential and placed-based models created in response to northern Indigenous students' needs. The concepts of cultural and community input, at all levels of educational design and delivery, are promoted. The process of education is redefined as themes of community, place, Indigenous identity and an integration of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives with current Western forms, which has been found to be successful.

Present Day Applications

a) Inuuqatigiit

The Education Departments of the Northwest and Nunavut Territories have been working with Elders and community members to develop *Inuuqatigiit* (Government of Northwest Territories, 1996); a curriculum document that delineates Inuit knowledge. The word Inuuqatigiit means Inuit to Inuit, people to people or family to family. This is the foundation of the curriculum, which derives from Inuit epistemology the concept of togetherness and a family unity between people.

Referenced as "The curriculum from the Inuit perspective", *Inuuqatigiit* incorporates themes and topics primarily developed for Inuit children, yet it is acknowledged that it also contains valuable knowledge for people of many different backgrounds.

Inuuqatigiit is being promoted across the two territories and aims to reinforce the Inuit identity for children. It seeks to develop a school system that encourages communities to play a more visible role in their children's education.

Inuuqatigiit focuses on the enhancement and enrichment of language and culture of Inuit students. It also promotes integration of the Inuit perspective with the standard school curriculum. In almost every school subject, students learn about Inuit history, knowledge, traditions, values and beliefs. This will strengthen their education today and in the future (Government of Northwest Territories, 1996, p. 3).

The goals of *Inuuqatigiit* are to: maintain, strengthen, recall and enhance Inuit language and culture in the community and the school; enhance unity within Inuit groups; create a link between the past and the present; encourage the practice of Inuit values and beliefs; and, encourage pride in Inuit identity to enhance personal identity.

Inuuqatigiit acknowledges the lack of external support in formal schools by promoting an educational partnership between the child's family, the community, educators and the school system. It is recognized that community involvement is crucial in identifying and involving strategies that promote positive learning, and which will lead to a more engaged parental network.

Relationships to "People" and to the "Environment" are the two basic topics which drive the curriculum. Activities that promote Family and Kinship, Elders, Traditional Responsibilities of Gender and Age, Medicine and Healing, Laws and Leadership, Land, Water, Ice, Sky, Weather, as well as selected Fish, Animals and Plants are included in the curriculum protocols. This model is a telling example of how the Indigenous perspective can be included effectively into the curriculum. The concept of connectedness within the natural world is promoted, as topics of "People" and "Environment" are explored as foundational aspects of the learning process. This provides context to the learning as students are able to see the relevance to their lives and community and its place in the

larger global context. The promotion of 'place' and its connection with the learner, community and culture is congruent with place-based ideologies. The education process is focused on personal realization of the cultural and social conditions within their own society (Denise & Harris, 1989). Inuuqatigiit educators believe that it is very difficult for students to engage with larger global issues unless they have some sort of understanding of their own local issues. Therefore the students begin with their own experiences as the starting point.

Most schools in the Northwest and Nunavut Territories have adopted the label of "IQ (short for Inuuqatigiit) schools". Through Nunavut's "technologies in the schools" initiatives, students use satellite transceivers and receivers, as well as cable boxes originally provided for distance education purposes, to share their activities and insights with other schools and communities not only within the territory, but also on a national and global scale. Video conferencing is often used to collaborate with other IQ schools in the North on various experiential projects dealing with issues such as global warming, bird, fish and animal migration, and resource protection. This provides key avenues for the students' social development, since they share knowledge with other engaged participants and develop an Indigenous cognitive schema that is enabled by experiential exploration and new media technologies.

b) Alaska Rural Systemic Initiatives (AKRSI)

The Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative (AKRSI) (University of Alaska Fairbanks, 1997) illustrates how a more culturally responsive curriculum, one that is place-based, academically rigorous, and engages the learner in direct experience, can propel students forward. The rural school improvement effort was initiated in 1995 by a collaboration of the Alaskan Federation of Natives, the University of Alaska and the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development. The AKRSI addressed the continuing inability of schools to be effectively integrated into the fabric of many rural communities after nearly 20 years of local control. AKRSI was to formulate a renewed educational agenda regarding the structure, content and processes that are needed to increase the

involvement of Alaska Indigenous people in the application of Indigenous and non-Indigenous scientific knowledge, and to develop the untapped potential of Indigenous knowledge systems as a foundation for rural/ Indigenous education in general, and science education in particular (Emekauwa, 2004).

The first phase of the AKRSI project consisted of five major initiatives:

1.Native Ways of Knowing and Teaching. Developed with the understanding that no documentation and validation of the traditional ways of teaching and learning were previously created, that was congruous to the integration of Indigenous knowledge in a Western-orientated educational system.

2.Culturally Aligned Curriculum Adaptations. AKRSI and participating school districts co-operatively developed a comprehensive, culturally aligned curriculum framework that balanced and integrated Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge and skills.

3.Indigenous Science Knowledge Base. A comprehensive resource database was created, documenting the cultural and ecological knowledge of the Indigenous people in each of the state's five major cultural regions.

4.Elders and Cultural Camps. Alaskan Indigenous expertise in educational and scientific programs and services was integrated through resources like the Elders-in-Residence program, cultural camps in the schools and events at the University of Alaska's rural campuses.

5.Village Science Applications. These activities were developed to foster Indigenous student's interest in science related careers.

The inclusion of Indigenous knowledge is made within the pedagogical methods, and a complementary relationship results between the Indigenous and Western science fields. The AKRSI is a good example of how including diverse knowledge sources and traditions, especially highlighting marginalized ideas and ways of knowing, could point the way to curriculum review and transformation (Ismail & Cazden, 2005). It is aligned with Pinar's (1988, 2004)

reconceptionalist approach to curriculum theory, which promotes a development of curriculum on the basis of the students specific historical, political and cultural contexts, supporting the notion that it may be particularly useful in the area of Indigenous education.

c) Other Experiential Models

Many Indigenous scholars (Cajete, 1999; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Hanohano, 1999) have emphasized that teachers must be prepared to ensure that Western paradigms and Indigenous worldviews coexist, so students can understand life's complex interconnections among peoples and with nature. These scholars focus particularly on the need to relate to one's local community and geography; as previously explored, an approach to learning often referred to as "place-based education". Teachers strengthen family and community teachings in the belief that "book knowledge," while having its place, should not supersede the "collective wisdom" learned through the ages and passed on to each new generation by Elders. The expectation that teachers solely carry the responsibility for teaching Indigenous identity is unreasonable, but they can support the significant contributions made by families and Elders. Schools, such as Rock Point Community School in Navajo Nation, which nurture bicultural perspectives have shown improvements in learning environments and academic success (McLaughlin, 1992). A collaborative team of Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators work with community members to provide a place-based program that incorporates local ecological and cultural activities designed to complement community-based curriculum.

By learning how to provide place- and community-based curriculum and instruction, teachers can provide students with a relevant, practical and motivating education where, in the words of Corson (1998), "Indigenous learners can actively participate in shaping their own education" (p. 240).

The Community-Based Education Model (CBEM) at Santa Fe Indian School, examined through the project "Real, Relevant, Meaningful Learning:

Community-Based Education in Native Communities" (Enos, 1999), is an example of community, place-based education "that seeks to engage students and tribal communities in issues related to their environment, natural resources and health... in an attempt to stimulate (high school) student interest and motivation in the areas of math and science" (p. 2). The students' work is rooted in their local community through field experiences such as water quality analysis, vegetation studies and watershed restoration. Connections are made with community members and ties are strengthened between cultures, school and community.

Conclusion

Experiential approaches to learning are most commonly found in the early years of schooling. By the time students reach the intermediate years, a significant shift towards instruction and away from experiential learning has occurred. By the secondary grades, the majority of school time is given over to instruction and students who encounter difficulties with this approach to learning have no other means of engagement. Many Indigenous students complain about the lack of interest school holds for them and their failure to see the relevance of what they are taught. Much of what is taught today is thought to be, in effect, static by Indigenous standards (Cajete, 1999; Kawagley, 1995). Curriculum is often delivered as a finished product, with very little consideration as to how it came to be and virtually no attention as to what may occur in the future. In today's society, which often values and promotes change, the contradiction is not lost as curricular interpretations assume that the future will be very similar to the past and therefore, the curriculum is designed and delivered in such an inert method.

Experiential education, particularly the place-based processes, offers solutions to such educational problems (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; University of Alaska Fairbanks, 1997). Experiential approaches are based on student engagement, community involvement, addressing diverse learning styles, and

participation in real and present community topics. Such approaches have demonstrated positive success in standard assessments and dramatic changes in student, parent and community attitudes (McLaughlin, 1992).

The top-down technical standards of the Western industrial reform movement have had detrimental effects upon the students' learning process. Since this rigidity prevents teachers from rooting the learning experience in children's lives, it is counterproductive (Kincheloe, 2003). The curriculum has to have meaning for children if they are to engage with it, and it is the connection with their own lives that informs the curriculum with such meaning. A curriculum that is devoid of meaning to children will inevitably affect their motivation to learn, and an unmotivated child is a difficult, if not impossible, child to teach (Carnie, 2003).

Literature on place-based and experiential education has predominantly grounded itself in adventure or outdoor educational practices. An internet search of the term experiential education will provide an array of ambiguous results that range from outdoor education, adventure programming, skills-based training, corporate team building, and, to some extent what is mostly aligned with this paper's interpretation, a philosophy and methodology of education. One of the goals of this dissertation is to gain a better understanding of the field of experiential education as defined by the actual practitioners in two northern educational systems.

The location of place-based and experiential initiatives in the school's curriculum is usually limited as a specific subject matter (e.g. as the separate courses of Physical Education and Mathematics are found in a school's curriculum). This research, on the other hand, is focused on constructivist learning practices in place-based models that actually drive the overall operation and philosophy of the school. While this dissertation centres on some community and place-based models that have succeeded, they seem to be a rarity in Western education environments (Enos, 1999; McLaughlin, 1992). I will argue that the larger educational community needs to "think outside the box" in

terms of pedagogy, curriculum and structure for these types of models to become widely accepted. Some Indigenous scholars (Cajete, 1994; Hampton, 1995b; Kirkness, 1998) have gone so far as to call for a complete redefinition of the educational system so that it may finally reflect Indigenous thought and needs.

Educational styles in mainstream schools often separate learning from activity, and this does not fit in the constructivists' and Indigenous understanding(s) of learning. The focus on competitive, individual learning and empirical paper-pen testing has had a detrimental effect on Indigenous learning. The artificial separation of subject areas, along with the rigid and uniform implementation of knowledge has caused many Indigenous students to disengage (Calliou, 1998; Kanu, 2005).

Traditionally the educational institution and community have remained isolated from each other. The boundaries between the two need to be removed so that the school is an integral part of the community, and the community is an extension of the school (Carnie, 2003; Government of Northwest Territories, 1996).

Constructivist learning values knowledge acquisition resulting from direct activity and practice, something that is not easily reproduced since each student is unique in his/her learning process. Also, present standardized assessments may not reflect student learning in place-based educational models. These issues will be further addressed in Chapter 7 (*Findings*).

Now that I have provided a theoretical interpretation of the fields of experiential and place-based education, I will next describe the guiding principles of this study that include the research questions. I then describe the chosen research methodology and methods, which include details about my role as an active observer, the nature of the interview process and the recording of field notes, which comprised the bulk of the study's data.

Chapter 5: Methodology

I begin this chapter with the description and design of the research project. I believe a better understanding of the overall study's methodology will help make connections with the remaining three sections of this dissertation (*Comparative Case Studies, Findings* and *Conclusion*) which explore the data in detail and provide some appropriate conclusions suitable for the phenomena of interest.

Project Summary

This research involves the current educational challenges facing First Nation students of northern Canada, through examination of two experiential and place-based educational programs. These programs are presently being applied in both the public school system of the Yukon Territory (Experiential Programs in Whitehorse and surrounding communities, YT) and in two Cree and Dene Nation reserve schools in northern Alberta (Community-Based Experiential Education Program in Kehewin and Cold Lake, AB).

These programs utilize experiential and placed-based initiatives to address the lack of success and disengagement amongst Indigenous students by promoting a holistic form of education, which values the importance of place and its cultural knowledge. The primary objective of this research is to discover which elements of experiential and place-based education lead to a greater engagement of Indigenous students and improved educational outcomes. These two programs are practical applications of experiential education and critical theory as praxis.

Purpose of Research

When people ask me where I went to high school, I tell them that I went to Wood Street School, an experiential education school in Whitehorse,

even though I only went there for three semesters. The common response is "what is experiential education?" Actually most people say "experimental" which I guess it is in some people's eyes. Even when I was given the option to join the program by the high school counsellor, my parents were like "what is that?" I was not doing well at the regular high school and I hated school. Things changed for me when I went to Wood Street... I even find it hard to say what an experiential school or class really is. It is very different then the regular school that is for sure. At Wood Street the teachers really care about you as a person, and you feel like you have a say in your learning. A lot of people say that it is not "academic". That is not true at all. I never worked so hard in my life but it was interesting and I had a lot more freedom. We did stuff that seemed to matter....I think back and before Wood Street, there was no way I was going to finish high school and even go to University. Now look at me...But yah what makes experiential education work so well? That's a tough question. –an Indigenous Yukon student now attending University

This quote reflects much of my experience and curiosity regarding the field of experiential education, and captures the essence of where I centered this study. Having spent the last 13 years involved in Indigenous education in the North, I wanted to better understand how educators, students and community members felt about their education and how they interpreted the field of experiential and place based learning. This study focuses on those participants, their perceptions, their beliefs, ultimately their stories. I acknowledge my subjectivity, and act as an active observer in this process. The participants are the experts who share with me their perspectives. It is with these fundamental assumptions in mind that I have chosen qualitative research methods.

Research Objectives

Drawing on my personal, emotional and professional experiences within a northern education context (see Chapter 1), my exploration of my motives and reasoning as a non-Indigenous educator and researcher in pursuing research in

Indigenous education (Chapter 2) and, my review of literature on Indigenous, experiential and place-based education (Chapters 3 and 4 respectively), I worked with the two community collaborators to develop the following questions as the general focus of this study:

1. How do students, educators and community members interpret the field of experiential and place-based education?

2. In what ways can educators and community members share values and practices to create more purposeful classroom praxis?

3. How can current educational systems redefine its practices to address Indigenous needs, as well as improve student engagement and success?

Answers to these questions and others are found throughout the *Comparative Case Studies* descriptions (Chapter 6) and in the *Findings* section (Chapter 7). A more explicit response to each of these questions is provided in the *Conclusion* (Chapter 8).

Methodology

Setting

I have spent approximately two months in each of the following communities observing and creating qualitative case study reports. An interdisciplinary approach was taken as the research team, which consists of two community collaborators and I, interviewed participants, observed programs, and analyzed curricular documents. It is anticipated that knowledge gained through comparative case studies developed from personal narratives, interviews and focus groups will hopefully assist other educators and community members in providing engaging and culturally relevant education.

These programs and their respective communities[5] are:

- *The Experiential Education Program* - Wood Street School, Ghùch Tlâ Community School, and Selkirk Elementary, part of the Yukon Department of Education in Whitehorse, Yukon; and,

- *The Community-Based Experiential Education Program* - Kehewin First Nation School and Le Goff School, part of Treaty Six Tribal Chiefs Peacekeeping Conservation Commission in St. Paul, Alberta.

The programs were chosen as they represent an extensive cross-section of cultural groups (Yukon First Nations, Cree, and Dene), educational systems (public vs. reserve schools), a diversity of geographic locations (Yukon and northern Alberta) and scopes (diverse pedagogies and epistemologies).

It is important to note here that I had originally scheduled and received approval to include an experiential program from the Nunavut Territory as part of this study (Inuuqatigiit- "the curriculum from the Inuit perspective" used in Rankin Inlet, NU). All the necessary planning and preparation was made with the community collaborator and interested participants were identified. Unfortunately, issues arose that resulted in a change of school administration and the subsequent cancellation of the specific program of interest. Therefore, I had to refocus my efforts on the two programs aforementioned. If we are to agree that education must reflect and involve the complex lived world that the learners are part of, then we must also recognize that a school which hopes to incorporate the lived world of its many students is most surely a highly complex space. This is a sobering thought for a researcher who attempts to analyse such places and break down the phenomena we refer to as education. This also speaks to the complex and ever-changing nature of research, which directly reflects the multifaceted society in which these schools are found. I was forced to engage in

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[5] Please refer to the following chapter titled *Comparative Case Studies* (Chapter 6) for a detailed examination of each program and community.

methodological humility as I now believe flexibility and openness to the unexpected are characteristics of good emancipatory research (Habermas, 1973).

Framework

Qualitative research methods were chosen, as there seems to be some evidence that Indigenous methodologies are conducive to this type of research design (Chavers, 2000). Hermes (1998) finds qualitative methodology is more compatible for researchers in Indigenous settings. A "bricolage" approach (Kincheloe, 2001), incorporating various research methodologies, was used. I followed the philosophy of Denzin and Lincoln (2000), who realized that the world is too complex to be described through objective reality and a single standardized method. As research findings are largely specific to the method or methods utilized, it is in the application of multiple methods that I hoped to provide a richness and depth to my study.

I acknowledge my subjectivity as the researcher and, as a result, have chosen qualitative research strategies that support such a perspective. It is with this in mind that I attempt to frame the perspectives and subjectivities of the participants and myself, and therefore function as an "active observer", meaning I engaged with the participants in everyday activities and worked with specific individuals and in small groups. My thoughts are my own, and they are shaped by a collective that is social and of which I am a part. I therefore attempted to empathize with the participants so as to best understand the context from which they draw meaning, and to develop a relationship that allowed me to appreciate and share their perspectives, all the while with an understanding that I am a non-Indigenous observer.

In my attempt to conduct good emancipatory research (Habermas, 1973), I choose what I believed to be strategies of inquiry that recognize the uncertainty of the human condition, the diverse nature of knowledge, and the foundational aspect of context (Tobin and Kincheloe, 2006). This interdisciplinary-bricolage approach included the following methodologies:

Hermeneutic Phenomenological Inquiry focuses on the participants' "everyday lived experience", so that they may find themselves in the world and give meaning to it (Gadamer, 1989; Ricoeur, 1981; van Manen, 1990). This form of research is found in many Indigenous contexts, as a tremendous amount of importance is placed upon oral traditions, story and narrative, which primarily reflect lived experience (Cajete, 1999; Hampton, 1995a; Kawagley, 1995). This philosophy of being is aligned with Indigenous epistemologies as it does not end with just the simple cultivation of human subjectivity but also its implications in the construction of all human beings and inanimate objects (Alfred, 1999).

Many Indigenous groups believe the concepts of knower and known to be irrelevant. The understanding lies in the interrelationship between humans and other entities; be them physical or not. It is in the engagement of a life-generating relationship that each finds interest and mutual benefit (Cajete, 1994; Hanohano, 1999; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). As a researcher working in an academic Western setting and entering into a relationship that is not always aligned with my studies, it was crucial that I make these relationships foundational to my research. Hermeneutics assists me to enumerate and analyse these relationships and helps me understand the implications they have on me as a person and researcher and also their impact upon the participants and the study itself.

As a researcher, I attempted to develop dialogue and seek relationships with those who often see the world differently. It is not my intention to romanticize or appropriate their knowledge but to engender new enlightened perspectives and more sophisticated ways of knowing and inquiring (Giroux, 1997). Through the hermeneutic process of synthesizing diverse information, I hope to provide a more sophisticated level of meaning-making (Foster, 1997, Kincheloe and Berry, 2004).

While a focus for this research is concerned with the empowerment of the participants, I expanded on the participants' voices by engaging in the hermeneutic circle of interpretation. Most participants preferred to share their experiences through written narratives or, when in the context of an interview or

focus group, as an orator of their life stories. Evaluation of personal narratives, interviews and focus groups that center on the educational programs and their impact on student engagement, critical learning and identity formation provided valuable information for this research.The evaluations were done in a recursive process as I explored with the participants of not only their ideas, but the forces that shape their assumptions (Bruner, 1996).

Participatory Action Research (PAR) was valuable, as community collaboration and critical theory are primary tenets of this study (McTaggart, 1991a). It was my intention from the very beginning stages of this process that this research would provide more than a thesis that reflects my acumen. The methodology was built on a foundation that is participant and community-based and ultimately leads to outcomes that are now directed and implemented by the people who represent the community of study. Through the incorporation of some key elements of PAR, a social justice value interacts with community connectedness and participation; as such there is a team approach to the research that respects the contributions of all participants and pays attention to the power relationships between participants, including the researcher(s) (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

The use of action research was valuable in an Indigenous context, as it takes a critical stance which seeks to reveal power structures and promotes social justice (Boston, MacNamara, et al., 1997; Martin, lisahunter, & McLaren, 2006). PAR is conducive to many Indigenous values and was promoted by both community collaborators and participants throughout the research process. It empowers the participants and communities at all levels, since open, direct, transparent methods and full consensus through local involvement and input are foundational (Freire, 1970; Hagey, 1997; Reitsma-Street & Brown, 2002; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). This community-based research model assisted me (a non-Indigenous researcher) and other participants to act with respect and sensitivity to the community's cultural needs, and kept me grounded with respect to personal and community perspectives.

Comparative Case Studies [6]analysis provided a textual interpretation of each program (Burawoy, et al., 2000; Stake, 2000; Yin, 2003). While providing a description of the programs that respects the participants' perspectives, many elements that lead to engagement and educational success were specifically explored. Each case study also provides a description of the barriers that exist in the implementation of such alternative programs. A rich description of each program's evolution is offered. It is the hope that the particulars of each case study, as well as the commonalities and differences explored through comparative analysis, will provide valuable information for communities, schools, and educators. While this research does not seek to promote a universal form of education, or a one size fits all structure, it foresees some transferability of successful elements for interested educational communities.

Participants

As this project used some important tenets of Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodologies, the collaboration with specific community and school participants was foundational in the research. Each community provided a lead collaborator who supplied direction and support for the study. They worked in cooperation with myself, the lead investigator. The community collaborators were instrumental in the planning, preparation and dissemination of findings with respect to each of their home communities. I relied heavily on their insight and direction for many important issues. Ultimately this dissertation is mine, yet it is a result of many people's hard work, commitment, and dedication to improving the educational standards in the respective communities.

The research performed in each community and their relevant program also included input from Elders, Chiefs, associated community members, parents, teachers, students and educational administrators, including ministers, department directors, principals and advisors. The recruitment of participants was originally done by the community collaborators, yet as the social network

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[6] An in-depth description of the comparative case study methodology is provided in Chapter 6- *Comparative Case Studies.*

was constructed, many other participants were contacted, or in many cases, volunteered. A total of 98 people participated directly in this research project.

A special focus was placed on the phenomenological accounts of community Elders, teachers and students involved in these programs. Data acquired from narratives, journals, interviews and focus groups that reflect the participants "lived experience" (Dilthey, 1985; Gadamer, 1989) were incorporated into each community case study (see Chapter 6) and represents the nature or "essence" (Husserl, 1982; van Manen, 1990) of each program from the participants' perspective. "One of the most important techniques teacher researchers have used to gain access to student perceptions and their (and their teachers') own understandings of them involves keeping student and teacher journals" (Kincheloe, 2003, p.137). Other data gathering activities included: recording field-notes and the subsequent reflection upon them, producing audio and visual recordings of educational events or of participants outside the classroom setting, and interviewing participants about the various aspects of the educational process.

Gaining Access

Through my previous experience with the two chosen programs for this study, I was able to get approval for the research and gain access to the programs in a reasonable fashion. Both community collaborators were past colleagues of mine, therefore I had developed a professional and personal relationship with them that better enabled me to "re-enter" into their respective educational contexts. While most of the educators, administrators, and students had changed since I was previously involved, I believed this to be of benefit, as it provided fresh ideas as well as a re-definition and interpretation of the field.

In both settings, the research was the culmination of a desire by many administrators and educators to have their respective programs reviewed and assessed. Many educators also expressed an interest in learning from other

similar programs, recognizing the varying context and culture. Prior to beginning the research, as I was completing my Masters of Arts in alternative programming in Indigenous education, similar questions were asked of me by both communities when I returned for a visit: What were other communities doing with respect to Indigenous education?; What were other communities doing with respect to experiential and place-based education?; Were there any differences?; Similarities?; Were they being assessed?; If so, how and what were the results?. Therefore, once I decided to undertake my doctoral studies, it was a natural evolution that I should join forces with these two larger communities and work towards a research study that attempted to address these valuable questions.

Each community has their own rules, nuances and ways of being. The process for obtaining approval was quite different for each community. I will go into the specific details of each setting in the following chapter, *Comparative Case Studies* (Chapter 6).

Yukon Experiential Education Programs

The Yukon approval process began at the governmental level as the community collaborator and I worked in coordination with the Department of Education, who had created a new unit under the Public Schools Branch - the First Nations Programs and Partnerships Unit (FNPPU). They helped guide the planning and implementation process. Responsible for building productive relationships with Yukon First Nations and for improving the results of Yukon First Nation students in the K-12 system, the FNPPU provided the descriptions of current and past related projects, associated names and initiated introductions. The branch, which most Yukon educators recognized as being long overdue, was eager to assist us with the project as they saw its potential in promoting cultural inclusion in Yukon schools and a way to better assess the Indigenous students needs. I was very happy with this relationship since it promoted some of the ideals of PAR. The FNPPU saw this as a way of helping themselves, their students and teachers, of pushing their mandate further, and of having the input of another perspective and/or a new set of ideas. Many of the Yukon First Nation

communities and schools had justifiable reservations when dealing with the Department of Education, yet with the creation of the FNPPU and their staff who were well respected and trusted by the schools and communities, I was very fortunate to have such positive support and endorsements. It is also worthy to note that my previous work with experiential education and Indigenous students in the Yukon had granted me a favourable reputation amongst many of the communities and the FNPPU.

The timing of my arrival for my first set of interviews was fortuitous, as it coincided with the release of the much anticipated *Yukon Education Reform* completed by the Yukon Government and its partners (2008c). I was invited to the inaugural release by the Yukon Territory Government's Minister of Education who acknowledged my research and pledged his support. This opened avenues of interest in the political and administrative streams of education, which are not always easy to access.

I was very fortunate to be invited on a Territory-wide, Department of Education sponsored mission to produce experiential education kits for all of the community schools. The lead person, a (retired) experiential educator, was charged with the task of creating an inventory of school equipment and identified teachers' needs. This entailed creating a data base and informally interviewing the principal and school-identified experiential educators, usually one or two teachers from each school. I visited six Yukon communities, which provided a wealth of information. Many of the communities offered me an invitation to return and conduct more formal interviews with educators, students and community members regarding my research. I was pleased and very fortunate to have these connections fall into place so auspiciously.

Tribal Chiefs Peacekeeping Conservation Commission (TCPCC)— Community-Based Experiential Education Program

The approval process for the Community-Based Experiential Education Program supported by the Treaty Six Cree and Dene Nations of northern Alberta

was directed by the governing organization of the Treaty Six Tribal Chiefs Peacekeeping Conservation Commission (TCPCC). The community collaborator was a respected member of the TCPCC, and the organization provided direction and support for all involvement with the schools and communities. Initial commitment was gained by the particular community's Chief and Council. I was usually then asked to meet with the school principal, interested educators and community members. This process resulted in two communities asking me to provide a presentation delineating the research objectives, and discussing how this might benefit the community. A planning session and informal focus group interview followed.

Gaining access did not occur without challenges, as originally all five communities from the TCPCC were contacted. Yet as the Chiefs and political support often changes in many of these communities, so does the support for educational initiatives, and more specifically, the experiential based programs. Fortunately two communities (Kehewin First Nation and Cold Lake First Nation) were committed to their programs and supported the research under the direction of the TCPCC. They saw the value of its assessment properties as the Community-Based Experiential Education Programs are relatively new, only two years into their existence, and at various implementation stages. The communities saw the value of evaluation and promoted a reflective process that engaged various participants in the program's planning and delivery.

I am uncomfortable to express the next aspect regarding gaining access and developing close relationships with respective community figures, yet I believe it is necessary. Many of the Cree and Dene community members are avid and somewhat fanatical golfers. I have been fortunate enough to be blessed with some skill in this sport and with it comes a certain reputation (and I may add undue pressure to perform). Therefore upon the request of many educators, Chiefs, Councils and community members, I played a lot of golf during the initial stages of the project. As a result, I developed close relationships with many influential and active members of the communities that assisted me in

gaining respectful and trustworthy introductions to passionate educators and community members devoted to Indigenous education. While I ultimately cannot charge the cost of my green fees to the research budget, in fact much of the initial planning, some informal interviews, and even insight came from my time on northern rural Alberta golf courses.

For the purpose of this study, I consider that the data collection phase formally started in June 2007 and ended in late August 2008. I have provided a timeline of my research activities in the *Appendix II* which shows the different stages of my data gathering over the course of those 14 months.

Data Gathering

Participant Observation

I attempted, to the best of my abilities, to act as an "indweller" in the everyday activities of the specific programs in question. That is, I attempted to empathize (van Manen, 1990) with each participant in order to understand how they constructed an understanding of experiential and place-based education. As I recognized that my time was precious in the communities, I spent as much time as possible "within the schools" which is a bit of a misnomer because much of the programs' school days were spent outside in the surrounding environment. I requested to be treated as a participant and active observer. This stemmed from previous experiences where I was introduced as a teacher and, as a result, many educators and students called upon my experiences and expertise. I do not deny that my participation included some infusion of my ideas and had consequences. Yet I was conscious of, and determined not to, direct or control the direction of events that transpired each day.

Classroom Participation and Observation

Since my role was primarily as an "observer", I spent some time at the back of the class or from the "side lines". Yet my role is more accurately defined

as an "active observer" in that most of my time was spent engaged with students in the prescribed activities of the day (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). I was often in a group setting, as the students frequently worked in small groups. It may be of interest to note that I was assigned different nicknames in each community. My Yukon name was "OC" as it was the name given to me by a student in my first experiential program in 1996, and had been resurrected by a student who prided themselves on knowing my past careers "retro" history. My northern Alberta name was the Cree word "Niibin", which was given to me by an Elder one day when out on the land with the students. It was explained to mean "summer", as my son and I both have the same first name, and were born in the summer months (my son was born around the same time I spent in the community). As often is the case in these intense and inclusive programs, relationships were developed that enabled me to actively participate in the school activities.

My role developed with time. I was initially treated as a welcomed guest, yet this developed into what I can best describe as an "indweller". Spending extended periods of time in snow caves, tents and sweat lodges, at feasts and funerals, on skiing, hiking and hunting trips enabled me to quickly integrate into the programs' every day happenings and develop relationships with the participants. This produced, what I believe, to be rich participant descriptions and insight. I do not wish to dismiss the awkward and often mute periods at the beginning of the data gathering stages as the students assessed my character and tested my resilience. I am relieved to report that in most cases I made the grade, so to speak.

I gained much insight while in the field, as I shared in many life-affirming activities that tested all participants. Trusting your partner while rock climbing, building a snow cave, and sharing hospitalities at -35 degrees Celsius, provide opportune moments to gain insight from your cohort. It was my goal to participate in at least one extended field trip with each group identified, as I believed this to be crucial in providing meaningful and accurate observations. While I spent over 60 days within each community and, for most of the time,

was engaged in the actual programs of study, I also paid considerable attention to the administration and planning processes performed by the educators. Debriefs with teachers and assisting in the evaluation of trip journals was also a valuable tool in my research.

Some students stood out as their characters were undeniably intriguing. Yet it was the reserved and often passive students that I was initially drawn to. These students provided much insight into the comparison of the "regular" education system when compared to that of the alternative. Some of the most in-depth and emotional responses I received came from these students.

As criticality is promoted in these programs, I was able to develop a heightened awareness of certain issues that were deemed important by the students, as well as the educators (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). Debates were promoted and often students were asked to respectfully engage in group discussions involving contentious issues such as Indigenous rights, environmental issues, resource development, historical interpretations, political subjects and local problems. Both programs were of the opinion that if you were to have an opinion, you must back it up with reasons. This sometimes emotional display of opinions was essential to a researcher trying to gain an appreciation of the participants' subjectivities.

Field Trips

As I previously mentioned, most of my time within the school was spent on field trips. I quickly learned that most educators believed that experiential approaches were best displayed outside the four walls of the institution where they were based. I also requested to spend, at the very least, a few days in the classroom with the students to gain an appreciation of the diverse environments in which the programs were delivered (Creswell, 2003).

The settings and duration of the field trips varied according to the school, educator and respective programs. Some were short 1-2 hour excursions, while others were half to full day long outings. As I mentioned, I spent at least one

extended field trip with each program. These trips ranged from an overnight canoe trip to a snowshoe trip in the mountains that lasted three days. While the programs often embarked on longer trips, I could not spare the extended time within the limitations set out by my schedule. I chose to analyze their associated journal narratives instead as it provided ample insight into their experiences and perceptions.

As travel was prevalent in most field trips, I used this time to informally chat with students and educators. While I did not voice-record any of these informal discussions, I was busy recording responses and my related observations in my field journal. Other opportune times for discussions and observations were during meals, breaks, while hiking, skiing, snowshoeing and most engagingly around a campfire.

Field Notes

The field notes for this study were written in a collection of field journals that I kept on hand during the entire research process. I would take notes while in the school, out in the field, while travelling, during informal conversations, and throughout formal interviews and focus groups. I made a point of spending a couple of hours each day or night reviewing my notes from that same day while things were still fresh in my mind. At this point I would add points that I remembered but did not have the time to record, insert my reflections, and connect certain issues and thoughts that formed emerging themes or conflicted with other ideas (Merriam, 1998).

These field notes materialized as a central component to my data gathering, as I realized I worked best when recording events, ideas, and statements in this manner. I also found that many of the participants were much more comfortable and open with sharing their thoughts in this manner when compared to having them recorded by the digital voice recorder. I attempted to formally interview and voice record each participant at least once in the process, yet I used the field notes to follow-up, ground truth (reinforce and/or confirm)

and provide additional insight with each participant in similar or differing contexts.

The information that resulted in these field notebooks became extremely large and complex. As I initially intended the interviews to be the primary form of data gathering, I was unprepared to devote such a considerable amount of time on the analysis and cross referencing of the emerging data from the field notes. My notes also provided considerable support for the framing of the methodology and this dissertation. A description of the analysis process will be provided later in the chapter (see *Analysis of Field Notes*).

Interviews

While the field notes were crucial in guiding the methodological process and assisted me in reshaping the interview method as the research evolved, the interviews became my focus as I attempted to understand how students, educators, and community members felt about their education and how they interpreted the field of experiential and place based learning (Creswell, 2002). Much of the interviews represent formal voice recorded interviews. I also informally interviewed and hand recorded countless participant responses throughout the timeline of the study. This information was kept in notebooks, as described in the previous section (see *Field Notes*).

I conducted voice-recorded interviews with 45 different individuals; while 8 people were interviewed multiple times (see Table 5.1). I also conducted four voice recorded focus groups, which ranged from 6 to16 participants.

Table 5.1: *List of Interviewed Participants for each Research Setting*

Individuals Interviewed	Yukon	Northern Alberta
Students	8	4
Teachers and Administrators	12	6
Elders and Community members	6	9
Total participants	26	19
Focus groups	2	2

The majority of the formal interviews were done either inside a school, band office or in the participants' home. In recognition of the students' and teachers' busy school schedules, I conducted many of the interviews at lunch time or immediately after school. I met many of the administrators in their offices or at the respective school. Many Elders and community members chose to meet at their home or at the local coffee shop. I presented each Elder with a gift before each interview. In the Yukon I was instructed to provide an arts-related article and, as such, I chose prints from a Yukon First Nations run gallery in Whitehorse. In northern Alberta, I was advised to provide a package of tobacco and a fleece blanket, which was furnished by the TCPCC. For most of the interviews, I brought lunch, dinner or snacks (depending on the time of the day and the location) as a way of showing my gratitude and respect for their willingness to participate. I sought out valuable insight into proper cultural protocols when meeting with many of the participants. Each community collaborator provided insight and I also sought the guidance of a few Elders with whom I had previously developed a relationship. With that being said, I still managed to cause a chuckle or induce a look of confusion from some of my participants with respect to a cultural "faux-pas" or my ignorance. Thankfully everyone was accepting of my intentions and supportive of the overall goal.

All the interviews were completed in English even though many of the participants were fluent in other languages (e.g. Cree, Dene, Southern Tutchone, Gwitchin, Tlingit, and French). For the participants whose primary language was not English, I offered to have the community collaborator participate in the interview process to help translate. Yet none of the participants accepted this offer and it turned out that all the participants were able to convey their thoughts fluently and with ease. I also offered to provide each participant with the written transcript of their particular interview.

The interviews were focused on three major themes: Indigenous education, experiential and place based learning, and local initiatives. The

differences in school programs and cultural settings demanded that we adjust the interview protocol appropriately. I focused the questions on gaining insight into the participants' academic, social and professional (when relevant) activities and thoughts with respect to education. While no comparative structure with the regular school program was built into this study, participants often compared the experience of the experiential program with that of the regular program. We conducted "a spiral of cycles" (Lewin, 1947) in our research, thus the results from one interview allowed us to refine not only the questions, but also the research techniques for following interviews. After each interview, I would review its recording and take notes with the intention of picking up key issues that the participant raised and use that insight when preparing for the next interview.

Examples of the interview questions are in *Appendix V* for each identified participant (i.e. students, educators, and community members). Please note that these questions only provided a framework for the interviews and focus groups, as each participant and previous interviews provided valuable insight in creating culturally appropriate and place-specific questions that detailed the specific and complex issues explicit to each community and culture. With respect to the student participants, the parents, family member, or guardian were welcomed to attend the interviews as an observer if they so desired. None took this opportunity.

I interviewed both community collaborators and some selected teachers numerous times as we worked very closely together over the two years. Though I did not have any of the teachers directly interview their students, I attempted to have them work closely with me on the preparation of the questions and their subsequent review (each student's identity was anonymous to the teacher and they were only provided with the resulting data in aggregate form after the semester had ended and marks were submitted). In the process of interviewing students about their educational experiences and teachers subsequently listening to their students' (anonymous) perceptions, many benefits can occur. It provides

a space where students feel safe and supported to express previously submerged perspectives. This provides a healthier, more engaging experience where a mutual respect is developed between student and teacher. It also provides a confirmation and sense of validation for the student, as they feel their voice is not only being heard but respected. The teachers gain beneficial connections to the students as they engage in real-life inquiry and acquire a more holistic understanding of the student in a specific context. Even though we chose in this study not to have teachers directly interview students, I am compelled by Duke's (1977) description of teacher-student interviews as "debriefing". He argues that educators can now use the information received from such interactions to develop curriculum and deliver practices that are more responsive to the students' needs. He also suggests that students who engage in the "debriefing" questions take responsibility for recollecting and reconstructing previous experiences and in the process organize, interpret, and attempt to make sense of their academic lives (Kincheloe, 2003).

As previously reported, I interviewed political figures such as the Yukon Minister and Deputy Minister of Education, several Chiefs, three superintendants and five principals. This provided valuable insight into the administration and sustainability of these alternative programs. As one could imagine, the perspective of this group of participants often provided dissimilar perspectives when compared to other participants. I appreciated the divergent viewpoints as it provided depth and a realistic analysis of the phenomena in question.

Focus Groups

I conducted two focus groups in each respective setting. All the focus groups were carried out in the particular school of interest and ranged from 6 to 16 participants. They included school and band staff exclusively, such as teachers, aides, administrators and band councilors. In the Yukon schools, the focus groups took on an evaluative tone as the programs have a lengthy history and it was seen as a chance to reflect and assess the program's value, success, and failures. The northern Alberta school programs are relatively new and

therefore, the focus groups became an informal planning session for the staff and led to valuable insight into this aspect of research. Many discussions became emotional as sensitive topics such as residential schools and other personal and professional struggles came to the surface. As the questions were provided to each participant, I acted as a moderator who provided as little specific input as possible, yet I had to clarify the direction of the discussion in a few cases as some school administrators attempted to include different agenda items.

Other Forms of Data

Besides interviews and informal discussions with students, educators, administrators, and community members, I had frequent contact with many of the participants via e-mail, which I saved for analysis. I also communicated with some of the teachers and administrators by phone and recorded highlights of these conversations in my field notebook. Many of these exchanges provided valuable insight. I was very fortunate to have the students offer their trip journals and associated personal narratives and stories, which were often arranged by the teachers to focus on the research objectives. Following some principles of PAR, I provided reflective tools for teachers to use in their program with their students. The teachers also used them as a form of evaluation of their students and programs.

I did receive some quantitative data with respect to the students, school administration and demographics, community data, as well as some informal long-term assessments done by specific teachers. However, I was shocked and extremely disappointed to learn that very little was recorded, kept on file, or simply made available to me.

Data Analysis

Analysis of Recorded Interviews and Focus Groups

Similar to the process of developing interview questions, my approach to my transcription analysis evolved as I spent more and more time with the data. My research grant from the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) provided some funds for transcription services and, as I had over 60 hours of audio-recorded data, I contracted a professional service to transcribe half of the interviews. Unfortunately, the service and product was substandard and I found their work unacceptable since many words and phrases were missing or mis-transcribed. This was unfortunate with regards to my time-line, but it did force me to spend over three months transcribing each interview myself. I believe this gave me an intimate and in-depth understanding of the recorded data, and helped me to place and connect themes as they emerged.

The analysis process began after each interview when I would listen and review the audio form and take notes in my notebook. This influenced the ways in which I would engage and question the participants over time, as I became more familiar with the emerging data. My initial reviews of the interviews lead to my search for basic themes within the context of the research protocols: Indigenous education, experiential and place-based learning, local practical examples, etc. Once all the interviews were completed, I then began the "official" data analysis phase (May to August 2008). I listened for words, phrases and themes that initially did not fit into my protocol or that emerged as trends within the larger scope of the data field (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I began to listen to the participants' voices as they strayed from the limitations of the questions I posed in the interview. I then embarked on the transcription phase which was long, tedious and not an enjoyable task due to its manual process. Yet at the end of each transcription, I coded specific parts of each interview as key words or phrases which captured the ideas that the participant identified as important (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This identification and coding was intentionally intuitive and quick in nature. This fast read allowed me to infer the

data outside of the confines of the interview protocol. I then returned to transcriptions with a list of previously identified words, phrases and themes and proceeded to reread the documents slowly and carefully, looking for specific data that would support or contradict these emerging ideas (Stake, 1995). Through this double read process, I created a thematic summation which acknowledged, but also ventured beyond, the interview protocols, and which was grounded in the specific voices of the participants (Wolcott, 1994). For each identified theme I coded specific utterances which supported the theme, color coded them according to an emerging master list of themes, and then assembled them into specific themed documents (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This was not a linear process, as many identified and emerging ideas often conflicted, merged or reshaped these previously identified themes. This process also transformed subsequent readings of both new and old data. This was a long and tedious process since my analysis of any given interview or other form of data (e.g. field notes, interview notebook, journals and narratives), essentially shaped all subsequent readings of other data (Berry, 2004; Varela, 1999). This became a latently endless cyclical process.

Analysis of Field Notes

While I previously reported my additions to the field notes at the end of each day of data collection, I only truly analyzed these field notes in depth after I had spent the two months collecting data in the respective community. I felt it necessary to spend a considerable amount of time with the participants and to develop relationships before any analysis, as I wanted the participants' perspectives to shape the direction and bring to light the key ideas that I would attend to in my field notes at the analysis stage (Schon, 1991). The field notes became a valuable tool in both the data collection process and as a record of events since I used my notes while writing both this chapter and the following ones. I used the field notes to verify the order and nature of the various research activities. I also relied on my field notes to provide the details and scope of each case study in the following chapter (Chapter 6). I quickly realized that I worked

best by recording my thoughts as they emerged with each passing day, for they then reflected the complex process of trying to make sense of each day's activities and the participants thoughts that ultimately frame my research findings (Chapter 7- *Findings* and Chapter 8- *Conclusion)* (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973).

Analysis of Other Forms of Data

The participants' trip journals and reflective narratives were extremely informative and gave me insight not attainable through the interviews and focus groups. Specifically, they were the thoughts of select students and teachers who provided personal, private and emotional insight unlike the data obtained through interview transcriptions. The trip journals also provided valuable insight into the practical application of reflection in the learning process, as it is deemed essential by most educators in the facilitation of experiential education. While not formally intended as an example of assessment practices, it became a window into how some teachers evaluated the students' development.

Dissemination of Knowledge

After the data analysis was completed, the results were disseminated through a variety of mechanisms. These included:

- *Two case studies*, each specific to the particular program represented. A preliminary report that included the two case studies was supplied to the participants of the programs at the end of August 2008. Over the course of the Fall 2008 session, I was in contact via phone and email with the community coordinators and some participants which resulted in a trip to each of the communities to debrief with the participants. This also allowed me to include their input for assessment of the textual representations of their experiential programs through community meetings and follow up interviews. I then returned to the data and made the final inclusions, deletions and adjustments according to the input provided by the participants. As community input is foundational and

many values of PAR were upheld through the process, the analysis of the data and its textual representation was assessed and endorsed by the participants of the two chosen programs. With the support of the participants, I provided the dissemination of my findings in this dissertation.

- During this past year, a large portion of my time was spent analyzing data and preparing the final report to be given to the two communities and the Canadian Council on Learning (who supplied much of the funding necessary to make this study possible). The report is a reflection of parts of this dissertation, which include the completed analysis of the data (Chapter 7 – *Findings* and Chapter 8 – *Conclusion*).

- A comparative analysis of the two case studies (Chapter 6) was also provided in the final report and is linked to the comparative analysis section (Chapter 7), as well as the discussion and conclusion of the research (Chapter 8). It is my hope that the comparative case study section will provide key information for educators interested in exploring alternative forms of education. Thematic findings included the following topics: Specific Program Terminology; Program Characteristics; Program Strengths; Program Limitations; and, Promising Future Innovations.

Conclusion

This chapter served three functions: 1) to present the questions that frame this research; 2) to provide the theoretical basis for the manner in which this study was conducted; and, 3) to describe, in detail, the process I undertook to gather and analyze the data that is the foundation to better understanding the application of experiential and place based programs found in the Yukon and northern Alberta.

In the next chapter I will establish the context that shapes the subject of inquiry, and provide an in depth comparative case study analysis of the two

varying settings (i.e. the Yukon and northern Alberta). A rich description of each program will be provided, as I present a description of the program from the participants' perspective, my interpretation of their voices, and my personal experiences in the communities in question. I will highlight program elements that lead to student engagement and educational success. Each case study will also provide a description of barriers that exist in the implementation of such alternative programs.

Chapter 6: Comparative Case Studies

Introduction

This chapter covers a broad range of issues, and identifies factors and strategies that encourage Indigenous learner success rather than focusing solely on the failure of students. It begins with a description of the methodology used for the extended case method, followed by an overview of the complex environments in which these programs operate. The two case studies, which focus on the two specific programs identified, are then provided in detail. The concluding section of this chapter analyzes common patterns across the two programs, ending with a description of the dominant factors that promote and hinder student success.

Contextualizing the Methods

Case studies are bound by time and activity, with the overall intention being that the researcher collects rich, thick and detailed information using a multitude of data collection procedures over a prolonged period of time (Stake, 1995). Gall, Gall and Borg (1996) state that case studies serve three purposes: to achieve detailed descriptions of phenomena of interest; to develop possible explanations of phenomena; and, to evaluate the phenomena of interest.

Scholars, such as Yin (2003) and Bryman and Teevan (2005), suggest that the use of multiple case studies can strengthen external validity of the results. They also note that the relationship between the case study and existing theories can lead to decisions based on generalizations from case study research. Yet Stake (2000) warns researchers not to lose that which is unique about the case in an effort to find similarities with other cases. He points out that many scholars, such as Yin (2003), view case study methods as leading to scientific generalisations, but he emphasizes the intrinsic interest of each case as being important and dismisses its value for scientific generalisations. It is with this debate in mind that I am interested in Burawoy's (Burawoy, et al., 2000)

description of the extended case method for "(re)constructing theory out of data collected through participant observation" (p. 271).

The extended case study method is often associated with two traditional criticisms of participant observation. The first is that even though it may provide interesting results, it is incapable of generalization; hence it is not to be considered "true" science. Secondly, the extended case method is intrinsically "micro" in nature and therefore not considered true sociology.

The extended case method responds to such criticisms with the notion that the "micro and macro are discrete and causally related levels of reality and that generalizations can be derived from the comparison of particular social situations" (Burawoy, et al., 2000, p. 273-274). It is by illuminating the connection between the micro and macro that the social situation is informed by the particular external forces which shape it. Hence the extended case method can produce certain generalizations through reconstructing theory as it interprets a situation as shaped from above (macro), rather than grounded theory's principle of building the macro from its micro generalizations. In this case, we are to regard the social situation shaped by the external and as a representation of the wider social network.

This method has implications for critical theory as it exposes power structures and their impinging influence on the happenings of everyday life. The extended case method is conducive to exposing the subjugated or exceptional cases as the researcher is drawn outside the field situation towards a broader economic, racial and political understanding. This specific extended case method strives to examine the specificity of the subject of inquiry, how it varies from place to place and how it has changed over time, with the intent of better understanding and exposing the forces that shape it. This can lead to an analysis of power-domination and resistance, a force all too common in Indigenous communities.

As a researcher involved in the extended case method, who is concerned with the specific historical context that shapes the subject of inquiry, it is through the critical act of examining curricular documents that questions have arisen, such as: "Who wrote what and for whom?" and, "How was it received by participants?" I included in my analysis some critical investigation that exposes some of the effects curricular documents have. What one may deem innocent and autonomous can be understood to have been created for a purpose and do produce effects (Burawoy, et al., 2000).

The extended case method looks for specific macro determinations in the micro world, through the reconstruction of existing generalisations/theories. It "derives generalizations by constituting the social situation as anomalous with regard to some pre-existing theory (that is, an existing body of generalizations), which is then reconstructed" (Burawoy, et al., 2000, p. 280). Therefore the worth of a certain case relates to what it actually says about the larger world in which it is found.

As I have included two case studies, it is in the importance of each separate case, the interrelationship of the varying research sites, and the connection between the particular and the general that I look for what it tells us about the education system as a larger whole, rather than about the specificity of the education of similar cases. That is to say that I pay attention to each case as unique, with its specific complexity, depth and thickness, yet it is in the macro foundations of microsociology that this study seeks to understand.

The comparative case studies are based upon some principles of PAR. Those principles include: community engagement (Reitsma-Street & Brown, 2002); participant-based and community-driven research methodologies (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988); a social action component that reveals power structures and aims to improve the lives of the participants (Freire, 1973); and, a praxis of Indigenous social, cultural and political values throughout the research project (McTaggart, 1991b).

I have previously referred to my incorporation of *"some"* elements of PAR. I feel obliged to disclose why I use the term "some". It is with trepidation that I include PAR in my research as I believe that some rhetoric associated with PAR has been used to secure undemocratic and non-participatory ends (Hagey, 1997; McTaggart, 1991a). While I firmly believe that the research participants must be partners in the development, study design and production of all aspects of the study (Stringer, 2004), I am in no position as a non-Indigenous researcher to promise or engage in the pure forms of such an ideology as it is defined by many Indigenous scholars (Reitsma-Street & Brown, 2002, Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). As a doctoral student who is engaged with the constraints of a post-secondary institution, these institutions (for many reasons) place specific demands and standards upon myself, the lead researcher, which is counterintuitive to many of the ideals espoused through PAR. This field of research promotes: the involvement of different groups; it speaks of involving all parties; and, giving the power to the participants (Freire, 1970). While I subscribe to this view, I try to place myself in a grounded space: as a non-Indigenous student researcher for McGill University involved in Indigenous research; with a life outside of school; a timeline for my studies; a recipient of funding from an outside organization; and, pressure to complete my research and write a scholarly dissertation that is accepted by academia. How do I successfully manage all these conflicting factors while putting full control of the research into the participants' hands?

I am attentive to Hagey's (1997) caution of PAR that uses the facilitator and community members as puppets, and to McTaggart's (1991a) warning of using the PAR flag as a communitarian value when it is not. I would like to live up to PAR's ideals yet struggle with the "How".

This comparative case studies research is based upon praxis of social action. It is through this action research that participants are assisted in better understanding and changing their situations for the better (Freire, 1970; Hinchey, 1998; Kincheloe, 2003; Martin, lisahunter, & McLaren, 2006). The PAR

principles chosen support the comparative case studies process as an improvement in school and community relations is inevitable when teachers and parents come together in a research project. As parents, teachers, students and community members were asked to discuss questions about what is taught, how it is taught and its implication on their vision of larger education goals, a true critical and participatory process was engaged (Giroux, 1997).

Yukon Schools

Demographics

The Department of Education oversees the territorial public school system under the *Education Act* (Yukon Territory Government [YTG], 2002). In 2007, 4,925 students were enrolled in K-12 at 29 public schools. Over 25% of the students are of First Nations ancestry (Yukon Territory Government [YTG], 2008a). It is important to note that at each specific school level, many administrators claimed that it was difficult to determine how many students were First Nations since the records kept by the department and each school often lacked a confirmation of ancestry verified by a parent or guardian.

There are 15 public schools in the Yukon's capital and largest city, Whitehorse. They include: eight elementary schools; two Catholic elementary schools; two secondary schools; one Catholic secondary school; one K-12 French First Language school; and, one experiential secondary school. There are another 14 public schools in the small rural communities outside Whitehorse. Most offer Kindergarten to grade 9, with several of the larger communities offering up to grade 12. Students from the communities where secondary grades are not offered may attend school in Whitehorse or another community.

This research study visited ten schools in the Yukon (see Table 6.1).

Table 6.1: *Yukon Schools Visited for this Research Study*

School Visited	Town	Location	Grade Levels
Wood Street School	Whitehorse	urban	9-12
F.H. Collins	Whitehorse	urban	8-12
Selkirk Elementary	Whitehorse	urban	K-7
Elijah Smith Elementary	Whitehorse	urban	K-7
Ghùch Tlâ Community School	Carcross	rural	K-9
St. Elias Community School	Haines Junction	rural	K-12
Teslin School	Teslin	rural	K-9
Chief Zzeh Gittlit	Old Crow	rural	K-9
Watson Lake Secondary	Watson Lake	rural	8-12
Johnson Elementary	Watson Lake	rural	7-12

Culture and Language

According to oral tradition, the Yukon First Nations people have lived on their present land since Crow, a mythological creature who made the world and set it in order. Archaeologists calculate that the first humans inhabited the Yukon more than 10,000 years ago, crossing the Bering land bridge, from Asia. Today, the Yukon First Nations people belong to the Athabaskan or Tlingit language families.

There are 14 Yukon First Nations: the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, the Teslin Tlingit Council, the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun, the Selkirk First Nation, the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation, the Tr'ondek Hwech'in First Nation, the Ta'an Kwach'an Council, the Kluane First Nation, the Carcross/Tagish First Nation, Kwanlin Dun First Nation, and the White River First Nation , Liard First Nation, and Ross River Dena Council. Currently, the first eleven Yukon First Nations listed above have reached land claims and self-government agreements.

There are eight language groupings amongst Yukon First Nations. There are two major language families: Athabaskan and Inland Tlingit. Athabaskan is further subdivided into seven dialects of Athabaskan which are: Gwich'in, Han

or Tr'ondek Hwech'in, Upper Tanana, Northern and Southern Tutchone, Tagish and Kaska. The Athabaskan language family extends over an immense area of North America and is the largest language family in the Yukon. The Tlingit people and language originate from Southeast Alaska, and they made their way into the Yukon at least 300 years ago to trade with the people of the Interior, the Athabaskans. Many of the people in the Southern areas have both Athabaskan and Tlingit ancestry.

Instruction within the public school system is English-based for the majority of students. French and Indigenous languages are widely offered as second language instruction. French Immersion and French First Language education is offered in Whitehorse exclusively.

Curriculum, Programs and Services

The Yukon is a full partner in the Western and Northern Canadian Protocol (WNCP). This protocol supports the development of common curriculum frameworks for Western and Northern Canada. Within these frameworks, the British Columbia program of studies forms the basis for the Yukon curriculum. This curriculum is frequently adapted to reflect local needs and conditions, as demonstrated in the *Yukon Experiential Programs* described further in this chapter.

The Department of Education values experiential approaches to curriculum delivery and places a particular emphasis on literacy, numeracy and the use of technologies. Yukon schools are among the most 'connected' in Canada. Because of the vast area of land and isolated rural communities, all Yukon schools have access to high-speed internet service.

A recent example of culturally relevant curriculum is *Yukon First Nations 5*, which covers four themes: Yukon First Nations Languages, Clans, Citizenship and Governance and will be used in all Yukon Grade 5 Social Studies classes in 2009. It has three goals: to help understand and appreciate the role of traditional Yukon First Nations governance; to help students find balance within, in order to

live peacefully and respectfully with themselves, one another and the land; and, to help students demonstrate respect for Yukon First Nations languages and culture (Yukon Territory Government [YTG], 2008b).

The First Nations Programs and Partnerships Unit (FNPPU)

Located within the Public Schools Branch, the mandate of the FNPPU is to build productive relationships with First Nations; improve the results of First Nation students in the K-12 system; work toward increased levels of cultural inclusion in Yukon schools; and, provide direct and indirect support to Yukon First Nations, schools and the Department of Education.

Initially created in 2006, it is already making considerable progress. Working collaboratively with the First Nation Education Advisory Committee (which invites representation and participation from all Yukon First Nations), the FNPPU has developed several First Nations curriculum materials and resources for the Yukon classroom. In addition to the aforementioned *Yukon First Nations 5,* the FNPPU is also responsible for the following: Yukon First Nation focused Social Studies units for Grade 4; three new titles in the Yukon First Nation - focused Early Reader *NorthWind Books* series; adapt the British Columbia First Nation Studies 12 course for use in Yukon classrooms; development of an interactive DVD featuring Yukon First Nations Elders; and, an Engagement Protocol which will outline best practice on how to involve First Nations in school activities.

Experiential Learning

The Yukon Department of Education's interpretation of experiential learning was most recently defined as:

> Participative, taking place in purposefully constructed settings, whereby learners engage in structured experiences, combined with meaningful reflection, as a way to maximize learning. These structured experiences might include classroom 'solution-finding' activities, outdoor activities,

the performing arts, and Service Learning. Experiential Learning is suited
to the acquisition of practical skills through the opportunity to practice
techniques related to authentic tasks, undertaken in real life settings.
(Yukon Territory Government [YTG], 2008c, p. 4)

There has been a growing interest in experiential programs in the Yukon
since its introduction in 1990, both at political and public levels. Wood Street
School has been the department "flagship" model, and has attracted a
considerable amount of interest and support from the community over the years.
In the beginning it was introduced by the governing territorial New Democratic
Party political party. Yet in 2002, as a new government gained power, initial
plans were to restructure the programs and close the school. This was met with
heated public opposition and the government was forced to rescind its decision.

While Wood Street School is often seen as "the" model for other schools,
it is not to say that experiential learning is not happening in many classrooms
across the territory. A strong history of outdoor education has defined the
educational policies of the Yukon for many decades, as it mirrors the
environment and social preferences of many Yukoners. In 2007, the Yukon
Department of Education published the *Education Reform Project – Final
Report* which was a result of a two year review (2002-2004) of the Yukon's
Education Act. In many sections of the document, recommendations for an
increase in experiential learning can be found. At the Minister of Education'
release, he began his address with a resounding voice for experiential processes,
and I quote: "I want the Yukon to be the experiential capital of Canada" (2008).

Experiential learning can be found in all Yukon schools. A recent
department allocation for experiential education was created that provides, on
average, each school with $25,000 a year for experiential activities. This study
has chosen three specific schools for the setting of the Yukon case study. *Wood
Street School* (Whitehorse), *Ghùch Tlâ Community School* (Carcross), and
Selkirk Elementary (Whitehorse) all have committed to the experiential programs
and have shown positive results with student success. While they represent

different geographic locations (urban versus rural) and grade levels (elementary versus secondary), their use of the experiential programs are similar in pedagogy and epistemology. Even though the case studies are focused on the respective experiential programs that are to be defined later in this chapter, I find it necessary to provide a short description of each specific school chosen in this study. The descriptions are informed by the field notes, participant interviews and program documents.

The Three Schools

Wood Street School is located in the heart of Whitehorse. Students from across the Yukon Territory are participating in six major programs that incorporate provincially approved high school curriculum that ranges from grade 9 to 12. There are approximately 110 students per semester enrolled for semester-long programs that include: *OPES* (Outdoor Pursuits and Experiential Science) and *PASE* (Plein Air et Sciences Experientielles) programs for grade 9 students; *ACES* (Achievement, Challenge, Environment and Service) program for grade 10 students; *ES* (Experiential Science) program for grade 11 students; and *MAD* (Music Arts and Drama) program for grade 9/10 and 11/12 students. The student population is representative of the Yukon population, as it is estimated at 25% Yukon First Nations.

There is one administrative assistant on staff and five teachers, all non-Indigenous, who teach semester-long integrated experiential programs to classes that range from 20 to 30 students. The *MAD* program is team taught and the other programs' teachers team teach as the curriculum allows. There are no bells and each teacher determines with the students the schedule for the day, week and ultimately the semester. One of the teachers acts as the department head and the school administration is ultimately governed by the principal of F. H. Collins High School, a large public secondary school in Whitehorse. These programs originally were housed in F. H. Collins, representing a "school within a school" model, but soon outgrew their place in the high school and were given their own building.

The present building is an old elementary school that has a small gymnasium, a computer lab, and a large equipment area shared by all the programs. The facility is often referred to as a "Centre" as it includes rooms for a YTG French language program and First-Aid training. It is also a facility that many groups, clubs and community organizations use in the evenings and on weekends.

Selkirk Elementary is located in Riverdale, a suburb of Whitehorse. The majority of students live in Riverdale within a two kilometre radius of the school. There are approximately 255 elementary students who attend Kindergarten through grade 7 classes. It is estimated that 50% of the students are of First Nations' ancestry. The school has begun an experiential program for a class of 11 grade 6 & 7 boys.

There are over 38 people on staff, which includes 24 teachers, who teach classes that range from 15 to 25 students. Selkirk is similar to other schools in its administration as it has a principal, vice-principal and secretary. The school relies on specialists for activities such as physical education, computers, music, learning assistance and First Nations Culture. Selkirk also has 10 educational assistants (EA) who are dispersed amongst the classes. The schedule follows a typical school day of five hours and fifteen minutes, beginning at 8:30 am and finishing at 3:00 pm.

Selkirk elementary prides itself on parental and community participation in many classrooms, in school wide events and in special activities. Many parents are involved in the classroom as volunteers and teachers are asked to remain in close contact with the students' homes as much as possible. It is important to note that many students come from low income families, and most take advantage of the breakfast and lunch programs.

The experiential program at Selkirk is taught by one teacher and is supported by two Educational Assistants (EA). The 11 students within this program are working on Individual Education Programs (IEP) and have various

learning and behavioural disabilities. Many are functioning academically at a K-grade 1 level. The majority are Yukon First Nations students who come from different areas of the Yukon, while one student is Inuit from the Northwest Territories. Aside from meeting the grade six and seven curriculum, many of the program's activities are based on promoting positive social behaviours which are often identified in the students IEP's. Teamwork, cooperation, and leadership are some of the components included in the experiential activities. Many forms of communication, such as circle sharing, personal journals and various types of drama and art are promoted as students attempt to develop skills that support healthy relationships. The program is only in its second year, yet success is already being reported. Each student had, previous to this program, required a personal EA, but now they are all working together as a class cohort with a significant reduction in EA support. The students' attendance, which was previously an issue for many, has improved; observable positive relationships have developed amongst the students and educators; and many are making the transition back into parts of the regular class setting.

Ghùch Tlâ Community School is a public school located on the Carcross/ Tagish First Nations reserve in the southern part of the Yukon. The community of Carcross, where the school is located, is 74 kilometres south of Whitehorse, and is close to the Alaskan border and the harbor town of Skagway. The school has 62 students from Kindergarten to grade nine. Students who wish to pursue grades 10 through 12 are required to attend a secondary school elsewhere. Some commute daily to Whitehorse but many take advantage of a Yukon Department of Education subsidized residence for rural area secondary students. The community's population is 430 and it is estimated that 65% of the students at Ghùch Tlâ Community School are First Nations.

The school employs 15 staff members including a principal and two school Elders. Class sizes are small as they range from 8 to 15 students. Believed to be the only "elementary" school in North America that has an active Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) licensed radio

station, it broadcasts out into the community and beyond. Many of the students have their own radio programs and the school has recently completed construction of a new sound studio. The school hopes to begin streaming the students' radio shows over the internet in the near future. Another identifying feature is the school's indoor climbing wall, referred to by many as "The Great Wall", which has brought national attention because of its scale, technical difficulty, and most notably, its artistic design and painting that represents the community's passion for the arts. The school has also received numerous accolades for its incorporation of technologies.

In 2006, following community recommendations, the Department of Education renamed what was previously known as the Carcross Community School to the *Ghùch Tlâ Community School,* in honour of Carcross/Tagish First Nation Elder Lucy Wren. "Ghùch Tlâ" is Wren's Tlingit name, which translates in English to "Wolf Mother". The renaming of the school for Mrs Wren was to honour her passionate role in maintaining and enhancing current knowledge of Tlingit and Tagish languages and cultures, both in and out of the classroom. Upon retiring at the age of 84 from her position as First Nation Language instructor at the school, she still remained involved in the school and in the creation of the "FirstVoices" digital language archives, until her unfortunate passing in 2008. In addition to Tlingit, English and Southern Tutchone, Mrs Wren also spoke Tagish, and was possibly the most fluent remaining speaker of that language. Mrs Wren's work, the commitment of other community members, and the renaming of the school in Mrs Wren's name demonstrates the community's commitment to infusing Tlingit and Tagish language and culture into the educational praxis of the school (Yukon Territory Government [YTG], 2006).

This infusion of Tlingit and Tagish language and culture is fundamental to the development, delivery, and assessment of the *Carcross Experiential Program*. Created in 2005, one teacher is responsible for the year-long experiential program for the cohort of 15 students from grades 7, 8 & 9. The

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students remain with the same teacher for three years (through grades 7-9), and a turnover of the cohort exists every year as previous grade 6 students opt into the program and finishing grade 9 students move on to a secondary school in Whitehorse. The program is heavily reliant on community input and has recently received numerous accolades for its grass roots programming (Road Less Traveled Award) and the incorporation of new technologies at a community level (Network of Innovative Schools Award).

For a comparison of the three Yukon schools and their respective experiential programs see Table 6.2.

Table 6.2: *Overall School Comparison*

School	Wood Street School	Selkirk Elementary	Ghùch Tlâ Community School
Location	Whitehorse, YT	Whitehorse, YT	Carcross, YT
Total Number of Students	110	255	62
Grade Level	9 to 12	K to 7	K to 9
First Nations (%)	25	50	65
School Staff	6	38	15
Teachers	5	24	10
Indigenous Staff	0	21	9
Experiential Education Program-Class Size	20 to 30	11	15
Year Program Created	1995	2006	2005

Yukon—Experiential Education Programs

The Experiential Education programs, supported by the Yukon Education Department, were originally developed in 1990 and have continued to grow and attract student, parent and community interest. The original experiential programs were delivered in a "school within a school model", and then were later moved to their own school (*Wood Street School*). Presently, many schools are incorporating experiential learning in various forms throughout the Yukon.

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Their structure varies from simple integrated activities such as a nature walk, a dramatic performance, or an analysis of the communities water, to extended field trips (as long as 35 days) which take the students to various areas of the Yukon, Alaska, B.C. and Alberta, all the while integrating the curriculum.

The experiential education programs were developed around three basic principles:

- *Learning styles*: People learn in many different ways. For many, hands-on experiences are a far more effective means of learning than lectures, readings and visual presentations. The experiential programs address curricular outcomes in many different ways, frequently incorporating experiential processes and media technologies. This means of addressing different individual learning styles allows many more students to learn effectively.

- *Integration*: People are able to learn more effectively when they are able see things in relation to other things. This principle of integrating subjects is central to the instructional processes used in these programs. Such integration lends itself to the examination of real life issues. Activities often use one subject as a means to understanding another subject.

- *Motivation*: People learn far more effectively when motivated. Participation in meaningful events, studies or enterprises involving students in a wider community is both exciting and motivating to students. Involving students in adventurous enterprises captures their emotional commitment, as does the sense that their participation will make a difference to community decisions. These are all means used by the programs to motivate students.

For details on the programs offered in the specific schools chosen to represent the Yukon Experiential Programs see Table 6.3.

Table 6.3: *Comparison of Programs*

Program	School	Grade Level	Semester	Courses Offered	Field Experience
OPES (Outdoor Pursuits and Experiential Science)	Wood Street	9	Fall	Science 9, Social Studies 9, Physical Education 9, Information Technology 9, and Outdoor Pursuits 9	3 to 5 overnights, variety of day trips
PASE (Plein Air et Science Experientielles)	Wood Street	9	Spring	Science 9, Social Studies 9, Physical Education 9, Information Technology 9, and Outdoor Pursuits 9	3 to 5 overnights, variety of day trips
ACES (Achievement, Challenge, Environment and Service)	Wood Street	10	Both	Social Studies 10, Yukon Studies 10, Career and Personal Planning 10, Physical Education 10, and Fine Arts and Applied Skills	30 days, day and overnight trips
ES (Experiential Science)	Wood Street	11	Both	Biology 11, Geography 12, Forests 11, Chemistry 11, Art 11, Field Methods 11 and Career and Personnel Planning 11/12	30 to 35 days field trip, variety of day trips, 2 days/week in Yukon College
MAD (Music Arts and Drama)	Wood Street	9/10	Fall	English 9/10, Social Studies 9/10, Physical education (Dance) 9/10, and either Fine Arts (Drama) 9/10 or Applied Skills 9/10	3 to 5 overnights, variety of day trips
MAD (Music Arts and Drama)	Wood Street	11/12	Spring	English 11/12, Social Studies 11, Theatre Performance 11/12, and 2 to 3 courses from: Media Arts	3 to 5 overnights, variety of day trips

				11/12; Music; Composition and Technology 11/12; Drama: Film and Television 11/12; Dance Performance 11/12; Dance Choreography 11/12; Theatre Production 11/12; Theatre Performance: Directing and Script Development 11/12	
COYOTES Experiential Program	Selkirk Elementary	6/7	Year-long	English Language Arts, Yukon First Nations Culture, Science, Mathematics, Health and Career Education, Physical Education, Outdoor Education, and Social Studies	Majority based in the community 1 overnight, variety of day trips
Carcross Experiential Science	Ghùch Tlâ Community School	7 to 9	Year-long	Yukon First Nations Culture, Science 7/8/9, Applied Skills 7/8/9, Health and Career Education 7/8/9/, Fine Arts 7/8/9, Social Studies 7/8/9, Outdoor Education 7/8/9, English Language Arts 7/8/9, Mathematics 7/8/9	Majority based in the community environment, 3 overnights, variety of day trips

These eight experiential programs are designed to help students develop as critical learners and engaged members of their community by reflecting upon individual and group responses in a variety of settings. A large part of these learning settings are in the classroom, lab or theatre, but a significant number are

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also held outdoors. These settings provide challenging experiences, which help the students grow intellectually, physically, socially, emotionally and culturally. Evaluation is from within the individual, by the peer group, and by the teacher or additional instructors. The programs encourage each student to become a responsible citizen, with the self-confidence and skills needed to meet the many challenges facing an Indigenous person in a changing society.

Activities are organized using a range of field studies that focus on the specific program objectives. Field studies are extended through detailed observations and illustration, increasing students' appreciation of the topic in a natural setting. The field studies are often projects based on coordination with government and community organizations. These partnerships add interest and importance to the field studies, and encourage students to develop skills they would often miss in the conventional setting. During the field activities, students meet and take part in projects with community members, professionals, Elders, and other students. These encounters provide students with in-depth discussions about many issues that relate to their specific program, but also regarding local community interests, social justice and world affairs.

Thirty-five days (or more) of each semester consist of either one trip or many shorter trips depending on the specific program. These trips often take the Yukon students through places like Alberta, Central or Coastal British Columbia, Alaska, and remote areas of the Yukon. Some activities include sailing, SCUBA diving, sea kayaking, skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, biking, canoeing, forest and marine surveys, private company and government facility tours, dramatic performances, and university and college visits. Some culturally specific activities include a bison hunt, culture camps, trapping, net fishing and hunting. These trips are often the highlights of each program.

Students are responsible for undertaking major projects and developing a comprehensive study for their fellow students. The major projects have touched upon topics such as water quality analysis on a community lake, GPS/GIS (Global Positioning System/Global Information Systems) mapping of

community trails, long term thermal observations to determine appropriate northern gardening locations, Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) practices in environmental assessments, fitness assessment of the entire class, development of a salt water aquarium with tidal movement, development of an alternative working model of a full suspension bike, raising populations of arctic char in a pothole lake, ancestral mapping of a family, traditional wood carvings, traditional drum making, recording Elders stories, and tanning of caribou and moose hides

Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning and to work cooperatively. Computer-based communication technologies become a basis for some of the students' work, as they are in contact and work collaboratively with many interested participants across the territory, country and even internationally. Virtual communities evolve as the students are promoted to work with others as a team, and to be flexible and adaptable participants. Students are also encouraged to create online journals with some generating "blogs" that promote the educational objective of a "critically engaged learner" which the program strives to achieve.

The classes are organized on a different model compared to the regular public school model. For instance, at *Wood Street School* there are no bells in the school and, together, the teachers and their students decide when it is appropriate to take breaks and lunch according to the learning schedule. The *COYOTES Experiential* and *Carcross Experiential Science* programs are both housed within a regular school structure but are flexible and adapt according to the specific needs of the activities to be performed. Each program involves one or two teachers who holistically teach the curriculum by integrating the specific course requirements. The students work together as a single cohort with their teacher(s) for the semester, year or in the case of the *Carcross Experiential Science* for a three year period. The classroom is seen as a home base yet many different and diverse sites (indoor, outdoor and web-based) are used to promote experiential learning.

The programs adapt territorial curricula to meet the student's social, cultural and academic needs. The programs develop community and business education partnerships, and demonstrate relationships between school subjects and society. The experiential programs develop working relationships with a number of community organizations. Students are engaged, regardless of their level or ability.

The experiential programs encourage students to participate in activities beyond course requirements; they encourage students to venture "outside the box". Many students return to the programs to share their experiences following graduation. Students appear more willing to take on real world challenges following the experiences they encounter in these programs.

Teachers who have these students in following semesters or grades often comment on the students' ability to work effectively and cooperatively. The extended field trips, in which each student is required to take a turn preparing food and/or cooking for everyone, to keep themselves organized while carrying on their studies, and to live together, away from home, in the face of constantly changing challenges and experiences, develop a strong sense of self worth and class cohesion.

The experiential education programs integrate hands-on strategies and problem solving activities. The programs provide field activities, new media and networking experiences related to all the major learning outcomes for the courses included in each program. The field studies are selected because they complement and extend the outcomes identified in the course curriculum. The programs involve parents and community in student learning.

Independent Directed Studies (IDS) approach for Yukon Traditional First Nations Cultural Activities

The IDS model has been recently introduced as a means for developing, delivering and assessing independent, directed studies in areas of Yukon First Nations traditions. The Independent Directed Studies approach is currently being

used in some of the *Wood Street Experiential Programs*, as well as at *Ghùch Tlâ Community School.* The application of the various IDS' is extremely popular in the rural community schools in which I visited.

The B.C. Ministry of Education has defined IDS as a means of gaining graduation credits in elective subjects. One to four IDS credits for a single subject related activity may be granted to each student, depending on the scope of the course. A student may be able to get credits for more than one IDS course. Assessment is based on the demonstration of skills, attitudes and oral accounting. These, in turn, form a portion of a student's portfolio. The skills and attitudes are embodied in an IDS course and are clearly identified at the outset. These are referred to as Individual Learning Outcomes (ILO's) for the existing school course.

The processes and instructional strategies reflect community and cultural perspectives. Elders and specific members of the community, who are considered proficient and knowledgeable in the chosen topic, are involved in creating, overseeing and assessing the specific IDS. The teaching is directed toward the mastery of skills and internalization of attitudes. The demonstration model of assessment suggests that the student be presented with multiple opportunities to show mastery.

One example of this approach is the Yukon First Nations: Land-based Activities[7] (Sharp, 2005). This IDS course can be completed over a period of years, involving related family, community and school cultural activities. Parents, Elders, community and school all participate in asking students to demonstrate the skills identified in the IDS and/or provide oral accounts, and in grading their performance in these skills and accounts. The record of student task completion is part of the student's portfolio.

This course includes a wide variety of demonstration and oral account topics, each of these relating to an ILO for the course. The *Yukon First Nations*

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[7] An example of a *Yukon First Nations: Land-based Activity-Winter* is provided in *Appendix VI*

Land-based Activities can include topics such as different seasonal cycles of land-based activities. They also include an array of specific ILO's and their related demonstration or account assessment.

Tribal Chiefs Peacekeeping Conservation Commission (TCPCC) Schools

Demographics

The Tribal Chiefs Peacekeeping Conservation Commission (TCPCC) represents the five Tribal Chiefs Association (TCA) First Nations reserve schools on the northern plains of the province of Alberta, and supports the *Community-Based Experiential Education Programs*. The five founding members of the TCPCC include: Beaver Lake Cree Nation; Cold Lake First Nation; Frog Lake First Nation; Kehewin Cree Nation; and, Whitefish Lake First Nation #128.

Each community supports a band school on reserve land. The schools provide classes for students either housed in one or two separate buildings, depending on the community. The population of these reserve schools consists of predominantly Cree Nation students, yet the community of Cold Lake First Nation, and its community school,- *Le Goff School*, is of Dene heritage.

The five schools consist of both elementary (Kindergarten to grade 6) and secondary (grades 7 to 12) levels. The populations of these schools range from 80 students per school, to the most populated at 400 students. The classification of the schools is considered "rural": defining them as servicing a large geographical range while being outside any urban areas. They are accessible by road, with the most accessible school being 250 km north-east of the city of Edmonton. They are all found in relatively close proximity to each other within a 200 km perimeter.

The TCPCC reserve schools and communities are found on Treaty Six land, surrounded by larger more developed towns populated by predominantly White-Caucasian farmers and oil and gas employees.

The schools serve low-middle class communities, many who have traditionally shown dissatisfaction with the previous educational services provided. The schools' curricula incorporate Alberta's provincial curriculum, but they are not bound to its use, as they sometimes supplement it with other provincial programs.

Based on community demographic data collected, the communities and respective schools have diverse cultural backgrounds (four Cree, one Dene/Chipewyan), are of various combinations of religious backgrounds (Traditionalist, Catholic, Methodist and Pentecostal), occupy diverse locales (boreal forest, parkland and prairie), are surrounded by intense oil and gas activity (65,000 wells in the immediate area), and are subject to a high, chronic unemployment of 70% (c/. The Great Depression of 30%).

The Context of Reserve Schools

It is important to review the broad and diverse context in which these reserve schools operate. Indigenous education in Canada is characterized by a complex system of governance and funding. Students who live off the reserve normally attend Albertan provincial schools, for which the Canadian Constitution delegates authority to the province. The federal Government of Canada, through the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), is responsible for the education of First Nations students living on reserves and who have the option to attend reserve schools (operated by their respective bands), provincial schools through educational services or tuition agreements negotiated by each band and INAC, or federally operated schools on the reserve. This final option is the case with Cold Lake First Nations' *Le Goff School*.

Although this has been an extremely slow process, INAC has almost attained the goal of "Indian control of Indian education" (see Chapter 3). All but

seven of the 507 schools on reserves (one of the seven being *Le Goff School*) are now under First Nations management. In comparison, in 1969 only one school was managed by First Nations.

Legislation, dating back to 1876, gives INAC the responsibility to fulfill the lawful obligations of the federal government to Indigenous peoples (*Indian Act*). INAC is responsible for the delivery of basic services that include education, social assistance, housing and community infrastructure to Status Indigenous communities. Funding to support Status First Nations students living on reserves is paid to the band councils. This is intended to cover costs such as, providing instruction in on-reserve schools, repayment of tuition costs for on-reserve students who attend off-reserve provincial schools, and student support funding services including transportation, counseling, accommodation and financial assistance. The delivery of the funding is a complex and confusing process at its best. Many of the bands struggle to comply with INAC's demands and interpretation of financial accountability. This is not to say that examples of band council financial mismanagement do not exist.

A fundamental issue related to funding equity is the formula by which the reserve schools are financed. The formula, known as the Band Operated Funding Formula (BOFF), is used by INAC to calculate the funding allotted to reserve schools. It is calculated on the basis of the number of students attending a reserve school multiplied by the student tuition rate, or "unit cost". This varies in each province and every year. In the 2006/2007 school year, the average unit cost for Alberta was reported at approximately $4,500 per student. Additional increments are allotted for programs such as, Special Education and Indigenous Language Instruction, but an exact number is not specified. On average, INAC provided $7000 per student in federal funds to the reserve schools. These numbers reflect information provided to me by the individual band offices of each TCPCC community.

The province of Alberta also has significant influence over the education of First Nations students, as many of the students on reserves exercise their right

to attend provincial schools off-reserve through the funding support of tuition arrangements with the host school division. Reserve schools traditionally follow the curriculum and graduation requirements set out by Alberta's Ministry of Education.

TCPCC

The Tribal Chiefs Peacekeeping Conservation Commission (TCPCC) has been charged with the duty to implement the terms of Treaty Six on the traditional lands of the member First Nations of the Tribal Chiefs, Alberta. This involves developing a management regime for hunting and fishing off reserve, assisting the leadership in their consultations with other levels of government by developing methods for monitoring the effects of resource developments on 'traditional lands', and instilling a sense of responsibility among the membership for what is happening on traditional lands. This is done while also attempting to prepare and motivate students to take advantage of the employment opportunities that are currently emerging on Treaty Six lands.

A significant dimension of this broad undertaking entails re-configuring teaching methods within on-reserve schools. At the time of publication, talks are in process to involve up to eight First Nations schools situated along the North Saskatchewan River and the Cold Lake-Beaver River watershed systems, on both sides of the Saskatchewan/Alberta border.

The TCPCC's Primary Mandate:

1. Provide program and advisory needs pertaining to all Peacekeeping issues within participating Member First Nations (MFN), between MFN, TCA, and other First Nations and 'Tribal' organizations, as well as between individual members of MFN and all other jurisdictions and authorities concerned with their collective well-being.

2. Provide program and advisory needs pertaining to all conservation and harvesting issues arising within MFN, between MFN, TCA and other First

Nations and 'Tribal' organizations, and between individual members of MFN and all other jurisdictions and authorities impinging on their hunting and fishing practices.

3. Initiate and direct all surveys, research and assessments pertaining to their collective well-being, including conservation and harvesting issues.

4. Seek funds supporting the pursuit of all aspects of the mandate.

5. Assist and develop ways in which the programming needs of participating member regions can be established and met.

6. Develop protocols for participating MFN to modify the programming initiatives to best address regional needs and concerns.

7. Develop mechanisms for monitoring, evaluating and adjusting the effectiveness of all programs.

8. Establish liaisons and partnerships with all agencies and governing bodies that have a bearing on their objectives. (Tribal Chiefs Peacekeeping Conservation Commission [TCPCC], 2002)

Current TCPCC Projects [8]

In addition to supporting the *Community-Based Experiential Education Program*, the TCPCC is involved in other experiential-based activities. The following projects include the participation of the students of the five TCPCC schools which employ the experiential program: Traditional Knowledge Record and Map; Surveying, Monitoring and Supervising Capacity; Tribal Access System (TAS) Web Site; and, Community-Based Experiential Education Teacher Certification Course.

The Two Schools

Kehewin First Nation School is a band school found on the Kehewin Cree Nation (KCN) reserve. The KCN community is located approximately 250

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[8] You will find an in-depth overview of the *Current TCPCC Projects* provided in *Appendix VII*

km northeast of Edmonton. The school provides classes to students from Kindergarten to grade 12 in two separate buildings (Kindergarten to grade 6 & grade 7 to 12). Total enrolment is 262 students. Another 134 KCN students attend local provincial schools in the nearby towns of St. Paul, Bonnyville, or Cold Lake.

All of the students who attend the Kehewin First Nation School are Cree First Nation students. Cree language and culture are taught to the children from Kindergarten to grade 9. The majority of the school staff is First Nations, yet over half live off reserve. Historically, the school has seen a high turnover rate with its teaching staff. It has been suggested that this factor was due to the lack of leadership, and a disconnection from an administration which was staffed by non-KCN members. Yet a new principal, who is from the community, has provided stability to the school over her three years. The benefits have been seen through improved school morale, facility enhancements, and lowered student and teacher absentee rates, and can be attributed to the current principal and staff.

An important issue that was being debated within the community while I was conducting this research was the issue of KCN students attending off-reserve schools. This seemed to divide the community since one third of the student population were attending off-reserve schools. This has implications for the funding of Kehewin First Nation School. INAC directly funds the community school according to the number of students enrolled. This is a common problem amongst the four other TCPCC schools, and measures to reduce the off-reserve schooling were being discussed (i.e. cancel buses, cut band funding to students attending off-reserve schools, etc.).

The *Community-Based Experiential Education Program* was implemented at the Kehewin First Nation School in 2006, and is coordinated by one teacher. The class consists of twelve grade 10 and 11 Cree students. It is taught within the regular schedule of the school and, depending on the day, the students are together for either one or two consecutive blocks. The program

incorporates provincially approved courses, which are integrated and delivered within the local communities' cultural and environmental contexts.

Many of the students have traditionally shown poor attendance and have a history of academic struggles. They are deemed "at risk" for dropping out of school and therefore, are encouraged to participate in the experiential program. At the present time, the program is limited by the behaviour of the students involved. The policy is that each student is personally responsible for demonstrating appropriate behaviour, framed as "Respect". The scope and length of the field activities are designated as rewards, which are limited by the behaviour of the students, but more specifically by the group as a whole.

The school has recently applied to INAC for funding for a new school facility. The KCN hopes to promote the experiential model school-wide. They have coined the term "Kehewin Community-Based Experiential School" in their application to INAC. When this dissertation was submitted for review, there had been no response from INAC.

Le Goff School is a Dene First Nation school found on the Cold Lake First Nation (CLFN) reserve. The CLFN community is located approximately 350 km northeast of Edmonton. Most of the students are Dene yet some also have Cree heritage since inter-cultural marriages are common. The federally run school provides classes for Kindergarten to grade 8 students. Total enrolment is 67 students. Another 52 CLFN students attend local provincial schools in the nearby towns of Bonnyville and Cold Lake.

While 507 reserve schools exist in Canada, Le Goff School is one of only seven federally run reserve schools. It is important to note that after extensive community consultation, the CLFN band council has recently decided that it is in the community's best interest to have Le Goff School remain a federally operated reserve school. This arrangement provides for some interesting partnerships since the staff are federally employed and unionized (which is not the case in other reserve schools). The school still remains closely connected to

the CLFN Chief and Council, with the everyday operations of the school being "co-managed". An interesting issue that surfaced while data was being collected involved the hiring of a Dene language instructor who did not have INAC-approved teacher credentials (Alberta teaching certification). The final arrangement between INAC and the CLFN Council resulted in the teacher being employed by the band and INAC recognizing her role as a "specialist".

The *Community-Based Experiential Education Program* was implemented in 2005 by one grade 5 teacher, but as of 2007 the program has been adopted school-wide. The school works with the community to provide Dene language and culture at all grade levels. All Le Goff School teachers, EA's, administrators, and some selected Elders and community members have been trained to promote experiential learning that reflects the CLFN's culture. Recognizing that CLFN Treaty lands are rich in oil and gas reserves, the community promotes the use of the *GLOBE* (Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment) science program as a way to educate the students about their environment. Field activities are included that promote environmental assessments. Students work with the CLFN environmental monitoring program, *Nu Nenne AXYS*, to promote place-based education, a respect for the lands their community occupies, and to develop interests and skills that may eventually lead to employment. The school places special emphasis on science-related activities. The students and staff have received special recognition, and have been granted awards that acknowledge their science proficiency and community-related projects.

For a comparison of the two TCPCC schools and their respective experiential programs see Table 6.4.

Table 6.4: *Comparison of TCPCC Schools*

School	Kehewin Cree Nation School	Le Goff School
Location	Kehewin Cree Nation	Cold Lake First Nation
	250 km NE of Edmonton	350 km NE of Edmonton

Grade Level	K to 12	K to 8
Number of Students	262	67
First Nation	Kehewin Cree Nation	Dene First Nation, some Cree
Students Attending Other Schools	134	52
Location of Local Provincial Schools	St. Paul, Bonnyville and Cold Lake	Bonnyville and Cold Lake
Program Format	Class within a day	School-wide
Credit Courses (4 credits)	Aboriginal Studies 10-20-30; What is Wildlife (WLD1010); Mapping & Aerial Photos (FOR1050); First Aid	Provincial standardized grade-level appropriate curriculum
Option Courses	(Outdoor Experiences 1-Survival Skills (WLD1030); Water Management (AGR3110); Taking Responsibility-People, Culture & Wildlife (WLD1050); Why Forestry? (FOR1010); Career Directions-Expansion (CTR2310); and Resource Management (AGR1110)	Provincial standardized grade-level appropriate curriculum

Tribal Chiefs First Nations Reserve Schools – Community-Based Experiential Education Programming

This newly developed program (implemented in 2005) is based on an experiential model that incorporates traditional ecological knowledge, interviews with Elders, as well as environmental studies and assessments. The educational foundation is built on local traditional and cultural knowledge, with a strong emphasis on experiential learning. The objectives of the program are the following:

- to create broader community support in education by involving the Elders and other community members as instructional resources;
- to encourage students to be aware of and feel responsible for the lands their ancestors have occupied;

- to encourage openness and flexibility in integrating local knowledge with general forms of understanding;

- to promote a positive sense of self-esteem for the students that facilitates empowerment and positive social skills; and,

- to better prepare and encourage the students for employment opportunities that exist within Treaty Six lands.

Each specific school has chosen to deliver the *Community-Based Experiential Education Program* in various formats. Le Goff School decided to implement the program at a school-wide level, diffused across all aspects of the school programming. Conversely, Kehewin First Nation School has adopted a "class within a day" model where the program is scheduled in a block/period similar to a traditional academic course, such as Science 9 or Social Studies 10.

The *Community-Based Experiential Education Program* at Kehewin First Nation School includes four one credit core courses (Aboriginal Studies 10-20-30; What is Wildlife (WLD1010); Mapping & Aerial Photos (FOR1050); First Aid) and several option courses (Outdoor Experiences 1-Survival Skills (WLD1030); Water Management (AGR3110); Taking Responsibility-People, Culture & Wildlife (WLD1050); Why Forestry? (FOR1010); Career Directions-Expansion (CTR2310); and Resource Management (AGR1110)).

The *Community Based Experiential Education Program* focuses on the use of experiential and integrated curriculum to promote contextual and applied educational initiatives that emphasize engagement and hands-on learning. It promotes an integration of some of the existing curriculum with traditional and local cultural knowledge, as well as present community principles. This integration develops place-based learning and knowledge development. Teachers incorporate delivery methods that integrate local, cultural and community objectives with the curriculum. Therefore, teaching emphasis is intended to draw heavily on local knowledge and to stress direct experiential learning.

In coordination with the TCPCC, a highlight of the program is the development of an audio-visual record and map pertaining to traditional use practices, movements, co-operative arrangements, historical events and spiritual well-being as recounted by the Elders of each First Nation. The students were instrumental in conducting the interviews and disseminating the data which is consequently being used by the teachers to extend curriculum delivery methods that integrate local cultural and community objectives.

The use of the natural environment, hands-on learning and the incorporation of computer-based communications technologies are used to support the learning process. An example of student engagement in cultural and community objectives is the creation of the newly developed Tribal Access System (TAS) website and Geo-referenced Internet Map. The map is a web-based GIS application that provincial stakeholders access when planning developments or are otherwise conducting business within the Tribal Chiefs Area of Treaty Responsibility (TCATR). On the site, the TCATR appears as a single spatial entity. However, it is constructed from the traditional use areas of the participating Tribal Chiefs Member First Nations and informed by student-run Elder interviews, which provide valuable knowledge that extends the scope and depth of the TCATR. These areas overlap in many places. These separate areas and their various overlaps are layered under TCATR and are an integral feature structuring which First Nation(s) should be contacted regarding a particular issue or project. Technologies such as GPS, GIS and the TAS website are used to facilitate the development and maintenance of data obtained from environmental assessments. It is believed that along with the Elder's teachings and the use of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), GIS can be an important tool in helping to understand and manage the local environment.

New media technologies are being used through the *GLOBE* program, which is a worldwide, hands-on, primary and secondary school-based online education and science program that is used to develop an awareness of one's "Place" in the natural world. Through the use of environmental science-related

activities and an integration of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), students develop an enlightened recognition of the proper relationship of self, community, and the global world. Teachers are trained to provide this innovative environmental science program in an adapted manner that incorporates their community's specific cultural and educational needs. There are opportunities to make connections on a global scale as *GLOBE* schools across the world share knowledge and collaborate on environmental activities. An outdoor education component is incorporated, as many of the activities are undertaken in the field.

This experiential program focuses on place-based activities and community involvement that specifically addresses the five specific community schools' cultures and traditions. Opportunities to share knowledge and increase social awareness are provided through Information Communications Technologies (ICT) such as the Tribal Access System (TAS) website, the *GLOBE* program, various virtual communities, and online journals. The *Sunchild E-Learning Community* is also used, as it is a web-based distance learning program directed at Indigenous students in Canada that has had tremendous success in improving academic achievements. Teachers and students interact in real-time over the web and through video-conferencing, learning and sharing information as it applies to various educational outcomes.

The experiential program is currently developing a curriculum that recognizes the complex intersection of historical-cultural knowledge, and Alberta provincially approved science and social studies programs. Curriculum development hopes to link local social studies and sciences (see *Current TCPCC Projects* and *Appendix VII*), and is currently being developed for grade five to twelve in the following areas: Mapping/GPS; Water quality/Hydrology; Fishing in all seasons (including boat safety); Soil; Plants/ Land management; Vegetation/Riparian health; Ecosystems; Firearms and hunting safely in all seasons (including Quad safety); Clouds/Atmosphere; Snow Study; Forest Assessment; First Nations Environmental Tool Kit; and, Careers.

Comparative Case Studies Analysis

I have chosen to summarize the pedagogical practices of the two programs (Yukon - *Experiential Education Programs* and Tribal Chiefs First Nations Reserve Schools - *Community-Based Experiential Education Programming*) by five themes which emerged from the analysis of data (Stake, 1995; Wolcott, 1994). They are:

Theme One - *Learning from Place*: These two programs put considerable focus on the implementation of Indigenous knowledge and methodologies in their present educational system. Place-based education is administered as it connects place with self and community. Because of the ecological and cultural lenses through which place-based curricula are envisioned, these connections are pervasive throughout. It is ultimately through this process that Indigenous values, culture and language are effectively incorporated in the curriculum. This educational initiative is based on the ideology that an Indigenous student with a strong cultural identity and a sense of Indigenous history is the student who remains in school longer, enjoys success, and has higher aspirations in his social and economic outlook.

Theme Two - *Understanding the Development of Self/Identity through Learning Units*: The identity of Indigenous peoples, whose concept of self is inextricably connected to community and place, contradicts the concept of self held by many Euro-Canadians whose identities can be summarized as an independence of the individual. The self-as-relationship of Indigenous people, who understand themselves as formed by their relationships with all living things, extends beyond the self-in-relation. These epistemologies conflict with the present Western style education and contribute to the lack of engagement and success of the Indigenous student. The two programs' incorporation of experiential and place-based programming is aligned to Indigenous epistemologies as critical thinking, identity development, and the acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of all things are essential components. The educational programs of these schools include motivators, such as teaching Indigenous

culture and history, having Indigenous role models, speaking a Native language, participating in local field experiences, the use of ICTs which develop personal skills, and the presence of cultural participation. This educational model increases achievement levels in many Indigenous populations.

Theme Three - *Technology and Learning*: In the *Community-Based Experiential Education Program*, E-Learning projects are used to integrate cultural language learning to ensure renewal of Indigenous cultures and language. The implementation of various ICTs embraces experiential and place-based learning initiatives, and supports local community values. Through the use of environmental assessment-related technologies and an integration of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), students develop an enlightened recognition of the relationship of self, community and the global world. The training and experience students receive while engaged with new technologies provides a bank of knowledge and skills that the students can use for future employment opportunities. Also, the engagement in knowledge sharing through virtual communities has provided positive outcomes for Indigenous students' social, political and cultural development. Acknowledging that students today live in a modern world surrounded by evolving forms of technology, many teachers believe that the incorporation of ICT's and other technological tools increase students' engagement and motivation.

Theme Four - *Diverse Educational Systems and Learning*: While many participants of this study may not be "well read" in the theoretical interpretations of critical theory and pedagogy, the participants are engaged in a praxis of criticality. The intent and actions of both programs demonstrate a system of education that is concerned with particular issues of power, justice, and the ways that the community's economy, matters of race, class and gender ideologies, discourses, education, other social institutions and cultural dynamics interact to construct the social systems that make up one's consciousness. This has tremendous impact on students whose educators ultimately envision a system of learning that values new possibilities for students to live well on Earth with all

other life. The current framework that guides many of the local public schools, and some classes in reserve schools, is based upon colonial thought and places the learner in a recipient position which is contrary to many Indigenous epistemologies. The two programs of study teach Indigenous students in the North to become critical learners and active participants, as it is only as dynamic participants in the world that we can see the relevance and need to learn about it.

Theme Five - *Alternative Pedagogies*: In a response to the negative effects of colonization, and an attempt to heal many Indigenous peoples' spirits, the concept of holistic education has been included as part of the experiential and place-based programs found in the programs chosen. Holistic education is a traditional practice that was used by many people in educating the young before formal education displaced such practices. It can be best described as a pedagogical approach to education that develops the whole child, intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically. A holistic education is not new to many Indigenous people and is compatible with traditional tenets of Indigenous peoples' conceptualizations of well-being and good life. The two programs were chosen as research sites because they have made significant gains through alternative pedagogical approaches to address Indigenous learning needs.

There are some reoccurring characteristics with respect to the two experiential initiatives that have emerged from this research. They are:

- Each school is made up of committed, knowledgeable and energetic staff.

- The staff all share a similar philosophy in reaching curricular goals.

- Community support is paramount in the integration of culture, traditions and local knowledge with school pedagogy.

- Technology is seen as an important vehicle in engaging students.

- Student's interest and motivation seem to be heightened in learning science-related topics with the use of new technologies.

- An emancipatory component was often included, as social justice issues regularly framed the educational activities and increased engagement.

- Recognizing the social and political context in which Indigenous students often find themselves, the programs worked to develop the human traits of criticality and resilience.

- Respect for the natural world and the use of environmental assessment often determined educational activities.

- An outdoor education component is incorporated as many of the educational activities are undertaken in the field.

- Each program struggled with alternative forms of evaluation that demonstrated the spirit of experiential learning.

There are also numerous *conflicting* elements of the two programs that were identified in this study. They are:

- *Different interpretations of the act of reflection*. While all of the teachers stress the importance of reflection as a key component in relation to action during the learning process (a fundamental component of the experiential process, see Chapter 4), many practitioners leave little time for group dialogue, debriefing, journaling or other practices of reflection. While the teachers' reasons may be valid, they often choose action at the expense of reflection. Simply put, practitioners are not practicing what they advocate.

- *The framework and scheduling in which the programs are delivered*. The format of each school's experiential program varied tremendously. *Wood Street School* and *Le Goff School* provide semester and year-long integrated programs. These programs are taught to a single cohort by one or two teachers in a school setting, and are devoted to the ideals of experiential and place-based education at all levels of the schools operation. *Ghùch Tlâ Community School* and *Selkirk Elementary* have adopted the "program

within a school model" and are in effect working as a separate identity within the school facility. This is not to say that the students and teachers do not have contact with the larger school. In fact, the teachers often decide to join school activities when it contributes to the program's objectives. *Kehewin First Nation School* delivers its experiential program as it would a regular class. The students attend it for a single or double block each day. However, in recognition of the use of field studies, each week the students are together for either a half or a full day depending on the activity.

- *The funding that is provided to the schools for delivery of such programs varies tremendously.* A fundamental issue related to funding equity is the formula BOFF by which the reserve schools in Alberta are funded as compared to the territorial schools found in the Yukon. It was reported that, on average, INAC provided $7000 per student to the Alberta reserve schools, in comparison to an estimated $13,000 per student for Yukon territorial rural schools (Yukon Territorial Government [YTG], 2008c). The Yukon schools receive almost double the funding as compared to the reserve schools in Alberta, and this does not take into consideration the extra funding for experiential education that the Yukon Department of Education also supplies.

  There is also a significant difference in teacher salaries when comparing Alberta reserve schools to Yukon schools. A teacher with similar education, experience and teaching portfolio is paid on average $20,000 more a year at Yukon schools (Yukon Territorial Government, 2008d). It should be noted that the Yukon is considered a "northern" area that pays northern (isolation) allowances.

- *The goals in which the principles of experiential and place-based education were originally based upon.* The Yukon program was originally developed to address diverse learning styles and to promote a community-oriented process of education. The Northern Alberta program was based on the

integration of Treaty rights within the process of learning, to encourage students to be aware of and feel responsible for the lands they occupy.

- *The percentage of Indigenous students and teachers within the programs' populations varies*. This difference can be directly attributed to geographic location as the urban areas, such as Whitehorse, have a smaller Indigenous student population (25 to 50%) than the rural communities, such as KCN, CLFN, and Carcross/Tagish First Nation (65 to 100%). The percentage of Indigenous teachers was quite similar to student demographics, with the exception of *Wood Street School* who have no Indigenous permanent staff.

- *Professional support from non-experiential program colleagues*. The study noted a wide range of perceptions by non-experiential program educators with respect to the experiential programs. Even though community support appeared to be universal in each community, some educators (including administrators) expressed resentment and disapproval for the programs. This was no more evident than in Whitehorse, as some non-experiential program teachers used terms like "ES: -Easy Science" or "Hoods in the Woods" to describe the programs. At *Le Goff School* a few teachers were not supportive of the school-wide experiential approach mandated by the administration and CLFN Chief and Council. It is important to point out that these data were collected during the first year of the school-wide programming change, therefore initial teacher perceptions may have changed. Also, this element does not conflict with a recurring characteristic noted previously (*The staff all share a similar philosophy in reaching curricular goals*) as this variation applies to non-experiential educators who would not be considered the staff of the programs.

- *The reclamation of Indigenous language was minimal in urban schools compared to rural schools*. Again, it is believed that this discrepancy can be attributed to the demographics of Indigenous populations when comparing urban (25 to 50%) and rural (65 to 100%) areas. It was evident that the application and retention of Indigenous language and culture was

significantly higher in rural communities compared to the urban area of Whitehorse.

- *How achievement/success was measured.* The schools employed many definitions of success with respect to Indigenous students. The schools' chosen indicators of progress correspond to aptitude, the barriers individual students encounter, and the community's goals and priorities. Some schools are still working on the essential preconditions for learning, such as regular attendance, readiness to learn, and parental involvement and support. Other schools identify their success in terms of academic outcomes, transition rates to post-secondary, first language proficiency or pride in one's cultural heritage. Success was also measured in terms of social programming and the strength of community partnerships to enhance these offerings, the degree of local control over governance, the Indigenous representation within the teaching force and the development of human capital to strengthen the local economy. School success was also measured by the capacity imbued in their students to thrive in both the traditional and modern worlds.

It is crucial to note that not only are there definite relations and nuances within each experiential and place-based program, but also explicitly within each school, community and reserve.

For a Review of the similar and differing elements of the two experiential programs chosen for this study, see Table 6.5.

Table 6.5: *Similar and Differing Elements of the Two Experiential Programs Examined for this Research*

Similar Characteristics	Conflicting Characteristics
School consists of committed, knowledgeable and energetic staff.	Different interpretations of the act of reflection.
Staff all share similar philosophy for reaching curricular goals.	The framework and scheduling in which the programs are delivered.
Community support is paramount in the integration of culture, traditions and local knowledge with school pedagogy.	The funding that is provided to the schools for delivery of such programs varies tremendously.

Technology is seen as an important vehicle in engaging students.	The goals in which the principles of experiential and place-based education were originally based upon.
Student's interest and motivation seem to be heightened in learning science-related topics with the use of new technologies.	The percentage of Indigenous students and teachers within the programs' populations varies.
An emancipatory component was often included, as social justice issues regularly framed the educational activities and are believed to increase engagement.	Professional support from non-experiential program colleagues differed.
Recognizing the social and political context in which Indigenous students often find themselves, the programs worked to develop the human traits of criticality and resilience.	The reclamation of Indigenous language was minimal in urban schools compared to rural schools.
Respect for the natural world and the use of environmental assessment often determined educational activities.	How achievement/success was measured contrasted.
An outdoor education component is incorporated as many of the educational activities are undertaken in the field.	
Each program struggled with alternative forms of evaluation that demonstrated the spirit of experiential learning.	

Conclusion

An evaluation of the two northern programs reveals that inclusion of Indigenous knowledge can be achieved within prescribed pedagogical methods. A complementary, rather than antagonistic, relationship can result between the Indigenous and Western science and social fields. Some examples are: the activities of local Indigenous peoples in each seasonal cycle, how animals, fish and insects are important in the lives of Indigenous peoples, the special significance of celestial objects for Indigenous peoples, and how Indigenous views of the interconnectedness of the environment are reflected in resource stewardship.

These two experiential programs are appropriate examples of how including diverse knowledge sources and traditions, especially highlighting marginalized ideas and ways of knowing, could point the way to curriculum review and transformation (Ismail & Cazden, 2005). It is aligned with Pinar's (1988, 2004) reconceptionalist approach to curriculum theory, which promotes a development of curriculum on the basis of the students' specific historical, political and cultural contexts. This is also complemented with critical inquiry, supporting the notion that it may be particularly useful in the area of Indigenous education.

Many Indigenous scholars (e.g. Cajete, 1999; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Hanohano, 1999) write how teachers must be prepared to integrate diverse forms of knowledge into curriculum so that Western paradigms can coexist with Indigenous worldviews about life's complex interconnections among peoples and with nature. They must focus especially on the need to relate to one's local community and geography, an approach to learning often referred to as "place-based education". The associated educators of the two northern programs attempt to strengthen family and community teachings, in the belief that "book knowledge," while having its place, should not supersede the "collective wisdom" learned through the ages and passed on to each new generation by educators, Elders and most recently through ICTs, in the recognition that many Elders are no longer with us to provide such wisdom.

The two programs and their associated schools are not without their issues. The most glaring discrepancy is found in funding equity. The numbers are staggering as territorial (and provincial) run schools are funded at a considerably higher rate than reserve schools. This has tremendous effects upon student outcomes, as some studies show a direct correlation between student achievement and school funding (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Kozol, 1992). Consequences of this funding gap for staff working in reserve schools include low salaries, lack of employer-sponsored pensions and limited professional development.

Another identified discrepancy of the two programs is in their understanding and intended outcomes associated with the fields of experiential and place-based education. In the Yukon, it was reinforced many times through the interviews and textual documents that the application of experiential and place-based processes are intended to meet diverse learning styles and needs, and to broaden the scope of curriculum delivery by including community involvement. The incorporation of Indigenous culture and language is seen as a valuable component, yet often treated as a substrate of the major goals aforementioned. In comparison, the TCPCC and its five reserve schools' interest in experiential and place-based programming is grounded in their commitment to Treaty rights and the reclamation of Cree and Dene culture and language. Through their history of oppression and within the present context of resource development, these programs have chosen to support forms of resilience and emancipatory actions that include critical pedagogy. It is believed that through this active inquiry process, student motivation and engagement are heightened and ultimately lead to success.

Each of the schools is trying to achieve tangible progress for its students. This study acknowledges the commitment, courage and humility in sharing their success and their struggles. The insights that can be drawn from their work will hopefully assist other educators and policy makers in furthering practices to promote educational success for Indigenous students.

The following chapter (Chapter 7 – *Findings*) will identify key issues emerging from the research data, and explore how these themes, emerging from the application of experiential and place-based education, contribute to the success of Indigenous students.

Chapter 7: Findings

This chapter is devoted to answering the three research questions set out as the general focus of this study: *How do students, educators and community members interpret the field of experiential and place-based education?*; *In what ways can educators and community members share values and practices to create more purposeful classroom praxis?*; and, *How can current educational systems redefine its practices to address Indigenous needs, as well as improve student engagement and success?*

Through a recursive process of data analysis, several themes have emerged. I explore those themes through the participants' voices as they relate to each research question. It is through these stories, their similarities and differences that I hope to provide scope and depth to this study.

I begin this chapter by addressing one of the three major research questions that provided the focus of this study:

> **How do students, educators and community members interpret the field of experiential and place-based education?**

Experiential Education

What is Experiential Education?

While a main goal of this research is to gain a better understanding of the field of experiential education as defined by the actual practitioners in the educational system, I believe it is my responsibility to first address my motivations regarding why I want to help define what experiential education is.

I am drawn to take part in the conversation on "What is experiential education?" because it is of significant meaning to me as an educator and researcher. A major component of research involves conveying the perspective that frames your study. I began this process in Chapter 4, with an academic review of the theoretical and historical interpretations of the field. However, I

struggled with some of the models in the experiential education literature as they did not support the depth of learning I had observed over my years as an educator or in the current practical and cultural applications I examined through this research. I also toiled over the contradictions that emerged with more established scientific and/or theoretical interpretations, and became concerned as I prepared to exchange ideas with different communities.

This struggle attracted me to Seaman's (2008) critical description of the experiential education field: "Today, this framework has evolved from a set of practice-driven models with historically specific purposes into a broader belief system underwritten more by liberal-humanist ideology, folk psychology, and administrative interests than by a scientific or epistemological foundation for learning" (p. 9). While I believe he speaks from an empirical focus, his critique is a valid assessment. If we are to agree that the field is being defined by "liberal ideologies", and "folk psychology" through practical models, then it seems logical to seek the perspectives of the actual practitioners and tell their story as it relates to the praxis of experiential and place-based education.

The following is a look at the field of experiential and place-based education defined by the words and insight of the participants of this study. I begin by sharing some of the participants' voices [9]as they relate to the field of experiential and place-based education.

> *It is taking the things that we learn in the classroom, giving them the*
> *basic theory and, as soon as possible thereafter, giving them practical*
> *applications that are actually meaningful…Not just an experiment that*
> *duplicates what we [the teacher] have just told them, but something in*

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[9] I have chosen to italicise the participants' quotes as to emphasize their voices. All quotes from teachers are from non-Indigenous teachers, unless otherwise stated. All quotes from Indigenous Elders and Chiefs are identified as such. Quotes from parents are identified as: (Indigenous; non-Indigenous) parent. Because of insufficient school records in the Yukon, accurate information on the identity of the Yukon students could not be obtained, so students are identified as: Yukon student. All the quotes from the TCPCC students are identified as: (Indigenous; non-Indigenous) TCPCC student.

*real life, preferably outside the classroom…it has real applications and
has some meaning to their life.* –a TCPCC teacher

*It is finally about us [students] being able to enjoy learning and some of
it is lifelong kind of things. It has not only given me the skills to do stuff
on my own, like skiing and rock climbing…but also an interest and
confidence to try new things out.* –a Yukon student

*It is teaching kids how to use the written word, how to recognize and use
their own experiences often through reflection, how to learn from other
people and themselves, and I think the process is as important as is the
content.* –an Indigenous TCPCC administrator

*In the last year I have watched my son grow up in front of me. He has
become more responsible and a better person. He is more confident and
now has a focus and passion for something. Shouldn't that be what we
want from our schools? …the academics are there but they are mixed
with our culture. So, the language, the science, arts, history and physical
activity all centre on activities which are rooted in our culture and are
often in the bush.* –an Indigenous TCPCC parent

Common Aspects

While the interpretations are somewhat varied and, as mentioned in the
previous chapter (Chapter 6: *Comparative Case Studies*), the original objectives
of each program differ, there are three identifiable aspects that both programs
support and that encourages teachers, students and community members to
become more active in experiential learning. They are:

1. A common belief that students learn in many different ways. Personality,
social interaction, the processing of information and instructional methods are all
key factors in determining learning styles. Many learning styles can be addressed
by employing various teaching methods. Experiential learning expands the scope
of instructional approaches and resonates with a larger range of students.

I walk into my class every morning and look out at all the different faces looking back at me; I have come to realize that with each difference in appearance comes different ways to learn...experiential education allows me to best meet the students differing needs as learners.–a Yukon teacher

2. While it is often assumed that students are intrinsically motivated to learn, many students have traditionally voiced their feeling of disinterest and irrelevance to school studies. Experiential learning is intended to provide a link between the curriculum and the personal and social lives of the students. By providing the connection between the student's own world and the curriculum, students may develop an understanding of why the subject matter is meaningful and important. The assumption is that motivation is a key to student success.

We try to break down those walls that separate the school from the outside world. What a novel idea, eh?—try to make what we are teaching relevant to the students' lives. It can be difficult in some cases, but the benefits far outweigh the difficulties. You can see it in their [student's] behaviour, that gleam in their eye when they are interested and see the connections…We don't have issues with attendance in this program, they want to be here…What is discussed in class often continues at home at the dinner table. This is powerful stuff... It has an authentic use; it's not just an exercise. –an Indigenous TCPCC teacher

3. Students are often not engaged in their studies. It is no surprise that the traditional style of teaching, which frequently includes an authoritarian type of teacher relaying information to a static recipient group of students, has lead to a general trend of passive learning. Many students develop curricular interests through active participation in field studies that are experiential and social in nature. The two experiential education programs believe that engagement is fundamental to the retention and further exploration of subject matter, and are also reliable indicators of student achievement.

I am so tired when I get home from school because we do so much in a day. It's a good tired because I am doing stuff that matters...I feel like I have some control of what I learn because I often get to choose what to learn and how, through the projects and stuff. We [the class] get to meet some really cool people who are experts in their field. Like on the 35-day trip, we named it the 'Trip of Passions' because we got to visit people who are so excited and passionate about what they do...[Tired] imagine being on the road for that long, but when you get involved and meet people who are so jacked-up about what they do, it is hard not to be excited and interested yourself, it's contagious. –a Yukon student*

As active learning is a priority in both programs, school activities often include the wider community. Teachers and students often work collaboratively on hands-on projects, experimenting and exploring local problems, which often lead to critical debates. Students are encouraged to work on projects that reflect their own personal interests. Subjects such as science, math and social studies are often taught as exercises that involve everyday situations and case studies.

Teachers

It was deemed fundamental that the teachers who participate in these programs have a clear understanding of the curricular objectives and outcomes set out by the province or territory. It is in the integration of various curricular outcomes, and a facility to match appropriate activities to support those outcomes, that experiential teachers are responsible.

It is not the teachers or the curriculum that is a problem, we [regular educators] need to not change what we teach but change the focus of the actual learning; adapt our delivery of curriculum and art of teaching to best address those diverse learning styles. –a Yukon educator*

There is a considerable amount of responsibility put upon the teacher as they are often required to be proficient in many subject areas, and have a considerable amount of skill and expertise in field activities. While the programs

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often rely on community members trained in specific areas, it is still the teacher's responsibility to connect the subject matter back to the curricular goals.

Most of the experiential teachers had considerable experience in the classroom (on average five or more years) and were certified in an extensive array of outdoor pursuits and field studies. The specific programs offered at each school often reflected the interests, skills and expertise of each teacher who ultimately delivered them. The concept of *Teacher Centered* programs will be explored in further detail later in this chapter.

> *We need to have an interrelationship with what we are teaching.* –an Indigenous TCPCC teacher

Several components were identified by teachers that are essential to create and maintain an experiential classroom. These are: a considerable amount of teaching experience and appropriate training (classroom management skills were often noted as a priority); the availability of resources to support such approaches; and, a school organizational plan and administrative support that allows for flexibility of both in-school and out-of-school learning activities.

Throughout my data collection, it was obvious, that the amount of time the teacher spent with students in and outside of class, as well as the energy and passion each teacher possessed had a tremendous impact on student success.

> *I think experiential education is engaging kids in things in and outside of the classroom. It works because you turn kids on that haven't been turned on to school before... So, when you get some energetic people who think outside of the box, they are talking about turning kids on. You know when they are turned on, as a counselor it is one of the biggest things I can see. I truly believe that those teachers connect with kids and it is that connection that is so important in any learning environment. Because when you are 'WOWed' by somebody, your eyes are open, right?...and you can't get enough of what they are talking about, what they are sharing with you…the students are inspired.* –a Yukon counselor

Schools

Teachers are often key players in establishing experiential classrooms, but the structure and organization of the school must also support such processes. The schools that support the experiential programs often differ in their configuration in many ways (this will be addressed in further detail later in the chapter, see *Organization*). Time is organized differently to accommodate projects, out-of-school activities and community involvement. Team teaching is a common practice in both of these programs.

> *I always remind people that we wouldn't be able to do this without [the principal]. He is constantly rearranging schedules, getting materials and defending our actions because we are different and we have different needs, and like in many cases 'different is good'.* –an Indigenous Yukon teacher

The schools are consistently engaged. They engage the communities' interests through projects and service learning opportunities. Administrators are continually involved in the learning opportunities; they are regularly the program's loudest proponents. Often described as "creative thinkers", staff work together to address difficulties and invite community input. The school's priority becomes focused on creating an appropriate learning environment where all students can achieve success.

> *Our experiential program has more to do with taking the existing curriculum and doing practical things with it… we want to go out and do everything we have always been doing on the land with the community, and then we want to come back and bring it into the school. We want everything we did out on the land to count for something and it should, but we don't want to lose anything in the academics also, we realize that is important too...This is why we have the 'Independent Directed Studies - IDS'* [see Chapter 4] *in which you can do all of our traditional pursuits and then bring that back into the classroom.* –a Yukon Chief

The evaluation processes use multiple approaches. In addition to provincial and territorial-approved standardized assessments, portfolios, peer and self-assessments and other alternative tools are used to evaluate learning. Regional evaluations are used as methods for validating instructional practices, yet more focus is placed on the actual learning as opposed to the teaching.

> *It can be very frustrating when you have to sit and write an exam when you have been so active and doing such amazing things. I guess it is necessary but I don't think it helps us. I like it when we get graded on our actual actions, our stories, and even when we rate ourselves, though that is really hard to do sometimes.* –an Indigenous TCPCC student

Communities

Both programs were founded on the idea of community-based schooling, a system of learning that is structured around the beliefs and happenings of a community. A considerable amount of time and planning went into identifying concrete goals which governed the processes and evaluation of the program.

> *This program would not exist without the support of the families and the community. I am humbled by the energy and passion put forward... It truly is what some may define as 'grass-roots'.* –a TCPCC educator

Teachers and administrators were hired because they demonstrated a proficiency and desire to relate educational approaches to the everyday realities of a community. It is not always an easy task to have a clear grasp of community wishes and needs; therefore time is delegated each week and month for community input and shared planning. Many teachers are not First Nations; hence they rely on community support to provide the key aspects of cultural infusion and language development that governs the program's objectives. Extensive consultation occurs between school staff and selected community members, such as Elders, to best decide how cultural objectives are to be met.

[Experiential programming] supports First Nations because when we are out on the land at our camps, at a fish camp or in the bush, we can help bring the learning in a natural kind of way…You don't always need the pencil and paper…There are many ways to teach, and as many or more ways to learn. I am proud to say that I can help in that. –a TCPCC Elder

All of the teachers put a considerable amount of onus on community input and involvement. Along with the classic "parent information evening", teachers and administrators are in constant contact with parents and community members regarding resource support, chaperoning, sharing expertise, equipment repair, cultural initiatives, etc. Bi-weekly and monthly meetings are scheduled for community input and assessment. The incorporation of diverse opinions, and often conflicting epistemologies held by community members, was identified as a challenge that required effective social skills and mediation experience.

Those meetings [with the community] can get pretty hairy at times but you know what? That is the reality of a community. We all do not see eye to eye and we need to develop skills that allow us to move forward in a positive way. It is important to ask these questions…Our students often participate because they are the primary shareholders of this thing…I won't deny that I get frustrated sometimes and some people are not always happy with the outcome but I really think this is our baseline, we get our energy and direction from this process. –a Yukon teacher

Not Just Outdoor Education

All of the programs incorporate outdoor pursuits in the educational programs. These activities are often locally based, such as canoeing, hiking, skiing, biking, kayaking and rock-climbing, etc. While others require the students to travel outside their known setting to experience a "foreign" context such as scuba diving, caving, sailing, sea-kayaking and ski-mountaineering, etc.

There is an overlying perception by many that experiential education is in fact outdoor education. Although some participants associated the two as being

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very similar, most practitioners in the field of experiential education were quite adamant that they are in fact quite different.

> *When we say experiential education, we have to be very cautious not to stereotype it as just outdoor education.* –an Indigenous TCPCC principal

While the skills of a certain outdoor activity are often taught and promoted, the acquisition of those skills is often seen as a by-product of the actual educational process.

> *I have everyone learn how to canoe, act safely and become proficient in that skill, but I use the act of canoeing as a form of transportation to get me where I want to go to teach something…It also has to do with getting them to connect with the land, with the place as a medium. It is far more effective to have them travel in this way and soak up the environment which is my black board, so to speak, than to have them sit in a packed van listening to some punk band and then get out into some disconnected environment…the active living and skills acquired are just pleasant additions, they are not our primary objectives.* –a Yukon teacher

Experiential learning is occurring in various forms in the present educational system. Yet it is argued that didactic approaches dominate the educational landscape as they are often seen as more rigorous and academically charged with theory-based instruction. Outdoor education on the other hand boasts a more practical, skill-based approach. Experiential education is seen as the link between the more academic processes and the more practical activities, as it strives to integrate theory and practice (Dewey, 1938).

> *In the Yukon if you say experiential education, everyone thinks of the programs at Wood Street School, which is seen as more of an outdoor/science education program. Coming through the trades, I disagree completely. Experiential learning to me is completely different, it is more about the actual activity that is taking place. It is about hands-on learning that is supported by the theory of a classroom. It is not some*

passive or talk-down learning method, it has the students involved and making choices that get them skills they can use to get a job. –an Indigenous Yukon administrator

Conclusion

A question that is worth asking is: 'W*hy does this investigation matter?'*

A major reason this matters is for legitimacy. Like many other educators, I have in the past (and continue to) struggled to work in an experiential manner in schools. Within my new role as a researcher, I face the same issue while I attempt to work and share ideas with new communities. As you might have heard through some subtleties of the participants voices, experiential and place-based learning is still often seen as an "alternative" form of education. This is why I believe trying different approaches and hearing other interpretations can help improve these ideas, as well as help find common ground within the field of education and promote new ways of learning and teaching.

With that "alternative" stigma comes the classic positioning of "us against them". Many participants of this study shared in this ideological stance, often claiming that the fields of experiential and place-based education are "superior" or "better than" formal Western education. I am uncomfortable with this positioning and I feel it ultimately does a disservice to the field. It is Dewey (1916) who taught us that education is a social institution, and therefore any person who assists people in the process of learning and personal development is, in fact, involved in education in a broad sense.

> *Education isn't an additive system, but it is not a subtractive one either. The very first question Patrick Ruble [Yukon Minister of Education] asked me when he became minister, was 'what can we get rid of so we can do more experiential education'. My response was, 'you can never ever get rid of anything because everything that we do is the best thing that we can possibly do for _some_ kids'.* –a retired Yukon administrator

Through the act of flying the alternative flag, the 'either/or' mantra begins to emerge, which is counterproductive and quite simply inaccurate. In fact, in many classrooms across the country experiential and place-based activities are happening, except they go by different terms such as: service learning, constructivism, holistic education, etc. I think there is a lot of excellent work being done in other areas that experiential educators could benefit from. Equally, experiential education has much to provide to offer to other fields of education.

Therefore I return to Seaman (2008) who reminds us that "if experiential education is to play a serious part in the social, educational, and ecological problems of our time, it is worth moving 'alternative' perspectives to a more central role in future inquiry and scholarship" (p. 15).

I choose to end this section with the eloquent words of a Tlingit educator whose powerful vision best summarizes the two experiential and place-based programs of study.

> *When I think about experiential learning, it is largely about reflecting the lives past, present and future of the students. I envision going into a Tlingit school and there are totem poles at the entrance to greet you. There would be the presence of the clans. That is experiential learning. It is real life, authentic, and reflects the actual community history and perspectives. It is education that represents the reality of the situation; our students learn some Western education and some Tlingit education. We have teachers who are both Yukon First Nations and non-YFN.*

> *The teachers are not just competent in their own content area, but are competent in using a variety of methods to integrate other content areas, because that is how we learn. It is not always going outside. Experiential learning is about using different approaches and providing different experiences, not just about outdoor skills. No matter what I am teaching, if I am teaching about governance, I should be able to take the kids into*

the Chief and Council meeting and then be able to take the students to Whitehorse and observe the Yukon Government Legislative House. This is done in combination with academic readings and discussions. The more experiences you provide, the more everything gels for that student.

When I was teaching history, instead of studying just Greek mythology, we study Tlingit, the legends, and our stories. I explain the oral traditions, about how our land claims are routed in our oral traditions and, is in fact recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada. We talk about the trail between Atlin and Teslin, and how our people came under the glacier, there is a long story about that… have the Elders come in or we go to their homes, we have a DVD created by the students where that story is narrated and we take them on that journey, doing different activities along the way. To me that is history, social studies, science, physical education, culture, language studies, art, geography and so much more, depending on what you decide to integrate as a teacher…That's authentic education, experiential education. It develops a sense of place and a connection to the land that is their home but also their heritage. There is so much in there, it's so rich and has much potential…Can you imagine how those Tlingit students are going to be by grade nine when they move on to the larger community of Whitehorse. They will be better prepared for the challenges of secondary school because of the experiences they get from education; they are going to be strong enough to stand tall in adversity with a strong sense of identity. Their schooling will have given them the roots based in their communities. That is sense of place and the school should be a foundation in that process. –an Indigenous Yukon educator

Themes Identified

The balance of this chapter is devoted to answering the remaining two questions set out as the general focus of this study:

In what ways can educators and community members share values and practices to create more purposeful classroom?

and

> **How can current educational systems redefine their practices to address Indigenous needs, as well as improve student engagement and success?**

Through the recursive process of data analysis, several themes have emerged. The dissemination of data is best summarized in five major themes, which include*: **Partnerships**; **Field Studies**; **Indigenous Culture and Knowledge**; **Evaluation**; and, **Sustainability***.

What follows is an examination of the participants' voices as they relate to the two research questions above.

Partnerships

Family and Community

Speaking from a sociological perspective, the definition of family and community appropriately includes a group of individuals who are bonded together by common goals and who support, help and care for one another. This was most evident in the small and rural communities and especially apparent on First Nations reserves, as a sense of community governs social functioning.

Many studies have consistently reinforced the fact that active family and community involvement does have a considerable impact on student achievement (Booth & Dunn, 1996; Epstein, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). The profound and comprehensive benefits for students when parents, family and community members become active participants in the educational process is undeniable (Diss & Buckley, 2005). Melnechenko and Horsman (1998) identify family influence as one of the major factors contributing to the

educational success of Indigenous students; "Educators have come to know that there is a positive correlation between success at school and positive family influence, support, and relationships" (p. 9).

> *It is about partnerships. It is about the community. It is about Elders and others. It's about people coming together.* –an Indigenous TCPCC parent

> *We have a responsibility to teach our children. I feel good to work with them, they are our future leaders…we must pass on the knowledge and wisdom so they can be good people and live happy lives.* –a Yukon Elder

One of the most obvious partnerships discovered in this research is the one created by the five participating Cree and Dene bands in the creation of the Tribal Chiefs Peacekeeping Conservation Commission (TCPCC). This organization is in existence to speak for, protect and sustain the community collective, which is defined by each community signing the Treaty Six agreement with the Federal Government of Canada. It is through this document that these First Nations people can defend and lay claim to the ownership of land, resources, hunting and fishing rights, and of special interest to this study, social well-being and education.

> *We have a responsibility to teach [Treaty rights] to our children and incorporate hunting and fishing rights, land use, and environmental assessments because it fits and it's important. It represents us as Cree people of Treaty Six and we need to work together to develop as strong and confident people.* –a TCPCC Chief

The borders that divide the five bands are often seen as simply lines on a map, and history shows that these people have inter-related without recognition of set boundaries. Each community has their own school, yet through the coordination of the TCPCC and other community groups, schools often work collaboratively together and share common goals. The ideology of reclaiming their connection to the land and acting as "keepers of the earth" drives each experiential program to include cultural and environmental initiatives. Because

most of their studies are based in their sense of place, family and community support is paramount. Elders, parents and selected community members work in collaboration with school staff and students to reach mutually beneficial goals.

> *Treaty is so important to us, and the original idea [experiential program] was to connect this to our children's education. Not just some simple history lesson, but incorporate the actual mandate into what children do at school. We now use Treaty to demonstrate traditional lands and travel routes. To show that my family had a homestead on another reserve, but we are all related in some way and that the borders are just man-made. All of Treaty Six is somehow interrelated along family lines. I have cousins in Hobema, Saddle Lake, etc…And that is where the phrase 'all my relations' comes in, because as a Cree, I am related to people of Saskatchewan and Montana, and they are all Cree… Our Treaty area is the range of our population. –an Indigenous TCPCC teacher*

Parents

From the original planning of the programs to the implementation and evaluation, parents are being asked to participate. As an active observer in the schools, I witnessed that most schools had parents actively involved in some capacity either in the school or out in the field. The roles of the parents differed, and I am told that they are well defined from the beginning so as not to cause confusion or miscommunication. Students, for the most part, appreciated the close nature of the school environment. School staff spoke of the importance of their participation and how they engaged the parent's collaboration through email, phone, weekly written updates, meetings and even social events.

> *What has really helped the success of our program is parents. We keep them involved and informed in all that we do and every week they get an update that requests for input. They get e-mails from me. They ask "what are we doing?', 'what can they do?', and that's key, that's crucial…The kids know that this has many implications, from that seamless connection*

between house and home, to always being monitored and being

consistent. –a Yukon teacher

<u>Community</u>

School staff makes it a priority to represent community values in their curriculum. The teachers adapt curriculum and delivery methods so that they address the diverse learning needs of their students and, specifically, the definite concerns of the local community. Program delivery is often based around the social, cultural, cognitive, economic, and political context that the school is in a relational aspect with. While not usually termed critical pedagogy, the praxis of such methods mirrors the ideology espoused by many academics (Harding, 1998; Kincheloe, 2005; McLaren, 2003). Through this critical exploration, members of the community share diverse epistemologies that often lead to debate. It is believed that this process is a central, but undervalued, feature of social life. It also provides a basis for learners to accept dissimilar forms of knowledge and to ultimately be accepting of what is different.

This critical process has meaning in a context that often struggles to define itself amongst conflicting representations, such as some of the contradictions between Indigenous and Western cultures. It is ultimately through the participation of the community that students get a realistic understanding of the varied nuances and issues that define the society of which the students are members.

I think there are endless opportunities to use local knowledge and local

people… A few years back when we were talking about incorporating

Traditional Knowledge into everything we do in the education system, a

Chief shared the fact that you have non-First Nation families who have

lived in the Yukon for over a hundred years and nobody seems to be

going to them for their Traditional Knowledge. We need to get away from

this notion of only Aboriginal people can participate in that. It is anybody

who has local knowledge and that is a kind of Traditional Knowledge,

and we should call that Traditional Knowledge. –a Yukon Chief

Many Elders and other community members spoke of the responsibility in sharing their knowledge with the students. It is not only an empowering process for the students, but also for the community members as a mutual learning process was depicted. In accordance with the previously described concept of family and community, most participants spoke about the notion of a collective, and the benefits of sharing that collective in a selfless manner.

> *No matter if you are cutting up a moose, or caribou, or traditional things like that, I think you should have the students coming along and learning. I think traditionally if you are the holder of the knowledge, and I do not have that knowledge, at the end of the day it is your fault that I do not have that knowledge, because you have it and I do not…Every once in a while people try to give me hell for not being able to speak my language and I tell them 'well if you can speak Dene and I can't then whose fault is this?' So they have a responsibility to teach me and I think there is an important lesson in that we all should be completely sharing our knowledge within the community. –an Indigenous TCPCC community member*

Resources

As was identified in the opening section of this chapter, the teachers of the experiential and place-based programs are required to possess a considerable amount of skills and knowledge in order to integrate provincial or territorial curricular outcomes with local community and cultural interests. To achieve such lofty goals, it is understandable that most teachers rely on community expertise to assist in this educational process.

> *It takes a lot to run these programs, not only to share the huge knowledge base but also to supply field equipment and resources. We all know that schools are not printing money, so how do you get all of the equipment, right? So we have partnerships within the communities, with other First Nations, with recreation boards, and groups like that. –a Yukon teacher*

It is unrealistic to assume that most teachers have the background and expertise to single-handedly provide an educational program that reflects such a wide array of curricular and community objectives. It is even more unlikely since many teachers are not originally from the specific communities in which the schools are based or from the specific Indigenous cultures. It is with this in mind that programs use the community to support teachers regarding the explicit protocols and epistemologies that govern a specific community.

> *I do not know of any teacher training program that is properly preparing teachers for the varied responsibility and multi-skill set that is required to be an experiential teacher. We need to use community involvement in programs because parents can be resources, First Nations can be a resources...You think of so much social studies, culture and language that can be included with the help of parents and community, especially since they [experiential program] are trying to document language, photographs, history, and the archaeology of our culture. It is not like you can rely on a book or some set of curriculum. –an Indigenous TCPCC parent*

A good example of partnerships and community involvement in the Yukon is the Bison Hunts that are organized by the Yukon Department of Education. Permits are available for each school interested and they take place in the late winter and early spring. The Bison Hunt brings together people from all over the territory, including wildlife officials, government administrators, local First Nations, Elders, community members, parents, school staff and students. It requires many months to prepare for, and is often seen as the highlight of the school year. Students are encouraged to take on specific responsibilities while in the field and are often engaged in peer tutoring. The various YFN groups have differing protocols when hunting and Elders are always involved in the process.

> *I just had an example of cultural ignorance this week when I got a call from the Department about a biologist who would like to come along on our Bison Hunt to test for contaminants of the Bison's liver and heart*

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etc… I thought this was a great idea; she can speak to the kids about her profession, we are doing contaminants in the grade 9 science program, the biology of the systems etc. So I told everyone about it and was really excited. The next day, one of the Elders knocked on my door and very politely explained to me that the Bison's organs were considered to be something very sacred to their culture and it would be seen as a very negative act to pursue. Well, that was that… but it just did not occur to me. –a Yukon teacher

The notion of community support was especially prevalent in the more rural and isolated communities. Issues of support, guidance and safety were identified as areas of concern since many of the teachers in the communities were young and not originally from the local communities. As the programs incorporated outdoor pursuits throughout the season, many parents and school staff spoke to the fact that local and Traditional Knowledge was foundational in their implementation of the field activities.

It's impossible for one person to know everything. So, when it is -40 degrees, and the program has planned for months to go out on the land and the students are pushing to go, you hope the teacher will make the right choice but sometimes it takes a community member who knows the land, to say 'we don't go out in this temperature'. It is crucial to have that local knowledge…We rely so much on community perspective and direction to facilitate this type of learning. –an Indigenous Yukon administrator

Elders

With the inclusion of cultural knowledge and language, Elders play a crucial role in the delivery of local educational outcomes. They provide a link between the past and present, and are asked to provide context to what is now often no longer observable. Many of the students in both programs were working with Elders to capture, via tape or video recorder, the stories and history of their communities. This is in recognition of the deaths of many Elders, and with their

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departure goes the knowledge and insight that the community holds very sacred to their existence. In just the short time (approximately five months) I was in the communities, I witnessed nine funeral and reception feasts for Elders.

> *We are taught that they [Elders] are our real teachers. My grandmother is an Elder and I often think about all that she has seen and done. It makes me a better person when I am around her...She and my grandfather taught me my language and how to survive on the land, but also how to be good to other people and animals.* –a Yukon student

As much of the programs' work is place-based and rooted in the health of their environment, Elders are often asked to participate in field activities and provide context to the land that the students are assessing, both historically and from an environmental aspect.

> *It is very important to have Elders work with the school…and the students are very respectful of this because there have been huge changes over the years, like how long it took to travel, areas to hunt and fish, there is no river now. It is Elders, that can tell us those things…And just making them [students] aware of what is happening around us, I am sure they wonder, they just had no one to ask.* –an Indigenous TCPCC teacher

Many people are supportive of the experiential and place-based programs, and are eager to participate in various capacities. This does not come without challenges as Indigenous educational epistemologies are often very different from those of the current Western-based system present today. Issues such as the separation of knowledge into packages (courses) and periods (blocks), the use of bells, organized seating and passive learning are often foreign concepts to many Elders. The programs work with the Elders and students to respect differences and accommodate the various needs. Language has also become an issue, and often a translator is brought in to assist communication and provide a bridge between differing dialects and languages.

I think it is important to give people the opportunity to feel comfortable in the school, and in the situation with Elders, provide some training on both ends. Not every Elder is a teacher. So, if you bring them into the school system, and they are not sure what to expect, and just put them in a room with chairs and expect them to lecture, often it is not something they are comfortable with and you are setting them up to fail…The students and some staff also need training. –a Yukon administrator

Pedagogical and Cohort Relationships

To my surprise, many of the participants identified an aspect of the two programs that was equally important for the success of the students in, what I can best describe as, *Pedagogical and Cohort Relationships*. Before I begin to explore each type of relationship in detail, I am compelled to articulate the often unexplored phenomenon of 'relationships" that developed in the two programs.

Building upon my own experiences and reinforced by the voices of the participants, "relationships" are what Aoki (2005) best describes as "curriculum as lived" in these programs. Yet, a revelation that emerged through this study is that relationships are also seen as "curriculum as planned" through the efforts of the educators. A considerable amount of focus and attention is placed upon building positive and close relationships through the activities in the programs. Either through long intensive field studies and trips, or through challenging tasks shared with a partner, teacher or group, relationships develop that are often acknowledged as being different from the regular classroom experience.

While it was often difficult for the participants to vocalize their understanding of this phenomenon, it was obvious that this had tremendous importance in student success. Often coined as a "camp-like" atmosphere, "bonding" or "family", participants were adamant that this aspect had a tremendous impact on the success of the programs. Participants spoke of two major types of relationships: the one shared by a teacher and the students in which I, for the purpose of this study, have termed *Pedagogical Relationships*;

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and the other being the relationships that evolved in a group or cohort setting, which is referred to as *Cohort Relationships*. Their descriptions follow.

Pedagogical Relationships

I have chosen to use van Manen's (1991, 1995, 2002) interpretation of "pedagogical relationship" between the teacher working in the experiential programs and the participating students. A number of scholars advocate the importance of the emotional, intuitive, imaginative, engaged and responsible aspects of the relationships that teachers build with students (e.g. Greene, 1995; Kelchtermans, 2005; Korthagen, 2001; Zembylas, 2005). However, van Manen has written extensively on this aspect of pedagogy and asserts that "human development and personal becoming" (1995, p. 45) are possible only within particular, concrete, pedagogical relationships.

For van Manen (1991), pedagogy is not a rational formula or set of techniques to follow for effective teaching. It is, rather, a personal, improvised tact and mindful thoughtfulness through which a pedagogue tries to act in "a right, good, or appropriate manner" (p. 9) for the sake of what is best for the being and becoming of the learner. According to van Manen, several aspects make up the nature of the pedagogical experience: pedagogical situation, pedagogical action, and pedagogical relationship.

van Manen (1991) goes on to point out that the actual practice of pedagogy involves two major aspects: 1) sensitive listening and observing of the learner, and 2) continual reflection on our actions with learners in order to become more sensitive and insightful. He refers to this thoughtful reflection and mindful action as pedagogical tact. It is through van Manen's (1991, 1995, 2002) interpretation of "good pedagogy" and in his description of "pedagogical tact" that I find representation of the qualities espoused by the teachers of these experiential programs.

[Teacher] is not always telling us what to do…he is helping us learn. He doesn't just tell us the answer, he sits down with us, he says 'OK lets think about this' and we brainstorm until we get the answer ourselves…I trust him, I like him, he is a cool guy that is a teacher. –an Indigenous TCPCC student

I use the term "teacher" loosely in this section as Elders, community members, and sometimes parents are responsible for the teaching of the students and therefore, have also been identified as creating pedagogical relationships.

Perhaps too often we think in terms of having to be the psychologist on the couch, when really it's the kid finding the connection themselves with a guiding person or mentor...Nobody can do it for themselves alone and maybe it is through those opportunities of making those connections, along with really supportive, loving people that are going to be excited in what they are good at and are learning. I know that sort of thing is very idealistic but it is happening and important. –a Yukon administrator

The presence of relationship building initiatives, supported by teacher pedagogy, is apparent in most educational activities. Teachers speak about their intent on building close relationships, as it is believed that students will become more confident in their abilities and assertive in their participation. This is seen as part of the recipe for student success.

I am in the business of relationship…It is not always easy, any time you have a group of people, especially young ones together for an extended period of time, you have issues, but it is through those moments of tension and how you deal with them that a lot of learning goes on. I learn every day, and so do my students, because sure you can go work in a cubicle and not know how to deal with people, but if you don't have the skills to build a healthy relationship; that is sad. –a Yukon teacher

Cohort Relationships

The notion of student cohorts has been a fairly standard component of efforts in education reform for the past two decades. I refer to the definition of cohorts, held in the field of teacher education, as the structure of student groupings similar to that demonstrated by the two experiential programs. "Cohorts are generally defined as groups of students who move through their [teacher] education program together, sharing course work and developing a sense of community and support" (Sapon-Shevin & Chandler-Olcott, 2001, p. 3).

Ross et al. (2006) report the strategies utilized by students to make their cohort work well as a community: keeping an academic focus, pulling ones' own weight, taking care of the community, being willing to move outside of one's own comfort zone, and including everyone.

While most teachers in this study reported their intent on creating an environment to nurture healthy relationships, some participants believed it to be a by-product of experiential learning. The intensive nature of field trips and experiential learning's previously noted similarities to outdoor education create an environment of emotional, social and personal interactions.

> *I have thought about that part [relationships] a lot and I think it's a sense of belonging. It is having that camaraderie and the sense that you are accepted for who you are, I really tried to push that as a teacher… It is an important part of the experiential model; we provide experiences that are life-changing, we are all social beings so you share experiences with people…those memories that you carry with you include other people who you develop relationships with…That's a really powerful thing and I don't know how you measure that… There is a lot of things going on there, even people who have gone to camp…you may have not gone to the same camp, but people who have experienced that relationship building thing can share that.* –an Indigenous TCPCC teacher

Many educational activities are done in student partnerships. Activities are undertaken as either a whole class or in smaller groups. In fact, very little is done which asks the students to work independently. The intention is to develop skills that support healthy personal and social relationships. It is another component of the curriculum that is purposely integrated to improve student outcomes. It is seen as becoming a "community of practice" (Wenger et al., 2002) rather than only a "community", and is further proof of an experiential program that includes relationships as "curriculum as planned".

> *Bonding, because by the end of the semester those kids are like family. Something happens in the semester where, we do some planning as teachers, but some other things just happen…I think these are life skills, how to live with each other, learning to cope with other people around you on a daily basis. It is quite intense and a huge aspect of it is social learning or maybe life orientation skills. As teachers we are preparing them for the realities of a big trip: cooking, surviving, sleep deprivation, organizational skills, social skills… it is a major component of what we do and the reason why this program is so successful.* –a Yukon teacher

> *Some of my best friends are from that class and it is because of what we did. We all still keep in touch, many of us get together as like a reunion every year… Man, I met my wife in that class.* –a past Yukon student

Many students from the formal educational system speak of the disconnection the school has from the people that surround them and the community it is found within. "Education has no intrinsic value, no connection to the lived world of human beings" (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 117). Yet we hear from many participants that these experiential programs attempt to address this issue by incorporating partnerships into all aspects of the educational model.

> *The students become what I often preach as a 'well oiled machine', all parts working in unison and reliant on the other parts for success. Everyone has a role and all are equally as important. That stuff really*

works and you see the benefits even down the line, later in the students'
lives. It gives them the confidence to grow and do other things in the
world when they are finished here. You also see the students become very
close and develop bonds that last them into adulthood. It may be the
people, the environment, the intense trips but whatever it is, it is life
influencing. How many classes did you have where everyone is crying at
the end of the semester…I think it was how they were impacted, and it
impacted them for life. –an Indigenous Yukon teacher

Cartesian modernists (e.g. Horace Mann, Frederick Taylor and Edward Thorndike) have advocated that a strong foundation of democratic thinking is based on a cohesive and analogous community approach, which holds a set of universal principles. A critical perspective, held by many experiential and place-based educators, challenges such views since many heterogeneous communities, that incorporate differing values and doctrines, can provide a more liberal and sustainable system of critical engagement and moral reasoning (Kincheloe, 2001; Welch, 1991). They support an educational practice that connects place with self and community. Because of the ecological and cultural lens through which a decentralized, place-based experiential curriculum is envisioned, these connections are pervasive. Experiential curricula include multigenerational and multicultural dimensions as they interface with community resources. It is in this process that diverse and "subjugated" values and participation can be effectively incorporated at all levels of education.

Challenges and victories…the students encourage each other. They are
cheering the slowest student and when that whole group gets up to the
top, that's when the experience gives back. And they get experiences like
this over and over again, plus because the experiences we get are so wide
and so varied, you are not going to have kids who are good at absolutely
everything… Just about every single kid is going to run into some
challenge that somebody else in the class is better than him at and will
require some help. Whether it be a skill of organization or a physical skill

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or an academic skill, or a social skill...One thing I love about this
program, and I hear it in the halls from the rest of the school is these kids
celebrate each other's differences... I think they not only celebrate the
differences but support each other to seek them out.–a TCPCC teacher

Field Studies

Pedagogies

There is widespread agreement amongst the experiential educators that the traditional transmission approach to teaching, which often involves the passive communication of predefined knowledge through lectures and assigned readings, is not the most appropriate approach. Instead, experiential educators focus on helping integrate theory and practice for students, a primary tenant of experiential education. Subsequently, what often is considered an "alternate pedagogy" of experiential education builds from a primary base of the students' experience, thus implying earlier, more frequent, and more substantial practical engagement than is traditionally the case in the regular classroom setting. This process supports student-centered learning, as curricular activities are facilitated by the cooperation of teacher and student with the purpose of addressing individual learning styles that vary in a classroom of 10 or more students.

The pedagogy used in the field, designed to complement the central role of mastering curricular objectives in classrooms, is described as socio-constructivist (Cajete, 1999; Welch, 1991) and self-reflective (Henderson, 1988). It best operates in a pedagogical community by means of student cohorts and often an integrated team of educators.

Finally, it fosters a holistic way of knowing for students, that involves not only the academic objectives, but also emotional well-being and community-based values (Curwen Doige, 2003). The interconnectedness and the understanding of the relation of things, which is a key component to both experiential learning and Indigenous education, becomes a necessary component of curriculum design. As many regular schools focus on top-down lessons that

fragment subject matter, the holistic component of learning, in which learners organize information globally and derive meaning from the relational aspects of the concepts, is promoted through an integration of practical subject matter.

> *When we speak of pedagogies and experiential education, I like to use the metaphor of a 'symphony of music', many notes to make the beauty and capture the imagination of the listener. We cannot only use one note or one verse, as this is too narrow and misses many different learning styles. This analogy speaks to the integration of the curriculum, community input and 'lived experience' versus 'planned experience'. I argue that curriculum as lived is a planned activity, pedagogical relationships can be organized. As a teacher, I look for those 'teachable moments', and the 'opportunity knocking'. Teachers may not have all the specifics premeditated in a detailed lesson plan but they need to have the ability to recognize and use activities, people, ideas, events to bolster or support the understanding and motivation of the student to pursue further and to assist in the retention of the curriculum.* –a Yukon educator

Teacher Planning

As noted earlier, it is crucial that teachers become proficient in understanding their set curriculum and how it can be complemented with field activities. Specific and detailed planning is required by teachers to effectively incorporate various forms of field studies as a delivery component which complements the curriculum. It requires considerable facility to integrate various curricular outcomes in a non-traditional setting, such as a forest or in a production plant.

> *My planning process is to know inside and out my core course curriculum and then I leave lots of room for maneuvering. It always changes from year to year, because it ultimately depends on the group of students that we have, their interests and what happens in the community, I call it the 'flow of the semester'.* –an Indigenous TCPCC teacher

Many of the field activities are community-based and incorporate local ecology and environmental assessments. This often requires community collaboration, gaining permits and an extensive skill base in environmental assessment and safety. While most of the work done by primary students is acknowledged to be process driven, many community and government agencies use the data acquired by the secondary students of these programs in various decision-making processes. This has a visible influence on the students' sense of identity and self-worth.

> *I feel like what we do in school is helping my people. Like we did land cover analysis on this site and the Chief is going to use that to talk with the oil company, which is cool. I feel proud to be part of that…I went home and told my family.* –an Indigenous TCPCC student

Often resource debates occur, and teachers must have the proficiency and fortitude to facilitate student and social differences as the curricular importance of an activity may often lie in the "differences" themselves. Students are taught to value those differences and acknowledge the impact these differences have in specific contexts.

Integration

One of the most important components acknowledged by the participants of the experiential programs is it being multidisciplinary. A notion of interconnectedness is espoused that promotes a relational aspect to knowledge (Cajete, 1994; Canella & Reif, 1994). The two programs are developed around the principle of *integration*; people are able to learn more effectively when they are able to see things in relation to other things. This principle of integration of subjects is central to the instructional processes of the programs. Such integration lends itself to the examination of real life issues. Activities often use one subject as a means to understanding another subject. Wells (1986) states that: "Knowledge cannot be transmitted. It has to be constructed afresh by each individual knower on the basis of what is already known, and by means of

strategies developed over the whole of that individual's life, both outside and inside the classroom" (as cited in Curwen Doige, 2003, p. 155).

> *It is more blending [curriculum]…more exposure to disciplines…like trying to get kids interested in vegetation classification, it's the driest thing in the world. I have trouble with it. After a few years I started to bring [Elder] along and she talks about medicinal usage of plants, and even I, without the advantage of the First Nations culture, get pretty interested on what plants were traditionally used for and most of them [students] get really excited. So, it really is how you want to blend those in a way that you are getting them interested, capturing the curriculum, and providing a relevant and meaningful experience.* –a TCPCC teacher

Educators of these programs use a framework for experiential curriculum design that emphasizes the incorporation of setting and social conditions. The curriculum is contextually shaped which includes both structural and sociocultural aspects. The sociocultural aspects can include demographic, social, political and economic conditions, as well as traditions, and ideologies that arguably influence curriculum. "By emphasizing the sociocultural aspect, curriculum is indeed 'contextually shaped' and always mediated by students" (Cornbleth, 1990, p. 53).

> *[Field Studies]One was on the hydro dam, the effects on the vegetation from flooding and what was and wasn't here before the dam. Another one was recycling during the Canada Winter Games and another was on water-use in the city. This is Geography, Resource Management, Biology, Social Studies, English, Art and Science... It all works together; the combinations and possibilities are endless.* –an Indigenous Yukon teacher

Reflection

A final key component identified in the pedagogy of experiential education is to provide an opportunity and support for students to reflect upon

and learn from their immersion in experience. In these programs, the development of learning portfolios, trip and field journals, and personal narratives serve as a teaching and integrating device for the students' experience and learning. It is designed to help students reflect on their experience in school and, as such, its development both shapes and reflects the growth of students' learning competencies. For this reason, students are strongly encouraged to share their work with peers, and will often "showcase" their portfolios.

The more you start to work on it [Portfolio], the more it becomes your own. It represents me, who I am and what I have done. Sometimes I open it up and I am like 'oh my God, what was I thinking' but it's OK because that is learning, right? I know I am going to use this later because it has so much in there and it is a good reminder of what I did this year. I definitely won't throw this in the garbage like all the papers and tests I have from other classes…It is a lot of work. –a Yukon student

The other kind of support for students is an ongoing discussion and exchange during the semester designed to help them build their knowledge together through dialogue. One central component of this support is a weekly circle or seminar session (the format depends on teacher), which includes the teacher and students. These sessions are designed to support the students' development. The sharing sessions focus on a particular topic based on developmental issues that they encounter during the term. The approach to each topic is built around a problem-posing pedagogy, designed to foster socio-constructivist and self-reflective learning in the group, and to carry over to individual students' ongoing work on their portfolios.

As reflection is one of the main objectives of experiential learning, students are often asked to write a comprehensive articulation of what they have learned about a certain topic (often termed as 'learning journal'). They are encouraged to include possible artefacts collected from their work to complement their written statements.

Place

Many Indigenous and northern epistemologies involve relationships with nature. This links people through an interconnectedness that ties them to the land, stars and other places in the universe. The significance of place was often expressed during this study as a fundamental aspect to the participants' lives.

> *Cree people, our place is who we are and that includes our relationship with our Mother [Earth] and community.* –an Indigenous TCPCC administrator

Dewey (1938) reminds us that as human beings we develop our identity by making meaning through our lived experience. We often seek out other people who have shared in events or, through other experiences, have created a lens in which to see the world that is similar. As social beings, we search out others who have come from a similar place. It is through these assumptions that educators utilize tenants of experiential and place-based education to provide a meaningful connection and engagement to the curriculum.

The delivery of these programs might be best characterized as the pedagogy of community; the integration of the student into their home land and the reinforcement of the essential links between the student and their place. Through this process students can make connections to their schooling that is based on realistic, immediate and important statutes. Students see the relevance and importance of the studies as they have immediate and causal effect to their present lives and, ultimately, the well-being of themselves and their collective.

> *When you are thinking and acting in that [immersion] deep way, when you are connected to the land, learning in a practical way, the retention of the material is tenfold…We went out and watched a bird for half a day. Without knowing anymore, just watch the bird, observe, detailed observation… the objective is to come back and explain what you saw and what you now think you know about it based on what you have just*

seen. It is the little things like that are some of the most powerful teaching tools of this program. –a Yukon teacher

This focus on place gets the students to ask such questions as: 'Where am I? What is the nature of this place? What sustains this community?' The student is tasked with determining where they belong in the continuum of a place. A process of re-storying often occurs as students investigate the past, present, and future of their homeland, and begin to create their own story as it affects them. The objective of this local inquiry is to allow students to discover his or her own points of access into conversations with their environment. The students are asked to position themselves within this enlightened recognition of place and make peace with issues of culture, politics, social variances and their environment. They become active members of their community and are guided by mentors along the way.

> *It is arid, a desert in this region compared to what it was 15 to 20 years ago…you can only see that if you knew the area before, have seen data sets, or heard about it from the Elders. That is why this program is so important, it gives us [students] a chance to see and hear about those changes and hopefully to care about what is happening.* –an Indigenous TCPCC student

Keepers of the Earth

Both experiential programs put considerable onus on ecological studies and environmental assessments. Students often spend a considerable amount of time developing an understanding of a certain land base by conducting scientific, social and political assessments. This is often done with a lens of criticality, as students are allowed to debate resource extraction and other contestable issues.

> *We are tying in environmental and community issues with education [lake studies— lake drying up]. The kids recognize the change because they have been given a baseline and have done assessments and compare*

them to that baseline. This is empowering to them…It's their community. It's their life. –an Indigenous Yukon community member

The place-based studies attempt to encourage a healthy and positive atmosphere while engaging in ecological problems. Teachers emphasize creative exploration and promote successful and realistic solutions that emphasize the ties that connect people with nature and culture in a specific place.

> *This program can regain that connection we had with the land. As Cree we call ourselves 'keepers of the earth', but I think we lost that. We need the younger generation to realize and gain a connection with the land again…And that fits very nicely with Treaty…In fact, it is exactly what one Elder spoke about at the funeral yesterday. He said that we have all had the knowledge passed on by our Elders that we have to learn to respect Mother Earth because that is our Mom. We get nourishment from our Mom, like when we were being breast fed from our Mom. Same thing, same concept. But now, we have totally abused our Mother. We throw garbage out, we let the oil companies tear up all the land and we don't require them to repair the damage. He said if this was happening fifty years ago, we had a strong base, a strong connection to the land and strong Elders…But now we don't have that because every time we think of trying to stop those cats [bulldozers], we get a dollar to move out of the way…He says, that is why we need to go back to the basic understanding that Mother Earth is our Mother and we need to respect her like our Mother. We have to go back and be keepers of this earth. We always say we are. So let's act as if we are the keepers.* –a TCPCC Elder

Immersion in Action

Many of the programs' teachers spoke about the ability to manage the educational environment that best serves the process of learning. It is essential to find those key places and moments where learning is heightened. They are often those periods best described as "moments of breakdown" (Varela, 1999), or what Aoki (2005) would refer to as "moments of tension", when the student is no

longer in complete control and therefore, they become beginners who search for ways to understand what is foreign so that they may feel comfortable and at ease with the task at hand. Teachers also expressed their belief that this all-inclusive experience provided them with a more detailed and realistic assessment of the students' abilities in different environments.

> *It is hands-on, it's visual, and it's auditory… They get to see things like a frog, beaver or something foreign and then we [teachers] present a learning opportunity and connection right at that moment…that is it, it gets them interested in school but also helps them retain the information. We capitalize on their curiosity, it's beautiful.* –a TCPCC teacher

This process follows a major principle of experiential education: "learning through action". The teachers employ a system that teaches active participation, as it is only as dynamic participants in the world that the students can make personal connections with subjects that hopefully will bolster a need to learn more. The practical opportunities to immerse yourself in the actual experience of what is to be learnt is assumed as necessary, yet not always of praxis in many regular schools. Rich and detailed observation is used as educators support students in acquiring an intimate understanding of the subject matter through written and visual mediums.

> *You almost have to have that one to one with the land or the water, where people are taking the time to connect, reflecting, thinking about things and being comfortable with where they are. That is when the land and water give back… remember it is that two-way thing.* –a Yukon Chief

Educators of the programs attempt to transform education as they support efforts to learn how events and processes close to home relate to local, national, and international issues and happenings, leading to a new understanding of ecological stewardship and community. "It is desirable that the problems be set up in the kind of environment in which such problems usually arise in life. This

is more likely to result in his viewing this as a real problem worth of his effort to solve" (Tyler, 1949. p. 69).

Activities "Beyond Curriculum"

> *As a teacher, I give them puzzles not answers.* –a Yukon educator

Many of the research participants spoke at length about their perceptions of a Western school system, which supports universal educational curricula based on the belief that knowledge is valid, true, real, and "out there" as absolute. It sustains the mandate to write standardized curricula, maintains that teachers deliver it as universal, and students passively accept it as "ultimate" truths. The participants recognized that there is very little room for creative input by the teacher or critical assessment by the student. This contradicts the goals and implementation of the two experiential and place-based programs as praxis.

> *We have a responsibility to make things better. We are the future leaders and as a student I speak for the young people. Life is very hard, we have been screwed so many times, we need to know our history, be strong in our culture and language, and use that to make our community better, stronger…I never got that from my other classes.* –an Indigenous TCPCC student

Most of the programs' educators believe there is much more to schooling than the prescribed provincial and territorial academic curricular outcomes. Experiential programs encourage students through field activities, multiple perspective curriculum, and active exposure to social, cultural and political issues to venture "outside the box' of the conventional education system. They are persuaded to embrace those moments of tension and widen their field of security. Students develop beliefs that are based on their own critical assessment; differing opinions and ways of thinking are encouraged. Through student-centered learning initiatives and cooperative work, learners develop a cognition that values multiple perspectives, that is not always found in curricular materials.

I did what one observing parent called 'alternative education', to me it was a team building experience, our oral and natural history, science and personal skills. Students develop skills that are life skills that they will carry with them after school. –a Yukon teacher

<u>Life Skills</u>

With the increase in land claim agreements, renegotiation of treaty rights and local control of resource development, the quest for informed and skilled members of the community is a motivating factor for education in many northern Indigenous communities. There is a redefinition of educational priorities and a need to reconnect schools and their communities; to provide opportunities for students to contribute to their community and also benefit from the opportunities before them. Resource development in the North has become a major issue and many of the participants spoke to the fact that their community's schooling should prepare and encourage students for employment opportunities that exist within their Indigenous territories and beyond.

Integrate the curriculum as it relates to their life as a Cree person. In the experiential program, I introduced them to agriculture, got them working with animals and on the land because we are surrounded by farms and many will have an opportunity to work on farms…With the hunting and firearms section of the program, it is important to be safe and especially if you want to go feed your family, which is the reality here…it is like that proverb says 'you can give a person a fish and you feed them for a day, but you teach somebody to fish they can feed themselves'. I often think about that when I would ask my Kookum [grandmother] about how it was living in the great depression and she would say 'what great depression? We never starved, we fed ourselves'. –an Indigenous TCPCC teacher

The two programs of study teach students in the North to become critical learners and active participants. The program exposes issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class,

and gender ideologies, discourses, education, religion, and other social institutions and cultural dynamics interact to construct the social systems that make-up our consciousness (Kincheloe, 2003). The educators envision a system of learning that values new possibilities for students to live well on Earth with all other life.

> *In my opinion we tend to say that a person who is successful is successful academically. So that to me is a reflection of the science curriculum. A student also needs to be able to make decisive and insightful decisions on their own health, physical well being, mental health, environmental awareness, and have the capacity to do the right things. We still bring what has been defined in specific terms as learning outcomes in curriculum, let's say in science, but we then go the full circle. The curricular outcomes are just a slice based on what we call science, or what we call social studies, but we try in this program to come full circle with general wellness, caring for ourselves, for each other, and for an environment. –an Indigenous Yukon teacher*

Adversity

The themes of adversity and resistance in Indigenous history and stories define the very essence of northern people. The effects of colonialism are connected with many people's sense of place. Some Indigenous scholars affirm that "resistance to colonialism" has roots in the Indigenous story and an affirmation of a sense of place (Alfred, 1999; Cook-Lynn, 1996). Ortiz (1981) speaks of the ability of the Indigenous people to take the socio-political colonizing forces beset upon them and form meaning in their own terms. To find meaning through adversity and the actual transformation applied by Indigenous groups is a demonstration of the Indigenous struggle for liberation.

> *Adversity, meaning through adversity…it is part of our history as Dene people…we make it part of our education and training. It makes you better people to overcome hurdles to succeed. –an Indigenous TCPCC administrator*

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The "colourful five percent" as many northerners are often referred to, similar to many Indigenous groups, seem to have formed, by necessity or choice, a mantra of resilience to adversity that is often depicted in their history. Stories of northern survival, famine, government persecution and the Gold Rush have spurred on many people to find significance in hardship.

The programs of study often use adversity as a motivating tool for personal and academic success. Students speak of the hardships they endure on extended field trips and the destruction of their environment. Teachers approve of the character building qualities that such educational programming espouses.

> *I try to set it up in such a way that everybody gets a chance to fail. They find out their failing isn't a bad thing as long as he or she uses it to learn something and then try it again. When I was talking [previously] about how we learn from our mistakes, I think the traditional school doesn't practice that at all. When you make a mistake in regular school there is often a permanent consequence: now you got 65 instead of 75 and that's there forever. That is not learning from your mistake, that is learning to not want to make a mistake, which to me is learning to not want to push your limit…to provide an environment that is safe to go out and fail, because you can learn from it…And that's something everybody needs to learn and I don't think a lot of people in our society learn that at all…Because I think our society stifles that. –a Yukon teacher*

Indigenous Culture and Knowledge

Culture

It is not my intention to enter the discussion on the all encompassing subject of culture and how it is interpreted (e.g. see Deloria, 1997; Gertz, 1983; Gramsci, 1988; Lévi-Strauss, 1968). Yet, this study would not be complete without identifying the process by which the research participants navigate the understanding and inclusion of culture into educational methods of the programs.

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It is an extremely difficult and endless process for educators, students, administrators and community members to determine the scope of culture as it relates to a particular community, especially in a time of multicultural development, when a community is rarely considered homogeneous. Even within a First Nations reserve, there are varying beliefs, religions, traditions and interpretations. Languages are divided along Indigenous groups and dialects. Many communities speak more than one language and it is a contentious issue to decide which or how many to include in the school programs.

> *It has been very difficult and a long unending process. There is no one consensus on this [culture]. We continue to move forward, revamp and reshape our interpretation as the community does. Remember, communities, cultures, they change.* –an Indigenous TCPCC council member

The education system of the Yukon Territory was in the midst of a debate while I was conducting my interviews, as the *Education Reform Project* released a document calling for a First Nations school. This caused discussion around the idea of segregation (similar to what was being debated in Toronto at the same time per the creation of a "Black High School"), but also in defining what 'First Nations' meant to the people of the Yukon. I often chose to use this subject as a starting point in discussing issues of culture with the Yukon participants.

One area that the participants seem to agree upon is that culture should be present throughout the curriculum, and should support delivery practices. I did not observe many issues caused by conflicting Western and Indigenous interpretations that have been traditionally identified by scholars to be present in the school system (previously highlighted in Chapter 3) (Kirkness, 1998; Noley, 1981; Wilson & Wilson, 2002). Most educators promote a system that uses culture as a guiding beacon in which to incorporate curricular outcomes; they use the analogy of "education into culture, not the other way around". Though it may be inconsistent in its definition, the term "infusion" is often used by participants when referring to culture's place in the educational programming.

The subject of student identity and its ties to a strong sense of culture is also acknowledged. Many participants believe that a student with a strong sense of community and a rich understanding of their culture is someone that will be successful in school, remain in school longer, and have a positive transition to the post-secondary world.

> *We learn how to make snowshoes from a First Nations perspective, the history of their use, the different designs and their purposes, and then we use the snowshoes to go out on the land. So the activity is what guides a lot of my curriculum from start-to-finish. They [students] learn so much, like the use of the Boreal forest, the animals, survival skills, the history of our people, the environment, and it goes on and on…there is a sense of pride and it becomes another part of their identity.* –an Indigenous Yukon teacher

Another aspect to culture is that of respect, and teaching the students the protocols and beliefs that are deemed important by the community. Each school of study has detailed curriculum that deals with the issue of respect, which includes relational aspects with people and also the environment, all living things, and even inanimate objects. Much is culturally-based and often referred to as "traditional teachings". The students are instructed by teachers, community members and often Elders to model appropriate behavior in diverse settings.

> *Our culture and protocols are very important. We have Elders who come to talk to the students about respect and the protocols…it is important that they understand and respect our ways with medicines, trees and animals, even the berries. We thank our Mother for this. The students are really happy to learn these things, because they didn't grow up in that environment, that traditional way of life like I did.* –an Indigenous TCPCC principal

Negotiating the Gap

The varied perspectives of the participant responses to the incorporation of culture into school programming demonstrates the struggles the programs are undergoing as they attempt to reflect community principles that are often mixed and conflicting. While each program is based upon the assumption that culture is important and an integral part of the program's methods, the understanding on how to effectively go about this process if often unclear as each community has specific needs and epistemologies that are not always uniform.

> *There often is little consensus with respect to culture because it means so much to everybody. Yet, I think the fact that acknowledging that there is a gap is really important and needs to be said.* –an Indigenous TCPCC administrator

> *My grandfather says that I should not be doing culture at the school… but school is supposed to be about my life, and things I learn to make me better, so shouldn't my culture be part of that?* –an Indigenous TCPCC student

The cultural "infusion" process includes accepting the realities of a changing society that is extremely dissimilar to that of what some consider a "traditional lifestyle". Technology, mass media, urbanization, and the reduction of hunting and gathering opportunities were all identified as contributors to a new and unchartered way of life in the communities. While some communities are considered more isolated from Western living, all communities, big or small, urban or rural, spoke to this issue. This has tremendous implications on the cultural content that is to be taught, as the debate of "new" versus "old" is encountered. Students spoke about being caught between two undetermined worlds and struggled with their place. What some participants perceive to be contradictions, others label as realities. It is in the consultation promoted by the programs that this issue is being continually explored.

*There is no perfect answer for that [culture], just like there is no typical
First Nations person, because there is such a wide range of languages
and people. In the Yukon, we have unique and distinct First Nations
groups. We also have urban First Nations, children who have never lived
out in the rural areas. They have never seen an axe or a woodstove, so I
think to make the assumption that all First Nations students are the same,
could be very detrimental to their identity.* –an Indigenous Yukon
community member

*Use the whole cultural basis absolutely…Have the students act as
researchers so it doesn't matter what background you are from, it is
student-centered learning. …from an Aboriginal point of view, it is
storytelling, modeling and weaving the culture in that way…having our
Elders in with the students to discuss and share ideas about spirituality,
respect, and history. Let the students then make meaning of that however
they can. We have got to get away from getting caught up in the specific
content and move toward the process.*-an Indigenous TCPCC teacher

Infusion

*Our First Nations cultures curriculum…it is about it being seamless like
you don't even know it is there.* –an Indigenous Yukon administrator

The infusion of culture into the entire educational framework of the two
programs supports many Indigenous peoples' belief systems, as the process of
integration and inter-relational connections are believed to be crucial in a
positive educational process. This contradicts the monological view of the
Cartesian belief that all phenomena should be broken down into their constitute
parts to facilitate inquiry (Cajete, 1994; Kincheloe, 2001).

I do not intend to imply that this process is an easy one, or that the
participants speak of a utopia of flawlessly blended Western and Indigenous
epistemologies. The fact that each program has placed high importance on not
just the inclusion of local Indigenous culture, but that it actually drives the

delivery of educational programming is impressive. It is in the very idea that the dominant discourse of Western style education does not trump Indigenous epistemologies; rather, when the two often diverging ideologies conflict, the areas of variance are exposed for examination and debate by the students and a critical engagement is facilitated by the teachers.

> *To teach culture is to teach about place. It includes the language, the 'tone' of the community, the history of the people and places. It is connected to the stories, to the legends and the artifacts, to the songs. You need to look at the oral traditions, in which some people say is the foundation of the education system or the core of it…so culture comes from the local, the place that the community is from.* –a TCPCC Elder

> *We now have some cultural-based thinking and some science-based thinking and it is no longer one or the other. A good example is when we are out in the field for a forest assessment. We have an Elder to help with plant ID who talks about the history of the place, the respect for the land and the traditional protocols. We do GPS work and he shows how to read the land, the sky, and the weather. It all fits.* –an Indigenous TCPCC teacher

Respect

Participants spoke of the necessity to teach people the specific protocols and beliefs associated with cultural ideologies. Often referred to as respect, Elders and other enlightened members of the community are often asked to share the traditional teachings, beliefs and etiquette that govern their culture.

> *I am proud of my culture; we do things differently like thanking the animals and being respectful of Mother Earth. People don't do that down South and look what has happened…Some kids don't listen to our Elders and act bad but they [Elders] know so much and they come to teach us...we will be better to our earth because of them.* –an Indigenous TCPCC student

As the Western and Indigenous worlds are constantly redefined by mass media, these communities have made it a priority to inform the students of their culture's traditional ways, which often incorporate dissimilar epistemologies than what is accepted in Western culture. Students' spoke of these differences and conflicts, yet they perceived their Indigenous culture as unique and something which should, ideally, be treasured, even if this is not always demonstrated through their actions.

> *When we began this school, they [Elders] wanted a place that didn't look like a school and to promote respect in all aspects. So I can honestly say that this school is based on respect, because even the architect had that in mind…We work very hard at having the children listen to the Elders' stories and be understanding of the old ways. Many are skeptical but it is one thing to be critical and another to be ignorant. It is important. I see it as morality and ethics. It makes us all better people.* –a Yukon principal

Some older participants spoke of the young having lost the respect and connection to the traditional protocols and therefore, believed that the educational programs had a responsibility to teach these again. A key observation was that the Indigenous belief in the close connection and respect for the natural world seemed to promote and support the inclusion of environmental education and assessments. This area seemed to provide an avenue where cultural epistemologies combined with academic outcomes.

> *The notion is respect. We include this in all our topic areas, to respect people, animals, the environment, solids, or whatever the topic is… even things they may not like or understand.* –an Indigenous TCPCC teacher

Indigenous Knowledge

The participants of this study spoke of the need to better understand and incorporate Indigenous knowledge into the curriculum of the two experiential programs. While most acknowledge the positive attempts presently made to include such epistemologies, many cited room for improvement.

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First, I believe it is important to define Indigenous Knowledge (IK) as its interpretation by the participants is varied in scope. A majority defined it as being rooted in local awareness, unique to a specific culture or community. It was often seen as having implications for local decision-making that included issues such as health, education, the environment, natural resource management and social well-being. Most referred to it as a body of knowledge rather than a specific practice or belief, as it is commonly held by a community rather than an individual. Many participants had difficulty in articulating their thoughts on this subject in general, as it is often seen as tacit knowledge and embedded into community practices and rituals. Contradictions occurred in its perceived evolution since many participants spoke of it being based in the past, while others spoke of a dynamic and evolving process.

One key component that all participants spoke to is the risk of IK becoming extinct as Elders, often believed to be 'keepers of the knowledge', are dying at a rapid rate. Both programs have attempted to address this issue by implementing student-directed initiatives that endeavour to capture this knowledge through the written word, or on audio and video recordings. The students work with Elders, and at times interpreters, to record stories and other teachings that provide the basis of what many consider to be IK.

Again, as with the interpretation of culture, gaps are evident between Western and Indigenous interpretation of knowledge. Western belief is that knowledge is divisible and can be separated into parts. This is contrary to many Indigenous cultures' thought, as IK is seen as relational and has connections that are pervasive. This speaks to the participants' understanding of IK as a body of knowledge. It is understood that a single, isolated element of knowledge is unknowable. In an educational context, many participants believe the Western fragmentation of knowledge leads to a lack of context for the learner and diminishes the connections between the student experience and worldview. "You cannot know what something is unless you know what else it connects to that

gives it a place in the world, what else it involves and reflects when it comes into being, and what involves and reflects it" (Jardine, 2005, p. 99).

This speaks to the multidisciplinary element of IK since the notion of interconnectedness is essential (Cajete, 1994; Canella & Reif, 1994). IK promotes a relational aspect to knowledge. It is believed that the ideologies grounded in IK fit very well with those advocated by the experiential programs which are developed around the principle of *integration*; people are able to learn more effectively when they are able see things in relation to other things. This principle of the integration of subjects attempts to foster IK philosophy by examining real life issues, and by means of teaching strategies which incorporate activities that use one subject as a means to understanding another subject.

Educational activities often include input from multiple perspectives. Elders, scientists, professionals from economic corporations and officials from various levels of government are included in the field studies to provide a holistic representation of certain issues. Curriculum is planned to promote and explore the connections between subject matter, and IK is often used to provide local context to the studies. It is the hope that students will find multiple connections not only between curricular outcomes, but also within the aspects and events of their own lives.

> *Among First Nations communities, you have an additional commitment to say we just do not want to inform community. We want to inform a Dene community and that adds a set of responsibilities. So the reality is that if you are in a Dene area where you have a lot of environmental impacts, then you want a Dene community that is aware of the culture and environment.... stewards of the landscape. This is our goal through the combination of IK and Western science.* –an Indigenous TCPCC council member

<u>Curriculum</u>

The participants of the study spoke of the responsibility of the school and community to teach the community's knowledge, rituals and accepted practices to the students through IK appropriate curriculum. Elders and other community members work with educators to identify suitable learning opportunities that promote each community's practice of IK. It is seen as a tool to engage and motivate the student by providing local interests and context to the curriculum.

> *By including Indigenous Knowledge in the program, for the First Nations students, especially the boys, it validates whatever learning many of them have had before they get to school, in what is often very difficult times as they adjust to a whole new milieu.* –a TCPCC teacher

An Indigenous person is often conflicted between Indigenous and Western worlds. Technology has changed how people connect with the natural world, and traditional forms of understanding are constantly being transformed. Communities struggle with decisions about appropriate IK curriculum and activities, yet the development process is often described as empowering for the community as they define current interpretations of IK.

> *The Kaska [Yukon First Nations] are saying our knowledge is a separate body of knowledge. It is not science, it is not data, it is a body of knowledge and it comes then according to the rules that the Kaska assign to that body of knowledge, much like science has rules around how you use it...I think the trick is to think of these [Western science and IK] as bodies of knowledge and to bring them together and come up with some conclusions that are directed to what you are doing.* –an Indigenous Yukon biologist

> *In my understanding of IK, there seems to be a certain definition of Elder understanding, information exchange, and behavior that has a certain definition that has been integrated into learning across the community. But there is a gap between what used to be done where those*

Elders came from, and where it is now, learners take a different journey.
That platform that the Elders came from and the various levels they
climbed, can we replicate that? And if so will that produce the same kind
or similar kind of outcomes? –a Yukon teacher

A prime example of an education program acknowledging both Western
and Indigenous ideologies is the creation of the Yukon Independent Directed
Studies (IDS), in which students incorporate both IK and territorial approved
learning in a student-centered framework that includes members of the
community as facilitators and evaluators (see *Chapter 4* and *Appendix VI*).

<u>Interconnectedness with all living things</u>

An important aspect to Indigenous Knowledge is the close connection
people have with the natural world. The relational aspect of the natural world
and its inclusion in educational practices through integration is something both
programs espouse in their delivery and is derived from local Indigenous
epistemologies. The two programs utilize active student experiences in the
natural world, and a connectedness of subjects and supporting environments
through the process of integration. It is through this purposeful, educational
programming that they have found success for many Indigenous students.

The notion of interconnectedness of beings, in sets of relationships with
other people, living creatures and the environment, is the basis of many
Indigenous belief systems, and forms many Indigenous peoples' sense of
identity. Knowledge is seen as relational and through the incorporation of IK,
students learn about themselves and their place in the natural world. Educators
believe that through an exposure to IK, and an enlightened recognition of the
web of interconnectedness between an individual, community and nature,
students will develop a strong sense of identity and self-worth.

I have always seen our outdoor pursuits as a way that connects with what
I call Indigenous or Traditional Knowledge....we go out locally with
traditional snowshoes, canoes etc…and be aware of different patterns of

environment, be intuitive to what things are happening around us. You also learn how to react if something happens; survival instincts etc. You adapt to time, use weather and daylight hours as your definition of time is quite different. ...So we get back to the land and have the very young person walking or moving; they begin to internalize those personal feelings, to gain the connection back with the land and their culture. They now become the database. They work on their own definition...that capacity, based on Indigenous Knowledge, is the very extent amongst many traditional First Nations people. –an Indigenous Yukon teacher

The interconnectedness of the natural world that is espoused through IK was often deemed by participants as difficult to quantify or measure. Stories of this connection were shared, which defied typical Western realities, as participants often spoke of what is best described as "paranormal" abilities of Elders or other enlightened individuals. They seemed to have a higher sense and acuity to the natural world. Participants spoke of the need to have educational programming that promoted such beliefs, but questioned if it was possible to regain that connection in a technologically driven society.

There are always consequences for people's actions. I say this because I worked at Renewable Resources [Yukon Territory Government] over a decade ago and during that time they were implementing a territory-wide wolf kill and forced sterilization program. They did not consider the implications of such actions and, certainly were just starting to think about Indigenous Knowledge. Many YFN people were very upset by that and angry that no one was consulted. Some people now say that if you consider all the bad things that have happened to the people involved in that program, it is justified as a consequence for what was done. It is something I believe because of the way I was raised and how I interpret my connection to wildlife, fish or anything living. We see it as our Brother and so there's that really close connection that is foundational to

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our existence as First Nations people. –an Indigenous Yukon community member

Evaluation

Conflicting Ideologies

Questions about evaluation include the need to differentiate between the extent to which broad educational goals are realized, the extent to which the broad scope of instruction has been addressed, and the extent to which the student is learning. Experiential programs often depart from more traditional didactic instructional processes. Experiential activities are perceived as difficult to evaluate with present, generic forms of assessment. Evaluation processes utilized for experiential activities demand other ways of assessing whether learning has occurred across a range of skills, values and knowledge.

The participants of the study were highly critical of typical standardized tests, one-shot final exams, and a misplaced emphasis on rote repetition. Many see the need to include alternative forms of assessment that acknowledge what students can actually do, and that demonstrate progress in student studies. Evaluation has tremendous implications on students' identity, and therefore this issue is addressed when planning and implementing assessment tools.

> *No matter how much support we get from the community and the Department, there is always the question: 'Are they [experiential students] learning something?' because we do something that is very different from the regular classroom. So in addition to peer assessments, portfolios, skill-based demos etc…I have them go back to the main high school and write the school's final exams. Our students have consistently done better, on average, than the regular population, even though they usually come to our school because they have struggled in their previous*

years of schooling in the regular high school…But again, that exam is only a small part of how we evaluate them. –a Yukon teacher

The process was often referred to as experiential evaluation and assessment, while other terms included active evaluation, "authentic assessment" (Janesick, 2006) and performance-based assessment. No matter the term, the educators spoke and demonstrated similar evaluation traits that include a process of critique, feedback, redirection and reconstruction.

Some common experiential evaluation techniques used by both programs include: portfolios, journal writings, self-assessments, oral presentations, formal observations, performances, role-playing, circle discussions and active demonstrations. All are used interchangeably throughout the semester and are intended to respond to the diverse learning styles and interests of the students.

This form of evaluation focuses on higher-level thinking, critical and problem solving investigations, and more complex levels of learning. This multi-layered and comprehensive assessment model conflicts with the widely accepted generic form of testing found in most 'regular schools' that includes provincial, territorial and national developed final exams. The rationale of government-issued standards and one-size fits all testing does not align with the goals and objectives espoused by the programs.

I start the year with easy stuff and after a couple of tests most kids will have between 95 and 100. I put them in the position not to get a high mark, but to defend a high mark. So, they don't want to have a bad test now because they will lose that really good mark. Rather than saying you have got to get a really good mark, now you must fight to keep it. That's a totally different attitude and so now you are on the side with the kids and you are working with them. It totally changes the teacher-student relationship because now you are working with them and they are in control of their learning which includes different ways of evaluation. –an Indigenous TCPCC teacher

<u>Standardized Testing</u>

One-size, one-shot fits-all testing typically: contains only one correct response; is void of local input and generic in scope; is often created by someone removed from the student's environment; is based on a process simplified for ease of scoring; and, is intended to provide one trial scoring.

> *I use marks to inspire kids to further learning and do it better, to find out what he doesn't know, to help him grow. Unfortunately we don't train our teachers to inspire, we teach them to be score keepers.*–an Indigenous Yukon teacher

As many educational systems use standardized testing to compare schools on their academic achievement, with the resulting "high achievers" being rewarded with increased funding, teachers and students are often put under an increased load of pressure and stress to produce positive results. Many teachers spoke of being pressured to 'teach to the test' at the expense of rich exposure to curriculum. The competitive playing field between schools today often contributes to community divisions, and ultimately increases the divide between the more affluent schools and the poor under-funded ones, as the latter often has lower test scores on standardized tests. Another issue discussed was that of test bias. Provincial and territorial exams are deemed biased against Indigenous groups and English second language students. One-size testing does not fit all students.

> *We have so many of these boxed exam packages out there and there is no quality control on those. They often include bad questions and the teacher is often attracted to them because they think 'it almost tests what I was talking about, so great, already prepared, easy to correct'. So, what you do is you teach kids here, and then you assess kids on something over there [different location] and then often the teacher says 'well kids you failed'.* –an Indigenous Yukon administrator

With the increasing need to evaluate and compare educational progress, control of educational assessment has shifted from the local to the territorial, provincial and national levels. An empirical model, based on separate test-centered curriculum intended to eliminate local teacher-driven curriculum, now tests in the name of controlled standards and principles. Administrators often prefer one simple score to alleviate excess labour and simplify the design. Experiential assessment differs as it requires extra time, involvement, training, and professional development. The standards are often locally based and are not always considered to be empirical in nature.

> *One of the hardest things that we [experiential educators] do is to properly evaluate kids and we don't do the same old classroom setting assessment with multiple choice tests and written assignments to be marked. This doesn't benefit the students; sure it is way easier on the teachers and the Department…We still want to measure their [student] development but in a more all-inclusive, long-term way. So we decided to leave them in charge of some of the teaching…I give them a topic and say you teach it next week, I help the student out with preparatory materials etc…The students then get to evaluate the student-teacher and they evaluate themselves. We find this is a far more effective form of learning and assessing when the students take some ownership of the process. There may be peer pressure but they make sure they know their material inside and out, and if they don't, well they know right away as the other students keep them grounded and honest. It has worked really well and we are always tweaking the format to improve. –a TCPCC teacher*

Experiential Evaluation

The two experiential programs' assessment processes take in to account Gardner's (1999) work on multiple intelligences, as they recognize and evaluate the many intelligences a person can develop. Based on the assumptions of the field of experiential education, evaluation is realistic and attempts to replicate real life experiences; it requires creativity and personal judgment; it is practical

and active in nature; and, it is multidisciplinary with the intention of assessing a wide array of skills and abilities that promote high-order thinking.

It is no surprise that the participants, all with some familiarity of experiential and place-based education, believe that evaluation should reflect the assumption that a person cannot know something without directly experiencing it (Dewey, 1938). Also, students should have a say and some control over not only their learning, but also their assessment. They believe that the evaluation process should reflect the complex system of how the mind works and its influence on the process of learning (Breunig, 2005). Many participants spoke of Gardner's (1999) work on the full range of human intelligences and how we learn in order to survive. This contradicts the typical reliance on tests that are narrow in scope and are usually done in one-shot deliveries. Following place-based learning, participants believe students should be able to demonstrate the ability to solve problems and develop assumptions that are relevant to a particular cultural setting. Experiential evaluation includes procedures that address the student's ability to creatively think and be critical in their assumptions. This component of experiential evaluation will be addressed later in this chapter.

Experiential educators spoke of the need to include assessment practices that measure, not only what the students know, but also what they can do. This often is interpreted in skill and performance-based testing such as is done in the field of professional trades. This type of evaluation is typical in areas such as, the Arts, Music, Physical Education and other skill-based subjects. The idea is to evaluate learning in a setting that most closely resembles the real world. Students are also asked to provide explanations on why they gave a certain answer, and are pushed to back up their answers with reasoning. The common assumption is that assessment should be meaningful to the student.

Both programs demonstrate approaches that are intended to educate the whole child, to encourage a sense of community, and to provide ethical responsibility that is based on cultural and community perspectives. This is incorporated into their assessment techniques as it is multidisciplinary; it

includes local participation and promotes a critical examination of community issues. Students are asked to produce a particular product and also to participate in a certain act. Ultimately, they enact the knowledge that is gained and synthesized through their education (Janesick, 2006).

> *We do things differently here, because it's no zeros and it's more comment based, and some teachers even throw the multiple grades away. Many are just doing letter grades or not even doing any. It is holistic in nature and what's interesting is you just need to make sure that every single second the teacher is aware that the students understand the curriculum. Are they absolutely getting it? Can everyone get it? It is a matter of how you get there.* –an Indigenous TCPCC administrator

While generic testing requires students to be proficient in the rote memorization of specific subject matter and facts usually outside of local context, experiential evaluation is designed for students to focus their learning on both the understanding and application of curriculum, often based on local and cultural environments.

> *The capacity to develop locally approved curriculum and assessment speaks to an openness that is not often reflected in other educational programs. I think that one of the lessons we learned in [experiential program] suggest that it was not the curriculum as much as the instructional strategies and evaluation that could be found to more effectively meet the broad curricular goals. [Experiential program] demonstrated that we could surpass the performance of others using field studies and community-based projects as instructional and evaluation tools. [Experiential program] also demonstrated that the long term student learning, engagement and assessments had a more profound consequence than just the 'courses'.* –a Yukon educator

Alternative Forms

<u>Reflection</u>

As the process of reflection is an essential component of experiential learning, many participants spoke of the importance it had in the assessment process. Techniques such as portfolio assessment and journal writing are used by some teachers to review the progress of the student's work. The students often are involved in selecting which artefacts go into the product. Students are asked to include a repertoire of work that includes field studies, formal and personal observations, reflective writings, personal narratives and stories, videotapes, photographs, drawings, slides, group work and projects, and even self-assessments. The teachers often work with students to determine a standard that guides the learning objectives and ultimately the assessment.

Most teachers referred to their evaluation guidelines for educational work, such as portfolios and journals, as a rubric which provided criteria for the evaluation of student performance. Teachers consult directly with students on the matrix developed to assess educational work. It is usually presented as a set of categories with a value assigned for each defined category, by which teachers and other students evaluate a student's work. Students are often included in the rubric's development, as it is deemed crucial that all students have a clear and concise understanding of their value and application.

> *I work with rubrics. They are especially important in what we do [experiential education] because we are looking to evaluate more than just memory work and basic subject retention. I, with students, develop evaluation rubrics for different subjects and activities…I am always looking for how students can come up with creative solutions and I assess them on that…The best skill we can give them is the ability to think for themselves and to question everything. You can't test for that with basic multiple choice exams.* –a TCPCC teacher

Portfolios are a common method of assessment, as they are multifaceted and complex in their creation and content. Portfolios are used for different purposes. They are sometimes seen as a work in progress which represents their learning as it develops and become an educational artefact that demonstrates the student's learning progression and on-going development. The *wiki* format was being explored by two teachers because it provided a living written transcript of student dialogue, documenting ideas and tracking development. Others used it as a record-keeping document. The portfolio provides a historical record that can be used to access various parts of the student's learning. All students are asked to share their portfolios at various times and in different formats. This process can be done in groups, between peers, with parents and also in a teacher-student conference format. Some students are opting to create their portfolios electronically with software such as *Hyperstudio*, *Clarisworks*, and *Microsoft Works*. The portfolio designs were varied and ultimately endless in possibilities.

Students spoke to the value of creating a portfolio. At first, they value it as a practical tool for a job search or as a record of learning that they can access throughout their schooling. However, as they work on them more and more over the semester, the students find their own "voice" within the portfolio. Making it their own (rather than the teacher's) assignment, they realize its importance in shaping their learning identity and in shaping their emerging knowledge. They find it an enjoyable task, but also a very challenging one. Participants were aligned in their judgment that portfolio assessment is a more complex and richer evaluation alternative then a single, high stakes, standardized test.

Journal writing is implemented by most educators, as it provides students with an avenue to reflect upon experiences and make sense of one's beliefs and behaviours. Prepared as both a hard text and electronic document, students and teachers engage in its use with continual feedback. Seen as the most accessible reflection process for students, journals assist students in developing a cognitive schema that is often based on experiential learning. Journal writing is used to assist in critical analysis, as students are involved in community research

projects that require critical investigation and assessment that often involves multiple perspectives. Student journals may include art work, drawings, photographs, artefacts and a variety of other intelligences.

> *I do a lot of personal writing and stories in this class. I like that because that is what we do in our culture and how we learn from others. I get credit now for my ideas, even though they may be different than the teacher's or the books.* –an Indigenous TCPCC student

> *As experiential educators, we promote student reflection as much as possible. It can be hard sometimes because as teachers we are taught to think of the process, so I struggle to find time for student reflection… Journaling is an area I work on with the students at the beginning because we do so much traveling and natural observations in the field. Some students initially have a hard time as they recount mundane events of each day like 'Today, we got up at…and we went…we had spaghetti for supper, it was good etc' and that is not the type of reflection we are looking for. So we go through some of the journaling done by people like John Muir and others who were so good at making meaning of their observations and thoughts on paper. Once I do that exercise, the scope of the journals changes for the better.* –a Yukon teacher

Critical Thinking

Just as many participants spoke to the importance of first identifying curricular and community goals before developing the experiential programming, the same process was acknowledged to be essential for assessment procedures. The two programs rejected the assumption that students show mastery for subject matter by simple memorization and rote learning. The programs value evaluation techniques that recognize student development based on critical thinking and heuristic approaches to knowledge.

> *He isn't the kind of teacher to give you an answer. He'll say, 'OK, let's brainstorm, let's problem solve together about this', and that's very*

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helpful. [Teacher name] gives us the time to talk about things and share ideas. So instead of just saying, 'OK, you can do this' or 'you can't do that', 'try using this way or that', instead of just telling us the answer, he has us work together to talk about our different ways that each of us could come up with and then he supports them by showing the differences but saying 'it is OK to be different as long as you can explain why you think that way'. You can't just say 'Because', no way man…I feel like I get credit for thinking and being like who I really am, that's pretty cool. So the emphasis is more on the student. –an Indigenous TCPCC student

As generic testing and an adherence to provincial and territorial standards are dominating the educational system, participants believe the regular school schedule provides very little time and opportunity for critical thinking activities, and even less exposure to the actual curriculum material. In an attempt to provide an alternative environment, the experiential and place-based programs support critical debate and seek out diverse epistemologies as a way to increase student exposure and understandings.

With the inclusion of critical thinking activities such as journal writing, reflective narratives and critical debate, evaluation is often qualitative in nature and relies heavily upon the skills and insight of the teacher. This is in conflict with educational systems that support standards and one-size fits all testing. The two programs use portfolios and reflective writings to promote critical thought, and the implementation of community projects often involve critical action. Generic textbooks are seen as providing very little opportunity for creativity or imagination in the learning process. Regular school activities are often reduced to memorization, fact drills, repetition and the acquisition of the one ultimate truth. It is believed this hinders free thinking and stifles high-order thought.

Experiential assessment employs a continuous looping process of trying a specific activity, reflecting upon it, reviewing it, and then working to improve and master the act. The process allows for diverse skills and learning styles, it promotes fairness and diversity. The two programs believe that experiential

assessment best addresses the issue of students who speak English as a second language, as it does not provide an irreversible statement of failure that is often provided by generic final exams. Many of the programs experiential educators allow the students to re-write exams (outside of class time) to allow for improvement, recognizing that learning is a progression and should not be evaluated in a static format.

> *Experiential assessment looks different, we have a more holistic view of how the students are learning, it includes the academics but that is only a part. It also includes social and identity issues and that is very different than the typical standard assessment process. How do you measure belongingness, creative thinking, or the ability to critically question the assumed? and what does that look like? So we are using more qualitative measures, that include parameters such as self efficacy issues etc... These areas, what many may deem as alternative, have been built into that. Parents often believe that there is only one type of assessment; most typically it is based on standardized testing, but they need to understand that there are other formats of assessment, and we bring them together as it is summative. We are looking at the whole picture, how do we know the whole child is developing? And what does that look like? So we continue to improve and design.* –an Indigenous TCPCC administrator

Sustainability

Organization

The structure of most experiential programs studied is best described as program-based schooling, in which a cohort of students is taught a group of courses by one or two teachers for a semester or a full year. This is not unusual in the elementary grades, yet most of the secondary schools that provided experiential programming also follow this structure, often referred to as a 'homeroom' model. The *Community-Based Experiential Education Program* at

Kehewin First Nation School is the exception, in which it is delivered in block periods similar to a single course.

> *Our school [secondary-experiential] feels more like an elementary school because we have our own class and one teacher. I like that, I feel like we are a group and I know [teacher] really well… It is smaller than the big school [secondary-public] and we help each other out….we [class] get to take breaks when we want, we have lunch at different times, it depends on what we are doing. I like it that we don't have any bells, a lot of the time I don't even realize that it is the end of the day. –*a Yukon student

The program-based approach does not confine teaching to school settings. Such programs are often organized around a theme that includes a range of provincial or territorial courses. The merits are in effectively meeting a diversity of student interests and abilities, and the structure opens many opportunities to teachers for employing assorted instructional practices. As the courses are clustered and self-contained, teachers and students have the flexibility to be away from school facilities for sustained periods of time.

The course schedule and designing of the timetable requires a considerable amount of flexibility and creativity. Teachers, administrators and community members collaborate on course offerings and decide, as a group, what is best for each group of students. For example, courses such as Technology can be offered within the framework of a project or field activities; Physical Education can be provided within sport or active living activities; Culture and Language programs may link with parallel community programs; and, Art and Applied Skills programs may be arranged to match student interests in related fields. Electives, such as Film Production, can be matched with First Nation Studies to provide sets of related credits. Other credits may be taken through College and community programs, Skills Canada, First Nations resource courses and a range of other opportunities that arise. The courses reflect student interests, teacher capabilities and the resources present in the community.

The participants of this study acknowledged the diverse support network necessary to administer an effective functioning experiential school program. School administrators, teachers, school support staff, school councils, First Nations leaders and community resource people all play important roles. In the smaller communities, the support and involvement by associated community members is common; yet it was observed that this was also present in the experiential programs in Whitehorse, where the population averaged over 23,000 people.

> *To me, maybe it's because I am First Nations, but the easy part is talking with the community. I am more uncomfortable with identifying the opportunities where community and cultural events connect to the Western curricular goals. But I get help because we have so much support. I think where it becomes really challenging is in the implementation as it is co-implementation, and also assessment, because it is a co-assessment process.* –an Indigenous TCPCC teacher

Just as this study utilizes action research methodologies, so do the two programs through community problem-solving that provides a platform for study in many subjects while engaging in community service. The process usually begins with a problem being identified in the community that begs to be studied and addressed; opportunities for educational development are then explored. A single field activity, a semester course or project may evolve from such problem-solving activities, as the educators match learning outcomes with the studies that are often intended to contribute to the community.

Administrators of the schools are highly trained and have a passion for collaborative, community-based approaches. They were identified by many as playing a central role in making the school open to local involvement. Teachers spoke of the need for administrators to be strong advocates of the organizational models of the school, as they are often deemed alternative and therefore open to speculation. Participants spoke of the original planning processes of the two specific programs and some similarities were identified. In the beginning stages,

educators and community members consulted extensively on identifying educational goals, the type of organizational model the community envisioned, and the numbers of students and school staff for each program. Also recognized was the need to identify the types of personal characteristics the community desired to see represented by their school's staff. This was deemed essential so that the administration was more likely to select principals and teachers who believed in community goals and had a background in experiential learning. It is believed that an administration that wants to be part of a community has greater opportunities of running a successful school.

> *That word [experiential] was certainly not used ten years ago and suddenly everywhere I go I hear it being used. I think it's a tribute to the work many people have done to educate the politicians. That is very important because if you don't have political or community support it is not sustainable…community support because the politicians do what the community wants…It is also at the departmental level, as they can look around very easily and see what's going on in some of the schools and the value that experiential programs have. –*a Yukon principal

Structure

The participants often stress that the program-based structure is directly related to the record of academic and attitudinal success that the schools demonstrate. Community involvement and community research opportunities are often central to class activities. Each individual experiential class reflected the tone, beliefs and character of the community in which it was positioned.

These programs require resources that are quite different from those used by regular schools. Often a large percentage of school funding is allocated to the purchase, rental or maintenance of program-based equipment. Both programs had arrangements in place that allowed them to split costs of selected equipment and share their use with various community and government agencies.

When you don't have adequate equipment and funding, you are spending a tremendous amount of time trying to improvise. That time you are spending trying to improvise and make sure things are safe is taking away from time that you can devote to the actual teaching and the enhancement of educational opportunities...Now we have partnerships and funding that supports our equipment base because having good equipment means keeping the experience positive. –a Yukon teacher

The two programs assist and engage students in making a variety of career selections. As the structure allows for a considerable amount of flexibility in scheduling, the students get opportunities to participate in various community and government institutions and meet with people in diverse career fields.

The issue of student safety was addressed as students are often engaged in "moderate" risk activities such as outdoor pursuits, extended travelling and facility visitations. Insurance, teacher training, and extensively researched and updated activity-based protocols were identified as key components to ensuring student safety.

In the beginning of this program, one of the biggest challenges was the safety aspect. Each semester, we spend a lot of time with the students on safety. When people on the outside are looking for a quick fix for society and educational problems, they don't realize that safety is a big thing. We take it very seriously…God forbid, but if someone gets seriously injured or [touch wood] killed, the program is finished. –an Indigenous Yukon teacher

The participants identified a number of instructional models that were deemed successful in experiential settings. They include: student-peer modeling, through field activities, and monitoring processes in science and social studies; workshops for teachers, community members and even students demonstrating manipulative and hands-on activities; alternative evaluative processes in

experiential and constructivist learning; student led conferences, projects, and activities; and, cross-grade teaching and problem-solving activities.

Participants also acknowledged school practices that encouraged experiential and place-based programming. They consist of: consistent and on-going communication; demonstrated administration support and funding; an identified champion of the programs; ongoing support for teachers and staff; identifiable and agreed upon consequences for inappropriate student behavior ("students have to want to be there"); ongoing tracking of student and teacher accomplishments; an organizational model that reflects adaptability demanded by experiential and place-based learning; and, engaging the community in the process of determining study topics, data use and involvement in student studies.

> *With respect to the regular school, the overall structure and the bell system does not allow me to take advantage of the field studies. Here [experiential school] we have flexibility and structure to adapt as the curriculum activity sees fit…I think it is important to recognize we [teachers] don't always have the background to teach certain things. That is why team-teaching, allowing for the flexibility of people to come into the class and integrate curriculum, and having support to be able to pull teachers for training is so crucial. After running these programs for almost 15 years, I recognize this is the best way to go. –a Yukon teacher*

Schedule

The scheduling of the various versions of the two programs studied includes a typical arrangement of territorial and provincial courses offered in small elementary and secondary schools. The organizational plan includes one or two teachers. The experiential teachers are typically core teachers, as in many regular elementary models, but this is also the case for the secondary grades. The schedule usually limits the interference with other teachers in the school, but may involve them periodically where particular interests or specialization may be involved. In this arrangement, courses are arranged to avoid "student

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overload". Courses and electives may be taken by students across a number of grades and the electives are offered to reflect student interests and abilities.

> *One of the most important activities we do is timetabling and schedules, and there is no place in the country that trains you how to do that properly. The way we do it as a group is we often meet half way between, so we do a bit of blocking so you get the cohort grouping of students, and we do a bit of rotation so it is not all one way or the other…We have now gone to the homeroom scenario and it works very well because we take the kids for the whole semester. We teach them everything. One teacher, two teachers for the whole block, and it's very conducive to that type of [experiential] learning.* –an Indigenous TCPCC principal

In the program-based model, very few courses are offered sequentially; most are integrated holistically and arranged around study and teaching loads, student interest, and available community resources. Most are taught to a single cohort of students in the same grade for a semester or year. Yet two of the programs studied included a group of students who represented a grade range of two (grades 10 and 11) or three (grades 7, 8, and 9) sequential years that lasted up to three years in length.

When referring to the "timetables" of these programs, they appear to be static, but in reality, their praxis is flexible. This flexibility represents an accommodation to student progress, interests, community inputs and opportunities that arise. Teachers are often capitalizing on educational opportunities, often referred to as "teachable moments" or "opportunities knocking", as they become available. Daily and weekly schedules and standing classes are often rearranged, frequently on fairly short notice, to take advantage of such opportunities.

The responses from the interviews resoundingly supported the belief that "small is better". This supports Fine and Somerville's (1998) findings that claim flexible scheduling and faculty teamwork in smaller schools allowed for a level of depth and an interdisciplinary approach that provided students with a much richer educational experience. In *Successful Small Schools* (1998) they point out that "time is given for common planning and exchanging valuable information about students…and there is well-funded time for professional development" (Fine & Somerville, 1998, p. 108).

> *I think it was Judith Kleinfeld who wrote about the small schools of Alaska, and she said 'it's like one of those pictures—what's wrong with this picture?' There are six kids in the graduating class and the school is trying to pretend they are a big high school with 1000 kids. They are forgetting something, they are small and in being small they can do things big schools can't do. So we realized we had an opportunity to do some reshuffling. For example we took the entire Science block and added it to Applied Skills and did that as a lump, then shared it with the language time, so the language actually comes alive as part of what we do in Science, so there is not such a gap or disconnect.* –a Yukon administrator

One issue of note is that many participants vocalized the need to rethink the year schedule as it is presently applied to better reflect the seasonal activities of the local First Nations' cultures. To include some of the summer months, as they provide a rich and opportune context for cultural field activities.

> *With the experiential program there is an opportunity to go deeper and better meet the needs of the community. We now use a lot of the traditional activities in school time but we are still stuck in the September to June model…It is essential to coordinate our schedule with the seasonal timetable. We need to consider when hunting and gathering*

is…I am very hopeful and energized by what's happening here [experiential program] because it is trying to make the First Nations perspective fit… but it still feels like a non-First Nations model with the September to June thing. –an Indigenous TCPCC community member

Teacher Centered

A common theme expressed by many participants is that the programs would not be successful without the passion, skills and leadership of the teachers who directed them. The teacher had a responsibility to teach a wide range of courses and this was deemed crucial in successful programming.

The profile of the experiential teacher reveals that most have a considerable amount of classroom experience (on average five or more years), yet still possess youthful attitudes. They possess a considerable amount of various skill sets, certifications, and most have an interest and extensive background in outdoor and environmental pursuits. They are student-focused rather than subject-focused. Many teachers spoke about the need to develop close personal relationships with the students and most are active in a variety of school extra-curricular activities. Teachers often spoke about their personal investment and commitment to the programs, and a willingness to remain in their position for extended periods of time.

The program needs a champion; it needs a champion like [teacher name] in the educational system that knows people, what's going on, how it works, what's guiding the development of curriculum etc... It needs someone who has a high community profile, who has leadership skills and good personal rapport. You really need a champion of the program for it to be successful. –an Indigenous TCPCC community member

As previously noted, in an inclusive setting such as these community-based schools of study, many people are considered part of the teaching team. The multiple skills and passions of the various participants contribute to the

flexibility of the learning environment. The school staff, which includes Elders, parents, community members, educational assistants, tutors, past students and custodians, all contribute towards creating a positive attitude within the school.

Many participants spoke of the need to acquire more Indigenous teachers and/or educational assistants in the school, as they consider it an important support for Indigenous students. Indigenous role models and mentors were deemed crucial in providing support for an Indigenous student's positive sense of identity and personal and academic success.

> *It is about absolutely knowing your curriculum, knowing all the central learning outcomes of the program of studies. It is knowing that you can weave things in and that takes huge professional development, huge learning. It's like when you are doing your doctorate, you better be able to reach out and pull all those pieces in…It's a lot of work but it is the most rewarding job, it's not even a job, it's a calling…So it has a purpose. I am supposed to be here. It's every day going, I know I am supposed to be here and I know it's a journey and it is sometimes a very tough one but that is maybe why it is so rewarding…It's my life. –a TCPCC teacher*

Training

Most of the schools of study had a compact faculty size of on average of 15 to 20 staff, with some as small as eight. Because of the multi-disciplinary scope of the programs, teacher professional development is considered a priority in conducting effective, safe and engaging educational programming. In such settings, professional development is often enhanced by teaming and by small, task-oriented, group formations. For instance, teacher teams may work on interdisciplinary units or on personalized learning plans for all students. Under these circumstances, the entire team, including guidance personnel and even career-service staff, share students and may teach multiple subjects or mixed-grade levels, or collaborate on interdisciplinary teams. Thus, the necessity and opportunity for shared professional learning is heightened.

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Team teaching is really important for success in these [experiential] programs… That's why a lot of teachers struggle with this scenario because they don't train you to do this as a student-teacher. University training doesn't include these types of scenarios. –an Indigenous TCPCC teacher

The administrations representing the two programs spoke of their priority in providing on-going training and support for the teachers. In addition, teachers take specific certification courses outside of class time, in the summer, on weekends and evenings. Regularly, teachers cover their own costs for this training, yet some of the schools have a small budget for external training courses. Each program provides some professional development throughout the school year that brings together experiential teachers as a cohort of professional learners.

Teachers and administrators both acknowledged the importance of effective professional development programs that focus on a clear set of priorities; provide ongoing, school-based support to classroom teachers; deal with academic content as well as teaching methods; and, create ample opportunities for teachers to learn and attempt new teaching methods. Often, teachers with specific expertise and certification run peer-led and open-ended workshops that allow for classroom and field-based exploration to meet the needs of a variety of teachers. Professional development is on-going, extended and continuous training, as it encourages effective classroom practices.

The first years of teaching as an experiential educator are deemed the most demanding and vital for support and training, as teachers are often loaded with a tremendous amount of preparations, organizing, and responsibility. Some of the areas targeted for professional development include a wide variety of outdoor pursuits, first-aid and safety, environmental field assessment studies, cultural and language courses, art methods, and experiential and place-based lessons.

*Having a brand new teacher doing this [experiential program] is not
ideal. It is difficult to train people because so much of it is in the personal
life experiences, and getting credentials and certification to go out on the
land. I think you can accelerate it and teach people how to canoe etc. but
most people who do experiential education are already doing it
successfully. Those activities are part of their life-long passion and
interests…Remember the key is not in the outdoor skills but in the actual
educational skills of meshing those curriculum outcomes with the outdoor
pursuits, the field activities and community issues. –a Yukon educator*

Skills

Many community members and administrators spoke of the need to put a
considerable amount of attention into the selection of appropriate teachers when
developing an experiential program. Their "wish list" for an experiential teacher
included someone with: competency in a range of core academic programs; the
ability to explain complex problems in simple terms; the ability to work well
with a range of students; and, someone with good interpersonal skills.
Participants voiced their concern with the regular school system as the standard
methods of selecting teachers often do not make choices based on the above
criteria, and this is deemed a detriment to student success.

*I knew right away when I met [teacher] that he was ideal for this
[experiential] program. He has many skills in different areas and
because of his shop background, he can make things and be creative…He
is experienced with kids who are not doing well in the regular classroom.
He also was one of those kids, so it is personal for him… He could do all
three, he can do the science and field studies, he can do the shop, and he
can do outdoor education. It's a beautiful match. –an Indigenous TCPCC
principal*

Teachers spoke of a reliance on their own personal strengths and abilities
to provide direction to the programs. It was determined important to capitalize on
teacher strengths (along with student interests) as many of the teachers came

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with a varied skill set. This research identified many teachers as being "characters" and showed a willingness to work outside the box of regular educational frameworks. Their passion and energy is often what guides the specific programs. Many had skills of a naturalist, with an extensive background in outdoor and environmental pursuits. Often the teachers spoke more than one language including Cree, Dene, and French. They also had a strong background in cultural understandings and activities. The experiential educators are often revered in the community as sociable, approachable and well-liked members who usually have a considerable amount of experience in roles of leadership.

> *We are 'Jack of all trades'. You need to have a real diverse background. Most important thing is you have to really like kids and be comfortable with the age group you are working with. You need skills to be able to manage them inside and outside the classroom. Many teachers do a great job in the classroom but as soon as you take away the four walls and remove the straight row of desks, they struggle. They don't have that comfort zone and vision. You really need that strong background in class management. You need a variety of skills, and usually a science background, because it is a really nice fit for these [experiential] programs. It's a very hands-on subject.*–a TCPCC teacher

Indigenous Teachers and Role Models

Both programs recognize the importance Indigenous educators play in the development of positive identity and the educational success of Indigenous students. Mackay and Myles (1995) identify Indigenous teachers and/or educational assistants as an important support for Indigenous students in the school setting, within the context of Indigenous retention and drop-out rates. York (1990) notes that Indigenous students show a tendency to be more responsive in the classroom setting and more engaged in classroom activities and discussions when their teacher is Indigenous (cited in Brade et al., 2003).

> *I think it is really good to have our [First Nations] people come out and teach us. I am proud to hear about my people and who we are. My*

teacher [non-FN] is OK but he will never understand who we are and
that is why I like it when people [from the community] come to do things
with us and teach us about our culture and our land. –an Indigenous
TCPCC student

Unfortunately, these programs are similar to other schools in that they
lack a majority visible representation of Indigenous role models such as
principals, teachers and educational assistants. In the Yukon, the creation of the
Yukon Native Teacher Education Program (YNTEP) at Yukon College, in
Whitehorse, was meant to address this issue and ultimately 10 to 15 graduates
are certified to teach in Yukon schools each year. In northern Alberta, a
partnership between Blue Quills First Nations College in St. Paul and the
University of Alberta in Edmonton provide a First Nations guided Bachelor of
Education and Teacher Assistant Diploma. Unfortunately, to this date, very few
have become experiential educators.

It's not easy to be a First Nations teacher, look at YNTEP...to have
people come to Whitehorse from the communities and train them. They
then go back to the communities after so many years, it's hard on people
in the communities to go back and teach their relatives and be expected
to solve everything in the schools. –an Indigenous Yukon community
member

Participants identified issues that hinder Indigenous people from
becoming educators, they include: close family ties to the community that lead to
a difficulty with professionalism; excessive pressure to meet unrealistic goals;
and, a negative perception of present schooling because of past experiences and
community perspectives (e.g. residential schools). Many Indigenous educators
spoke of the tension and pressure they felt in addressing many of the issues
associated with Indigenous education. The Indigenous educators also felt,
because they were small in numbers, they were overwhelmed with the unrealistic
burden often bestowed upon them to solve many of the schools problems. Burn-
out was identified as a major issue that Indigenous teachers faced.

Being a First Nations teacher can bring a lot of challenges. Even in a First Nations band school with a lot of First Nations teachers, people think 'support in numbers' but because you are in a community full of First Nations people, it can be really hard on the First Nations teachers…We [First Nations teachers] were under more pressure and stress because of the expectations of the First Nations community and it was far worse on us than the White teachers. It was like they got a free pass because they were white…They [the community] expected all the First Nations teachers to do things that they wanted. –an Indigenous TCPCC teacher

The two experiential and place-based programs attempt to address this subject by including various Indigenous representations through the inclusion of community members and Elders in the educational programming. Some past students of the two programs are involved in peer tutoring and act as student mentors and role models, yet it was noted that many of the past successful students often move out of the community and are not readily available to assist.

Community involvement supports Indigenous representation and also helps non-Indigenous educators to be sensitive and informed of Indigenous perspectives. Support is also given to non-Indigenous teachers by Elders, who often play an active role by their presence in the school setting and assisting in the delivery of curriculum. It is believed that positive Indigenous role models will support Indigenous students to be confident and conscientious learners who stay in school longer and are successful.

Everybody looks for a silver bullet for Indigenous students and there is no surprise across the country, First Nations kids don't do as well as non-First Nations kids. Rural kids don't do as well as urban kids. Guys don't do as well as girls and so, if you are a First Nations boy in a rural community your chance for success is virtually non-existent. And so, every now and then you have that superstar pop up, right? You have the odd [local First Nations teacher name] in the mix, right? Thank God,

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because then we can point to him and say 'at least its possible'...but the bottom line is there is no silver bullet. Doing language, doing culture, doing experiential programming in itself are not going to make our First Nations kids be successful. I wish, if I believed for a microsecond that it's true, but I don't think so. I think we need those things absolutely, but I also think we need more Indigenous teachers and more Indigenous role models from the community. That is the goal. –a TCPCC Chief

The next and final chapter discusses some of the ways educators can facilitate experiential and place-based education as it relates to Indigenous learners. I will bring together some key points for discussion and illuminate critical issues voiced by the participants and touched upon in previous chapters, as well as through the dissemination of data.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This final chapter focuses on the implications of this study for both practice and research in the areas of experiential and place-based education, with a special focus on Indigenous learners. I begin this chapter with a synopsis of the key points and themes explored in the previous chapters, and engage in a discussion of their significance to Northern educational settings. This summary also includes the data findings presented in the last two chapters as they relate to the three research questions introduced in Chapter 1, delineated in Chapter 5, and addressed in Chapters 6 and 7. In addressing the research questions, I examine the pedagogical implications of this research as it applies to other educators who may be involved, or interested, in experiential and place-based education in a Northern and/or Indigenous context. In conclusion, I provide some suggestions for future clarification and study, as the research raises a multitude of questions that deserve further investigation.

Summary and Discussion

First, the study contributes some promising results to the relatively small body of research emerging on the praxis of experiential and place-based learning in Indigenous northern education, particularly in a Canadian context. It offers insight into an organizational context and pedagogy that appears helpful in fostering Indigenous student success through the integration and development of conceptual, experiential and place-based learning. In addition, it provides an alternative model to the usual building blocks of a school program—separate courses and separate individual teaching.

Secondly, I think it is important to summarize the specific elements that are included in this study as they relate to the primary objective of the research. As such, those elements of experiential and place-based education that lead to

greater engagement of Indigenous students and improved educational outcomes will be highlighted.

To begin, I decided it was important and necessary to identify some significant factors to be considered in conducting research with Indigenous communities and peoples. As a non-Indigenous researcher involved in Indigenous research, I am cognisant of my positionality and therefore, felt compelled and responsible to unveil my research motives. In Chapter 2, I document my journey as a novice researcher when I struggled to make sense of the initial questioning I received by colleagues at McGill University regarding my positionality. This eventually became a vehicle for my epistemological evolution as a non-Indigenous researcher in Indigenous education. I gained a better understanding of the differing values held within, not only Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems, but between Indigenous systems themselves that include the conditions, rights, and ways of life of many groups, cultures, communities and peoples. This critical journey provided me with an epistemological humility, and tools from which to better understand my development as an educator and explore my deep commitment to Indigenous education through an emotional understanding of my past experiences.

From here, I followed with a summary of the writings of mostly Indigenous scholars with respect to the past, present and future of Indigenous education (Chapter 3). As a non-Indigenous researcher, I believe it is crucial, and ultimately my responsibility, to develop an understanding of Indigenous education, as articulated by Indigenous scholars. Issues of identity, self-determination, local control, community, culture and a return to a traditional, holistic model of education were investigated. This was done with the recognition that I would only provide a wide and generalized overview of the field of Indigenous education, as I have consistently reiterated, throughout this study, that there are not only definite relations and nuances within Indigenous Nations, but specific within each community and reserve.

In my development of responses to the first and second research questions of this study, I began to lay the foundation for interpreting the fields of experiential and place-based education. The fourth chapter stands as a theoretical and academic review of these two closely related fields, and provides some examples of current educational models that have offered solutions to some of the issues identified by Indigenous authors (see Chapter 3) with respect to Indigenous students' needs. The alternative models provided were chosen as they incorporate some similar concepts such as cultural and community initiatives which are also utilized by the two programs of study.

By detailing the methodological structure that frames this study (see Chapter 5), I introduced the often ambiguous interpretations that seem to plague the field of experiential and place-based education. It is in this fifth chapter that I attempt to conceptualize how I located the research in the perceptions and interpretations of educators, students and community members, with respect to the fields of experiential and place-based education.

The sixth chapter establishes the two contexts that shape the subject of inquiry, and provides an in-depth comparative case studies analysis of the varying settings of the Yukon and northern Alberta. I concentrated on each case as a unique research site, with its specific complexity, depth, and thickness. Yet, it is what is told of the education system as a larger whole found in the macro foundations of microsociology, rather than about the specificity of the education of similar cases, that this research attempts to clarify.

I focus on program elements, factors and strategies that encourage Indigenous learner success rather than highlighting the failure of students. I chose to summarize the pedagogical practices of the two programs into five themes: *Learning from Place*; *Comprehending the Development of Self/Identity through Learning Units; Technology and Learning; Diverse Educational Systems and Learning;* and *Alternative Pedagogies.*

The concluding section of this chapter analyzes the patterns across the two study sites, ending with a description of *similar* dominant factors that promote success. These include: supportive and committed staff; community involvement through the process of integration; inclusion of science and technology as a means of engagement; and, critical inquiry: promoting issues of social justice and the development of student qualities of resilience and strong sense of identity. As well, through outdoor field studies and environmental assessments students developed a heightened connection with the natural world that reflected cultural and community epistemologies.

I also identify *conflicting* elements of the two programs of study. They are: different interpretations of the act of reflection; the framework and scheduling in which the programs are delivered; and, the imbalance of funding provided to the schools for delivery of such programs with respect to the northern Alberta schools, which received proportionately less. As well, the goals upon which the principles of experiential and place-based education were originally based differed considerably. The Yukon program was originally developed to address diverse learning styles and promote a community oriented process of education, while the northern Alberta program is based on the integration of Treaty rights within the process of learning to encourage students to be aware of and feel responsible for the lands they occupy. The percentage of Indigenous students and teachers within the programs population varied, as the rural Yukon and northern Alberta schools had more than double the Indigenous population when compared to the urban schools of Whitehorse, Yukon. Also, professional support from non-experiential program colleagues, the extent to which Indigenous language was promoted, and the assessment of achievement and success varied from one community to the other.

The last chapter is devoted to exploring the main goal of this research, which is to gain a better understanding of the field of experiential and place-based education as defined by the actual practitioners in the educational system. I

identify key issues emerging from the research data and utilize the participants' voices to frame the response to the three research questions.

I began by responding to one of the three questions which provided the focus for this study: *How can students, educators and community members interpret the field of experiential and place-based education?* In addressing the explicit question of *what is experiential education?* I explored some notable areas of interest that became evident through the dissemination of data. The first area identified was *Common Aspects,* which included topics surrounding a belief that students learn in many different ways; experiential learning, with its expanded scope of instructional approaches, thus resonates with a larger range of student learners. In addition, experiential education provides subject matter that is meaningful and important by connecting the curriculum to the lives of the students; students are therefore motivated. Finally, students are engaged when they develop curricular interests through active participation in field studies that are experiential and social in nature.

The other areas identified included the importance of *Teachers* in the programs, as they have a considerable amount of responsibility and require a wide range of skills, training and experience. The *Schools'* alternative structure and scheduling were identified as essential components since issues of support and organization assisted in curriculum integration and delivery. *Communities* were instrumental in all facets of the learning cycle, and provided a basis for cultural and local initiatives. Practitioners were adamant that experiential and place-based programs were *Not Just Outdoor Education,* as the use of outdoor pursuits was mainly to assist in the delivery of curricular outcomes and to provide a connection to the local and natural world.

A large part of the seventh chapter is devoted to answering the remaining two questions set out as the general focus of this study: *In what ways can educators and community members share values and practices to create more purposeful classroom praxis?* and, *How can current educational systems*

redefine their practices to address Indigenous needs, as well as improve student
engagement and success?

Several themes emerged through the dissemination of data. I summarized
them into five major themes*: Partnerships*; *Field Studies*; *Indigenous Culture
and Knowledge*; *Evaluation*; and *Sustainability*. Within each theme, various sub-
themes evolved and were investigated accordingly. Each theme and sub-theme
was explored through the participants' voices, as they relate to the two research
questions aforementioned. It is through these stories, their similarities and
differences that I attempted to provide scope and depth to this study.

The first theme, *Partnerships,* included three major areas of interest:
Family and Community, Resources and *Relationships*. The subject of *Family and
Community* explored central partnerships evident between the school and
Parents, *Community* and *Elders*, which help promote and deliver local
community and cultural values in the curriculum. These partnerships also
provide a basis for learners to accept dissimilar forms of knowledge and
ultimately become more accepting of what is different. The various partnerships
also provide educators with *Resources* in the form of professional, cultural and
subject expertise, as well as providing local Traditional Knowledge that was
deemed essential in field studies.

The subject of *Relationships* became of special interest to this study, as
the notion of relations dominated much of the interview process and was deemed
a crucial component to both of the programs' success. Participants spoke of two
major types of relationships: the one shared by a teacher and the students in
which I, for the purpose of this study, have termed *Pedagogical Relationship;*
the other being the relationships that evolved in a group or cohort setting, which
is referred to as *Cohort Relationships*.

I used van Manen's (1991, 1995, 2002) interpretation of "good
pedagogy" and "pedagogical tact" as a way to frame the subject of *Pedagogical
Relationships*, since I find representation of these qualities espoused by the

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teachers in their relationships with the students of these experiential education programs. Teachers (which include some Elders, parents and community members) spoke about their intent on building close relationships with the students as it is believed that students will become more confident in their abilities and assertive in their participation.

Cohort Relationships between students developed as teachers often reported their intent in creating an environment to nurture healthy relationships. Some participants believed this to be a by-product of experiential learning as educational activities are often intensive in nature and done in student partnerships that foster emotional, social and personal relationships. The "bonding" that was identified is acknowledged as a crucial component to improving sense of identity and promoting a healthy form of self-worth.

The second theme *Field Studies* addressed three major areas of interest, they are: *Pedagogies*, *Place* and *Activities "Beyond Curriculum"*. The subject of *Pedagogies* explores an "alternative" form of content delivery that aims at integrating theory and practice. Some key tenets of the espoused "alternative pedagogy" involve: a considerable amount of *Teacher Planning* that requires the teacher having a rich understanding of the curricular outcomes; and, *Integration* of subjects and real life experiences are seen as fundamental principles that guide the two programs and acknowledge the multidisciplinary and interconnectedness of curriculum, pedagogy and Indigenous epistemologies. Also, alternative forms of *Reflection,* such as portfolios, journals, narratives, circle (peer) and student-teacher discussions, are provided to assist in the students' immersion experience, promote the development of the students' learning competencies (assessment), and support socio-constructivist and self-reflective learning.

The subject of *Place*-based learning was characterized as the pedagogy of community, the integration of the student into their home land, and the reinforcement of the essential links between the student and their place, where place included not only the natural landscape, but also the social, emotional, political and cultural aspects. Two sub-topics were explored. The first was

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Keepers of the Earth as both programs promoted critical investigations through ecological studies, environmental assessments and cultural activities that are intended to connect students with their specific place on the earth. The second was *Immersion in Action* where students become active learners, as it is only as dynamic participants in the world that we can see the relevance and need to learn about it.

Activities *"Beyond Curriculum"* explores the mandate of the two experiential programs in redefining and adopting what education means to each community. The experiential programs encourage students through field activities, multiple perspective curriculum and active exposure to social, cultural and political issues to venture "outside the box' of the conventional education system. The programs' focus on *Life Skills* is done in the recognition of recent local resource development opportunities, and therefore preparing and encouraging students for employment opportunities that exist within their Indigenous territories and beyond. They also promote critical engagement, as the programs expose issues of power and justice, and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class and gender ideologies, discourses, education, religion and other social institutions or cultural dynamics interact to construct the social systems that make-up our consciousness. The experiential programs of study often use *Adversity* as a motivating tool for personal and academic success, as themes of hardship and resistance in Indigenous history and stories define the very essence of northern people.

The third major theme identified was *Indigenous Culture and Knowledge* which I address both topics: *Culture* and *Knowledge* in detail. Acknowledging that the subject of *Culture* is far too large and important to interpret in this dissertation, I focused on how the research participants' navigate the understanding and inclusion of culture into the educational methods of the two programs. I identified the difficulties both programs have in determining the scope of culture as it relates to a particular community, and more specifically, in

a time of multicultural development when a community is rarely considered homogeneous.

This discussion exposed the struggles many educators had with *Negotiating the Gap* identified in the perceptions of culture which reflect community principles that are often mixed and conflicting. Cultural "inclusion" was identified as a difficult process as technology, mass media, urbanization and the reduction of hunting and gathering opportunities created a changing and unchartered society that is extremely dissimilar to that of what some would consider a "traditional lifestyle".

While acknowledging the difficulties of cultural *Infusion*, both programs are committed to, and have placed high importance on not just the inclusion of local Indigenous culture, but to have it actually drive the overall delivery of the educational programming. In fact, when the discourses of Western and Indigenous epistemologies conflict, the areas of variance are exposed for examination and debated by the students as critical engagement is facilitated by the teachers. Often referred to as *Respect*, many participants spoke of the necessity to teach students the specific protocols and beliefs associated with cultural and community ideologies. The notion of respect often included a connection to the natural world which supported environmental education and integrated academic outcomes.

The interpretations of *Indigenous Knowledge* (IK) are varied, yet all participants spoke of the risk of IK becoming extinct and therefore a need to document, disseminate and include IK into the curriculum. *Curriculum* is often planned to promote and explore the connections between subject matter, and IK is often used to provide local context to the studies as many Indigenous epistemologies promote a relational aspect to knowledge. Communities struggle with decisions about appropriate IK curriculum and activities, yet the development process was described as empowering to the community as they define current interpretations of IK through an evolutionary process. The notion of *Interconnectedness with All Living Things*, through relationships with people,

living creatures and the environment, is the basis of many Indigenous belief systems and forms many Indigenous peoples' sense of identity. Educators believe that through an exposure to IK and an enlightened recognition of the web of interconnectedness between an individual, community and nature, students will develop a strong sense of identity and self-worth.

Evaluation became the fourth major theme and it was broken down into two areas: *Conflicting Ideologies* and *Alternative Forms*. Experiential activities are often perceived as difficult to evaluate by means of the present generic forms of assessment. In *Conflicting Ideologies*, the participants of the study were highly critical of typical standardized tests, one-shot final exams and misplaced emphasis on rote repetition. The rationale of government-issued standards and one-size fits all testing does not align with the goals and objectives espoused by the two experiential and place-based programs, which envision local initiatives and programming that recognizes diverse forms of knowledge and learning styles.

With respect to *Standardized Testing*, many teachers spoke of being pressured to teach to the test at the expense of rich exposure to curriculum. Participants resoundingly stated that one-size testing does not fit all students, and therefore standards should be locally based and are not always considered to be empirical in nature. *Experiential Evaluation* is based in meaningful contexts that allow students to make critical connections between the real world that they know and school-based curriculum. This form of evaluation focuses on higher-level thinking, critical and problem-solving investigations, and more complex levels of learning. Some common experiential evaluation techniques used by both programs include: portfolios, journal writings, self-assessments, oral presentations, formal observations, performances, role playing, circle discussions and active demonstrations.

Alternative Forms of assessment included the process of *Reflection,* as it is an essential component of experiential learning. Most educators referred to their evaluation guidelines for educational work, such as portfolios and journal

writing, as rubrics which provide criteria for the evaluation of student performance. Teachers consult directly with students on the matrix developed to assess educational work. It is usually presented as a set of categories, with a value assigned for each defined category, by which teachers and students evaluate. Students are often included in the rubrics development, as it is deemed crucial that all students have a clear and concise understanding of its value and application. This is another example of student-centered learning since students are involved in their own assessment, and it is seen as a progression, not static.

The two programs value evaluation techniques that recognize student development based on *Critical Thinking* and heuristic approaches to knowledge. As generic testing and an adherence to provincial and territorial standards is identified as dominating educational systems, the participants believe the regular school schedule provides very little time or opportunity for critical thinking activities, and even less exposure to the actual curriculum material. In an attempt to provide an alternative environment, the experiential and place-based programs support critical debate and seek out diverse epistemologies as a way to increase student exposure and understanding. With the inclusion of critical thinking activities such as journal writing, reflective narratives and critical debate, some components of the evaluation are qualitative in nature and rely heavily upon the skills and insight of the professional teacher. Experiential assessment employs a continuous looping process of trying a specific activity, reflecting upon it, reviewing it, and then working to improve and master the act.

The fifth and final theme identified was *Sustainability* which included two areas: *Organization* and *Teacher Centered*. The subject of *Organization* explored the common school *Structure* employed by the two programs, and is best described as "program-based schooling" where a cohort of students is taught a group of courses by one or two teachers for a semester or a full year. This approach does not confine teaching to school settings, and programs are often organized about a theme that includes a range of provincial or territorial courses. The merits are believed to be in effectively meeting a diversity of student

interests and abilities, as the structure opens many opportunities to teachers for employing assorted instructional practices. Community involvement through research opportunities and projects are often central to class activities, and are also part of the instruction and evaluation approaches. The responses from the interviews resoundingly supported the belief that "small is better".

The course *Schedule* and designing of the timetable often requires a considerable amount of flexibility and creativity. Teachers, administrators and community members collaborate on course offerings that reflect student interests, teacher capabilities and the resources present in the community. Teachers often capitalize on educational opportunities, as "teachable moments" or "opportunities knocking" become available. Daily and weekly schedules and standing classes are often rearranged, frequently on fairly short notice, to take advantage of such opportunities. Many participants spoke about the need to rethink the year schedule as it is presently applied to better reflect the seasonal activities of the local community interests and First Nations cultural initiatives.

Both of these programs are *Teacher Centered* and most of the participants acknowledge that they would not be successful without the passion, skills and leadership of the teachers who directed them. Because of the multi-disciplinary scope of the programs, experiential teachers require a considerable amount of *Training* to conduct effective, safe and engaging educational programming. Teachers and administrators both acknowledged the importance of effective professional development programs that: focus on a clear set of priorities; provide ongoing, school-based support to classroom teachers; deal with academic content as well as teaching methods; and, create ample opportunities for teachers to see and attempt new teaching methods. Some of the areas targeted for professional development include: a wide variety of outdoor pursuits; first-aid and safety; environmental field assessment studies; cultural and language courses; art methods; and, experiential and place-based lessons.

The *Skills* of an experiential educator included considerable prior experience (five or more years) teaching in a school setting, while still

possessing youthful attitudes. They have a considerable amount of diverse skill sets, certifications, and most have an interest and extensive background in outdoor and environmental pursuits. The teachers are student focused rather than subject focused. Many teachers spoke about the need to develop close personal relationships with the students, and most are active in a variety of school extra-curricular activities. Teachers often spoke about their personal investment and commitment to the programs, and a willingness to remain in their positions for extended periods of time. The experiential educators observed in this study are "characters", and are often revered in the community as sociable, approachable and well-liked members who usually have a considerable amount of experience in roles of leadership in various community-based activities. A "wish list" for an experiential teacher included: someone with competencies in a range of core academic programs; the ability to explain complex problems in simple terms; an ability to work well with a range of students; and, possessing good personal skills.

Even though both programs recognized the importance Indigenous educators play in the positive identity development and success of Indigenous students, most schools lacked a visible majority representation of *Indigenous Teachers and Role Models*, such as principals, teachers and educational assistants. This lack of Indigenous representation was explained by: the close family ties that teachers had to the community that lead to difficulties with professionalism; excessive pressure to meet unrealistic goals; and, a negative perception of present schooling because of past experiences and community perspectives (e.g. residential schools). Indigenous educators often suffered from "burn-out", as many were overwhelmed with the unrealistic burden bestowed upon them to solve many of the schools problems. The two experiential and place-based programs attempt to address these issues by including various Indigenous representations through the inclusion of Indigenous community members and Elders in the educational programming. It is believed that positive Indigenous role models will support Indigenous students to be confident and conscientious learners who stay in school longer and are successful.

In summarizing the contribution that experiential and place-based processes have made to Indigenous education and knowledge production, four conclusions are suggested:

First, the practical application of theoretical knowledge is a valuable contribution to the learning process. With the implementation of appropriate experiential and place-based initiatives, students and educators develop an ability to place objects and events in a new context within their own culture, as well as the cultures of others (Theobald, 1997).

Second, active participation developed by the immersion experience may provide a motivation for the recognition of environmental and social alteration, and the need for new strategies for social change. This has tremendous implications for the student's identity, who in the future may find themselves in such positions that require critical inquiry and opportunities for social justice (Cajete, 1994, 1999).

Third, students develop an understanding of the interrelationship between the ecology of their community and its social framework within a global context. It is envisioned that enlightened students will respect and promote cultural variations. Experience assists students in understanding why certain social policies exist or are absent from their community. They come to realize how the society that he or she is part of expresses its values and choices compared to those of other communities and cultures (Carnie, 2003).

Finally, experiential learning provides the Indigenous student with the ability to become conscious of and take responsibility for the reality of their own political and cultural awareness. This active, self-determining role is most productive outside of the formal classroom setting. It is in this very act that the central value is realized: the ability of all persons to know their potential for growth and self awareness (Denise & Harris, 1989).

Many of these programs listed were conceived as an attempt: to assist students in realizing the intense relationship which exists between people and their environments; to show, through an experiential and

place-based learning process, that the environments in which we all exist cannot be examined individually; and, to assist students in discovering that the interacting social, psychological, cultural and physical environments comprise the total milieu within which individuals, families, groups and communities function (Denise & Harris, 1989). "One thing should be constant: the recognition that human beings do best in situations in which they are known, cared for, supported and valued; in short where they are part of a community" (Carnie, 2003, p. 14).

Implications and Significance

Purpose and Structure of School

The current framework that guides our schools is based upon colonial thought (Harding, 1998; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999) and, I argue, places the learner in a recipient position which is contrary to many subjugated, non-Western cultural beliefs and epistemologies. Learners are seen as passive recipients of knowledge and teachers are purveyors of that knowledge (Goodlad, 1984; Sizer, 1984). All too often young students who are full of creativity, curiosity and active wonderment enter the school environment and become submissive and passive participants, because they are lead to believe that they must learn and act according to what their teacher and school reward them for learning and becoming (Jardine, 2005). Critical theorists (Greene, 1995; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999) recognize that the present educational system places students as "passive receptors in a fact-based memory game" (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 90). They instead envision a system that teaches young people to become active participants in the world. It is only through dynamic engagement that we can see the relevance and necessity to learn about it.

The experiential and place-based programs of study encourage students through field activities, a multiple perspective curriculum and active exposure to social, cultural and political issues to venture 'outside the box' of the

conventional education system. Students are asked to develop beliefs that are based on their own critical assessment; differing opinions and ways of thinking are encouraged. Through student-centered learning initiatives and cooperative work, learners develop a cognition that values multiple perspectives.

As educators, we are taught, and then forced to, impart knowledge in a vacuum. We must break this pattern and find ways of showing children the power of knowledge, by exposing the connections between subjects and how they relate to the world the students are immersed in. If we as educators facilitate the students' exploration of the responsibilities of resource companies, government officials, farmers, supermarkets, environmentalists and food and clothing companies, they are very likely to leave school understanding that they have a responsibility, not only as a valuable member of their own specific community, but also of the larger global community. The students will also develop an understanding that their actions, be it buying certain clothes or foods, getting into a car or driving a bike, have a direct impact on many aspects of the world and involve a moral choice. By direct experience and critical inquiry children learn to make connections with these issues. Through the acts of direct experience, analysing, questioning, debating and developing skills to push the boundaries of inquiry, students are better prepared to engage in improving society.

Curriculum

There is a movement present in our Western school system that supports universal educational curricula based on the belief that knowledge is valid, true, real and "out there" as absolute (Kincheloe, 2001). This sustains the mandate to write standardized curricula and assessment tools, which maintain that teachers deliver it as universal, and students passively accept it as "ultimate" truths. There is very little room for creative input by the teacher or critical assessment by the student. This contradicts calls by critical theorists (Harding, 1998; Varela; 1999) and the praxis of experiential educators (as demonstrated in this study) who advocate the promotion of varying forms and systems of knowledge that have

valuable insights to offer and reflect people, cultures and communities in one specific locale or around the world.

Foucault (2002), whose theories align with many Indigenous epistemologies, reminds us that we can no longer look at things as simply true or false in some universal sense; knowledge is relational. If we continue with this train of thought, the acts of teaching and learning become much more multifaceted, much more dynamic and "in need of active, critical, thoughtful participation" (Jardine, 2005, p. 87). As we have seen in the two programs of study, teachers can become much more generative in their teaching and learning compared to a system that values Western knowledge as absolute truths and hence universal (Doll, 1993).

The notion of interconnectedness and the understanding of the relation between things, which is a key component to experiential learning and some Indigenous thought, becomes a necessary component of curriculum design. As many formal schools focus on top-down lessons that fragment subject matter, the holistic component of learning, in which learners organize information globally and derive meaning from the relational aspects of the concepts, is lost.

Cornbleth (1990) promotes a framework for experiential curriculum design that emphasizes the incorporation of setting and social conditions. "Curriculum is contextually shaped. The relevant context is both structural and sociocultural ... Sociocultural refers to the environment beyond the education system/structural context. The sociocultural context includes demographic, social, political, and economic conditions, traditions and ideologies ... that actually or potentially influence curriculum" (Cornbleth, 1990, p. 6). "By emphasizing the sociocultural aspect, curriculum is indeed 'contextually shaped' and always mediated by students" (p. 53).

Unfortunately, schools today are governed by top-down standards, standardized testing and teacher-proof curriculum (Kincheloe, 2001) that conflict with experiential ideologies. A major reason why most standardized testing

involves dates, people and places is that it provides an "easy" way to measure the student's ability to "learn" the prescribed information. This is very different from the alternative forms of assessment demonstrated by the two programs studied that include portfolios, journals, personal narratives, and peer evaluation. These forms of experiential evaluation are much more multifaceted and complex in their construction and interpretation. Experiential programs rely on a multidisciplinary approach to assessment that incorporates personal reflection, collaboration, personal and peer input, integration of subjects and individual development that are represented in narratives, journals, portfolios, community projects and peer and self-assessments.

More and more Indigenous and community groups are attempting to integrate cultural and community-based content into the experiential and place-based curriculum. The intent is valiant and some are successful, yet minimal attention is being put forward with respect to how the context affects either the process or the product. On the surface the concept sounds good, but the reality is that it is a complex and difficult process. The evolution of current provincial curricula is developed by mainstream Canadian society. This curriculum was originally created with its own agenda that promotes its own culture, with its own values, traditions and language. The danger arises when subjugated, non-Western or community-based cultural content is simply infused into an already dominant system. This can lead to a simplifying of the existing problem.

Knowledge

Most regular primary and secondary schools today promote, not the production of knowledge, but the learning of that which has previously been defined as knowledge. Students of the "one-truth epistemology are treated like one-trick ponies rewarded only for the short-term retention of certified truths" (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 93).

One of the most important components to experiential education is that it is multidisciplinary. A notion of interconnectedness is espoused that promotes a

relational aspect to knowledge. Many experiential and place-based programs are developed around the principle of integration, in which people are able to learn more effectively when they are able see things in relation to other things. This principle of the integration of subjects is central to instructional processes used in experiential programs. Such integration lends itself to the examination of real life issues. Activities often use one subject as a means of understanding another subject. Wells (1986) states: "Knowledge cannot be transmitted. It has to be constructed afresh by each individual knower on the basis of what is already known, and by means of strategies developed over the whole of that individual's life, both outside and inside the classroom" (p. 218).

Family and Community Involvement

Many of the participants of this study spoke of the disconnection the school has with the people that surround it and the community in which it is found. Many scholars (Carnie, 2003; Diss & Buckley, 2005; Kirkness, 1998) support this notion, as many educational practices seemed to provide very little inherent value or connection to real life experiences.

The notion of interconnectedness is a central but undervalued feature of social life (Harding, 1998). Experiential and place-based educators argue that this basic value should regulate the curricular parts that support community and family connections, to provide a basis for learners to accept dissimilar forms of knowledge and ultimately be accepting of what is different.

Student's success rates in educational institutions are increased when family is involved. Melnechenko and Horsman (1998) identify family influence as one of the major factors contributing to the educational success of Indigenous students: "Educators have come to know that there is a positive correlation between success at school and positive family influence, support and relationships" (p. 9). Yet many parents find it difficult to participate cooperatively with the school in their children's education (Diss & Buckley, 2005, Kirkness, 1998). The experiential and place-based educators of the two

northern programs believe teachers should be given the authority and support to adapt curriculum and delivery methods so that it may address the diverse learning needs of their students, and specifically, in relation to the definite concerns of the local community. Community involvement is paramount in providing experiential programming, as it is based around the social, cultural, cognitive, economy and political context that the school is in a relational aspect with.

Role of Teacher

Teachers of the regular school system are often treated as "spectators" who receive direction from their superiors in the form of teacher-proof curricular units. They are then trained to act like "executors" who oversee the transmission of curriculum that has been systematically broken down into separate ordered units and tasks that are in isolation of each other. I agree with many educators such as Kincheloe (2001), Harding (1998) and the participants of this study, in finding this process "irrational" and counterproductive to student success. Unfortunately, this has often become "the path" with respect to teaching and learning, as little critical thought is required by the teacher or student. Repetition and mastery of separate pieces of knowledge that is confirmed by proficiency testing consist of the majority of today's "learning" process.

Unfortunately, when teachers show initiative outside the bureaucratic system, where they act as critical and empowered professionals, they are all too often labelled as "outsiders", "agitators" and "mavericks" who are then strategically ostracized because of "non-conformist" behaviour that inhibits teamwork and cohesion amongst school staff (Hinchey, 1998; Kamii, 1981; Kincheloe, 2001). Jardine (2005) has a similar view: "wanting teaching to be something else over and above 'teaching to the test' seems to be wanting to do something that is at best irrelevant, and at worst suspect" (p. 65).

The participants of the two experiential and place-based programs of study value a dynamic, shared experience between teacher and student that

supports a negotiation of curriculum. Community, school and students work together in transactional ways to provide learning initiatives that are congruent with all the members involved.

A common misconception of the mutual relationship that teachers share with students, in regard to the learning process, is that experiential education provides a "freedom" and lack of organization in its planning and implementation. Nothing could be farther from the truth, as most experiential educators will attest to the increase in time and effort needed to support these programs. Also, it is a lifelong skill to effectively participate and support a mutual, trans-directional experience between teacher and student that leaves both groups empowered. Dewey (1938) reminds us that there is a definite structure or authority (I prefer "facilitation") held by the teacher to direct experience in the act of education. This lack of teacher control can lead to educational genocide if chaos and a lack of structure are allowed to prevail. An example of this can be found in many Indigenous schools as the insidious legacy of residential schooling has led to a certain passivity and lack of direction propagated by many educators and caregivers.

Lived Experience

Cartesian modernists have the tendency to generalize, and through this process it prevents the development of a certain understanding of the uniqueness of the human experience (van Manen, 1990). With the promotion of "ultimate truths" and the need to own those truths in a capitalist-like banking of knowledge, there is little validity put on ones' lived experience. This goes against the principles of experiential education, in that learning takes place through direct experience, by action and reflection. The learner assesses the experience, assigning their own meaning and understandings as they relate to goals, aims, ambitions and expectations. From this processing of the experience come the insights, the discoveries and the understandings that are generally referred to as experiential learning. As this processing takes place, the pieces fall into place, and the experience takes on added meaning in relation to other

experiences. All this is then conceptualized, synthesized and integrated into the individual's schema of cognitive constructs which he/she imposes on the world, and through which he/she views, perceives, categorizes, evaluates and seeks additional experiences (Wright, 1970). "Lived experience has a methodical feature relating the particular to the universal, part to the whole, episode to totality" (van Manen, 1990, p. 36). A powerful description of experiences' relational aspects comes from Dilthey (1985): "lived experiences are related to each other like motifs in the andante of a sympathy" (p. 227).

Varela (1999) provides a progressive description of the relation of experience in conscious thought. He claims that experiential structures are relational to conceptual understanding and rational thought. "The point is not that experience strictly determines conceptual structures and modes of thought: it is rather, that experience both makes possible and constrains conceptual understanding across a multitude of cognitive domains" (p. 16). This speaks to the learner as being privy to various forms of knowledge, and also exposed to various types of learning styles; the power of difference.

Varela's (1999) enactivist ontology states that our identities are not pre-formed, and we often learn best when we empty ourselves of all that has been learned, towards what he calls the "virtual self" or "selfless self". "Knowledge appears more and more as being built from small domains composed of microworlds and microidentities" (Varela, 1999, p. 18). The key times to learn are in those "moments of breakdown" (Varela, 1999), or what Aoki (2005) would refer to as "moments of tension", when we are no longer experts of those microworlds and we become beginners who search for ways to understand what is foreign (through deliberation and analysis) so that we may feel comfortable and at ease with the task at hand. This speaks to the two experiential and place-based programs inclusion of adversity and resilience into curricular delivery and content.

It is a radical notion for many educators to envision that wisdom can be gained through a variety of traditions. The applications of enactivism as

pedagogy have tremendous implications for experiential educators, as they provide a rationale for providing diverse experiences and environments in the process of learning. This goes beyond the general tenets of experiential education that: promotes context therefore engagement; addresses diverse learning styles; and, encourages the integration of subjects. It provides a progressive rationale that I hope will provide other teachers with a better understanding of the benefits of experiential methods.

To advocate to students the need to empty ourselves of our pre-learned "baggage" and become beginners, open and eager to experience the "new", is a concept that has powerful possibilities for learning. It begins the journey to selfless-hood, in which we can begin to understand the creation of a self that is socially constructed (and can be reconstructed) in different environments and through various experiences. This is congruent with Vygotsky's (1997) concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), in which the social context shapes the range of learning that takes place. I believe Varela's (1999) search (based on Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism epistemologies) for the selfless self and ultimately a virtuous self, is one that many experiential and place-based educators should put into praxis, as it has positive implications for character building, critical personal reflection and a promotion of a socially just world.

Identity Crisis

The understanding of one's self-awareness is a crucial component to human development that is often missing in current educational practices. Character or identity development is not a priority in most classrooms, as it is subverted due to the fact that is has no relation to economic or material capital. Wilson (2001) tackles the claim that many Indigenous people suffer from an identity crisis. Many of the participants, especially Indigenous students, spoke of this concept as they struggled to determine their culture and identity as an Indigenous person in a changing world. This assertion is shared by critical theorists (Gaines, 1990; Steinberg and Kincheloe, 1997) who cite a

bombardment of information, which forces people to "shut down" or become emotionally void as to reconcile with the chaos.

Kincheloe (2001) warns that the most dangerous form of external control is when a person is unconscious to the fact that he/she is not in control. "Better that they (methods professors) show us a way to find our own ways than that they hand out detailed maps of the territory. A map is not much use to people who don't know where they are headed" (Ohanian, 1985, p. 697-698). This speaks to experiential learning as it differs from most traditional education in that teachers first immerse students in action and then ask them to reflect on the experience. In traditional classrooms, teachers begin by setting knowledge (including analysis and synthesis) before students. They hope students will later find ways to apply the knowledge in action.

I see no other issue more important for Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators then the support of student character and identity. The experiential and place-based programs of study provide a medium for which critical thinking and reflection allow students to develop an identity on their own terms. Critical theory reminds us that our identity is formed by cultural forces, such as gender, race, class and place, and in the various relations among them. By exposing those relational aspects and asking students to reflect upon the impact experience has upon their subjectivities, the two northern experiential and place-based programs provide an avenue for hope and active participation towards a better world.

> It may seem insignificant to those trapped in the culture of positivism and corporate power, but the critical ability to step back from the world as we are accustomed to perceiving it and to see the ways our perception is constructed through linguistic codes, cultural signs and embedded ideology is a giant step in learning to research, to teach, indeed to think. (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 127)

Pedagogical Relationships

While the participants of this study offer insight to the importance of the pedagogical relationship, and van Manen's work supports such insight, there are few guidelines, strategies or techniques for how to be tactful and thoughtful with learners. For this reason I turn to Rosenberg (2003), a psychotherapist, whose work on "non-violent communication" for fostering healthy, positive and productive relationships reiterates several of van Manen's key points, particularly the importance of care, respect and sensitivity to the other. However, Rosenberg's work also complements the efforts of the experiential and place-based educators in that it offers a framework of strategies, skills and techniques that individuals can learn in order to create healthier relationships.

His framework of skills focuses on two aspects of creating what he calls a "life-affirming" relationship (as opposed to a "life-alienating" relationship): (1) expressing oneself honestly by: observing neutrally instead of evaluating judgmentally; awareness of, taking responsibility for, and expressing one's feelings; awareness of one's unmet needs; requesting of the other ways to meet those unmet needs; and, (2) receiving others empathically, by trying to understand their feelings and needs and helping them to express them and have them recognized and "heard".

While van Manen's (1991) perspective implied that a pedagogue, in order to be truly effective, had to somehow already be a sensitive, caring, tactful and thoughtful person, Rosenberg's work offers the hope and promise that these abilities can be named and learned (although that learning implies a major, and not always easy, unlearning of past patterns and perspectives).

In summation, the essential base for creating a pedagogical relationship with learners seems to center on personal qualities that make an empathic focus on the learner possible. For example, Greene states, "One of the reasons I have come to concentrate on imagination as a means through which we can assemble

a coherent world is that it is imagination, above all, that makes empathy possible" (1995, p. 3).

Recommendations for Educators and Communities

This research supports the call by many authors who cite the importance of educators modeling constructivist approaches that engage students in interdisciplinary exploration, collaborative activity and field-based opportunities for experiential learning, reflection and self-examination (Cajete, 1999; Carlson, 1999; Dewey, 1938; Rogers, 1969; Tyler, 1949). Using an experiential model that supports reflective inquiry, students learn to appreciate the myriad of ways that curriculum and pedagogy can be linked to real life experiences. Students make discoveries and experiment with knowledge first hand instead of exclusively hearing or reading about the experiences of others. Students also reflect on their experiences and share them with other active participants in such environments as weekly sharing circles and also, in the less formal settings of school cohorts. Through this process they develop and share new skills, new attitudes and new theories or ways of thinking. Students then use this cognition to make informed decisions about life in and outside of the classroom, with the security that they are supported in partnerships.

This experiential model helps create an educational climate where students can develop into engaged, critical and empowered people of a diverse and complex globalized society. Pedagogical decisions are based on the teachers' insights into consciousness construction in the experience of themselves and their students, the interaction of the collective and the personal, diversity, social and educational theory, and instructional strategies. Such informed teaching creates unprecedented levels of awareness and higher forms of cognitive activity.

Through the use of extended field studies that promote experiential and place-based learning, and critical investigations supported by school-community partnerships, students become intimate with the dimensions of their school and

society that have been often missing in regular school programs. The teachers of these programs are now engaged in an educational praxis that raises the conceptual and ethical value of the teaching profession and better reflects the present climate of our society today.

Concerns

Experiential and place-based educators face the challenge of incorporating some or all of the principles aforementioned while avoiding simple "lip service"the act of tokenism. Experiential initiatives, such as a community presence in the school or the incorporation of student journals and self-assessment alone may not lead to improved discourse and less hierarchy. Many students, who have been habituated to their role as passive recipients of knowledge may find difficulty and provide resistance with this alternative methodology. This is why I think we need to reconsider the teacher's role as dictatorial and consider them as facilitators, as it is crucial that they guide transactional relationships between teacher-student and student-teacher. It is the responsibility of teachers to engage in meaningful, experiential and critical praxis with students, while avoiding an authoritarian paternalism (Breunig, 2005).

Many experienced educators who have attempted, or are providing, experiential and place-based praxis speak of its challenges. Issues of institutional adversity, parental resistance, extra time constraints with respect to student-centered learning and activity preparation, funding, legal implications of field activities, and a lack of teacher training in post-secondary institutions are all valid. With that acknowledgement, the majority of the study's participants speak to the benefits outweighing the negative, as the application of an experiential and place-based praxis is crucial toward a vision of a more socially just world. The advantages from the student, teacher, school and community's perspective is unlimited, as long as those theoretical and practical components are enacted in a mutual praxis.

It begins with the new generation of teachers, as a better collaboration between theorists and teachers is needed to reinforce the congruence of theory and practice in post-secondary teacher education programs (Raffan, 1995). Imparting theoretical knowledge is no longer sufficient, yet promoting an isolated experience that lacks intention, purpose and meaningful reflection is also inadequate. Literature on place-based and experiential education has predominantly grounded itself in adventure or outdoor educational practices. Its location in the school's curriculum is often limited to its own specific subject matter (i.e. as Physical Education and Mathematics are found in a school's curriculum). More research is needed in the practical applications of this type of programming, which actually drives the overall operation and philosophy of the school in order to study the application of these methodologies in diverse school environments that incorporate varying learners, cultures and communities.

A new pedagogy is needed that incorporates the best of both fields (experiential/place-based and critical pedagogy) that is rich in both theory and practice. One that provides substance to each fields' application towards a purposeful classroom and that incorporates critical learners actively in the development of an identity that will sustain them in good standing in a socially just world. I call for a pedagogy of generative praxis that teaches "in ways that will help each learner walk home experiencing their world differently because of what they learned in school that day" (Jardine, 2005, p. 4).

Questions for Further Research

We sometimes talk as if 'original research' were a particular prerogative of scientists, or at least of advanced students. But all thinking is research, and all research is native, original, with him who carries it on, even if everybody else in the world already is sure of what he is still looking for. (Dewey, 1916, p. 148)

I have come to learn that the practice of research is a recursive process that ironically ends with having more questions for study than when you first began. It is in these new questions that have arisen throughout this study, and the problematic issues surrounding them, that I suggest further exploration and research.

Clarification of Experiential Education

While the Association for Experiential Education [AEE] (2008) succinctly defines "Experiential Education" as "...a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills and clarify values" (Association for Experiential Education, 2008), the term tends to be used loosely and may need clarification of some key aspects, in particular:

- What qualifies as experiential education?

- What are its essential components?

First is the notion of *immersion,* which needs to be examined. A major implication is the primacy of experience for students. This outcome occurs for students in two ways. One is that experience needs to occur *early* for students to form a base for their learning. Thus, students in the programs begin experiential learning with only a brief orientation. In this way, supporting instruction can be based on the experiences that students are currently undergoing in the field or classrooms.

The other aspect of the primacy of experience for students is that they need *a great deal* of it. The goal of approximating the complex and demanding realities of community life within the scope of curriculum outcomes takes time to accomplish, since students can only take on certain subject progressions gradually. While fifteen to sixteen weeks in experiential programs for students may seem like a long period of time, many participants of the study spoke of a need to run year-long programs. Many teachers spoke to the fact that students

only began to show a heightened form of learning and identity development in the middle to last two months of a semester program. I propose several such long-term (year-long), program-based experiences for students in their academic career. Indeed, the experiential teacher who worked with a block schedule, having the students for only a small period of time each day, reported finding the experience too brief for truly effective learning. While some of the students spoke of a beneficial and positive experience in that shortened format, many struggled with being 'parachuted in 'for a short period of time, lacked ownership of the program, and were unable to develop the personal and cohort relationships that were deemed so crucial by participants of the semester-long cohort experience. As such, extended immersion is a key in the context of education programs in which passive course work still tends to predominate over the practical, leaving relatively little time for the experiential learning of student teaching.

Second is the notion of *constructing much of one's knowledge and ability*, which implies helping learners first build socio-constructively from their experiences, and responding with instructor knowledge only later in response to their efforts. Student personal theorizing is usually stronger than their induction to public knowledge, which becomes an essential base to build from later. A return to the root notion of "education" is needed, which in Latin is "educare" - to lead out from within. Estes (2004) claims that while many experiential educators emphasize the importance of student-centered learning, the evidence found in practice is contrary to this value, as many programs are teacher-centered. This speaks to the inconsistency of values that are advocated and those values that are actually practiced in the learning process.

Third is the apparent *lack of the reflection component* in many experiential learning programs (Breunig, 2005). A common criticism amongst the experiential educators of this study is there exists, in the field, a lack of congruence between the pedagogical theories and what is actually being practiced in the learning environment (classroom or field). A prime example

identified is the lack of the reflection component in the learning process. Kolb (1992), using Argyris and Schon (1974), refers to the "theories of action" and "theories in use", stating that even though most experiential learning programs stress the importance of reflection as a key component in relation to action in the learning process, many practitioners leave little time for group dialogue, debriefing, journaling or other practices of reflection. "What practitioners actually do in the field in this case, choosing action at the expense of reflection, rather than creating a balance, indicates theory-in-use" (p. 25) instead of theory-in-action. Quite simply put, practitioners are not practicing what they espouse to preach. Those theories-in-action are not being represented in the actual practices of the program (Breunig, 2005).

Relation Between Theory and Practice for Students

Another major insight is the nature of *the development of theory from experience* for students. Drawing on ideas of Plato and Aristotle, Korthagen (2001) makes a helpful distinction in regard to theory. On the one hand, there is scientific theory (*episteme*), which means that general principles are drawn from many specific examples, designed not only to describe phenomena, but also to provide prescriptive guidelines for dealing with them. This notion underpins the body of scientific knowledge in education, knowledge which usually forms the content of education programs. In contrast, there is also practical wisdom, or the realistic knowledge derived by individuals from an understanding of one or a few situations (*phronesis*). While shaped by the context in which one is learning, such knowledge is personal and often described as naïve.

In developing theory from the base of their experience in classrooms and schools, students tend to develop *phronesis* at first. Indeed, it is the teacher's role to help foster that development, a development which is ongoing and never complete. However, it is also the teacher's role to gradually foster a dialogue between students' personal theory and the body of scientific knowledge they are expected to master (*episteme*). Thus, as students continue to reshape the emerging theory that they are creating, they also gradually join the 'knowledge

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club' of other educated students. For example, a teacher shared with me the story of a student who, by mid-semester, was having difficulty with the acquisition of the Cree language as a result of a limited approach. When discussing the situation with the student, it was revealed that, in her eagerness to prepare for the program, she had read some books on the Cree language over the summer. It was suggested that she review some of those readings, as well as watch and listen to others in the class, at home and in the community with a new awareness. Over the next several weeks, she integrated the readings she was doing (scientific knowledge) into her emerging personal language development (acquired by engaging in class and community dialogue) and ultimately improved her abilities in the Cree language. Thus, it seems that *phronesis* is a highly effective road to mastering and integrating *episteme* and thus, why the two programs emphasize a "practice-to-theory" approach.

The issue of developing theory based in experience is central to this research since it challenges the traditional role of the teacher to share with students the best professional knowledge in the field. In other words, the teacher shares their *expertise* about certain aspects of the curriculum, as guidance for the students' practice. When teachers wish to work in a "practice-to-theory" manner, it can be a worrisome path to travel since students often build personal theory (*phronesis*) which is different from the teacher's and at odds with the research on best practices (*episteme*). However, by honouring and fostering students' personal theory development, and by bringing scientific knowledge to bear only in response to what students are already trying to do, very effective and powerful learning is possible. Notably, in these two programs, the teachers speak to the fact that they actually transmit less information to students when compared to their experiences in the regular school classroom. Yet, the experiential teachers also acknowledged that they have never felt more effective in their role as a teacher than in these programs. Clearly there is need for a great deal of discussion on the nature and role of scientific knowledge (*episteme*) in education, in order to improve the impact of such knowledge within the programs.

Sustainability and Institutionalization

Finally, alternative pedagogies (such as the two studied here), have proved to support student growth and development, yet they are often in contrast with school limitations of funding and priorities of provincial and territorial standards. Thus, issues of smaller class size, locally developed curriculum, and teacher time spent with a cohort of students teaching many course subjects, are often seen as problematic.

- Do schools have to choose between fulfilling expectations set by provincial and territorial standards on the one hand, and providing a strong and progressive education program on the other?
- Can both roles be met simultaneously? In partnership?

Conversely, difficulty can arise from educational institutions trying to incorporate alternatives into its mainstream without adapting them to the specific community in which they are based (e.g. current plans by the Yukon Department of Education to "franchise" experiential programs originally developed at Wood Street School, found in the capital city of Whitehorse, and place them in rural schools throughout the territory). This mainstreaming of what was once considered alternative is the result of past and present success, recent community popularity, and an increased pressure to expand its services for all students. It begs the question: *Does the actual mainstreaming of the program eliminate the factors that made the alternative program successful (i.e. small; unconventional schedules, structure, approaches and methods)?*

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Appendix I: Glossary

AFN: Assembly of First Nations

AKRSI: Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative

AOTE: Alaska Onward To Excellence

ACES: Achievement, Challenge, Environment and Service –grade 10 program at Wood Street School, Whitehorse, YT

BC: British Columbia–Province

BOFF: Band Operated Funding Formula–used by INAC

CBEM: Community-Based Education Model at Santa Fe Indian School

CCL: Canadian Council on Learning

CLFN: Cold Lake First Nation–Alberta

CRTC: Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission

EA: Educational Assistant

ES: Experiential Science –grade 11 program at Wood Street School, Whitehorse, YT

FNPPU: The First Nations Programs and Partnerships Unit –Public Schools Branch–Department of Education- Yukon Territory Government

GED: General Education Development

GIS: Geographic Information Systems

GLOBE: Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment program

GPS: Global Positioning System

ICT: Information Communications Technology

IDS: Independent Directed Studies–approach for Yukon Traditional First Nations Cultural Activities

IEP: Individual Education Program

IK: Indigenous Knowledge

ILO: Individual Learning Outcome

INAC: Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada

IQ: Inuuqatigiit—"The curriculum from the Inuit perspective" of the Northwest and Nunavut Territories

KCN: Kehewin Cree Nation–Alberta

MAD: Music Arts and Drama-grade 9/10 and 11/12 program at Wood Street School, Whitehorse, YT

MFN: Member First Nations

NIB: National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations)

OPES: Outdoor Pursuits and Experiential Science -grade 9 program at Wood Street School, Whitehorse, YT

PAR: Participatory Action Research

PASE: Plein Air et Sciences Experientielles –grade 9 program at Wood Street School, Whitehorse, YT

RCAP: Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

TAS: Tribal Access System–TCPCC website

TCA: Tribal Chiefs Association

TEK: Traditional Ecological Knowledge

TCATR: Tribal Chiefs area of Treaty Responsibility

TCPCC: Tribal Chiefs Peacekeeping Conservation Commission

WNCP: The Western and Northern Canadian Protocol

YFN: Yukon First Nations

YNTEP: Yukon Native Teacher Education Program

YT: Yukon Territory

YTG: Yukon Territory Government

ZPD: Zone of Proximal Development –Vygotsky (1997)

Appendix II: Data Gathering Timeline

Research Project- July 07-Dec 08

Co-Constructing a Pedagogy of Experiential, Place-based and Critical Learning in Indigenous Education

Work Schedule and Timelines

Timeline	Activities
Project start date: July 2007 Aug-Dec, 2007	-May,07- **Ethics Review** completion -July & August 07 -Develop first draft of **Interview & Focus Group Questionnaire** for use in community research. -Sept-Dec 07 -Consult with collaborators and receive feedback, revise the **Questionnaire** and confirm **Schedule**
Feb-April, 2008	-Feb-March 08 -**Yukon Field Research, Data Collection** -April 08 -**Data Analysis & Prepare Summary Report**. The report will outline the key findings from the research conducted in the Yukon. The report will also outline progress towards final deliverables for the first year of research
Oct, 2007-June, 2008	-Oct 07 & May 08- **Alberta Field Research, Data Collection** -June 08 -**Data Analysis & Prepare Summary Report** (as outlined above).
July-Sept, 2008	-Aug & Sept 08- **Alberta and Yukon Field Research**, follow-up & ground-truth, prepare for final field trips -**Interview Transcriptions, Data Analysis & Prepare Community Reports.**
Aug-Dec, 2008	-Aug-Oct 08 - Over the course of three months, the lead researcher will undertake two 10 day trips to each of the communities to debrief with the participants and to allow input for assessment of the textual representations of their experiential programs. This will involve **Community Meetings, Follow-up Interviews** and **Final Focus Groups**. -**Final Data Analysis**, prepare **Final Report** and **Dissertation** -Deliver **Final Year-end Report** that incorporates the two community case studies to CCL

Appendix III: Letters of Invitation

-For Students-

January 8, 2008

Dear Student,

We are contacting you since you are presently or have previously participated in a school program that uses "hands-on" experiential and "community-centered" place-based learning strategies. The programs were designed to make your schooling more relevant to your lives, more engaging and practical, and to improve and enhance your interest and participation as students by working in close partnerships with people from your community.

In order to discover to what extent that goal is being met and in order to improve this type of education program in the future, we have been awarded a research grant by the Canadian Council on Learning to study the effectiveness of the approach generally, but particularly to get your thoughts about the program. Thus, we are interested in your experiences in the program and are asking for volunteers to participate in the research study. The focus of the study will be on your experiences in the school program in a broad way. In order to inform you of the specifics of your possible participation, we are attaching copies of the letters of informed consent that any volunteer participants would be asked to sign. Your parent(s) or legal guardian(s) will be required to also sign the letters of informed consent. They spell out in detail the nature of your participation that we are requesting.

Thank you for considering our request to help improve this particular project, but also to help improve your schools program and your teacher's development of future activities and programs. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact Kevin O'Connor by phone at 514-398-6948 (office) or 819-921-1557 (cell) or by e-mail at kevin.oconnor@mail.mcgill.ca. We certainly hope that your participation in the research study will help you reflect on your experience and improve your future schooling during this semester and/or in the future.

Yours truly,

Kevin O'Connor

-For Teachers, Principals, Parents & other related Community Members-

January 8, 2008

Dear Teacher, Principal, Parent & other related Community Member,

We are contacting you since you are presently or have previously had experience and/or contact with a school program that uses "hands-on" experiential and "community-centered" place-based learning strategies. The programs were designed to make education more relevant to the student's lives, more engaging and practical, and to improve and enhance the interest and participation of students by working in close partnerships with people from your community.

In order to discover to what extent that goal is being met and in order to improve this type of education program in the future, we have been awarded a research grant by the Canadian Council on Learning to study the effectiveness of the approach generally, but particularly to get your thoughts about the program. Thus, we are interested in your experiences with the program and are asking for volunteers to participate in the research study. The focus of the study will be on your experiences with the school program in a broad way. In order to inform you of the specifics of your possible participation, we are attaching copies of the letters of informed consent that any volunteer participants would be asked to sign. They spell out in detail the nature of your participation that we are requesting.

Thank you for considering our request to help improve this particular project, but also to help improve the schools program and the schools development of future activities and programs. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact Kevin O'Connor by phone at 514-398-6948 (office) or 819-921-1557 (cell) or by e-mail at kevin.oconnor@mail.mcgill.ca. We certainly hope that your participation in the research study will help you reflect on your experience and improve your community's educational programming during this semester and/or in the future.

Yours truly,

Kevin O'Connor

Letter Requesting Access to School

January 8, 2008

Dear Principal, School Administrator,

We are contacting you as a result of your schools' successful implementation of experiential and place-based educational programming. Your school has been identified as successfully utilizing experiential and placed-based initiatives to address the lack of success and disengagement amongst Indigenous students by promoting a holistic form of education that values the importance of place and its cultural knowledge. *The primary objective of this research is to discover which elements of experiential and place-based education lead to greater engagement of Indigenous students and improved educational outcomes.* This project intends to improve and enhance the preparation of students and teachers by working in a partnership between McGill and your school, and at the same time supporting the educational mission of your school through action research methodologies.

In order to discover to what extent the goal of identifying which elements of experiential and place-based education lead to greater engagement of Indigenous students and improved educational outcome, we have been awarded an two year Aboriginal learning research grant by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL). Thus, we are interested in the experiences and perspectives on the project of yourself, your staff and some students, we are asking for volunteers to participate in the study. Participation basically involves taking part in interviews about the project in a broad way over the course of the winter-08 semester. In order to inform you of the specifics of possible participation, we are attaching copies of the letters of informed consent that any volunteer participants would be asked to sign, or in the case of your students (those deemed under the age of majority), we will seek both student and parental/guardian consent. We will follow and obey all protocols set out by your institution and provincial/territorial law. We will also provide prospective research subjects adequate opportunities to discuss and think about their participation in the research. The letters of consent spell out in detail the nature of the participation that we are requesting on your part and that of your students and staff. With your permission, I would like to include the actual names of the program and school in subsequent public reports, a dissertation and articles related to this research.

Thank you for considering our request to help improve this particular project, but also to contribute to the knowledge and insight about experiential and place-based education. For further information, please contact Kevin O'Connor by phone at 514-398-6948 (office) or 819-921-1557 (cell) or by e-mail at kevin.oconnor@mail.mcgill.ca.

Yours truly,

Kevin O'Connor

Appendix IV: Consent Forms

(SAMPLE Provided)

A. -Letter of Informed Consent: Students (are age of majority)-

Who are we?

We are a group educators who are interested in the benefits of experiential and place-based school programs. I, the lead researcher (*Kevin O'Connor, McGill University*) and three community collaborators (*Robert Sharp, Yukon Educator-Yukon Department of Education*; *Roger McDonnell, Educational Researcher-Tribal Chiefs Peacekeeping Conservation Commission*, AB; *Pujjuut Kusugak, Nunavut Educator-Nunavut Department of Education*) consist of the research project team.

Purpose of this research

- We would like to learn about your experience in the experiential place-based alternative program and are asking for volunteers to participate in the research study.

Why are we asking you?

- We are asking you to participate because you are one of the students who has been in an experiential program and showed interest in improving it.

What are we asking you to do?

We are asking you to provide information in two ways during the semester.

1. I, the lead researcher would **interview** you individually sometime during the semester, approximately in the month of_____(SEE DATES FOR EACH COMMUNITY). The interview would take place at your school at a time convenient for you and would last approximately 30-45 minutes.

We will give you the questions beforehand if you are interested in participating.

With your permission I will tape record each interview. It will then be transcribed (written out) and sent to you by e-mail, mail or if preferred hand-delivered. You will be asked to read it over to ensure that it is accurate and you are invited to add, change, or remove any parts.

2. To participate in two **focus group discussions** with other students, teachers and or interested members of your community (no more then 8-10 participants in total) who have some experience with the program at your school. The first focus group will be in _____(SEE DATES FOR EACH COMMUNITY) and then a follow up focus group the next year (2008-09) in the month of _____(SEE DATES FOR EACH COMMUNITY). They will take place at your school at a time convenient to you and will last about 45-60 minutes.

Again, the questions will provided to you beforehand.

REVIEW- We are asking you for:

- a total (interview and 2 focus groups sessions) of approximately 2-3 hours of your time during the year.
- You may choose to participate in only one of the ways (personal interview or focus group). *Your parent(s) are welcome to be present during the interview and /or focus group sessions.*
- We will also ask you whether you would be willing to share your school program narratives/journals or any parts of it for the purposes of publication; these parts would necessarily exclude any texts or photographs through which you personally could be identified. We will use pseudonyms (fake names) and other means (identity numbers, ie: person #1) to disguise the identity of participants.

Possible benefits to you

Your participation in the study would provide you with an opportunity to:

A. reflect on your experience and what difference, if any, the program makes to your development as a learner, and
B. to share your thoughts on your education and whether your school's program is a valuable experience or not, whether it should be continued, and
C. provide what changes to the program you would suggest to improve it.

Concerns and questions

- Other research participants such as other classmates, your teacher(s) or principal, and other community members will not know which students are participating in the study (names will be disguised using pseudonyms). Data will be presented in aggregate (a combined) form to limit linking specific responses to individuals

and will not be released until after the school semester is completed and grades for it have been submitted.

- Your participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time during the study without explanation.
- Your decision not to join the study or to withdraw part way through it will have no negative consequences for your status within the program or for your future classes. If you withdraw from the study, your data will be destroyed and not used in the study, unless you agree otherwise in writing.
- Confidentiality will be assured by keeping your identity anonymous. We will use pseudonyms and other means to disguise the identity of participants. The exception will be with respect to the focus groups. Because some of the data will be collected orally through a focus group and audio-taped in the group interactive session, it is difficult to guarantee confidentiality. However, every effort will be made to ensure that all participants understand the nature of their participation.

The focus of the research is to learn more about the effectiveness of this program, not to report on any one individual, or to compare teachers or schools in your community.

Research data is destroyed within five years of the end of a study. Prior to that time, it will be kept in a secure location. The transcripts will be kept on my computer and the tapes in a locked cabinet. The data will be accessible only to myself, the lead researcher and inaccessible to anyone else. It will be protected by passwords.

How to reach us

The **contact person** for this research study is **Kevin O'Connor, McGill University**, Department of Integrated Studies in Education. You may contact him by phone at 819-921-1557 (cell) or 819-827-7448 (home) or via e-mail at kevin.oconnor@mail.mcgill.ca if you have any questions about this study.

The research supervisor is Dr. Steven Jordan Chair of the Department of Integrated Studies in Education, McGill University, 514-398-4525, steven.jordan@mcgill.ca.

You can verify the ethical approval of this study by contacting Lynda McNeil, Research Ethics Officer, Ethics Review Committee at McGill University at 514-398-6831, lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca

Your signature below indicates that you understand the conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I, _____, AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROJECT UNDER THE CONDITIONS DESCRIBED ABOVE.

I agree to have my interview and focus group sessions tape-recorded and transcribed
YES____   NO___

NAME: (please print) _____

SIGNATURE: _____

RESEARCHER NAME: (please print)
_____

RESEARCHER SIGNATURE:
_____

DATE: _____

A copy of this letter will be left with you and a copy will be kept by the lead researcher

Appendix V: Interview Questions

(Sample provided)

-For School Staff-

How would you best describe the type of schooling/education that is promoted in the experiential program(s) at your school? List some aspects/examples of what makes them special?

What does "experiential" education mean to you? People often use the term "hands-on" to describe this type of learning. Can you expand on that? Why do you think it is described that way? Please provide some examples.

What does "place-based" education mean to you? People often describe this type of learning to be connected with the community. Can you expand on that? Why do you think it is described that way? Please provide some examples.

If you chose to participate in this school program, why did you do so? Was it a good choice or do you regret it? What were your expectations? Is it what you expected or different?

What have been the most important aspects of the school program for you? The least effective? What has made the biggest difference for you as a teacher?

What have been the most important aspects of the school program for the students? The least effective? How have they reacted to such a different type of learning?

What is your background as an educator? Why are you interested in experiential and/or place-based education? How have you changed as a teacher because of this type of learning? How has that happened? Any key incidents?

How would you compare this school program to the "regular" or "normal" schooling? Do you think it better prepares the students academically and/or socially? Why or why not? Please give some examples.

Many studies have shown that alternative experiential and place-based learning strategies have created positive educational outcomes for many Indigenous students. Would you agree or disagree? Why? List some examples if possible.

In this program the students are asked to reflect and use a journal, Why? How are they important in the students learning?

How do your colleagues react to this type of "alternative" education? Are they generally supportive or not? Why?

If applicable, describe the evolution of the programs in your school and/or community. What were some of the positives and barriers encountered when starting such a program? Now?

Anything that you would like to see added or removed in the program? Is there anything that stands out in your mind about this type of schooling?

-Protocol for Focus Groups-

What does education mean to you?

How is this different from what is being taught in the "regular" school/classroom? in the "alternative-traditional" program/classroom?

What are some important issues that your school is or should involve in the education of the communities children?

What have the most effective aspects of this program been for better preparing students? The least effective? How does it compare to the usual approach to schooling?

Many studies have shown that alternative experiential and place-based learning strategies have created positive educational outcomes for many Indigenous students. Would you agree or disagree? Why? List some examples if possible.

Explain how community partnerships are fostered in this program? Are they important to the education of the children? Please provide some examples.

What are some cultural and community values and knowledges that you believe should be incorporated in the school program? Are they presently found in the "normal" or "experiential" programs?

Please provide your ideal vision of your communities' school. Include curriculum, delivery, the participants, location and organizational structure.

* The above questions are also reproduced in the letters of informed consent for participants.

Appendix VI: Yukon First Nations- Land-based Winter Activities

(Sharp, 2005)

Land-based Winter Activities	Individual Learning Outcomes It is expected that students will:	Assessment		
Campsites	• demonstrate that they are able to plan the gear, food, and transport for a number of days in a winter camp; • demonstrate that they are able to select an appropriate winter tent site; • demonstrate that they are able to set up a wall tent; • demonstrate that they are able to set brush for the tent floor; • demonstrate that they are able to collect and prepare stove wood; • demonstrate that they are able to use an axe and swede saw safely; • demonstrate that they are able to set a stove within a wall tent safely and manage the fire safely; • demonstrate that they are able to manage human wastes around a winter camp site; • demonstrate that they are able to keep food appropriately around a winter camp site; • demonstrate that they are able to construct and use a high cache safely; • demonstrate that they are able to plan meals and food requirements for a number of days in a winter camp; and, • demonstrate that they are able to prepare a variety of meals.	Developing	Good	Mastery

| *Travel* | demonstrate that they are able to plan for cold weather travel; demonstrate that they are able to make appropriate judgments about cold weather travel; demonstrate that they are able to dress appropriately for cold weather travel; demonstrate that they are able to snowshoe through the bush; demonstrate that they are able to make basic repairs to a snowshoe; demonstrate that they are able to select appropriate snowshoes; demonstrate that they are able to make a shelter in cold weather; demonstrate that they are able to make a trail meal with a fire; demonstrate that they are able to collect and prepare stove wood; demonstrate that they are able to drive a snow machine safely; demonstrate that they are able to make basic repairs to a snow machine; demonstrate that they are able use an axe and swede saw safely; and, demonstrate that they are able plan meals and food for travel. | | | |
| *Hunting and Fishing* | demonstrate that they are able to identify a variety of animal tracks; describe the seasonal movements of various animals; demonstrate that they have an FAC and have completed a hunter training program; demonstrate they are able to clean and prepare caribou and moose; demonstrate they are able to prepare meat; demonstrate they are able to preserve meat; demonstrate they are able to set a net under the ice; demonstrate they are able to set a net | | | |

	in an eddy; • demonstrate they are able to set a net on a lake; • demonstrate they are able to identify a variety a fish; and, • demonstrate they are able to clean and prepare fish.			

Similar schedules are also developed for a number of other topics, such as:

- Land based spring activities and skills;

- Land based summer activities and skills;

- Land based fall activities and skills;

- Community History - social history and traditional knowledge;

- Community leadership;

- Traditional Arts and Crafts;

- Snow machine repair and maintenance;

- Bison hunts - bison population activities;

- Caribou hunt - caribou population activities; and,

- Hunter training program (Traditional practices and Hunter & Firearm safety).

Appendix VII: Overview of Current TCPCC Projects

Overview of Current TCPCC Projects

1. **Traditional Knowledge Record and Map**. Develop an audio-visual record and map pertaining to the traditional use practices, movements, co-operative arrangements, historical events and spiritual well-being as recounted by the Elders of each First Nation. The interview protocols include:

- arranging the interview and establish consent protocols;

- filming, conducting and cataloguing the interview;

- duplicating and preliminary editing of the record on DVD using *Final Cuts*;

- translating and transcribing selected clips;

- classifying clips according to three dimensional matrix (grouping type/activity/time);

- developing GPS co-ordinates of clips; and,

- Transpose selected clips and photos to Tribal Chiefs Area of Treaty Responsibility [TCATR] map with *OziEplorer* (a GIS application).

During the 2005-2007 school years, students were able to interview 143 of the 200 Elders who were available and had agreed to participate in developing this archive. Each interview was between 45 and 90 minutes, on average, and about ten percent of the Elders will produce four to five such sessions.

The TCATR map has received preliminary approval. It has been sent to the Government of Alberta and will be used as the reference map on the Tribal Access web site (see below).

In addition to continuing the interviews which, at the present rate, will continue for another two years, there is a great deal of work to complete from the existing records in the areas of classifying clips and translation/ transcription so that the interviews can be accessed as a permanent archive by the First Nation school students and others.

The project is on a four year timeline, with the interviews during the first and second years completed and two more years remaining.

2. **Surveying, Monitoring and Supervising Capacity**. In order to survey developments from the perspective of cultural, historical and Treaty interests, it is essential that the Tribal Chiefs possess the capacity to survey a site or route planned for development in an expedient manner. They must also be able to monitor the developmental activity conducted on the site and supervise any reclamation activities, should these be required.

The Surveying, Monitoring and Environmental Assessment section of the TCPCC works in partnership with the *Tribal Access System* and the students of the *Community-Based Experiential Education Program*. Many of the standards and protocols employed are derived from interviews with Elders and Ceremonialists, which are systematized on an ongoing basis. Since these standards have proven to be significantly different from the criteria and diagnostics of environmental assessment practices, they are part of the TCPCC Monitors training and responsibility.

Basic instruction is done through the BEAHR (Building Environmental Aboriginal Human Resources) Learning Institute (BLI), an Indigenous-based program which attempts to ensure that their trainees will provide a product useful to industry. TCPCC accepts this necessity although its concerns with habitat, culture, and Treaty are more comprehensive. The BEAHR program lasts for five weeks and involves an assessment stream, a research stream, and a practicum phase. Training is conducted at Lakeland College (Vermillion

campus), which is found in close proximity to the five bands represented by the TCPCC.

The practical training is conducted over the Gateway pipeline route, and there has been some preliminary discussions with *EnBridge* (a multinational resource development company working in the area) with respect to a training partnership. The research and long-range monitoring is conducted in conjunction with the senior grades through the *Community-Based Experiential Education Programs* being delivered by the First Nation schools.

3. **Tribal Access System (TAS) Web Site.** In order to facilitate consultation requirements, TCPCC and some selected students from the TCA schools have teamed with *Houle Development* to complete the design of the Tribal Access website. They have worked with *Latitude Geographics* to complete the Geo-referenced Internet Map, which is a web-based GIS application that provincial stakeholders access when planning developments or conducting any business within the TCATR. On the site, TCATR appears as a single spatial entity. However, it is constructed from the traditional use areas of the participating Tribal Chiefs Member First Nations. These areas overlap in many places. These separate areas and their various overlaps are layered under TCATR and are an integral feature structuring which First Nation(s) should be contacted regarding a particular issue or project.

4. ***Community-Based Experiential Education* Teacher Certification Course.** This course will eventually be a requirement for all teachers instructing in TCPCC First Nations schools. Yet it has only been provided in two iterations, once in 2007 and then in 2008. To date 22 teachers have been accredited. It focuses on the use of experiential and integrated curriculum to promote contextual and applied educational initiatives that emphasize engagement and hands-on training.

The TCPCC Experiential Education course trains teachers in the skills of integrating already existing curriculum with community principles, which

leads to a place-based style of learning and knowledge development. Teachers are introduced to delivery methods that integrate local and community objectives with the curriculum. The use of the natural environment and hands-on learning are promoted.

The *GLOBE* program (Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment), a worldwide hands-on, primary and secondary school-based education and science program, is introduced in this course. The teachers are trained to provide this innovative environmental science program and adapt it to their specific cultural and educational needs. The program is based on field studies. The activities include environmental assessments in the areas of atmosphere, hydrology, soils, land cover/phenology, collecting and reporting data, promoting student-centered research projects that involve local initiatives, creating maps and records that describe traditional lands and uses, and collaborating with community members, environmental monitors, other GLOBE teachers, students, and scientists.

The course focuses on recent place-based and community issues that address the five specific communities as identified by the TCPCC. An outdoor education component is also included in this course, as many of the activities are undertaken in the field. Topics such as safety, first aid, specific activity protocols and student – teacher ratios, legal requirements and administration are covered. A minimum of two days are allocated for specific outdoor skills training and certification, which includes prior and current *Community-Based Experiential Education* course teachers. For example, in 2007 a canoe certification was provided, while in 2008 a wilderness first aid certification was included.

The duration is two weeks (10 days total) with a weekend break from Friday afternoon until Sunday afternoon. There are, on average, eight to twelve teachers and one to two course instructors. All participants are from the TCPCC schools and the Commission itself. The course typically takes place in late August to accommodate the school scheduling, yet it has been

suggested that a winter course may be appropriate. The course takes place locally at Lakeland Colleges' Vermillion and/or Lloydminster campus and associated residence facilities. Numerous field locations are utilized for various local day trips. An extended overnight two day paddle on the North Saskatchewan River and a trip on the Frog Lake to Kehewin trail have been included in the past. All meals and accommodations are provided in order to create a cohort of educators in the hope that they will continue to share and inform each other once the course is completed.