Indigenous Educational Dawn Breakers: University Retention

by

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Abstract

There is a dramatic increase in Aboriginal peoples obtaining a post-secondary education but there is still a significant gap compared to other Canadians. This research focused on the challenges and supports experienced by Aboriginal students in completing their program at a Canadian university. Analyzed results from a survey of Aboriginal students at Thompson Rivers University and an Aboriginal talking circle that included Aboriginal Elders, Aboriginal university support staff, and an Aboriginal instructor was used. The medicine wheel was used as a framework for analysis and discussion. The mental aspect of the medicine wheel analysis revealed that there needs to more academic help for Aboriginal students that includes academic assessments, timely academic interventions, exit interviews, and the use of mentors. The spiritual aspect of the medicine wheel analysis described that there is a need for increased cultural activities, increased access to Elders, and a need for cultural sensitivity from instructors when there is death in the life of an Aboriginal student. The emotional aspect of the medicine wheel analysis took into account that relationships are an important source of support for Aboriginal students, with faculty, Elders, and amongst Aboriginal students. An Aboriginal student support centre called the Gathering Place was seen as an important space that fosters relationships. The physical aspect of the medicine wheel analysis contradicted past research in that a significant number of Aboriginal students in the survey stated that they had enough financial support. However, this could be attributed to the fact that they are eligible and could be receiving funding from Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Canada through the Post-Secondary Education Program. Aboriginal students also identified the need for additional financial support to study part-time that would require a government policy change. Both the city of Kamloops and Aboriginal students identified the need for housing. The Aboriginal population is growing

significantly with Aboriginal students completing their university program. Universities and Aboriginal communities need to this into account for future planning and enrollment.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the Secwepemc territory and the other First Nations students' on continuing and completing their own educational journeys. I would also like to thank Dr. Shelly Johnson for her guidance and support for my education while she was at Thompson Rivers University. As well, a big thank for my thesis supervisor Dr. Patrick Walton for his understanding and support. Also for the support from Tiffany and Vianne for the times that I spent with them and the times that I could not spend with them due to course work. As noted in my thesis that funding is a challenge for Aboriginal students, but I was fortunate to receive financial support from the Wikwemikong Post Secondary Program, Kloshe Tillicum, Indspire, and the Irving K. Barber British Columbia Scholarship Society.

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I am reminded about research from a Cree Elder Gerald Carter who has since passed to the spirit world. Gerald said that the word research translated into Cree as “Let’s share each others life through the eyes of the Creator to help gain the wisdom of how to help our people” (personal communication, July 7, 2012).

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Social Location

My name is James Shawana. My mother's community is Wikwemikong Unceded Indian reserve in northern Ontario but I was born and raised in the Cree territory of Northern Alberta. I grew up and mainly lived in the city of Edmonton. Prior to moving to Tk'emlúps I lived in the community of Bigstone Cree Nation and Wabasca in northern Alberta. I have currently resided as a visitor in the Secwepemc territory for the past three and a half years. So I have predominantly lived in an urban area but have lived in a Cree community before moving to Tk'emlúps. I am a hybrid whose lineage comes from my French father and from my Ojibway mother, who raised me as a single parent.

1.2 Rationale

Aboriginal peoples of Canada were and are being oppressed by ongoing colonial relationships with the dominant British and subsequent Canadian society. Aboriginal peoples have adapted and resisted the colonization of the dominant Canadian society. Aboriginal peoples have adapted through various methods despite being marginalized from many societal institutions.

The Ojibway people were told of the coming of the light-skinned people. They were told that they would either come with a face of brotherhood, "then there will come a time of wonderful change for generations to come. They will bring new knowledge and articles that can be joined with the knowledge of this country" (Benton-Benai, 1988, pp. 89-90). The other face would be that of death, in which "you must be careful because the face of brotherhood and the face of death look very much alike. If they come carrying a weapon…beware" (Benton-Benai, 1988, p. 90). I view this as an open handshake of peace or a hand armed with a weapon of

colonization. Furthermore for the Ojibway, their goals have been consistent "to restore balance, justice and good health to our lands and our peoples and to have good relations with settler governments and peoples based on respect for our sovereignty, independence and jurisdiction over our territories" (Simpson, 2011, p. 87). It is within this framework that the time has come within the past few generations that Aboriginal peoples have been offered an open hand to attend non-Aboriginal post-secondary institutions. It is a time for Aboriginal peoples to be welcomed to learn the knowledge and ways of knowing that have been brought with the light-skinned people. The time for wonderful change and resurgence of the Oshkibimadizeeg (New People) has begun that will take the knowledge to help transform their communities and nations.

I have chosen the research topic of Aboriginal post-secondary education retention, as the role and agenda of education has changed within one generation for Aboriginal peoples. My mother was forced to attend the Spanish Indian Residential School in which education was used as a weapon against her and other Aboriginal peoples to try to civilize, assimilate, or integrate them into the dominant society. Many Aboriginal peoples wanted their children to attend a Euro-Canadian school to be able to live a new life. However, the past education system of Indian Residential Schools was not only one that was abusive but often offered a lower educational standard than other schools in Canada at the time. Aboriginal students were not given the same learning opportunities, as they often had to do physical labor while children in other schools did not and had that time to learn.

On June 11, 2008 the Canadian Prime Minister offered an apology for the Indian Residential School System. Within one generation the role of education has begun to change. I was the first in my family to graduate from high school and from university. Education is beginning to change for Aboriginal peoples to help transform communities and nations. Not all

Aboriginal peoples are the same, just as not all Europeans are the same. It is hoped that this research will continue to transform the educational system to help Aboriginal peoples to completing their university education.

I attended a university conference while I was completing my undergraduate degree in social work. I was talking with the various professors in attendance about my interest in continuing my education for a Masters degree. In consultation and reflecting upon my own life and the importance of my own education, I realized that my interest was in a Master of Education degree. Furthermore at the end of the conference, a group was meeting to discuss a book and having certain scholars write a chapter. In our introductions at the meeting we talked of our own interst in the area of education, as education leadership was the theme of the book. I shared examples of how education was used as a weapon against Aboriginal people such as how my mother attended an Indian Residential School, but education was beginning to change from a tool of oppression to a tool of empowerment. I remember seeing immediate changes in facial expressions, that I interpreted as the look of shock on some of the scholars' faces. I was equally shocked at their ignorance of the role education played in trying to assimilate Aboriginal people in Canada. It was from this experience that I realized that I had a different theoretical framework, that is, from an Aboriginal perspective. It was not the first time however, as talking with other Canadian university students, they too were also shocked when they learned about the history of Indian Residential Schools in their university education. Various Canadian students wondered why the history of Indian Residential Schools was not taught when they attended the public school system.

Change needs to happen in the area of education in many Aboriginal communities in that "another contributing force to a unifying theory supportive of excellence in education is the

emerging alignment of research methods and epistemological foundations for understanding educational research" (Burger, 2007, p. 4). When research has been conducted on Indigenous communities, "this research has neither been asked for, nor has it had any relevance for the communities being studied" (Wilson, p. 15). Times have changed in the Aboriginal community, as there is an expressed need and clear relevance for research to help Aboriginal people in the area of education. Research is needed as "an emerging general theory of what works in education has the potential to make the critical connections in a matrix of political and epistemological meaning" (Burger, 2007, p. 8). With educational research, the educational system will have the opportunity to help Aboriginal students.

Like my story, the role of education and the role of research in Aboriginal communities has begun to change too. Wilson also notes "people such as Linda Smith, Lester Rigney and Fryre Jean Graveline have written about how Eurocentric research has helped in the colonization and oppression of our people" (Wilson, 2008, p. 13). Leanne Simpson states, referring specifically about a First Nation, that the "Nishnaabeg people are living in political and cultural exile" (2011, p. 98). Researchers, particularly non-Aboriginal researchers need to realize that "many Indigenous communities continue to live within political and social conditions that perpetuate levels of extreme poverty, chronic ill health and poor educational opportunities. Their children may be removed forcibly from their care, 'adopted', or institutionalized" (Smith, 2001, p. 4). There is the need for Aboriginal communities and nations to transcend the historic oppressive socio-economic conditions with education being a vital aspect in need of change.

With the help of research, Aboriginal peoples can transform communities. Research also has a political dimension. Research can challenge the dominant society to help Indigenous peoples to be self-determining once again. Indigenous research is not about competing with

Western research but rather "as an Indigenous research paradigm grows and evolves, we need to go beyond the tendency to compare it with mainstream research, in order to develop theory, practice and methods that are uniquely Indigenous" (Wilson, p. 16). Indigenist research, according to Rigney, has three fundamental and inter-related principles: resistance as the emancipatory imperative; political integrity; and privileging Indigenous voices (1997). Indigenous research is about liberatory research that seeks a balance between Indigenous knowledge and dominant society knowledge.

1.3 Terms

It was difficult to decide on word choice. My options were to identify students as either Aboriginal, that situates them within Canada, or alternatively I could have used the word Indigenous. Using the word Indigenous connects the world's Indigenous peoples together in their shared struggle against colonialism. I used the word Indigenous, when another scholar specifically used it. In the end I made the choice to use Aboriginal, as I wanted to make it clear that the research focused on the Aboriginal students of Canada. Further complications were that the survey was already designed and administered using the word Aboriginal. Thompson Rivers University also has international students that might also be Indigenous in their own country, but they were not included in this research.

1.4 Definitions

Aboriginal Peoples: "a collective name for all of the original peoples of Canada and their descendants. The Constitution Act of 1982 specifies that the Aboriginal Peoples in Canada consist of three groups –Indians, Inuit and Métis" (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2003, p. 1). The word Aboriginal is a word used by non-Aboriginal peoples to define a people without their input.

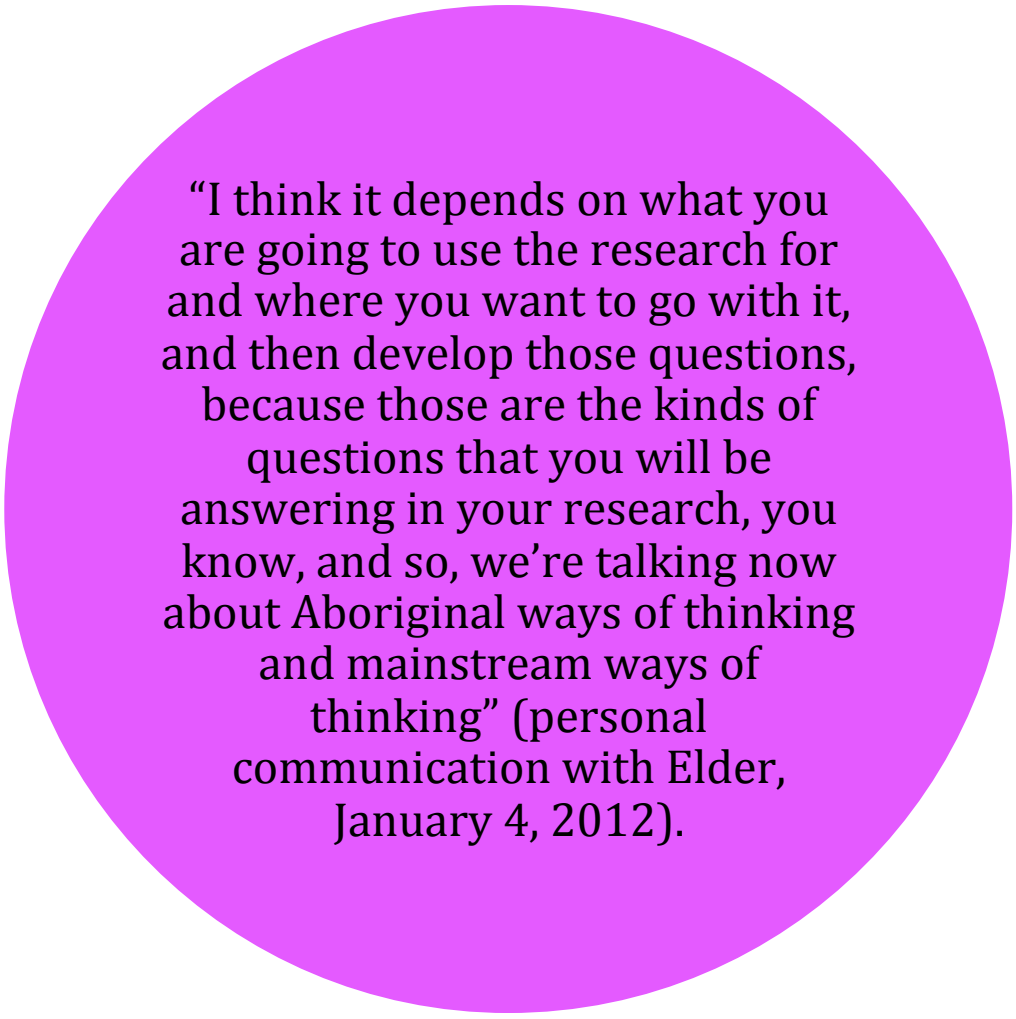
First Nation(s): "The term First Nations came into common usage in the 1970s to replace band or Indian, which some people found offensive (see Indian)." (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2003, p. 2). First Nation(s) is also a political term as it implies that they were in North America first with other nations arriving afterwards.

Indian: "The term Indian collectively describes all the Indigenous People in Canada who are not Inuit or Métis. Indian Peoples are one of three peoples recognized as Aboriginal in the Constitution Act of 1982 along with Inuit and Métis" (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2003, p. 3). As well, many may or my not know that Christopher Columbus on his arrival, incorrectly believed he was in India, hence the word Indian.

Indigenous: "…it usually refers to Aboriginal people internationally. The term is gaining acceptance, particularly among some Aboriginal scholars to recognize the place of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada's late-colonial era and implies land tenure" (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2003, p. 43).

Status Indian: "An individual recognized by the federal government as being registered under the *Indian Act* is referred to as a Registered Indian (commonly referred to as a Status Indian). Status Indians are entitled to a wide range of programs and services offered by federal agencies and provincial governments " (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada website, 2013).

Success: I define success as those Aboriginal students that have completed their program.


“I think it depends on what you are going to use the research for and where you want to go with it, and then develop those questions, because those are the kinds of questions that you will be answering in your research, you know, and so, we’re talking now about Aboriginal ways of thinking and mainstream ways of thinking” (personal communication with Elder, January 4, 2012).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Medicine Wheel

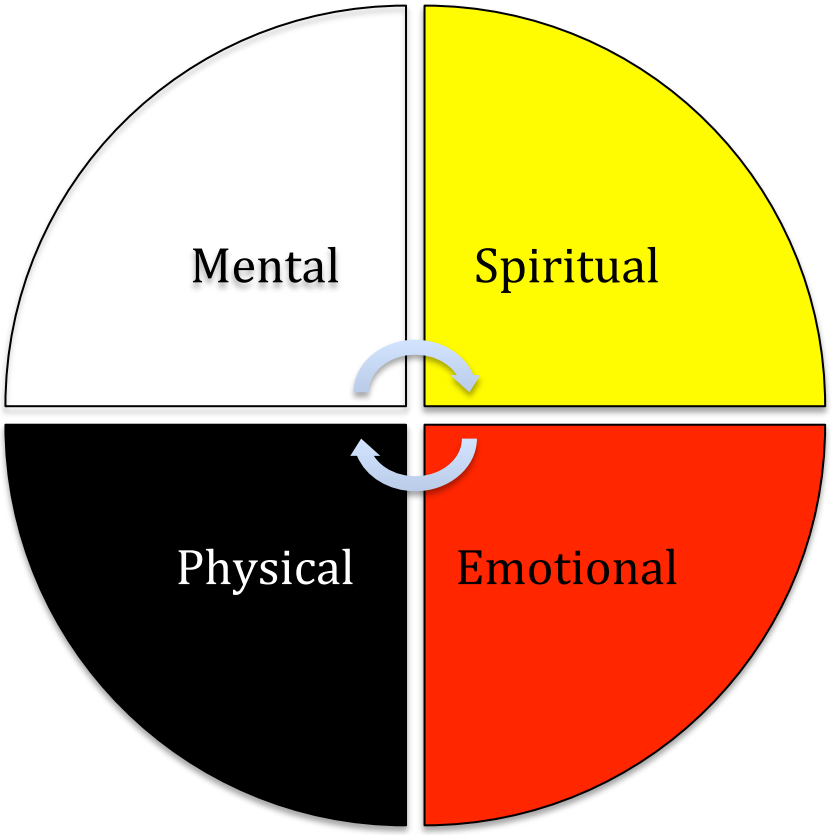
I attended the Aboriginal Education and Research Forum in Winnipeg in April 2013 and was able to attend a presentation by Colleen West. She presented her completed and defended Masters of Education thesis called *First Nation Educators' Stories of School Experiences: Reclaiming Resiliency* (2012). She had used the medicine wheel methodology, which reminded me of my initial supervisor, Dr. Shelly Johnson, who had also recommended that I use an Ojibway methodolgy such as the medicine wheel.

The medicine wheel is a holisitic framework that I will use for my analysis and discussion. Calliou shares that "medicine wheels can be a pedagogical tools for teaching, learning, contemplating, and understanding our human journeys at individual, band/commmunity, nation, global, and even cosmic levels" (1995, p. 51). The medicine wheel has four interrelated apects with "each direction also corresponds to an aspect of humanness: north with the mental realm (cognitive, intellectual), east with the spiritual, south with the emotional (psychological), and west with the physical" (Calliou, 1995, p. 53). The medicine wheel has the foundational concepts of wholeness, balance, growth, and healing (Hart, 2002). The Ojibway emphasize the seven values of:

> To cherish knowledge is to know *wisdom,* to know *love* is to know peace, to honor all of the Creation is to have *respect, bravery* is to face the foe with integrity, *honesty* in facing a situation is to be brave, *humility* is to know yourself as a sacred part of Creation, and *truth* is to know all of these things. (Benton-Benai, 1988, p. 64)

It is within this framework that I will use the mediciene wheel to discuss my analysis of the joint data from the survey and talking circle.

Figure 2.1. Medicine Wheel



2.2 Education Pre-European Contact

First Nations peoples have lived on Turtle Island, an Indigenous term for North America, since time immemorial and had their own methods of education before European contact. Despite what others may have read or have not read, First Nations peoples also have practices of looking after their communities and nations. Aboriginal peoples have their own laws, medicines, languages, and ways of education throughout the journey of life. The past affects the current colonial relationships as "it has important contemporary and practical implications, because many of the attitudes, institutions and practices that took shape in the past significantly influence

and constrain the present" (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], vol. 1, 1996, p. 31). First Nations peoples tell not of history using books but use oral traditions that take into account the relationships in this world and the spirit world, as well as the land itself.

> Indigenous learning was responsive to the needs of families within an ecology that cultivated holistic lifelong processes that were the foundations of Indigenous knowledge and cultures (IK). These educational processes of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada created vast learning civilizations based on multiple competencies in Aboriginal languages and knowledge, facilitating Indigenous peoples connections with their own communities and with large Aboriginal confederacies and alliances. (Battiste, 2009, p. 81)

First Nations people had their own traditional form of education that was linked to the survival of the family and community (Kirkness, 1999).

2.3 Indian Residential Schools Legacy

Indian Residential Schools in Canada began in the late 1800's, and the goals were to foster civilization and assimilation of First Nations children. In 1892 "the Government of Canada passes an order-in-council regulating the operation of Indian Residential Schools. The federal government and churches enter into a formal partnership to run a school system for Indian children" (Chansonneuv, 2005, p.33). Education included, "first, a justification for removing children from their communities and disrupting Aboriginal families; second, a precise pedagogy for re-socializing children in the schools; and third, schemes for integrating graduates into the non-Aboriginal world" (RCAP, vol. 1., 1996, p. 277). The national police force of Canada now called the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), recently acknowledged their role in transporting children to the schools:

> At the request of the schools' administrators or the Indian Agents; Assisting in looking for and returning runaway children to residential schools; Locating parents who refused to send their children to school and informing them of their obligations to do so under *The Indian Act*; Historically, the RCMP conducted investigations at the schools, but these were primarily related to fires or missing children and; Occasionally investigating complaints of abuse, but the complaints were rarely brought to the attention of the police. (RCMP website, 2011)

Children were not always allowed to speak their own language, practice their spiritual teachings, and were subjected to various types of abuse, isolation, threats, and sexual assault. Some Indian Residential School Survivors unfortunately had to bury their own friends that died at these schools. The first phase of the Indian Residential Schools was designed to assimilate Aboriginal people into the British colony now known as Canada from the 1800's to 1910; the next phase moved away from assimilation with the aim of segregation designed to civilize Aboriginal people from 1910 to 1951; and the final phase of integration from 1951 and onward (Chansonneuv, 2005). Residential schools were used for the purpose of breaking down the cultural transmission of culture and language from one generation to the next (RCAP, vol. 3, 1996). Education was "one of the earliest federal government attempts to assimilate Aboriginal people to the culture and values of the dominant society" (Parrack & Preyde, 2009, p. 229). Post-secondary institutions need to consider the inter-generational aspects of family and community for Aboriginal students to succeed in post-secondary education (Pidgeon, 2008).

2.4 Canadian Post-Secondary Completion

Overall for Canadian high school students, those that had high grades in high school corresponded with a decrease in having to leave both university and community college (Parkin

& Baldwin, 2008; Statistics Canada, 2000). For Canadians, people from low socio-economic status backgrounds "are less likely to shoulder the burden of higher tuition fees and these increases have affected their participation more than the participation of students from middle or high socio-economic status family backgrounds" (Statistics Canada, 2000). As well, the additional cost of studying away from home reduces enrollment among students from lower-income families (Shaienks, Gluszynski, & Bayard, 2008). Low-income students can be less financially and academically prepared for post-secondary education (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009). Individuals from more affluent backgrounds attend post-secondary education at a far greater rate than those from lower economic backgrounds (Kirby, 2009; Looker & Lowe, 2001). In addition, "university participation rates have not increased as fast for young people from low family socio-economic background" (Statistics Canada, 2000). Students who have no family history of post-secondary education are less likely than their peers to pursue post-secondary education (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009). However, other research has found that a parent's history of post-secondary education plays a role in the student deciding to attend university, but not necessarily completing their programs (Parkin & Baldwin, 2008; Shaienks & Gluszynski, 2007; Martinello, 2007). Canadian student barriers to post-secondary education include: distance to an institution, academic preparation, admission requirements, poverty, housing, racism and discrimination, substance abuse, cultural or social apathy, and language (Kirby, 2009).

2.5 Aboriginal Post-Secondary Completion

There is a gap in university completion rates between the Aboriginal and the remaining population (Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007). According to the 1996 census for those over 15 years of age, three percent of registered

Indians and four percent of other Aboriginal identity groups obtained a university degree, compared to 14 percent of all other Canadians (Malatest, 2004). According to the 2001 census for those over 15 years of age, 15 percent of the total population completed university, whereas four percent of the Aboriginal population completed university (Mendelson, 2006). In British Columbia specifically using the same 2001 census, 16 percent of the total population completed university, whereas four percent of the Aboriginal population completed university (Mendelson, 2006). In 2006, "sixty-eight percent of non-Aboriginal young adults (aged 25 to 34) held a post-secondary credential, compared to forty-two percent of Aboriginal young adults" (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009, p. 4). The drop-out rate is between 33% and 56% higher for Aboriginal post-secondary students compared to non-Aboriginal students (Parkin & Baldwin, 2008). However, several studies conclude that Aboriginal peoples are more successful than in the past for post-secondary education (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, and Statistics Canada, 2003; Embelton, 2011; Kirby, 2009; Malatest, 2004; Mendelson, 2006; Rae, 2005; Usher, 2009; Young, 1999). Increasing the rates of post-secondary of Aboriginal peoples can be viewed as a social justice and equity issue.

It should also be noted that Aboriginal students have left university to change schools or programs (Parkin & Baldwin, 2008). Changing programs or institutes was attributed to a lack of interest in their studies or the program not meeting their expectations (Parkin & Baldwin, 2008). As well, Aboriginal peoples may need more flexibility to complete their post-secondary education (Embelton, 2011; Hardes, 2006; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Timmons, et al., 2009). Many Aboriginal students are either institutional *stop outs* that withdraw from an institution for a period of time or withdraw from one institution to later enroll in another, or return to their original institution (Hardes, 2006; Pidgeon, 2008). Flexibility is also needed within courses; as

for example when an Aboriginal student has to miss a class to attend a funeral, the faculty at many post-secondary institutes arrange the makeup time when possible (Anonson, Desjarlais, Nixon, Whiteman & Bird, 2008).

The Aboriginal population is the fastest growing population in Canada (Anonson, Desjarlais, Nixon, Whitemen & Bird, 2008; Atkinson, 2008; Malatest, 2004; Preston, 2008; Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007). Aboriginal university students tend to be older and may have dependents along with other family and community responsibilities (Anonson et al., 2008; Bonnycastle & Prentice, 2011; Danziger, 1996; First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008; Holmes, 2006; Pidgeon, 2008; Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007; Usher, 2009). Childcare was also an issue; further, that there should be no evening classes unless there is also childcare available at this time (Bonnycastle & Prentice, 2011). As well, many Aboriginal peoples are first-generation post-secondary students (Hardes, 2006; Pidgeon, 2008).

2.6 Transform Education

Current education needs to be transformational using Aboriginal peoples personal experiences to share with one another for critical analysis and to transform educational institutions (Battiste, 2002; RCAP, vol. 3, 1996). Educational institutions could benefit from seeking input and feedback from Aboriginal people in helping to transform the lives of Aboriginal peoples. As a result, educational institutions can offer courses and programs that Aboriginal peoples seek to transform their own communities and nations. Indigenous knowledge must no longer be oppressed, as it is important and can be transformative (Battiste, 2004; Hogue, 2012). Post-secondary education needs to empower Aboriginal people (Danziger, 1996;

Embelton, 2011; Preston, 2008; University of Victoria, 2008). Education in the past was used to try to assimilate Aboriginal people, whereas education now can empower Aboriginal people.

2.7 Educational Barriers

Aboriginal high school students may have had inadequate academic preparation from programs for entry into post-secondary institutions (Anonson et al., 2008; Embelton, 2011; First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008; Hardes, 2006; Holmes, 2006; Orr, Roberts & Ross, 2008; Preston, 2008; RCAP, vol. 3, 1996; Timmons, et al., 2009; Usher, 2009; Vedan, Flanagan, & Perez, 2010). Aboriginal educational achievement was highest in the cities, then towns, then rural areas, and finally the lowest on reserves (Mendelson, 2006). Secondary school completion rates are "an astonishing forty-three percent of Aboriginal people aged twenty through twenty-four reported in 2001 having less than high school education, … and … the comparative figure for Canada as a whole is sixteen percent" (Mendelson, 2006, p. 12). Completion of high school is a barrier to post-secondary education for Aboriginal peoples (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Holmes, 2006; Kirby, 2009; Malatest, 2004; Mendelson, 2006; Orr, et al., 2008; Preston, 2008; Vedan, et al., 2010). As well "reserve and remote schools typically do not offer the academic preparation required to succeed in post-secondary studies" (Malatest, 2004, p. 12). Some Aboriginal people avoid post-secondary education as being irrelevant and assimilationist (Malatest, 2004).

2.8 Financial Barriers

Financial barriers exist for Aboriginal peoples to attend post-secondary education (Anonson et al., 2008; Atkinson, 2008; Critchley & Bull, 2011; Danziger, 1996; Embelton, 2011; First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008; Malatest, 2004; Mendelson, 2006; Parkin & Baldwin, 2008; Preston, 2008; Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and

Northern Development, 2007; RCAP, vol. 3, 1996; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Timmons, et al., 2009; Usher, 2009; Vedan, et al., 2010; Young, 1999). Poverty and lack of financial support are barriers (Anonson et al., 2008; Embelton, 2011; First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008; Holmes, 2006; Malatest, 2004). Financial barriers for Aboriginal students include tuition costs, living costs, perceived 'payback,' loan burden, and grant availability (Mendelson, 2006). Main sources of income on some reserves are social assistance benefits and seasonal jobs. The majority of Aboriginal families do not have adequate employment income to pay for post-secondary education (Malatest, 2004; Orr et al., 2008; Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007). Aboriginal peoples are marginalized financially and it is not possible for some of them to assume debt (Hardes, 2006; Holmes, 2006; RCAP, vol. 3, 1996).

For Status Indian students that receive post-secondary funding from Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Canada's Post-Secondary Education Program, the challenge is not tuition or books, it is the expenses of daycare, transportation, housing, food, and family expenses (Malatest, 2004; Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007). According to Holmes, Aboriginal students face higher costs compared to non-Aboriginal students (2006). The limited financial support that is available is aimed at Status Indians. However Non-Status Indians do not receive the financial support available to Status Indians. In addition not all Status Indians are eligible for financial support and turn to student loans (Malatest, 2004). For those Status Indians that do get funding that is inadequate, they are not usually eligible for student loans for additional funds (Malatest, 2004). Financial assistance with loans, grants, and bursaries underestimate the expenses of Aboriginal peoples. Expenses can include moving to an urban community, higher transportation cost, higher housing costs, and

the need to pay for daycare compared to childcare support that existed in their home community (Hardes, 2006; Malatest, 2004; Schwartz & Ball, 2001). The Assembly of First Nations "found that First Nations students receive only enough funding to cover 48% of the estimated average provincial cost per student per academic year" (Malatest, 2004, p. 21). This is supported by the government's own report that student support levels fall below even the allowances set for other Canadians under the Canada Student Loan Program (Indian and Northern Affairs, 2005). Funding is seen as a primary barrier to post-secondary education for Status Indians, non-Status Indians, and Metis students.

2.9 Social Barriers

Social barriers exist for Aboriginal students that include community and family expectations (Embelton, 2011; Malatest, 2004; Mendelson, 2006; Orr et al., 2008; Pidgeon, 2008; Timmons, et al. 2009). As well, there is a mistrust of education (Anonson et al., 2008; Cherubini, 2012; Embelton, 2011; Hogue, 2012; Malatest, 2004; Mendelson, 2006; Parrack & Preyde, 2009; Pidgeon, 2008; Vedan, et al., 2010). Distance from one's own home and educational institution with relocation was another identified challenge (Cowin, 2011; Critchley & Bull, 2011; Danziger, 1996; Embelton, 2011; First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008; Holmes, 2006; Mendelson, 2006; Orr et al., 2008; Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007; Timmons, et al. 2009; Usher, 2009). Finally, another theme was that of cultural insensitivity of institutions (Anonson, et al., 2008; Battiste, 2002; Cherubini, 2012; Cowin, 2011; Embelton, 2011; First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008; Holmes, 2006; Hogue, 2012; Malatest, 2004; Mendelson, 2006; Parrack & Preyde, 2009; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Timmons et al., 2009; Usher, 2009; Vedan, et al, 2010; Young, 1999). Support from family is important for Aboriginal students for post-secondary

education (Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Timmons et al. 2009; Young, 1999). Communities can alienate Aboriginal peoples for attending post-secondary education for their perception that they are conforming to the dominant culture (Anonson et al., 2008; Hardes, 2006; Orr et al., 2008; Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000). Many faculty at post-secondary institutions "do not have any depth of knowledge of Aboriginal culture, traditions and core values, neither do they recognize the diversity of Aboriginal communities or understand that not all Aboriginal students needs are the same" (Malatest, 2004, p. 15). This can lead to cultural insensitivity. Students who have to relocate face the challenge of moving away from their family and social support networks.

2.10 Motivation for Pursuing Post-Secondary Education

Aboriginal peoples attend post-secondary institutes to be able to obtain the highest educational level possible. Obtaining the highest education possible would allow them to compete for higher-level jobs, avoid poverty, and to apply their new skills back home (Timmons et al. 2009). Many Aboriginal students report that they want to use their education to help their own communities (Battiste, 2004; Danziger, 1996; Pidgeon & Hardy Cox, 2002). Education is viewed as a path to empowerment that transforms their lives.

2.11 Gender

Mendelson found that "females tend to do better in educational attainment both among the total population and the Aboriginal population" (2006, p. 13). Male Aboriginal high school graduates are about one-third as likely to go to university, whereas for female Aboriginal high school graduate students are about half as likely to choose university (Mendelson, 2006). It was found by Orr, Roberts, and Ross (2008) and the First Nations Education Steering Committee (2008) that females do better in educational attainment among the Aboriginal and Canadian

population. However, "there is also a lack of support for Aboriginal women, especially single mothers" (Malatest, 2004, p. 38). Three key issues for assisting Aboriginal women at university were housing, childcare, and transportation (Hardes, 2006).

2.12 Faculty

The recruitment of Aboriginal faculty is important for the success of Aboriginal peoples in post-secondary education (Hogue, 2012; Holmes, 2006; Kompf & Hodson, 2000; Malatest, 2004; Orr et al., 2008; Preston, 2008; RCAP, vol. 3, 1996; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Verjee, 2003). There is a need for "Aboriginal teachers at all levels to demonstrate teaching and support strategies that have proven effective in attracting and keeping Aboriginal students" (Malatest, 2004, p. 16). Faculty and staff need to learn more about Aboriginal cultures to raise their own cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity (Anderson, Horton, & Orwick, 2004; Danziger, 1996; Gunn, Good Striker & Tailfeathers, 2010; Hardes, 2006; Holmes, 2006; Hogue, 2012; Kompf & Hodson, 2000; Orr et al., 2008; Pidgeon, 2008; University of Victoria, 2008; Verjee, 2003; Young, 1999). Issues to be shared with faculty could be on equity and human rights, history, language, ways of knowing and Aboriginal protocols.

Relationships between Aboriginal students and instructors are seen as an important source of support (Embelton, 2011; Hardes, 2006; Looker & Lowe, 2001; Madgett & Belanger, 2008; Pidgeon, 2008; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Timmons, et al., 2009; University of Victoria, 2008; Verjee, 2003; Young, 1999). It is also important to note, "non-Indigenous scholars have a role in mentoring Indigenous researchers on the intellectual aspects of academia related to its operational requirements (e.g., research and knowledge)" (Kovach, 2010, p. 170). Aboriginal instructors are a minority and can be scarce at universities. As a result, Aboriginal students may seek out non-Aboriginal instructors that are supportive of their learning journey.

2.13 Cultural Events

Aboriginal cultural events are important for the success of Aboriginal peoples in post-secondary education (Anonson et al., 2008; Currie, et al., 2011; Embelton, 2011; Hardes, 2006; Kompf & Hodson, 2000; Malatest, 2004; RCAP, vol. 3, 1996; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Vedan et al., 2010). The Canadian Constitution acknowledges that Aboriginal peoples have a distinct place in Canada and therefore the accommodation of Aboriginal culture and identity needs to be included in post-secondary institutions (RCAP, vol. 3, 1996). Cultural events go beyond food and music, but can include ceremonies such as smudging and pipe ceremonies. Programs need to take into account Aboriginal oral traditions such as learning through stories, games, and hands-on learning (Klinck et al., 2005; Verjee, 2003). Aboriginal students "must maintain their cultural integrity to be successful within and outside of their own communities" (Pidgeon, 2008, p. 343). This is also supported in that "culture and cultural preservation may also play an important role in the ability of young Aboriginals to move into and advance through higher education" (Usher, 2009, p. 7).

2.14 Aboriginal Gathering Space

Aboriginal students need a gathering space on campus (Critchley & Bull, 2011; Danziger, 1996; Embelton, 2011; Hardes, 2006; Holmes, 2006; Hogue, 2012; Kompf & Hodson, 2000; Malatest, 2004; Orr et al., 2008; Timmons, et al., 2009; Verjee, 2003). Aboriginal physical spaces are needed to help Aboriginal students succeed as they serve as a social gathering place, a place of peer support, and provide a sense of community (Critchley & Bull, 2011). Aboriginal physical spaces may also provide computers for students to complete their assignments, as some may not be able to own their own computer. As well there may be computer and internet access

to connect with family and friends for support from their communities, as well as telephones and fax machines to communicate with their home community.

2.15 Elders

The recruitment of Aboriginal Elders is important for the success of Aboriginal peoples in post-secondary education (Anonson et al., 2008; Ball, 2004; Battiste, 2002; Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Embelton, 2011; Evans, McDonald, & Nyce, 2000; Gunn et al., 2010; Hardes, 2006; Holmes, 2006; Hogue, 2012; Kirkness, 1999; Kompf & Hodson, 2000; Malatest, 2004; Orr et al., 2008; Preston, 2008; RCAP, vol. 3, 1996; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Timmons et al. 2009; University of Victoria, 2008; Verjee, 2003; Young, 1999). Elders can be teachers or guest speakers in classrooms, develop culturally appropriate curriculum and methods, provide cultural awareness, and provide social and emotional support for students. Elders can help guide Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, as well as providing guidance to students, staff, and faculty. Elders can play a role in the transforming of education at post-secondary institutes.

2.16 Counsellors and Support Staff

Counselling and support staff are important for the success of Aboriginal peoples in post-secondary education (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Danziger, 1996; Embelton, 2011; Gunn et al., 2010; Hardes, 2006; Holmes, 2006; Hogue, 2012; Kompf & Hodson, 2000; Malatest, 2004; Preston, 2008; RCAP, vol. 1, 1996; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Timmons et al., 2009; Verjee, 2003). Recruitment of Aboriginal staff is seen as important for counselling and support staff (Danziger, 1996; Gunn, et al., 2010; Kompf & Hodson, 2000; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Timmons et al., 2009; Young, 1999). Support services can help students academically by directing them to the writing centre or connecting them with student mentors and tutors. Support

services can help with personal support through referrals to other university services or to external community agencies. Counselling services could include personal, family, sexual abuse, drug and alcohol dependency, suicide, and career counselling. Parrack and Preyde found with Aboriginal students that "as the amount of perceived social support increased, so did satisfaction of life" (2009, p. 235). As well, Aboriginal students benefitted from a separate Aboriginal orientation (Hardes, 2006; Hogue, 2012; Malatest, 2004). Support services can help build the sense of community and facilitate student peer support.

2.17 Mentorship

Personal mentorship is used as a retention strategy at some post-secondary institutes (Anonson et al., 2008; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Danziger, 1996; Gunn et al., 2010; Hardes, 2006; Hogue, 2012; Klinck et al., 2005; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Timmons et al. 2009; University of Victoria, 2008; Vedan et al., 2010; Verjee, 2003). Mentorship programs need to take into account that many Aboriginal students are not able to take part as mentors as they are busy with their own and extended families (Klinck et al., 2005). Mentorship can also include peer or group mentoring (Klinck et al., 2005). With group mentoring, a mentor can help more than one person if there is a limited amount of mentors. Support of mentors through financial support was seen as being important for sustainability (Klinck et al., 2005; University of Victoria, 2008). Mentor coordinators need to be provided with appropriate training and support, with a flexible structure that includes group mentoring and cultural events (Klinck et al., 2005). Mentors also serve as role models based on their own educational achievement (Anonson et al., 2008; Danziger, 1996; Hogue, 2012; University of Victoria, 2008; Usher, 2009; Verjee, 2003). This could also include an Aboriginal speaker series that profiles successful Aboriginal people from various professions (Hogue, 2012).

2.18 Aboriginal Pedagogy

Aboriginal people have their own traditional ways of teaching and learning (Anderson et al., 2004; Anonson et al., 2008; Battiste, 2004; Embelton, 2011; Evans et al., 2000; Gunn et al., 2010; Hogue, 2012; Kirkness, 1999; Klinck et al., 2005; Malatest, 2004; Preston, 2008; Pidgeon, 2008; Young, 1999). University programs need to look at learning in a holistic way that encompasses spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical dimensions (Kirkness, 1999; Klinck et al., 2005; Kompf & Hodson, 2000; Orr et al., 2008; Pidgeon, 2008; Young, 1999). Programs should incorporate knowledge of Indigenous history and culture (Battiste, 2002; Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Gunn et al., 2010; Klinck et al., 2005; Kompf & Hodson, 2000; Young, 1999). There could be improved new relevant curriculum and space for Indigenous knowledge (Anderson et al., 2004; Ball, 2004; Battiste, 2004; Donaldson, Barnes, McRae, & Docherty, 2005; Embelton, 2011; Gunn et al., 2010; Hogue, 2012; Orr et al., 2008; Preston, 2008; Young, 1999). Programs need to collaborate with the community (Atkinson, 2008; Ball, 2004; Battiste, 2002, 2004; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Donaldson et al., 2005; Evans et al., 2000; Gunn et al., 2010; Hogue, 2012; Klinck et al., 2005; Orr et al., 2008; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Timmons et al., 2009; Verjee, 2003; Young, 1999). A key to Aboriginal retention was the strengthening of Aboriginal language (Anderson et al., 2004; Anonson et al., 2008; Battiste, 2002; Currie et al., 2011; Donaldson et al., 2005; Evans et al., 2000; Kirkness, 1999; Malatest, 2004; Timmons et al. 2009; Young, 1999). Aboriginal peoples have had to learn subject matter developed largely from non-Aboriginal Eurocentric traditions (Battiste, 2002; Gunn et al., 2010; Malatest, 2004). Aboriginal learning preference is for experiential learning and a pedagogy that values a person's ability to learn independently by observing, listening, and participating with a minimum of intervention or instruction (Battiste,

2002; Evans et al., 2000; Hogue, 2012; Schwartz & Ball, 2001). Cooperative learning in the classroom was seen as an important way of learning (Gunn et al., 2010; Hogue, 2012; Orr et al., 2008; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Verjee, 2003). Hands-on learning is an important learning style with Aboriginal peoples (Hogue, 2012; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; University of Victoria, 2008; Verjee, 2003).

2.19 Preparation and Access Programs

There is a need for preparatory programs to help prepare students for the demands of a post-secondary education (Danziger, 1996; Hardes, 2006; Schwartz & Ball, 2001). Aboriginal students may not be academically prepared for post-secondary education and may need the help of preparatory programs. Academic upgrading programs are not designed for the particular needs of Aboriginal people (RCAP, vol. 3, 1996). Upgrading needs to include elements that strengthen identity and self-esteem and build student support networks (RCAP, vol. 3, 1996). Most access programs have been developed to help Aboriginal peoples with their transition to post-secondary education (Bonnycastle & Prentice, 2011; Donaldson et al., 2005; Embelton, 2011; Malatest, 2004; Orr et al., 2008; Vedan et al., 2010). Some upgrading programs allow students the opportunity of taking classes at the university course level (Vedan et al., 2010).

2.20 Financial Support

Financial support is crucial to the success of Aboriginal students in post-secondary education (Danziger, 1996; Embelton, 2011; Hardes, 2006; Holmes, 2006; Malatest, 2004; Orr et al., 2008; Schwartz & Ball, 2001). The funding for post-secondary education of learners is an ongoing debate between the federal government, provincial government, and First Nations (Orr et al., 2008). To increase the successful completion rate of Aboriginal students for post-secondary students, there should be more funding for emergencies, student loans, scholarships,

bursaries, links with industry and employers, as well as for increased federal funding for First Nations students (Hardes, 2006; Malatest, 2004). A Canadian Senate committee recommended that, "the 2% annual cap on spending increases for the Department's Post-Secondary Education Program be eliminated immediately,…based on actual costs, … and provide adequate funding under the PSE [post-secondary education] Program to every eligible First Nations and Inuit learner..." (Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007, p. xi).

There is also the issue of how funding for Status Indians for post-secondary education is to be distributed (Usher, 2009). Funding for a First Nations Band for post-secondary education is based on the number of students attending university in the previous year, which may not reflect an increase in students. For example if 35 students from one Band apply and there is only funding for 20 students, some bands split up the funding amongst the 35 students. This results in all the students receiving some funding, but none of whom receive enough to adequately cover all expenses.

2.21 Lack of Research

There is a lack of research of how many Aboriginal students are enrolled in post-secondary education (Holmes, 2006; Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007; Mendelson 2006). There is a "guess that there were about 10, 000 or more Aboriginal students in universities in 2000" (Mendelson, 2006, p. 29). As well, there is a lack of statistical data on Aboriginal ancestry by program (Malatest, 2004; Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007). There is a lack of credible data regarding the funding distribution of Status Indians that is presently based upon the previous year's allocation and not the actual costs, in which unfunded students are also not tracked (Orr et

al., 2008; Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007). There is also a lack of data to monitor and assess the effectiveness of post-secondary education programs in meeting the needs of Aboriginal peoples (Orr et al., 2008). As well, some studies rely on census data that provides general indicators but many Aboriginal people distrust the census (Malatest, 2004). Examples are that Census Canada workers are sometimes not allowed on the reserve and therefore no census information is provided publicly. Census Canada reports this as not being able to enumerate reserves (Malatest, 2004; Usher, 2009). A Canadian Senate committee recommended that:

> In collaboration with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders, develop a national database web site, accessible via the internet, for the purpose of making information about successful programs and initiatives in Aboriginal post-secondary education widely available to Aboriginal organizations, communities, learners and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal institutions. (Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007, p. xi)

Collecting data that is gathered collaboratively with Aboriginal communities can assist in better planning and success for Aboriginal students in post-secondary education.

2.22 Decolonization and Post-Colonialism

There is a need to decolonize education that exposes the injustices of a colonial history (Battiste, 2002; Battiste, 2004; Battiste et al., 2002; Evans, et al., 2000; Gunn et al., 2010; Pidgeon, 2008; Verjee, 2003; Young, 1999). Canada's "history of colonialism and assimilation has played a significant role in lives of Aboriginal families, and may still influence current educational experiences" (Parrack & Preyde, 2009, p. 228). Part of the decolonization process is to realize that cognitive imperialism "denies people their language and cultural integrity and

maintains legitimacy of only one language, one culture, and one frame of reference" (Battiste, 2004, p. 11). Kirkness (1999) asserts that changes to Aboriginal education needs to include rediscovering, respect, recovery, and rhetoric (Pidgeon & Hardy Cox, 2002).

There is a need to change postcolonial education, where postcolonial is not a time after colonialism, but is a response to the experiences of colonization and imperialism that seeks reconstruction and transformation to liberation from colonial imposition (Battiste, 2004). Postcolonial theory acknowledges that colonization is still occurring and creates an avenue for dialogue around the issues of colonization, higher education, and Indigenous notions of success (Pidgeon, 2008). Indigenous scholars must actively engage in indigenizing the academy and make these institutions their own (Pidgeon, 2008). Post-secondary institutes need to consider who is accessing higher education, how, and why (Pidgeon, 2008).

2.23 Self-Government and Self-Determination

First Nations assert that the right of education is a core element of self-government and was never surrendered (Battiste, 2004; Cowin, 2011; Danziger, 1996; Orr et al., 2008; Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007; RCAP, vol. 3, 1996). In addition, First Nations also believe that education is a treaty right as several of the numbered treaties promised education (Cowin, 2011; Danziger, 1996, Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007; RCAP, 1996). Oral history, as told by the Elders, was that education was negotiated as a treaty right that would provide a livelihood sufficient to live in the new economy of the settler's society (RCAP, vol. 3, 1996). The present development of Aboriginal self-government, compared to the past, will have adapted with the arrival of non-Aboriginal people and with the knowledge that they brought to Turtle Island. University education can help in building capacity within Aboriginal Peoples for

Aboriginal self-government. The Canadian federal government denies that post-secondary education is a right (Danziger, 1996; Orr et al., 2008; RCAP, vol. 3, 1996). Malatest found through his literature review and research that "whenever Aboriginal students are given control of their own programs or institutions, there have been higher rates of success in Aboriginal enrollment and graduation" (2004, p. 28). Principles of self-determination are important in education (Anderson et al., 2004; Kirkness, 1999; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Young, 1999).

The process can begin with establishing Aboriginal Advisory Boards at post-secondary institutions (Cowin, 2011; Gunn et al., 2010; Hardes, 2006; Holmes, 2006; Timmons et al. 2009; University of Victoria, 2008; Verjee, 2003). Advisory committees can make policy recommendations, serve as an institution and community link, develop and identify community-learning needs, and assist in research ethics applications. Aboriginal advisory boards seek to engage and involve Aboriginal peoples where they have been excluded.

2.24 Summary

There is a dramatic increase in Aboriginal peoples obtaining a post-secondary education but there is still a significant gap compared to other Canadians. Aboriginal students tend to be older and have dependents. Aboriginal students also have financial barriers due to poverty, lack of financial support, and additional family costs for Aboriginal students such as transportation, housing, and daycare. Aboriginal students face many social barriers that include family responsibilities, mistrust of education, discrimination, distance and relocation, alienation, and cultural insensitivity. The literature review provided has highlighted the need for improved Aboriginal retention that included hiring Aboriginal faculty and staff, the importance of relationships between faculty and students, cultural education of faculty and staff, cultural events, Aboriginal gathering spaces, Elders, support services, and mentorship programs. Many

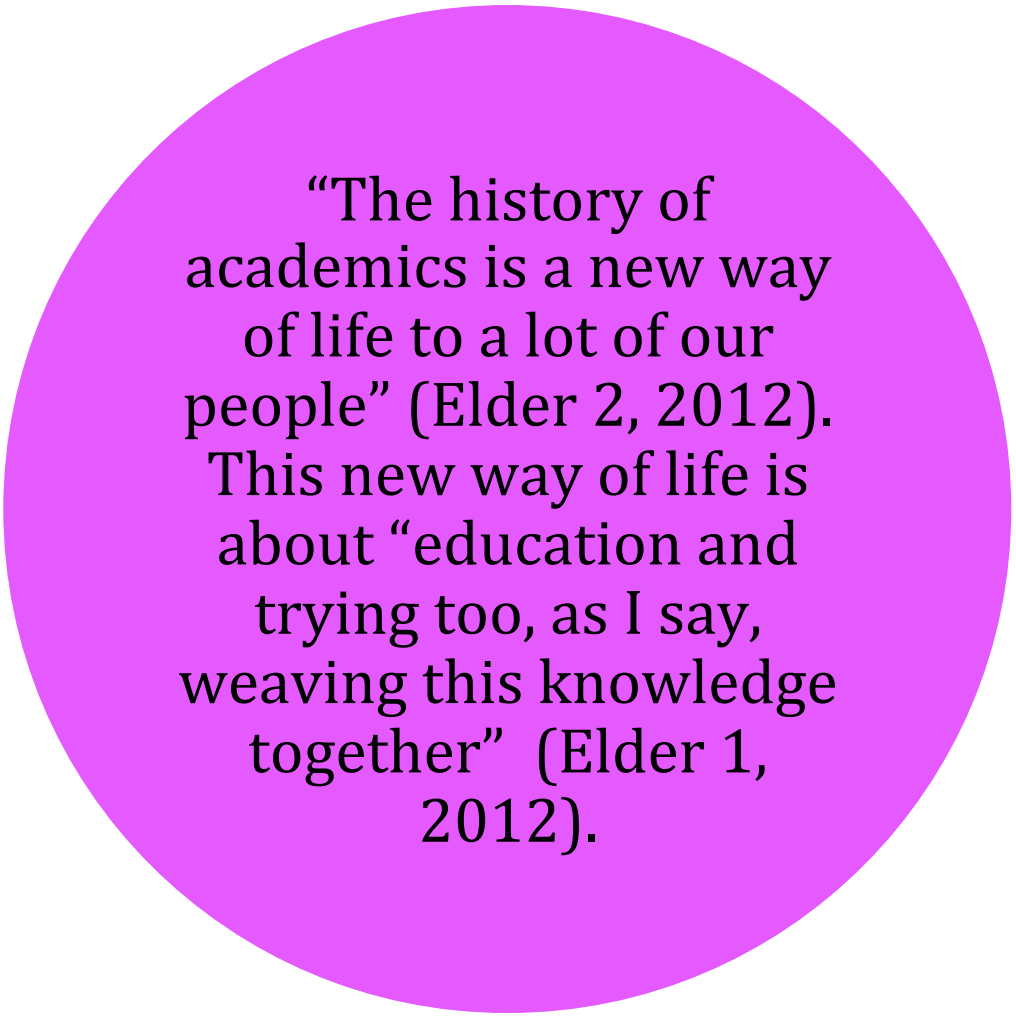
Aboriginal students are motivated to achieve a post-secondary education to have a better life for them and to help their community.

2.25 Research Questions

This research analyzed and synthesized the student's survey responses from the research project titled *Aboriginal Student Retention in a Canadian University: Findings from student interviews, talking circles, and secondary databases* (Walton, Hamilton, Clark, & Arnouse, 2012) and the data from a talking circle with Aboriginal people that help Aboriginal university students. The survey has provided data from Aboriginal students on issues and concerns through quantitative research, however research gaps exist as to further explaining the survey results. Specific gaps in the survey results include exploring the differences between literature findings and the results that do not necessarily coincide that could be explored through qualitative research in understanding the differences. Qualitative research, with the method of the talking circle was used to gather further data. This research seeks to combine through a mixed methods approach to better understand Aboriginal student retention at a university.

The specific research questions were:

1. What will Aboriginal students identify as challenges and supports in their experiences at university to complete their programs?
2. What will Aboriginal peoples working with Aboriginal university students identify as challenges and supports for Aboriginal students to complete their programs?
3. Are there gender differences for Aboriginal students to complete their university education? The literature review revealed that females do better in educational attainment among the Canadian and Aboriginal population, but there is a lack of support, especially for single mothers.


“The history of academics is a new way of life to a lot of our people” (Elder 2, 2012). This new way of life is about “education and trying too, as I say, weaving this knowledge together” (Elder 1, 2012).

Chapter Three: Research Method

3.1 Consultation

Thompson Rivers University has a First Nations and Aboriginal Advisory Committee of Senate made up of individuals representing Aboriginal students, Aboriginal community organizations, Elders, Aboriginal counselors, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal faculty and administrators. The committee decided that one of the most pressing areas research was to find out why Aboriginal university students left university, and what factors supported the students who stayed and graduated. Subsequently this research has been identified as an important area for further exploration by the Aboriginal community.

Figure 3.1. Cooperative Research on Aboriginal Student Retention at Thompson Rivers University

There was an ongoing consultation with Aboriginal students, instructors, Elders, support staff, and community members. Consultation assisted in guiding the research and ensured that it was conducted in a respectful manner as per the Tri-Council Policy Statement Two for ethical conduct for research involving humans. Consultation specifically focused on the choice of the research topic of Aboriginal student retention, method of a talking circle, questions to ask, and working in cooperation with other academic scholars. I was also fortunate to be able to attend various education conferences while I was studying in the Master of Education program that included: Indigenizing the Academy in Chilliwack, Rockyview Education Research conference in Airdrie, Indigenous Education Summit in Niagara on the Lake, Indigenous Graduate Symposium in Vancouver, and the Aboriginal Education Research Forum in Winnipeg. The topic was also chosen to compliment other research being conducted at Thompson Rivers University on Aboriginal student retention.

3.2 Participants

3.2.1 Survey Participants

The Aboriginal student retention survey (Walton, Hamilton, Clark, & Arnouse, 2012) was conducted at Thompson Rivers University in which students were chosen as current and former Thompson Rivers University students who self-identified as Aboriginal, Inuit, or Metis on their application to Thompson Rivers University. Aboriginal staff at Thompson Rivers University helped to identify specific Aboriginal students to be recruited at the Gathering Place. Both those who completed the program and those who left before completion were included in the project. The selection criteria went beyond self-identified students of Aboriginal ancestry. It included selecting students from a range of Thompson Rivers University departments, students from both rural and urban home locations, and gender balance. Fifty-four Aboriginal students completed

the survey from Thompson Rivers University that included the Kamloops and Williams Lake locations. Thirty-seven students were female and 17 were male. Aboriginal students came from various academic disciplines that included science, human services, trades, education, social work, arts, upgrading, business, and early childhood education. The youngest student was 18 years old, the oldest student was 57 years old, with an average age of 32.58 years with a standard deviation of 9.256.

3.2.2 Talking Circle Participants

Participants for the talking circle were chosen for a target of ten participants that would be Thompson Rivers University support staff for Aboriginal students, along with Elders, Aboriginal instructors, representatives from Aboriginal education organizations, and Aboriginal community members. Thompson Rivers University support staff were chosen based upon their experiences and ability to articulate the various assistance they have provided to Aboriginal students. Elders were asked to participate to help spiritually guide the talking circle and also based upon their experiences in helping Aboriginal students. At this time, there is a limited number Aboriginal faculty at Thompson Rivers University, that includes full-time instructors and sessional instructors. Aboriginal community members were also sought out that have experience assisting university Aboriginal students.

People were invited to attend through direct conversations about the research project and also via email requests. Invitations to attend included requests to the: local school district Aboriginal representative, local Interior Indian Friendship Centre, Thompson Rivers University Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal support staff, Thompson Rivers University Aboriginal instructors, two local band education departments, Elders, a representative from the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council, and Aboriginal community members. Information was shared about the

research project and time was given to reflect on if they were interested and able to participate. Sampling was not random as I wanted to specifically have people attend based upon their diverse experience with Aboriginal students. In accordance with ethical research, consent forms were provided and completed by the participants. Aboriginal protocols of consent were provided by the researcher offering tobacco to those participating in the talking circle. Tobacco was offered to ensure the research would be conducted and shared in a respectful manner. The tobacco was accepted by all the people attending the talking circle. The tobacco being accepted in the Aboriginal community, is similar to having a signature on the consent form in the Canadian community. If the tobacco was not accepted or it was given back, it would mean that consent had not been obatined or was being withdrawn. Honoraria of twenty-five dollars was also provided for each of the participants in the talking circle that lasted for one hour and forty-five minutes. A total of five people attended that represented Elders, an Aboriginal instructor, and two Aboriginal support staff. Aboriginal cultures included in the talking circle were the Secwepemc, Nlaka'pamux, Dene, and Metis.

3.3 Methods

My research further explored and expanded upon previous research on Aboriginal student retention called *Aboriginal Student Retention in a Canadian University: Findings from student interviews, talking circles, and secondary databases* (Walton, Hamilton, Clark, & Arnouse, 2012). This research included an Aboriginal student survey and interviews. The survey was administered to the Aboriginal students at the same time as the interviews, however that research project focused only on analyzing the interview data. The survey data was not examined prior to this research thesis. The survey data was collected as a pilot study after the initial research. The results of the twelve question survey asked about: financial support, part-time studies,

housing, child care, academic support, writing skills, support services, cultural activities, Aboriginal languages, Elders, faculty and student relationships.

A mixed methods approach was used to learn more about Aboriginal student retention. The mixed method of a survey and talking circle were the best available methods to address the research question. The survey complemented the themes that stood out in the literature review for challenges and supports for Aboriginal students. It was through the addition of the talking circle that allowed insight into interpreting the survey results to give voice to the challenges and supports for Aboriginal students.

The research was conducted using a talking circle in addition to the survey. As an Indigenous scholar describes that, talking circles are a form of focus group discussion that "involves people sitting in a circle, where each person has the opportunity to take an uninterrupted turn in discussing the topic" (Wilson, 2008, p. 41). The talking circle allowed for the equal sharing of all participants in their own voice about their own experiences working with Aboriginal students at the university. No personal information of Aboriginal students was disclosed. The talking circle began with an opening prayer by an Elder and ended with a closing prayer by an Elder.

The talking circle was audio recorded. In my experience, talking circles are generally not recorded, however I explained to the participants that if I were to only take notes, that what I chose to write down and the words chosen would be the result of my own bias. Therefore I sought to have the direct words of those participating to give their voice to the data. Anonymity was sought, in that once the audio recording was transcribed, it was destroyed so that voices could not be identified. The data of the transcript was stored with the faculty supervisor and will

be stored for seven years. No data will be released that specifically identifies individuals to other persons or agencies. Only the researcher and research supervisor will have access to the data.

"Tell our children to lift, lift up their heads, to walk proudly, because our contribution to the world already is huge" (Elder 2, 2012).

Chapter Four: Results

4.1 Aboriginal Retention Survey Findings and Analysis

Will Aboriginal students agree or disagree with issues or concerns about their experiences at Thompson Rivers University regarding program completion? The survey provided a 12-question likert scale response for Aboriginal students to identify issues or concerns about their experiences at university. The survey was designed before my thesis research but the questions corresponded to issues and concerns as identified in the literature review. Fifty-four Aboriginal students completed the survey, 37 women and 17 men. The average age of the students was 32.58 years (SD = 9.256). Statistical analysis was conducted with the survey findings (N=54) to determine if the responses differed across gender or between self-identified Aboriginal language speakers and non-Aboriginal language speakers. Independent t-tests with gender as the grouping factor found that there was no significant differences in survey responses across gender, all $p > 0.164$. The independent t-tests for Aboriginal language speaking ability found that there were no significant differences on the survey questionnaire between the Aboriginal speakers and non-Aboriginal speakers, all $p > 0.082$.

Table 4.1. Survey Analysis with Gender

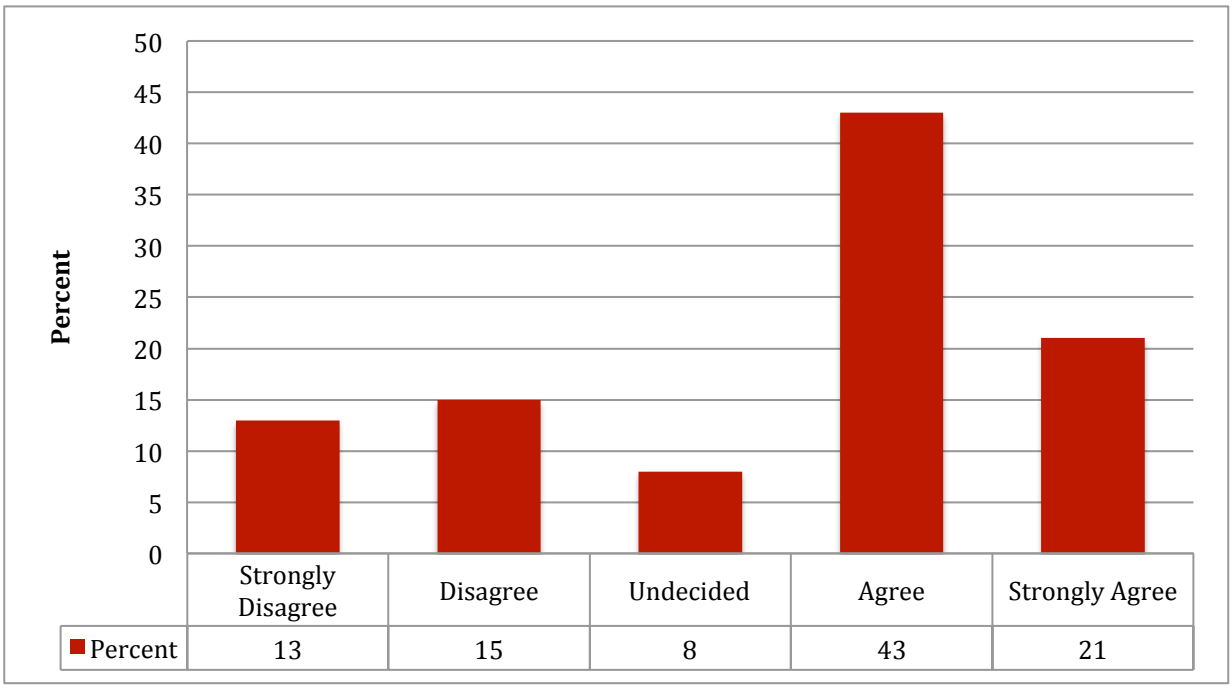
Question	Female	Male	Total Mean	SD
1. I had the financial support I needed to succeed.	3.42	3.47	3.43	1.337
2. Financial support to take my program part-time would help me to succeed.	3.74	3.56	3.69	1.225
3. Housing was readily available.	3.03	3.00	3.02	1.2753
4. Child care services were available to support me.	2.87	3.33	3.02	1.055
5. The university gave me the support to succeed academically.	3.76	3.71	3.74	1.136
6. The university helped me to cope with non-academic issues (e.g., family).	3.17	3.13	3.15	1.144
7. More Aboriginal cultural activities would help me at university.	4.03	4.00	4.02	.828
8. I can speak my Aboriginal language.	2.62	2.59	2.61	1.338
9. More access to elders on campus would help me to succeed.	3.7	3.94	3.78	1.022
10. I have the writing skills to complete university programs.	3.7	3.71	3.70	1.143
11. I have or had good relationships with the faculty at the university.	4.14	4.18	4.15	.810
12. I have or had good relationships with other students at the university.	4.19	4.12	4.17	.746

4.1.1 Financial Support

Poverty and lack of financial support have been reported as barriers to Aboriginal post-secondary education (Anonson et al., 2008; Embelton, 2011; First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008; Holmes, 2006; Malatest, 2004). Overall, the government reports that Aboriginal student financial support levels fall below the allowances set for other Canadians

under the Canada Student Loan Program (Indian and Northern Affairs, Evaluation of PSE Program, 2005). A combined total of 64% of Aboriginal students who responded to the survey that they Agreed and Strongly Agreed that they had the financial support that they needed to succeed. It is not certain if the financial support could be attributed to Status Indians who were receiving financial support from Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Canada's Post-secondary Education Program. A combined total of 28% Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed that they had the financial support they needed to succeed and 8% eight were undecided (see Figure 4.1). Those who felt financially unsupported could be due to the limited financial support that is available for some Status Indians, and the fact that no non-Status Indians are eligible for funding and are limited to student loans or other means of suport (Malatest, 2004).

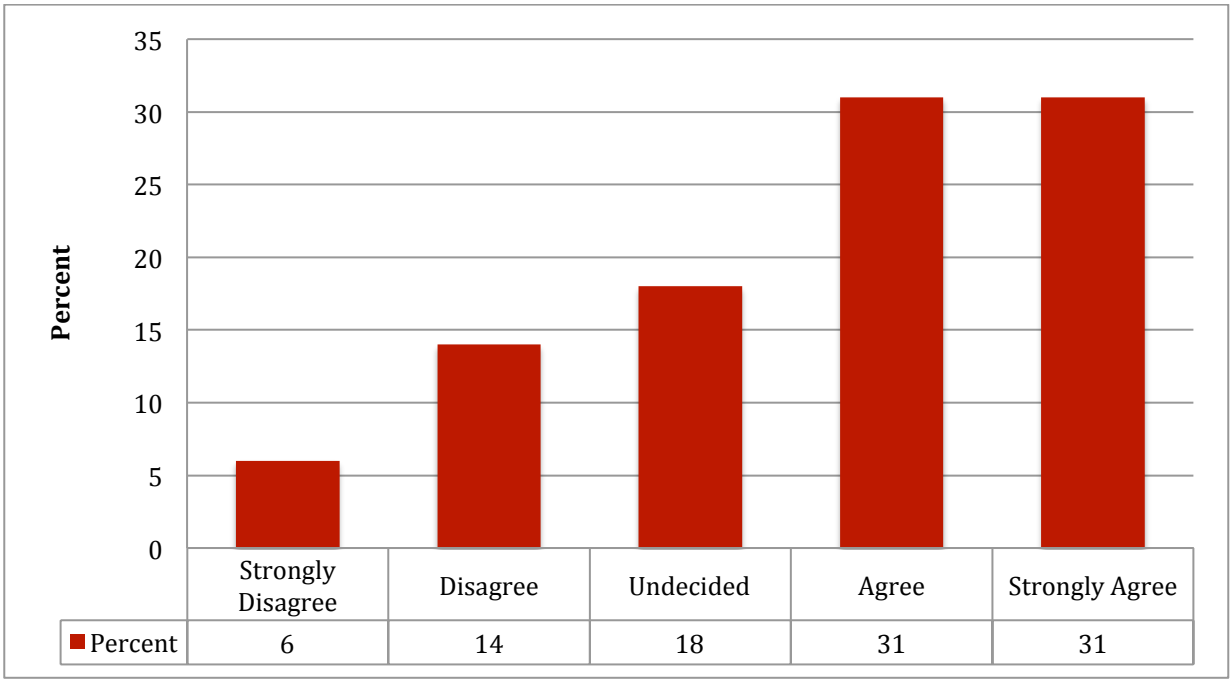
Figure 4.1 I Had the Financial Support I Needed to Succeed



4.1.2 Part-Time Study

On the topic of part-time study, 63% of Aboriginal students Agreed and Strongly Agreed of Aboriginal students that financial support for part-time studies would help them succeed. Twenty percent Disagreed and Strongly disagreed that financial support to take their program part-time would help them to succeed and 17% were undecided (see Figure 4.2). The need to receive part-time financial support could coincide with the need for more flexibility to complete their post-secondary education (Embelton, 2011; Hardes, 2006; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Timmons et al., 2009). Financial support from Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Canada's Post-Secondary Education Program only funds Status Indians for books and tuition for part-time students. Providing living allowance for part-time studies could also be more accommodating especially for students that have children. This would require a policy change with Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Canada.

Figure 4.2. Financial Support to Take My Program Part-Time Would Help Me to Succeed



4.1.3 Housing

Forty-three percent of Aboriginal students Agreed and Strongly Agreed of Aboriginal students that housing was readily available. However, 39% Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed that housing was readily available and 18% were undecided. Housing challenges could be the result of students having to relocate due to the distance from home to the institution (Cowin, 2011; Critchley & Bull, 2011; Danziger, 1996; Embelton, 2011; First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008; Holmes, 2006; Mendelson, 2006; Orr et al., 2008; Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007; Timmons et al. 2009; Usher, 2009). Affordable housing has also been idenified by the city of Kamloops as a rental market crunch with the most affected populations being persons who are harder to house, women and children, youth, and Aboriginal people (Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia, 2009).

4.1.4 Childcare

Twenty-nine percent of those surveyed Agreed and Strongly Agreed of Aboriginal students that childcare services were available as a support. Twenty-seven percent Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed agreed that childcare services were available for support and 44% were undecided. Aboriginal students were not asked if they had children when they answered this question. Childcare is important, as Aboriginal university students tend to be older and may have dependents (Anonson et al., 2008; Bonnycastle & Prentice, 2011; Danziger, 1996; First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008; Holmes, 2006; Pidgeon, 2008; Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007; Usher, 2009). Childcare is an issue with other researchers making the specific recommendation that there should be no evening classes unless there is extended childcare available for students

(Bonnycastle & Prentice, 2011). Thompson Rivers University has evening classes with the campus daycare closed in the evenings. It is also not known if daycare fees are a challenge. It was also not clear if the childcare question was about childcare by friends and family or daycare.

4.1.5 Academic Support and Writing Skills

Seventy-six percent of Aboriginal students Agreed and Strongly Agreed that the university supported them to succeed academically. Sixteen percent Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed that the university gave them the support to succeed academically, and 7% were undecided (see Figure 4.3). This identified gap of 23% indicates that students could benefit from receiving academic help from the university. Sixty-nine percent Agreed and Strongly Agreed that they had the writing skills to complete university programs. However, 23% Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed and 11% were undecided (see Figure 4.4.). Thirty-one percent overall perhaps could benefit by getting help with their writing skills. Students may have had inadequate academic preparation from programs for entry into post-secondary institutions (Anonson et al., 2008; Embelton, 2011; First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008; Hardes, 2006; Holmes, 2006; Orr et al., 2008; Preston, 2008; RCAP, vol. 3, 1996; Timmons et al., 2009; Usher, 2009; Vedan, et al., 2010). Given that students may have not been academically prepared prior to attending university, the question is what academic services helped them to feel prepared. As well, their home location would be interesting to compare with other research that Aboriginal educational achievement was highest in the cities, then towns, then rural areas, and finally least on reserves (Mendelson, 2006). Location in that sense could be linked with encatchment areas and student enrollment. Schools have an encatchment area based upon geographic location and boundaries. The school encatchment area could only have a certain number of students enrolled in the school and specific programs for those students. As a result, there might be limited

academic courses offered. An example is that a high school might not be able to offer science courses in biology, chemistry, and physics all in the same academic year as there is not enough students to offer all three courses. As a result, students might not be able to obtain the science prerequisites for certain university programs.

Figure 4.3. The University Gave Me the Support to Succeed Academically

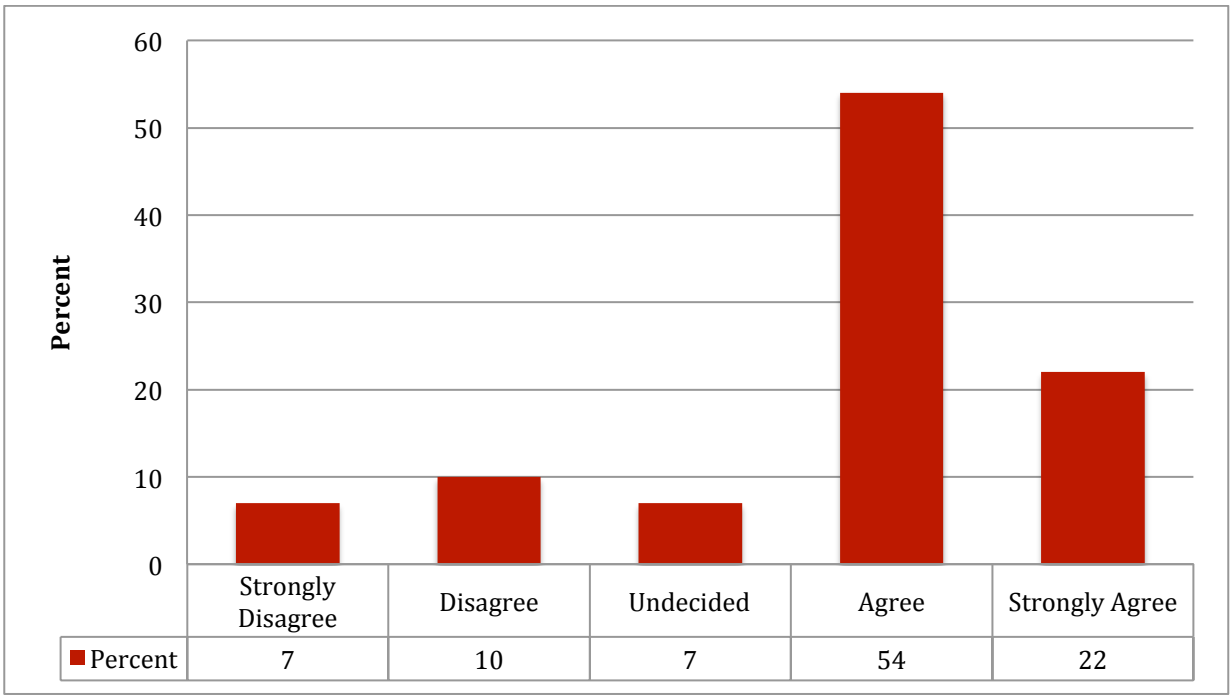
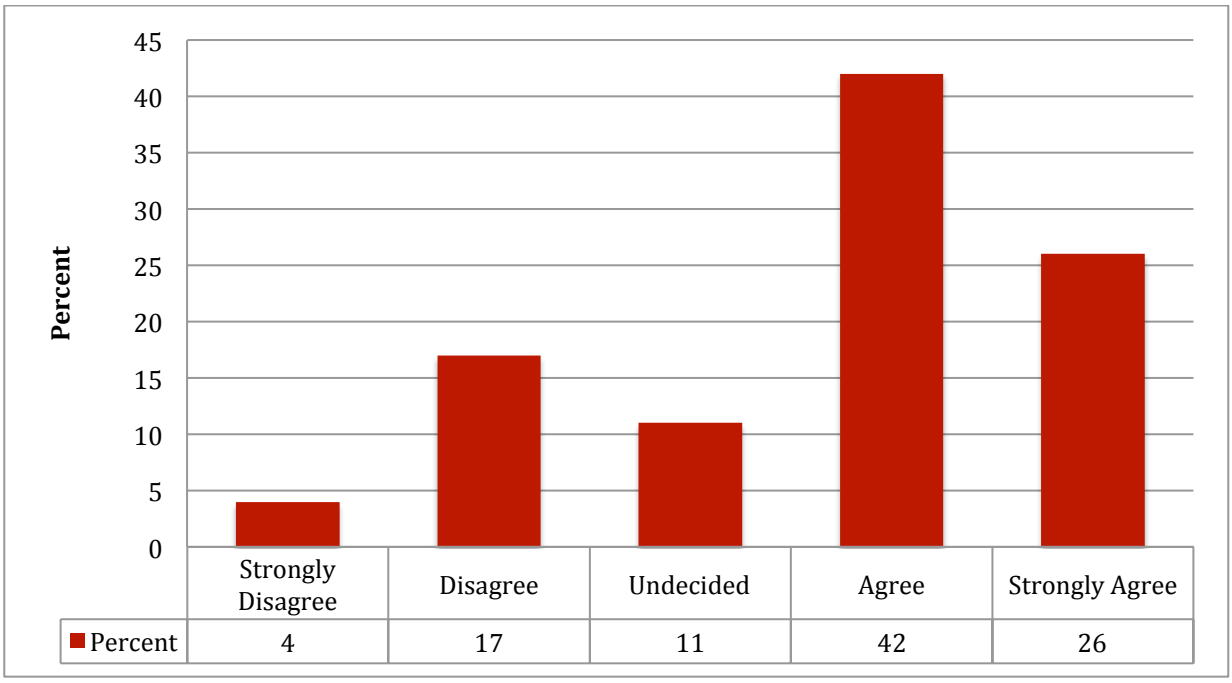


Figure 4.4. I Have the Writing Skills to Complete University Programs

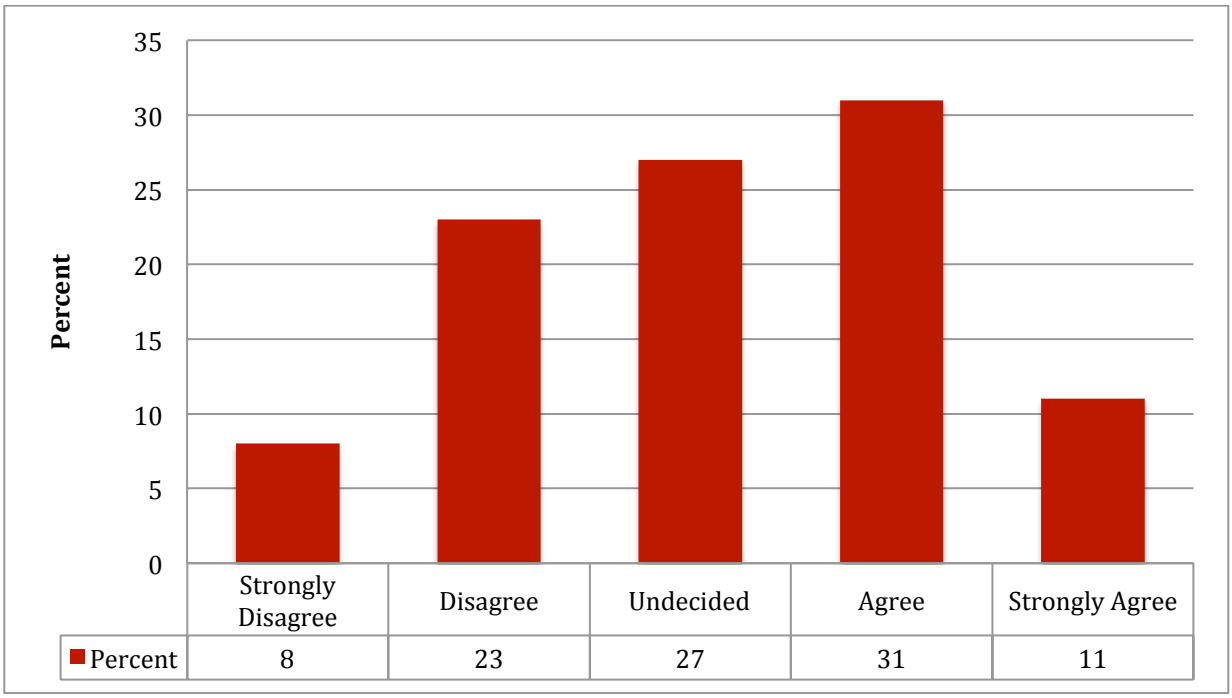


4.1.6 Non-Acadmic Support Services

Forty-two percent of Aboriginal students Agreed and Strongly Agreed that the university helped them to cope with non-academic issues. Thirty-one percent Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed and 27% were undecided (see Figure 4.5). The results somewhat support the idea that counselling and support staff are important for the success of Aboriginal peoples in post-secondary education (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Danziger, 1996; Embelton, 2011; Gunn et al., 2010; Hardes, 2006; Holmes, 2006; Hogue, 2012; Kompf & Hodson, 2000; Malatest, 2004; Preston, 2008; RCAP, vol. 3, 1996; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Timmons et al., 2009; Verjee, 2003). Non-academic services could include personal support, family, sexual abuse, drug and alcohol dependency, suicide, and career counselling, housing assistance, funding, scholarships, and advocacy. However, 58% of Aboriginal students that either

Disagreed, Strongly Disagreed, or were Undecided. Reasons why are a matter of conjecture but possible reasons include: lack of knowledge of services, lack of accessing services, or services that have been accessed but overlooked. Another important point is that although the question was asked about non-academic issues, there is no clear definition, only the possible context provided of family. This question could have been understood differently from each Aboriginal student's perspective. Different perspectives can have this question relate to several non-academic issues such as the Gathering Place services, transportation concerns, medical and health services on campus, recreational and athletic facilities, career and employment services or personal counselling.

Figure 4.5. The University Helped Me to Cope with Non-Academic Issues (e.g., Family)



4.1.7 Cultural Activities and Aboriginal Language

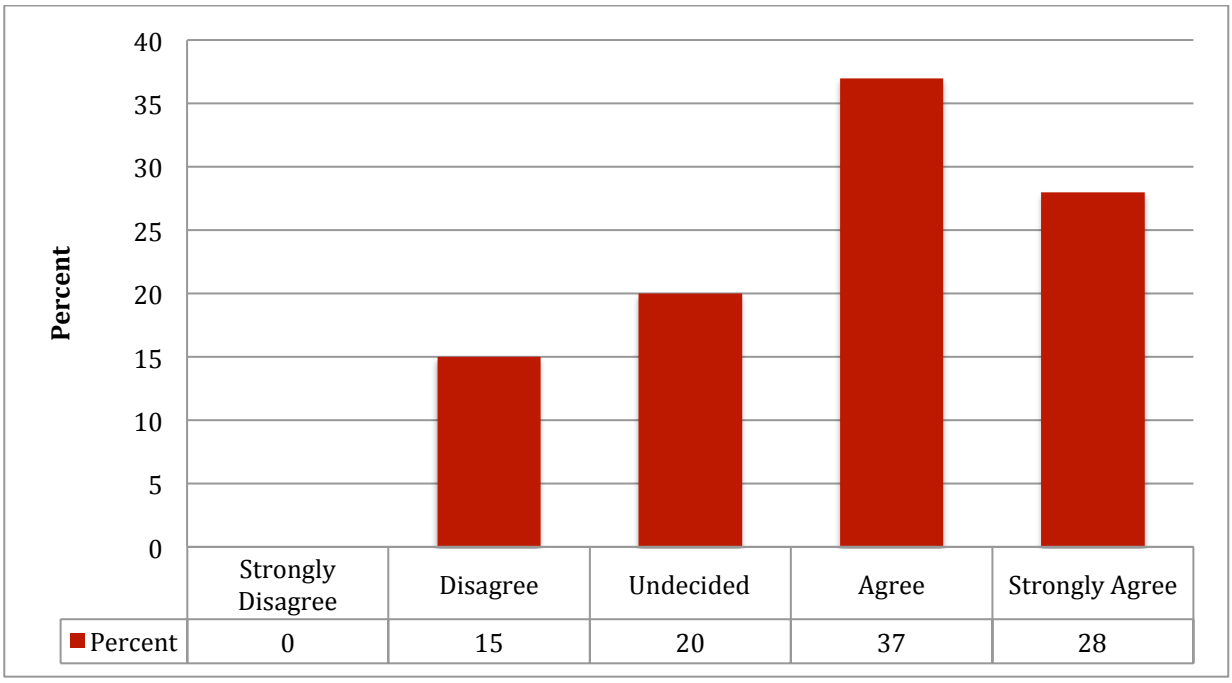
A significant number of Aboriginal students, (79%) Agreed and Strongly Agreed that more cultural activities would help them at university. This is supported by other research that

Aboriginal cultural events are important for the success of Aboriginal peoples in post-secondary education (Anonson et al., 2008; Currie et al., 2011; Embelton, 2011; Hardes, 2006; Kompf & Hodson, 2000; Malatest, 2004; RCAP, vol. 3, 1996; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Vedan et al., 2010). Aboriginal students "must maintain their cultural integrity to be successful within and outside of their own communities" (Pidgeon, 2008, p. 343). Cultural activities would vary according to the Aboriginal territories that could include powwows, round dances, smudging, pipe ceremonies, feasts, and sharing circles. Thirty-seven percent Agreed and Strongly Agreed that they can speak their own Aboriginal language. Fifty-nine percent Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed that they could speak their own language and 4% were undecided. Universities have begun to move towards offering Aboriginal language programs.

4.1.8 Elders

Sixty-five percent of Aboriginal students Agreed and Strongly Agreed that more access to Elders on campus would help them to succeed. Fifteen percent Disagreed and 20% were undecided (see Figure 4.6). This is supported by other research that the recruitment of Aboriginal Elders is important for the success of Aboriginal peoples in post-secondary education (Anonson, Ball, 2004; Desjarlais et al., 2008; Battiste, 2002; Battiste et al., 2002; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Embelton, 2011; Evans et al., 2000; Gunn et al., 2010; Hardes, 2006; Holmes, 2006; Hogue, 2012; Kirkness, 1999; Kompf & Hodson, 2000; Malatest, 2004; Orr et al., 2008; Preston, 2008; RCAP, vol. 3, 1996; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Timmons et al. 2009; University of Victoria, 2008; Verjee, 2003; Young, 1999). Elders can be used as teachers or guest speakers in classrooms, to help develop culturally appropriate curriculum and methods, and provide cultural awareness and social and emotional support for students.

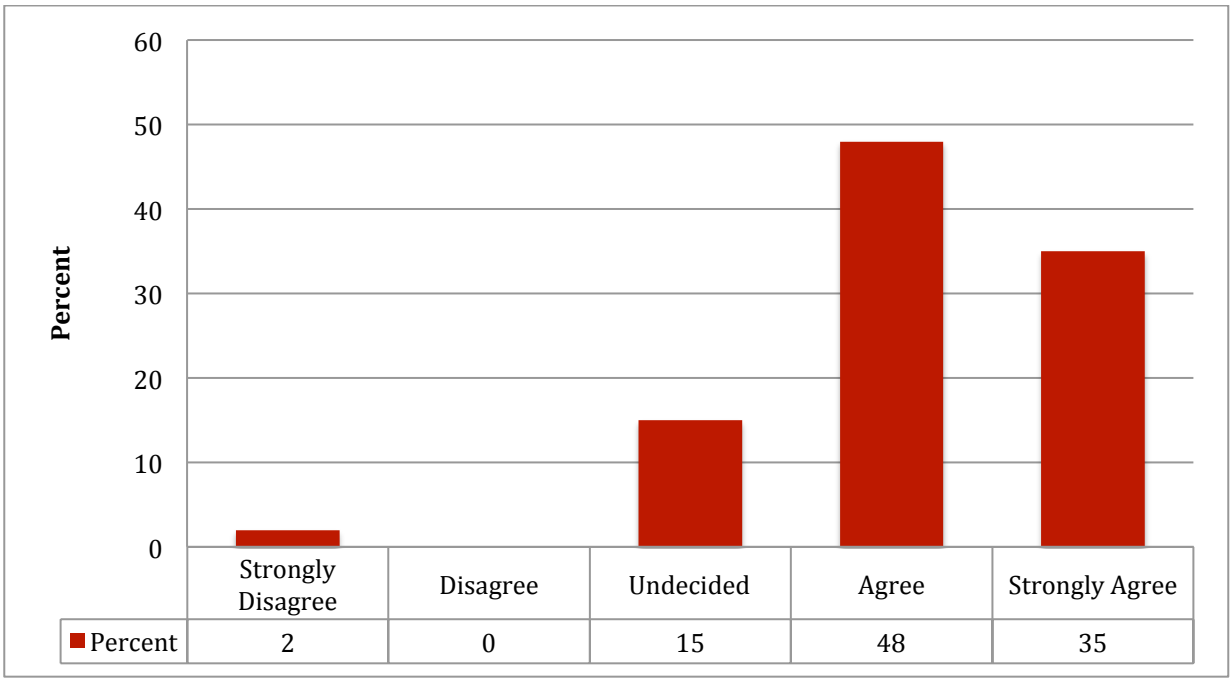
Figure 4.6. More Access to Elders on Campus Would Help Me to Succeed



4.1.9 Faculty and Student Relationships

Eighty-three percent of Aboriginal students Agreed and Strongly Agreed that they have or have had a good relationship with the faculty at the university. Two percent Strongly Disagreed and 15% were undecided (see Figure 4.7). Ninety-one percent Agreed and Strongly Agreed that they have or have had a good relationship with other students at the university. Six percent Disagreed and 4% were undecided. Relationships between students and instructors are seen as an important source of support (Embelton, 2011; Hardes, 2006; Looker & Lowe, 2001; Madgett & Belanger, 2008; Pidgeon, 2008; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Timmons et al., 2009; University of Victoria, 2008; Verjee, 2003; Young, 1999). Peer relationships are important to reduce or eliminate alienation reported in past research as a social barrier (Cherubini, 2012; Cowin, 2011; Danziger, 1996; Embelton, 2011; Mendelson, 2006; Orr et al., 2008; Schwartz & Ball, 2001).

Figure 4.7. I Have or Have Had Good Relationships with the Faculty at the University



4.1.10 Summary

Aboriginal student responses varied depending on the topic. A significant number of Aboriginal students (64%) felt that they had the financial support to succeed. This finding contradicts some of the current literature. Just over a quarter (28%) of Aboriginal students felt that they did not have the financial support to succeed. Eight percent were undecided for financial support. On the topic of part-time study, 63% of Aboriginal students believed that financial support for part-time studies would help them succeed. Financial support for full-time and part-time studies is a concern for Aboriginal students to be able to complete their program.

Aboriginal students seemed spilt concerning whether or not housing was readily available with 43% overall agreeing and 39% overall disagreeing, with 18% undecided. Housing specifically for Aboriginal people has been identified as a concern by the city of Kamloops. On

the issue of childcare, 29% responded that child care services were available and 27% respnded that childcare services were not available as support. However, 44% were undecided and that might be attributed to the Aboriginal students who responded not having children themselves. Thompson Rivers University has evening classes but the daycare on campus is closed in the evening.

A significant amount (76%) of Aboriginal students responded that the university supported them to succeed academically. However a combined total of 23% either disagreed or were undecided. On the topic of writing skills, 76% responded that they had the writing skills to complete university. However, 23% disagreed and 11% were undecided if they had the writing skills to complete university. Some Aboriginal students have identified a need for help from the university to succeed academically and for help with their writing skills. Currently, Thompson Rivers University has started an Aboriginal mentorship program in which other students who do not need academic or writing help can help those students that do need help.

Aboriginal students responded (42%) that the university helped them to cope with non-academic issues. A combined total of 58% disagreed and were undecided. A significant number of Aboriginal students agreed (79%) that more cultural activities would help them at university. On the topic of Aboriginal language, 37% agreed that they can speak their language and 59% disagreed, with 4% undecided. There was support from Aboriginal students (65%) that agreed that elders on campus would help them succeed.

Aboriginal students also agreed (83%) that they have or have had a good relationship with the faculty at the university. As well in relationships, 91% of Aboriginal students agreed they had or have had a good relationship with other students at the university. The question did not

specify with Aboriginal students or with students in general. Overall Aboriginal students had or have had good relationships at university.

4.2 Talking Circle Findings and Analysis

4.2.1 Talking Circle

A talking circle is when people sit in a circle and take turns talking. Sometimes people can smudge before beginning a talking circle with sage, cedar, sweet grass, or willow fungus. Talking circles can be opened and closed with a prayer. Prayers and smudging are used to help clear the mind, body, emotions, and spirit, to share in a good way. Each person is given the chance to talk and is not interrupted. Some talking circles go in the clockwise direction, as is the way of the sun, in allowing each person to talk. Others go in the counter clockwise direction depending on each culture. Some talking circles use an item for the person that is talking to hold. When they are done talking, they pass that item on to the next speaker. Items can include eagle feathers, talking sticks, or rocks.

The talking circle participants were chosen based upon their diverse experiences working with Aboriginal students at the university and their ability to articulate obstacles and supports for students to complete their programs. Several times the participants stressed the importance of the talking circle and how everyone participating was equal and everyone's sharing was important. It was also shared that there needs to be more talking circles at the university. Humour through laughter was also noted and translated into the transcript. It is my experience with the diverse Aboriginal cultures that I have experienced that humour is an important aspect of life. Life is difficult but that there are also joyous times. Humour stands out especially when I am being teased, as it is seen as sign of acceptance by others, and also humility to be able to laugh at yourself. It is when I am stopped being teased, that I am worried as it means that I am

no longer accepted and have offended someone or the culture. Tobacco was offered out of respect to the people attending as a contract to respect their sharing as part of research being carried out to to help Aboriginal students be successful at university.

4.2.2 What Do You Think the Roles of Elders Can Be at a University?

An Elder started by sharing that Aboriginal identity was important for post-secondary education completion. An Elder said that some Aboriginal students felt attacked by the new academic information they were receiving and learning. As a result, whatever self-esteem the Aboriginal student had was shattered and caused them to be in severe distress. An Elder said the distress was the result of something being triggered in the student. The Elder helped the student to cope and address unresolved issues whereby "the trigger I said was just a part of the healing process that they needed to do and to find an appropriate counselling person" (Elder 1, 2012). The Elder, as part of their process of helping also encouraged the students to "participate in an Aboriginal ceremony to cement them back into who they truly are" (Elder 1, 2012) as an Aboriginal person attending university. Elders also bring Aboriginal culture to the university. Elders encourage students to attend ceremonies, but also bring ceremony to the university such as smudging with sage.

Another Elder shared that having Aboriginal students attend university is a "new type of education through the government … and the history of academics is a new way of life to a lot of our people, where, not too long ago before that, the teachers were the Elders" (participant 3, 2013). The Elder stated that they had "learned the new way of life that came across the ocean … and we seemed to separate ourselves from the whole family life, the whole right from the grandmother and grandfather, to the parents and children and grandchildren" (Elder 2, 2012). The Elder said that they were fortunate to have been raised by their grandparents and their great

grandparents to "witness some of the knowledge that they had" (Elder 2, 2012) and to be able to apply it to their own life. The Elder also shared how this new way of life has affected the Elders, as "all of the Elders have almost lost their position for a while, even in their own families, … but now it's coming back and were trying to fix, fix so we can keep them longer in our village because they are valuable" (Elder 2, 2012). The Elder talked about the importance of stories that help to explain who a person is and where they belong so that they can walk proudly and hold their heads up because of their Aboriginal contribution to the world.

As Aboriginal peoples learned a new way of life, they also helped the new settlers to learn a new way of life on Turtle Island. An Elder said that Aboriginal knowledge was shared with the new settlers that included showing them medicines, how to dress in this climate, and what foods to eat. The Elder further shared that new settlers would not have survived very long without this sharing of knowledge. As well that with the arrival of the new settlers, Aboriginal peoples experienced "traumas that have happened to our people, … and we're healing ourselves from it" (Elder 2, 2012). The same Elder talked about how there is a need to rebuild families again and that being at the university is part of building a family. Education included cultural and educational values. This is evident from an Elder who shared what his uncle had told him:

> Don't think you're the important one just because you have been learning this for thirty of forty years, he said the important one is the one that just walked through the door that is willing to learn, that means a lot, just a small phrase like that means a whole great deal. (Elder 2, 2012)

Elders have a role in helping Aboriginal students to complete their education.

An Elder stated that there were misconceptions between Aboriginal people and the dominant society. Gender roles have changed and were misunderstood by the dominant society.

In the past, the men would sit in front and were perceived as patriarchial leaders. However, "the men were just a mouthpiece and the women that was saying prayers back there, that's where the words would come out" (Elder 2, 2012). Also the men walked in front of the women in the woods, not as the leader but as a protector from cougars, bears, wolves, or enemies. In addition, an Elder shared about his uncle, "he would pick the best, give it away, and if he came along about a month or two later and he saw that you were not taking care of it, he would take it back" (Elder 2, 2012). The Elder also talked about the ignorance of non-Aboriginal instructors, "they don't know the trauma of the descendant of those children that went to that Residential School, you know, the tortures and abuses, right from sexual to spiritual, to name it, disease" (Elder 2, 2012). Another Elder shared, "social workers are totally disregarded by the Aboriginal people because of those kinds of policies … about the great sweep of the reservations [where children were forcibly removed]" (Elder 1, 2012). The Elder also added that when some of their friends returned to their community after studying social work, the Elders mentally and spiritually guided them back into their community. It was not "that they disrespect the learning that the student did, but it's how to balance all of that knowledge so that the world they present and walk into will be a little bit more balanced" (Elder 1, 2012).

People shared that the role of Elders was important for Aboriginal students to completing their post-secondary education. A support staff said Elders are a frontline connection to helping students and providing referrals. Students and instructors, whether they are Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal are sometimes not sure of the protocols of approaching an Elder. The Elders shared that it is as simple as having a cup of coffee or lunch. An Elder expressed that they enjoy sitting with younger people too. Elders can help redirect an Aboriginal student, as a support staff said that it is "sometimes easier to hear it from an Elder than having a student hear it from me or

somebody else, and it's coming from an Elder" (support staff 2, 2012). Also mentioned, Elders are there to teach and remind Aboriginal students of where they come from, as well as take on a nurturing role. An Elder shared about helping the students to find their "own personal power and going to that inner circle that's within your heart" (Elder 1, 2012). Another Elder said that sometimes all it takes to help an Aboriginal student is just a few words of encouragement to get them motivated.

Elders also play a role in helping Aboriginal students maintain a balance with their relationships. An Elder said their culture and relationships have changed with the arrival of the new way of life that came across the ocean. An Elder shared how when they grew up, their grandparents and great grandparents shared their knowledge on relationships. The Elder said that in their culture, they were taught "about how to teach the children, how to treat the parents, how to treat the spouses, how to treat the grandparents, how to teach the other creatures that live on this earth, the birds, the four legged ones and the ones that live in the water" (Elder 2, 2012). An Elder stated "I think one of the biggest problems that I tended to help students with, was maintaining a relationship while they're a student, and that tends to be hard work because they spend so much time studying that the partners feel left out or the children feel neglected" (Elder 1, 2012). The Elder would help the Aboriginal students to "schedule out for the week all the different things that he or she could do to maintain that relationship" (Elder 1, 2012).

Elders also establish a supportive relationship with Aboriginal students. An Aboriginal support staff stated "my first year at university wasn't successful and it wasn't really around academically being able to do the work, it was on leaving my community, I was raised closely around my grandparents" (support staff 1, 2012). The person shared that they went to another university at that time that had Elders on campus. The Elders were comforting, nurturing, told

stories, and had a sense of humor. Another support staff stated the importance of the relationship with an Elder, "I think for me the biggest thing is that Elders are there to teach us and remind us of who we are, and where we come from, and about things that are important, and I think they keep us honest and aren't afraid to give us shit when we need it" (support staff 2, 2012). It was also shared that "when other students are around Elders, they are more respectful, they're treating other students with respect, right, they're respecting themselves, so it brings a different dynamic to the house where everyone is looking after each other" (support staff 1, 2012). As well, Elders help with establishing a community relationship and dynamic:

> When you think about community, there's kids, little kids here on campus at the daycare, you have your mature students, you have your students coming out of high school, so when you think about community, Elders are the next piece, right, the next piece that would be missing if everybody else is here on campus. (support staff 1, 2012).

As well that the relationship the Elder forms with a student carries on beyond the university with Elders running into students in the community, "I've met them in other areas where ceremonies were happening and they often identify themselves and thank me for being really firm with them and being honest with them" (Elder 1, 2012).

Elders also have a role to play in the classroom. An instructor shared that they see their role as a facilitator in making arrangements for an Elder to come to their class. In many cases most non-Aboriginal students have not heard or spoken to an Elder before. As a result, non-Aboriginal students have approached the Elder after the class has finished to meet with them. The instructor said that by having Elders come to their class, for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

students, “it’s a building of a relationship, you know, and something that is positive and supportive” (instructor, 2012).

An Elder shared that sometimes when they go to a class that the non-Aboriginal instructor lets them take over the whole class. This acknowledges that just as instructors have gained knowledge through their university graduate education, that Elders have also gained their own knowledge through their life experience. An Elder stated honoraria needs to take into account the distance an Elder has to travel. It was stated that another Elder who had to travel to get to the university will no longer attend as the honoraria will not even pay for their gas as most Elders are financially poor. An Elder shared that they work with several professors at the university in which they go with the class on hikes and share their Aboriginal knowledge by identifying different Aboriginal plant medicines. The Elders said that they are open and approachable for instructors to come to them if they need help in understanding and clearing up misconceptions. One person stated:

> So I kind of assume, it’s relevant for other Aboriginal people that their Elders are an important part of life, not just in an institution, but life as a whole and I really like doing things like this, but like I said sometimes, a certain thing about it, it’s a feeling, not something that can be quantified or described about, it’s just an innate thing within myself to be close and to listen to be a part of, to have my grandparents be a part of my life. (support staff 2, 2012)

Elders helping Aboriginal students are a part of the cycle of giving back to the community. Another person shared that having “an Elder on the ground … is really helpful, especially for some of our students that come a long ways, …you know, they’re used to seeing Elders and then to be here you don’t see any Elders” (Elder 1, 2013). An Elder said they may not have an

academic degree or credentials, but have received acknowledgment from their own communities for their lifelong learning and teaching. Past Canadian policies did not allow Aboriginal people to get a degree or they lost their legal Aboriginal identity as a Status Indian.

4.2.3 What is the Importance of Non-Academic Services at a University for Aboriginal Students? What Do You Think Aboriginal Students Need Help with at a University? What is the Importance of Having the Gathering Place for Aboriginal Students?

The Gathering Place is a house where support for Aboriginal students is provided and is also a work place for Aboriginals students at Thompson Rivers University. A support staff shared about the Gathering house, "it's the one stop shop, you can get it all there" (support staff 1, 2012). It was stated that the Gathering Place served the important function of helping Aboriginal students to maintain contact with their band by phone, email and fax. It was also seen as a place to go for help such as when a child is desparately sick, as "you wouldn't be able to go to admissions or whatever, old main and talk to somebody. I don't see that type of help available [anywhere else]" (Elder 1, 2012). It was shared that the Gathering Place staff already have established important educational contacts in the various Aboriginal communities. The Gathering Place is a place for students to study and "it's just a real welcoming place, if you're not necessarily seeking help right away or if you don't have the courage, I think it's a place for people [to] feel very comfortable and at ease" (support staff 2, 2012). Another support staff stated that at the Gathering Place:

> There are many different facets that are covered by the people that are there, it would be sad not to have that as a resource for Aboriginal students, especially if it makes them successful and I think that is what the place is about and having the Elders there

> is to create an environment that will allow our people to be successful no matter where they go. (support staff 1, 2012)

An additional comment was that "I find that being at the Gathering Place bridges more students to access [other] services [at the university]" (support staff 1, 2012). People shared how the Gathering Place served as space to help build a positive and strong identity for Aboriginal students. It was also seen as an important place for students to connect with other Aboriginal students, especially for those students that have moved away from their community. The Gathering Place has grown and has also been changed to create a "dynamic to the house where everyone is looking after each other" (Elder 2, 2012). Overall, the Gathering Place was seen as a space that created a sense of community and family that bridges students to access other services at the university and in the community.

An instructor said that Aboriginal students might benefit from a cohort model. The cohort model was a program that "students highly evaluated … and that means the same students are staying together and they get to know one another" (instructor 1, 2012). Students at a huge post-secondary institutions like Stanford University have highly rated the cohort model. The instructor later shared after the talking circle about the work of Darling-Hammond. The cohort model leads to relationships that serve as a family while students are away from their communities. The instructor also shared:

> I see myself more as a mentor and if [student name] has a bunch of ideas and brought a whole bunch of things to this relationship that I wasn't aware of, you know so I think that's part of it too, you know it's like, where we can help out. (instructor 1, 2012)

A support staff emphasized, “the equality of working together rather than that hierarchy” (support staff 1, 2012).

4.2.4 What is the importance of Aboriginal student relationships with faculty and what recommendations do you have for faculty in building those relationships with Aboriginal students?

An instructor talked about the need for instructors to intiate the process of getting to know students by reaching out to Aboriginal students. It was shared that instructors before the beginning of a class can reach out to Aboriginal students by asking their name and where they are from to make a connection. It was identified that the instructor needs to reach and “not wait for the students too initiate, because they just won’t” (instructor 1, 2012). Further to this a suppport staff said that some Aboriginal students are too “timid to approach an instructor or to get service and that was my experience here” (support staff 1, 2012). Establishing relationships helped to “feeling comfortable about my surrounding and having that community” (support staff 1, 2012). An Elder shared that it was significant that the “past president and the president now say this is Secwepemc territory” (Elder 2, 2012).

The university has held and sponsored a tiny tot powwow in which university administrators learned about smudging with sage at the first powwow. Initially there was no support for the powwow based upon misconceptions, as it was believed by some university administrators that:

> Oh my God, they’re going to make a fire, so he got excited and got all the faculty and some of the other administration together and we had to, some of us went up there to explain to him what really a smudge was, you know, burning sage, he thought we were going to make a fire in the middle of the gym. (Elder 2, 2012)

Cultural sensitivity is also practiced by Aboriginal peoples by not smudging indoors at times.

4.2.5 Is there anything that instructors need to take into consideration when there is a death in an Aboriginal community and the students need to go to the funeral?

People in the talking circle were asked about the experiences of Aboriginal students with death and funerals in Aboriginal communities while they had attended university. An Elder started with a cultural conception of death in the Aboriginal community as "to go to the spirit world is our main goal you know … in a cultural way of thinking, way of life, and knowing that helps us while living to walk your line a little straighter because what you do in this life determines what happens in the next one" (Elder 2, 2012). It was shared that for funerals for Aboriginal people, "it doesn't take like two hours or half a day, it takes four days you know and I think that if any of the faculty, or any of the people don't understand that, then I think that they should come to us" (Elder 2, 2012). A support staff said about helping Aboriginal students, "I haven't had any problem with getting extensions, an extension on an assignment or the awareness that they'll be away for a certain period of time because that student has accessed support" (support staff 1, 2012). As well, support staff have helped communicating with instructors in "educating them a little bit, then it was fine, but there hasn't really been any case in particular where it was a struggle" (support staff 1, 2012). It was also stated how the school district changed their policy when there is a death in an Aboriginal community and also made all teachers aware of the new policy. School District 73 in the Kamloops and Thompson area specifically changed their policy to address the death of a First Nation or Metis student to a culturally respectful response from the school (School District 73, 2003). This acknowledges that funerals in the Canadian community may be for only one morning or afternoon but that Aboriginal protocols for death may last longer. An Elder said "I personally see a protocol book

… where you can negotiate, once you have it written down, you can negotiate I need this time off, so, I think it's important otherwise some of our students can get into a lot of trouble" (Elder 1, 2012). Further to this the Elder thinks "that's part of retention, we loose some of our kids because of that, but now that we have counselors on staff to work with them, it's much easier, whereas three or four years ago we didn't, so it made it harder" (Elder 1, 2012). An instructor "found students who actually stayed, a lot of times, they feel guilty and they feel bad because they are not where they should be" (instructor 1, 2012) and that an Aboriginal student was better off going to the funeral ceremony, dealing with the death, and then coming back to school. As well there was the believe that Aboriginal students need to adjust to the mainstream practices, but that maybe the dominant society needs to also change their practices too. It was also acknowledged that there are now services at the university such as counselling available to help Aboriginal students cope with a death.

4.2.6 Do you think that Aboriginal students have enough financial support?

Eligible Aboriginal students that are either a Status Indian or Inuit and attend an eligible post-secondary institution may qualify for financial support. The financial support comes from Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Program through their Post-Secondary Student Support Program or through the University and College Entrance Preparation Program. It was shared that there are misconceptions about Aboriginal people concerning funding for university. It was expressed that it needed to be clarified that not all Aboriginal students get funding to attend university. An Elder commented on the finanancial misconception that "ignorance needs to be explained to them a bit, that affects the whole Native population when you think that way" (Elder 2, 2012). A support staff shared "students from my band are still getting the same amount and that was probably fifteen years ago, it hasn't inflated with the cost of tuition, books, and

living allowance right, living [cost] has almost doubled here in Kamloops" (support staff 1, 2012). As well, some Aboriginal students "work part-time which takes away from their studies, and then if you have a family, you're taking time away from your family, and you're feeling guilty about that, and you only have so many hours in a week" (support staff 1, 2012). Another support staff stated, "I think that economically speaking that it's a deciding factor whether a person is going to school or not and that sometimes depends if they are getting band funding or an alternative source of funding" (support staff 2, 2012). Another shared that when there is funding it is seen as a huge gift for Aboriginal students:

> To work really hard not to jeopardize it because it has funneled where there are more wait lists, there are more students wanting to come to school so that alone could be a little bit of a motivator and incentive, okay I got this gift, now I need to work hard to keep this gift because there's other people in line that would love to have this as well. (support staff 1, 2012)

Some students were not able to continue to complete their program due to limited finances as an Elder said "I mean most Aboriginal people don't have that kind of money. It limits what kind of education you can get whether you're qualified or capable or not" (Elder 1, 2012). Funding is not always available for Aboriginal students.

> Circumstances are also different for Aboriginal students due to family and living arrangements. An instructor shared that there is a concern especially for women, as: From my experience is Aboriginal students that I have encountered, finances have been a real problem, either it tends to be women with children and they're trying to juggle daycare, or sometimes, especially if they're splitting up with a grown partner

> and spouse, and they find all of a sudden, they got a big drop in income. (instructor 1, 2012)

A support staff also reiterated "it is a challenge for single moms" (support staff 1, 2012). There needs to be special consideration for gender and family circumstances.

Another shared that along with receiving the 'gift' of funding, that the student needs to realize it is not a lot of money and that sacrifices have to be made. A student has to manage their money, "a lot of the time with rent it's hard to make ends meet but by the same token I think … when you're a student you kind of have to suffer a little bit" (support staff 2, 2012). It was also stated that for those who were able to attend a university with their family nearby, it really helped them a lot. As for those students that are away from their home community, they do not have some of those supports. Overall, finances was seen as a huge struggle for Aboriginal students. It was also acknowledged that there are other sources of financial support with grants and bursaries available but students are not necessarily applying even when provided the information.

4.2.7 Analysis

4.2.7.1 Context of Dominant Society Interaction and Education

People shared about the context of education and how it has changed over time. The past effects the current colonial relationships as "it has important contemporary and practical implications, because many of the attitudes, institutions and practices that took shape in the past significantly influence and constrain the present" (RCAP, vol. 1, 1996, p. 31). Furthermore "it was after 1815 that the British adopted the policy of 'civilizing' the Indian as an integral part of their relationship with the Indians" (Tobias, 1976, p. 14). Civilizing entailed creation of the reserve system where Indians would "be taught to farm, and receive religious instruction and an

education" (Tobias, 1976, p. 15). The Indian Act of 1876 was introduced in Canada that was a consolidation of previous legislation. Education for Aboriginal peoples in the *Indian Act* is covered in Section 114 to 122. Section 114 (1) that states:

> 114. (1) The Governor in Council may authorize the Minister, in accordance with this Act, to enter into agreements on behalf of Her Majesty for the education in accordance with this Act of Indian children with (a) the government of a province, (b) the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, (c) the Commissioner of the Yukon Territory, (d) the Commissioner of Nunavut, (e) a public or separate school board, and (f) a religious or charitable organization. (Imai, 1998, pp. 106-107)

Educational policy was imbedded within Canadian law via the *Indian Act*. It became that "Indian policy was now firmly fixed on a national foundation based unashamedly on the notion that Indian cultures and societies were clearly inferior to settler society" (RCAP, vol.1, 1996, p. 277). In 1892 "the Government of Canada passes an order-in-council regulating the operation of Indian Residential Schools. The federal government and churches enter into a formal partnership to run a school system for Indian children" (Chansonneuv, 2005, p. 33). Education included, "first, a justification for removing children from their communities and disrupting Aboriginal families; second, a precise pedagogy for re-socializing children in the schools; and third, schemes for integrating graduates into the non-Aboriginal world" (RCAP, vol. 1, 1996, p. 277).

An Elder shared that some Aboriginal students felt attacked by the new academic information they were receiving and learning, however attending a university is a new way of life and survival. I think that Aboriginal students could have a different perspective of history that needs to be included at the university. Programs should incorporate knowledge of Indigenous history and culture (Battiste, 2002; Battiste et al., 2002; Canadian Council on

Learning, 2009; Gunn et al., 2010; Klinck et al., 2005; Kompf & Hodson, 2000; Young, 1999). I think of the example of Skookum Jim and the gold rush in Canada with two different perspectives on history. Cruikshank writes that a Canadian version of history as written by Pierre Berton (1958) that Skookum Jim, a Tagish person, had gone on a prospecting journey for gold in which he accidently found gold and that he longed to be a white man (Cruikshank, 1992). Whereas, the Tagish version of history highlights the importance of relationships and that Skookum Jim did not go looking for gold, but went to find his sister whom he had not heard from for over a year since she was married (Cruikshank, 1992). This is an example of two different perspectives on history.

The context of education has begun to change with Indian Residential Schools closing and a formal apology by the Prime Minister of Canada in 2008. It was shared that traditionally the Elders were the teachers in the communities and still are, but universities are also sites of learning. Academics may or may not realize the extent to which universities are products of colonization as:

> Universities have claimed a monopoly on what does and does not count as knowledge. To assert Indigenous knowledge research frameworks, that there is a need to critically interrogate this monopolistic knowledge enterprise. Applying a decolonizing lens prompts this action, thus becoming a quality of Indigenous research methodology. (Kovach, 2009, p. 79)

More Aboriginal people are attending and completing a postsecondary education. An example is Aboriginal women between the ages of 25 and 54 in 2001, with a 41% completion rate that increased in 2006 to 47% (Statistics Canada, 2012). Several studies conclude that more Aboriginal peoples are more successful than in the past for post-secondary education (Council of

Ministers of Education, Canada, and Statistics Canada, 2003; Embelton, 2011; Kirby, 2009; Malatest, 2004; Mendelson, 2006; Rae, 2005; Usher, 2009; Young, 1999). Education has begun to be a tool of empowerment to change the lives of Aboriginal students and their communities.

4.2.7.2 Relationships

Relationships were seen as an important aspect for Aboriginal students in completing their post-secondary education. An Elder shared how their culture and relationships have changed with the arrival of the new way of life that came across the ocean. As well, that traumas have been experienced as a result, but that Aboriginal peoples have begun to heal. The Elder talked about how there is a need to rebuild families again and that being at the university is part of building a family. Another person talked about how they help Aboriginal students to schedule time for their family. Support from family is important for Aboriginal students for post-secondary education (Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Timmons et al. 2009; Young, 1999). This is important as Aboriginal university students tend to be older and may have dependents along with other family and community responsibilities (Anonson et al., 2008; Bonnycastle & Prentice, 2011; Danziger, 1996; First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008; Holmes, 2006; Pidgeon, 2008; Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007; Usher, 2009). A support staff stated that having the different generations on campus is important in completing the relationship circle. As well, Aboriginal students have relationships with their family, community and nation.

Aboriginal students often attend university to seek a better life for themselves and for their community. However, communities can alienate Aboriginal peoples for attending post-secondary education for their perception that they are conforming to the dominant culture (Anonson et al., 2008; Hardes, 2006; Orr et al., 2008; Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000).

Alienation could be perceived in many facets such as the perception of being assimilated as a result of a university education or being ostracized by other people based on competition for employment. Other people may resent a person with a university education as they may be in better position to obtain employment in a First Nations community that has limited jobs. It is also important to note students have family and community obligations for a person that has gone to the spirit world and is required to help with a funeral ceremony. An Aboriginal instructor "found students who actually stayed, a lot of times, they feel guilty and they feel bad because they are not where they should be," (instructor 1, 2012) and students need to attend a funeral ceremony because of their relationship with that person. In the case such as a funeral, the faculty at many post-secondary institutes arrange the makeup time when possible (Anonson et al., 2008).

Relationships were seen as important in many facets and contexts. Aboriginal students turned to other Aboriginal students for support. Turning to other students could be the result of distance from one's own home and educational institution, while relocation was another identified challenge (Cowin, 2011; Critchley & Bull, 2011; Danziger, 1996; Embelton, 2011; First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008; Holmes, 2006; Mendelson, 2006; Orr et al., 2008; Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007; Timmons et al. 2009; Usher, 2009). As well, Elders helped Aboriginal students to balance the students' relationship with their children and partner. The Elders established supportive relationships with students at the university even after the student graduated. Another shared that for Aboriginal students to complete their program, there needs to be an aspect that realizes it is also not just about the individual student, "I think there's social things" (Elder 2, 2012).

Relationships are also suppported by having physical space and events. The Gathering Place at Thompson Rivers University provides a place for Aboriginal students to build relationships as a support staff stated, "I think it's a place for people [to] feel very comfortable and at ease" (support staff 2, 2012). Aboriginal students will access the Gathering Place and get to know one another across programs as "students I see like the Gathering Place, when I go there, I see a lot of the same students, like there's a lot of different students are coming there, but there is a lot of the same students when you go there" (instructor 1, 2012). A support staff found "that being at the Gathering Place bridges more students to access services" (support staff 1, 2012). The Gathering Place staff have already established relationships with Aboriginal community educational departments. The Gathering Place was seen as a place where Aboriginal students can feel good about being an Aboriginal person.

It was also important for instructors to reach out for the initial contact and establish relationships with Aboriginal students. Especially when, "non-Indigenous scholars have a role in mentoring Indigenous researchers on the intellectual aspects of academia related to its operational requirements (e.g., research and knowledge)" (Kovach, 2010, p. 170). Aboriginal instructors are a minority and can be scarce at universities. As a result, Aboriginal students may seek out non-Aboriginal instructors that are supportive of their learning journey. Relationships between students and instructors are seen as an important source of support (Embelton, 2011; Hardes, 2006; Looker & Lowe, 2001; Madgett & Belanger, 2008; Pidgeon, 2008; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Timmons et al., 2009; University of Victoria, 2008; Verjee, 2003; Young, 1999). Instructors needed to intiate the process by reaching out to Aboriginal students. An instructor shared that before the beginning of a class, an instructor can reach out to Aboriginal students by asking their name and where they are from to make a connection. It was identified that the

instructor needs to reach out as it may be too awkward for an Aboriginal student and it will not just unfold on its own. Some Aboriginal students are too timid as they have moved from a small community to the university, which seems to be such a huge environment.

4.2.7.3 Mentors and Cohorts

Related to relationships are cohorts and the role of mentors in helping Aboriginal students to completing their post-secondary education. An Elder shared that sometimes they will be approached by an Aboriginal student who is in academic distress and will refer them to a mentor to help guide them in that subject area. Culturally, mentorship has played an important role as an Elder stated that there is the "responsibility to make sure that the ones below is learning what he learned, … and our sharing and our giving, you know, our helping one another" (Elder 2, 2012). An instructor shared, "I see myself more as a mentor and [student name] has a bunch of ideas, and brought a whole bunch of things to this relationship that I wasn't aware of, you know, so I think that's part of it too, you know it's like, where we can help out" (instructor 1, 2012). Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal instructors can see themselves as a mentor but also have a reciprocal relationship where a student also brings their ideas to the relationship. Relationships with other students and instructors was shared as importance aspect of Aboriginal student retention. Another person shared that for Aboriginal students, mentorship is not about competing with one another for better marks but is about sharing and helping one another as a community of Aboriginal students.

An instructor shared that Aboriginal students might benefit from a cohort model. The cohort model allows students to build relationships and mentor one another for support. Students at a huge post-secondary institution like Stanford have highly rated the cohort model. Follow-up with the person shared about the work of Darling-Hammond who states that "cohorts of

beginning teachers get a richer, more coherent learning experience when they are organized in teams to study and practice with these faculty and with one another" (Darling-Hammond, 1999, p. 232). The cohort model leads to relationships that serve as a family while students are away from their communities. Cohort groups allow for stronger social and interpersonal relationships (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; Scribner & Donaldson, 2001). As well, another person shared that sometimes Aboriginal students are absent from their classes due to life circumstances and that they need the extra help to get caught up in their academic work. Aboriginal students can also help other Aboriginal students in applying for grants and bursaries.

Thompson Rivers University started their mentorship program for the fall 2012 and winter 2013 academic school year. Fifteen Aboriginal students in their senior year of studies were chosen and supported with an honorarium to mentor first year Aboriginal students. This program is supported by a part-time Aboriginal Mentor coordinator that works in the Gathering Place. The Aboriginal mentors also help with an Aboriginal student orientation and other Aboriginal events held throughout the year. Benefits so far include include identifiable Aboriginal students that can assist other Aboriginal students who previously had to try and identify persons themselves. In addition, Aboriginal students are able to further develop relationships with other Aboriginal students.

4.2.7.4 Role of Elders

I start with a definition of the term 'Elder.' According to the Assembly of First Nations, an Elder:

> Is a term that has come to mean many different things to Elders themselves. It may mean frail elderly or it may signify wisdom and experience and/or spiritual knowledge; it may define a state of being to achieve. The term Elder rather than

> senior celebrates the vitality, knowledge, experience and positive contribution of our Nation's Elders to our common future (Assembly of First Nations, 2007, p. 21).

Getting older "from a First Nations cultural perspective, aging is part of a cycle of life, a natural process that culminates in old age and finally passing to the spirit world" (Assembly of First Nations, 2007, p. 6). Thompson Rivers University has an Elders in Residence program in which there are four different Elders that work for the university on a rotating schedule in which there is one Elder in the Gathering Place for each weekday. Elders are an important part of an Aboriginal community.

People shared that the role of Elders was important for Aboriginal students in the completion of their post-secondary education. Elders, as stated earlier, help Aboriginal students with balancing their family relationships. For those Aboriginal students traveling to go to university, they are used to seeing Elders in their community, so it is natural to have them as a source of nurturing and guidance at a university. A support staff shared that when they first went to university they were not successful. It was not about academic issues, but that that they had left their community where they were raised close to their grandparents. So they actually went to another university that had Elders on campus to complete their education. Elders also help in establishing a positive self-identity. A person shared in the talking circle about the importance of stories that help to explain who a person is and where they belong so that they can walk proudly and hold their heads up because of their Aboriginal contribution to the world. It was also stated with increased self-confidence, Aboriginal students feel that they could complete their education and to continue on their educational journey to attend other educational institutions.

Elders serve as teachers in the classroom for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. An instructor said that they see their role as a facilitator in making arrangements for an Elder to come to their class. The instructor noted:

> For the students I'm thinking Aboriginal students, but I'm thinking non-Aboriginal students too, when one of the Elders comes into the classes …, they are more attentive, they are just like what's going to happen you know and it's like, I can just feel, it's a comfort and a interest. (instructor 1, 2012)

As a result, non-Aboriginal students have approached the Elder after the class has finished to meet with them. As an Elder shared about other Elders regarding honoraria, "one or two won't come because fifty dollars won't even pay for their gas to get here … and that's his reason for not coming" (Elder 2, 2012). It is an unfortunate reality that "many First Nations seniors appear to be living at or below the poverty line" (Assembly of First Nations, 2007, p. 13). An Elder said that they work with several professors at the university in which they go with the class on hikes and share their Aboriginal knowledge by identifying different Aboriginal plant medicines. Faculty and staff need to learn more about Aboriginal cultures to raise their own cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity (Anderson et al., 2004; Danziger, 1996; Gunn et al., 2010; Hardes, 2006; Holmes, 2006; Hogue, 2012; Kompf & Hodson, 2000; Orr et al., 2008; Pidgeon, 2008; University of Victoria, 2008; Verjee, 2003; Young, 1999). The Elders stated that they are open and approachable for instructors to come to them if they need help in understanding and clearing up misconceptions.

Cultural activities was another theme that arose but was never directly asked as a research question. Elders have encouraged Aboriginal students on their healing journey to participate in ceremonies "to cement them back into who they truly are," (Elder 1, 2012) that can include

attending a sweatlodge. As well, the Elder encouraged families to have their own talking circles to help them with their family communication. Elders attend the welcome feast that is held at the beginning of the acadmic year in September and a winter feast that is held in December for Aboriginal students. Stories are told to Aboriginal students by Elders to help them learn about their identity and to non-Aboriginal students to help them learn more about Aboriginal peoples. Also talking circles have been held with Elders and students in the past to help them maintain their balance while studying at university. Past Canadian policies did not allow Aboriginal people to get a degree or they lost their legal Aboriginal identity as a Status Indian.

4.2.7.5 Financial Support

It was shared in the talking circle that there are misconceptions about Aboriginal people concerning funding for university. It was expressed that it needed to be clarified that not all Aboriginal students get funding to attend university. An Elder commented on the finanancial misconception that "ignorance needs to be explained to them a bit, that affects the whole Native population when you think that way" (Elder 2, 2012). It was shared that for those students who do get funding from their band, they are getting the same amount as from 15 years ago, despite the cost of inflation of tuition, books, rent, and food for example. Some Aboriginal students are working part-time and that takes away from studies and their families, in which they feel guilty about taking time away from their families. Another person shared that their friend wanted to become a doctor, but could not because they did not have the funds. An instructor stated that based upon their experiences, that finanaces for university is a real problem. Especially for women with children or if partners that have separated, there is a huge drop in income. Another shared concern was for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students is the rising cost of tuition. With many Aboriginal families living in poverty, they do not have the money to attend university.

Funding for Aboriginal students is an issue for students to completing their post-secondary education. A support staff shared that "I think that economically speaking that ya, that it's a deciding factor whether a person is going to school or not and that sometimes depends if they're getting band funding or an alternative source of funding" (support staff 2, 2012). The educational living allowance for band funding has not kept up with the rate of inflation (Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007). Another support staff shared that when there is funding it is seen as a huge gift for Aboriginal students. Overall, finances was seen as an issue for Aboriginal students.

4.3 Summary

The talking circle provided a method for all to equally share and was openly accepted and welcomed by all participating people. People shared about the context of education and how it has changed over time. Aboriginal students going to university is seen as a new way of life. Aboriginal identify was seen as being important and that with increased self-confidence, students can continue on their educational journey to complete their program and perhaps continue on with further studies.

The support of relationships was important with an Aboriginal community of support on campus for students. Relationships included all generations from children to Elders. The Elders in Residence program at the university was seen as very important in helping Aboriginal students in balancing their relationships. The Gathering Place serves as a space to help facilitate and support relationships at the university. Instructors were seen as having an important role by reaching out and intiaiting relationships with Aboriginal students

Relationships were also seen as important with Aboriginal students serving as mentors and cohorts with other Aboriginal students. Mentors can help students in academic distress. As well,

culturally, mentorship has been part of the local Aboriginal culture. Instructors serve as mentors to students with a mutual exchange of ideas. Cohorts can help facilitate a network of mutual support and encouragement with other students

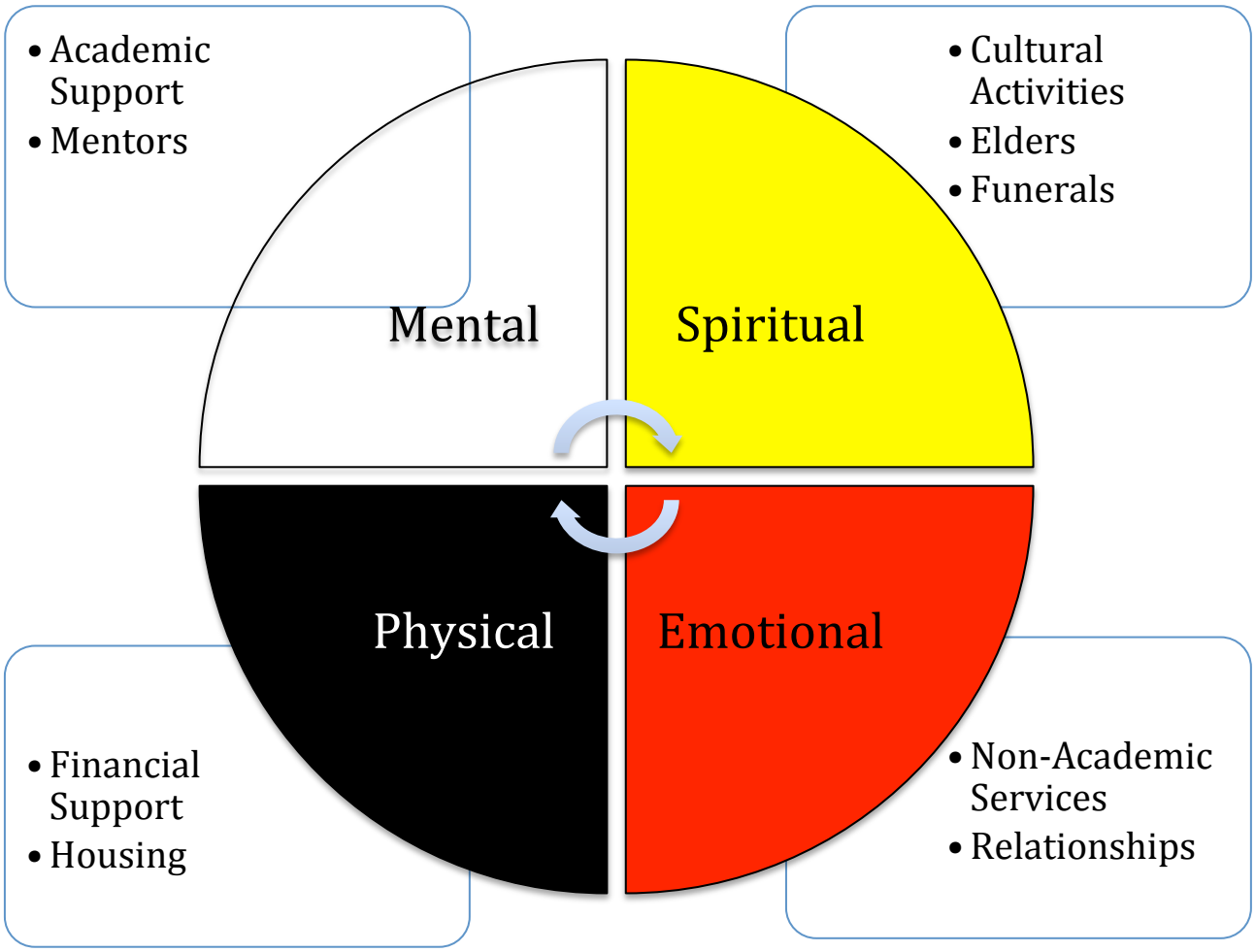
Elders have an important role in supporting Aboriginal students in completing their education. Elders serve as frontline workers in helping to guide students to services. Elders help with relationships between students and their familes. Elders help foster a positive self-identity in students. Elders help to faciliate cultural activities on and off campus. Elders help to educate Aboriginal students, non-Aboriginal students, Aboriginal instructors, and non-Aboriginal instructors.

Funding was also identified in the talking circle as a concern for Aboriginal students. Some, not all Aboriginal students, may be eligible for post-secondary funding if they are either a Status Indian or Inuit. For those that are eligible for funding it is seen as a special 'gift' even though the funding has had a funding cap. The funding cap of 2% has not corresponded with the increased cost of living. Specifically it was shared that Aboriginal women with children, or if partners have separated, experience financial hardships while attending university. However, Aboriginal students are also working part-time to support their educational journey. Aboriginal students are also able to apply for scholarships such as through Indspire.

About Elders helping Aboriginal students when they return to their communities,"it's not that they disrespect the learning that the student did, but it's how to balance all of that knowledge, so that the world they present and walk into, will be a little bit more balanced" (Elder 1, 2012).

Chapter Five: Anaylsis and Discussion

Figure 5.1. Medicine Wheel Holistic Analysis



5.1 Mental

The mental aspect of the medicine wheel includes the cognitive and intellectual aspects of Aboriginal student retention. The survey data provides some insight. Seventy-six percent of Aboriginal students Agreed and Strongly Agreed that the university supported them to succeed academically. The survey could also be biased as the students that did not do well academically, may have weeded themselves out of university and as a result were not available to take the

survey. Sixteen percent Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed that the university gave them the support to succeed academically, and 7% were undecided (see Figure 4.3). This identified gap of 23% indicates that students could benefit from getting academic help from the university. Sixty-nine percent Agreed and Strongly Agreed that they had the writing skills to complete university programs. However, 23% Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed and 11% were undecided (see Figure 5.4). Thirty-one percent could, perhaps benefit by getting help with their writing skills.

Completion of high school is a barrier to post-secondary education for Aboriginal peoples (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Holmes, 2006; Kirby, 2009; Malatest, 2004; Mendelson, 2006; Orr et al., 2008; Preston, 2008; Vedan et al., 2010). The 2001 Canadian Census demonstrated the high school completion gap, "among the population 15 years and over 48.0 percent of Aboriginal people have less than a high school graduation certificate compared to 30.8 percent of the non-Aboriginal population" (White, Spence, & Maxim, 2005, p. 66). As well "reserve and remote schools typically do not offer the academic preparation required to succeed in post-secondary studies (Malatest, 2004, p. 12). I used to live in a remote northern Alberta community in which the high school courses needed to attend university were not always offered. In British Columbia I have heard from an Aboriginal student that this is also the case, in which there are not enough students to offer all of the science courses of biology, chemistry, and physics in some communities. High school students may have had inadequate academic preparation from programs for entry into post-secondary institutions (Anonson et al., 2008; Embelton, 2011; First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008; Hardes, 2006; Holmes, 2006; Orr et al., 2008; Pidgeon, 2008; Preston, 2008; RCAP, vol. 3, 1996; Timmons et al., 2009; Usher, 2009; Vedan et al., 2010). Perhaps the identified gap of 23% for academic help and 31%

for writing skills could correspond with inadequate academic preparation before attending university.

Additional academic help is needed as Aboriginal university students tend to be older and may have dependents along with other family and community responsibilities (Anonson et al., 2008; Bonnycastle & Prentice, 2011; Danziger, 1996; First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008; Holmes, 2006; Pidgeon, 2008; Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007; Usher, 2009). High school completion is one factor, but I would further add, that even if a student completes high school, it does not mean that the student is academically prepared for university. A student's high school marks do not mean that they are academically prepared for university. An Aboriginal student could choose to take an academic placement assessment to better assess if they are academically prepared for university. Aboriginal students could also have the academic requirements to be admitted to a university, but the fact that they are older means they may have been out of school for an extended period. Those surveyed had an average age of 32.58 years (SD = 9.256). This is support by the literature review that Aboriginal student's tend to be older (Anonson et al., 2008; Bonnycastle & Prentice, 2011; Danziger, 1996; First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008; Holmes, 2006; Pidgeon, 2008; Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007; Usher, 2009). Academic placement assessment can help assess a students academics strengths and areas that need academic assistance. Depending on the extent of needed academic assistance, there could be a need for preparatory programs to help prepare students for the demands of a post-secondary education (Danziger, 1996; Hardes, 2006; Schwartz & Ball, 2001). Other research has identified that "consultants KPMG found Manitoba's access programs have been very successful in improving Aboriginal participation in

postsecondary education" (Malatest, 2004, p. 24). Access programs to help Aboriginal students can be one aspect that Aboriginal students do not necessarily need to be in a full-time access program. Aboriginal students could benefit from an academic refresher course in specific areas identified by an academic placement assessment. An Aboriginal student may need help with sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, math, sciences, study skills, finding research articles, and to the structure of an academic essay. Each university will need to determine if an access program is needed.

The next step on the educational journey is that an Aboriginal student is in an academic program at the university. While presenting a mock defense of my thesis at a conference, I was asked about what would I say if a student had failed all of their courses in an access program for the first year. As well, the Aboriginal student had begged the access coordinator to be able to return for another year of studies and was allowed to return. The student failed their second year also and had made a written complaint about the access coordinator that he should have not been allowed to return. The student was angry, as he had used up some of his limited number of years of funded studies. I was initially stumped but remembered parts of my literature review. It should also be noted that Aboriginal students have also left university to change schools or programs (Parkin & Baldwin, 2008). Changing programs or institutes was attributed to a lack of interest in their studies or the program not meeting their expectations (Parkin & Baldwin, 2008). As well, Aboriginal peoples may need more flexibility to complete their post-secondary education (Embelton, 2011; Hardes, 2006; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Timmons et al., 2009). Many Aboriginal students are either institutional *stop outs* that withdraw from an institution for a period of time or withdraw from one institution to later enroll in another, or return to their

original institution (Hardes, 2006; Pidgeon, 2008). This leads to a need for more information from students to identify program changes or withdraw.

I think of my own case where I too left a university over fifteen years ago and returned to find a program that had a better fit for my area of undergraduate interest, social work. There could be a need for educational counselling for Aboriginal students. As well, in my studies at three Canadian universities, I became friends with another Aboriginal student. She was told at the end of the first year of her academic program, that she had failed all of her courses and was required to withdraw from the university. My reaction was what and when did the university do to help identify a student in need of academic help? Universities need to be able to identify Aboriginal students in need of academic help and to have an academic intervention. The university needs to identify what can be done to help the student to complete their courses in a timely manner and not wait until the end of the academic year. Issues with students can be academic such as not understanding the course material, to academic course overload by taking too many courses. Issues may also be social such as family responsibilities or a death in the community. For those students, when it is too late for an academic intervention, an exit interview could be done in a respectful manner to help identify any issues as to why the student did not succeed academically. As well, to provide guidance as to how they can return to the same university or resume their studies at another university.

Many Aboriginal students are doing quite well in their academic studies at a university and could serve as mentors to other students. Personal mentorship is used as a retention strategy at some post-secondary institutes (Anonson et al., 2008; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Danziger, 1996; Gunn et al., 2010; Hardes, 2006; Hogue, 2012; Klinck et al., 2005; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Timmons et al. 2009; University of Victoria, 2008; Vedan et al., 2010; Verjee, 2003).

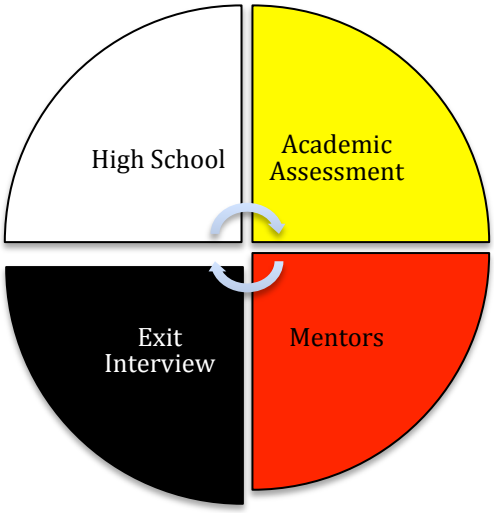
The stronger academic students can serve to help one another as mentors to the ones that feel they need academic help. Culturally, mentorship has played an important role as an Elder shared that there is the "responsibility to make sure that the ones below is learning what he learned, … and our sharing and our giving, you know our helping one another" (Elder 2, 2012). Mentorship programs need to take into account that many Aboriginal students are not able to take part as mentors as they are busy with their own and extended families (Klinck et al., 2005). Financial support of mentors was seen as being important for sustainability (Klinck et al., 2005; University of Victoria, 2008).

Thompson Rivers University has started its first Aboriginal mentorship program for the fall 2012 and winter 2013 academic year. Fifteen Aboriginal mentors are provided with a honoraria at the end of each semester. As the program grows, mentor coordinators will need to be provided with appropriate training and support (Klinck et al., 2005). It is important to have an organic program based upon the students needs but it also needs to be structured and organized. Some mentors have resigned from the program. Students that are doing well academically may not have the time during certain parts of the school year or could have other responsibilities. I would go beyond mentors as current students and include alumni from each academic discipline to assist Aboriginal students.

The mental aspect of the medicine wheel of Aboriginal student completion of a university program in summary has several aspects. Aboriginal students have identified that they need academic help including help with their writing skills. High school completion is an issue but also ensuring that an Aboriginal student is academically prepared to attend university. High school marks do not necessarily provide an accurate assessment but may require an academic placement assessment. Access programs have been proven to help Aboriginal students but each

university will need to assess if it is needed. A student might move onto another program or university to complete their studies. Mentorship programs can be developed that use other Aboriginal students or alumni.

Figure 5.2. Academic Stages for Support



5.2 Spiritual

The spiritual aspect of the medicine wheel of Aboriginal student retention includes cultural activities, Elders, and cultural sensitivity from the university. A significant number of Aboriginal students, (79%) Agreed and Strongly Agreed that more cultural activities would help them at university. This is supported by other research that Aboriginal cultural events are important for the success of Aboriginal peoples in post-secondary education (Anonson et al., 2008; Currie et al., 2011; Embelton, 2011; Hardes, 2006; Kompf & Hodson, 2000; Malatest, 2004; RCAP, vol. 3, 1996; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Vedan et al., 2010). Aboriginal students "must maintain their cultural integrity to be successful within and outside of their own communities" (Pidgeon, 2008, p. 343). This 'cultural integrity' was evident when it was shared

in the talking circle about when some social work students completed their education and they were helped with the transition back to their community by the Elders. Programs should incorporate knowledge of Indigenous history and culture (Battiste, 2002; Battiste et al., 2002; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Gunn et al., 2010; Klinck et al., 2005; Kompf & Hodson, 2000; Young, 1999). Cultural activities was another theme that arose too from the talking circle, and despite the fact that it was never directly asked as a question, the concept converges with the survey results. It was shared in the talking circle that there are cultural activites taking place at the university such as powwows, smudging, feasts and talking circles. However, people from both the survey and talking circle expressed the need for more cultural activities at the university. It is also not certain as to what more cultural activities should be, as there is a diversity of Aboriginal student cultures attending the university. Cultural activities also serve to build relationships with students, suppport staff, instructors, and administrators.

Sixty-five percent of those surveyed Agreed and Strongly Agreed that more access to Elders on campus would help them to succeed. Fifteen percent Disagreed and 20% were undecided (see Figure 4.6). This is supported by other research that the recruitment of Aboriginal Elders is important for the success of Aboriginal peoples in post-secondary education (Anonson et al., 2008; Ball, 2004; Battiste, 2002; Battiste et al., 2002; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Embelton, 2011; Evans et al., 2000; Gunn et al., 2010; Hardes, 2006; Holmes, 2006; Hogue, 2012; Kirkness, 1999; Kompf & Hodson, 2000; Malatest, 2004; Orr et al., 2008; Preston, 2008; RCAP, vol. 3, 1996; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Timmons, et al. 2009; University of Victoria, 2008; Verjee, 2003; Young, 1999). Elders can be used as teachers or guest speakers in classrooms, help develop culturally appropriate curriculum and methods, provide cultural awareness, and provide social and emotional support for students.

Elders play a vital role in the success of Aboriginal students and it is no surprise that more access to Elders on campus would help them to succeed after hearing about their role in the talking circle. It was shared that Elders are there to teach and remind Aboriginal students of where they come from and serve a nurturing role. Elders also serve as frontline workers that help guide, support, and encourage the students. Students turn to the Elders who they trust in times of crisis and help make referrals to other services. Elders help students but also have a role in the classroom. Elders share their knowledge with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. The Elders play an important role in sharing their stories in which there are "stories they've learned, they've sufferd through…, until finally some literature has been written about it and finally it's valuable now" (Elder 2, 2012). Faculty and staff need to learn more about Aboriginal cultures to raise their own cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity (Anderson et al., 1996; Gunn et al., 2010; Hardes, 2006; Holmes, 2006; Hogue, 2012; Kompf & Hodson, 2000; Orr et al., 2008; Pidgeon, 2008; University of Victoria, 2008; Verjee, 2003; Young, 1999). One Elder expressed that they have worked with several professors and departments at the university, except for the English department as they shared: "I think sometimes I forget my English where it's not quite on par for working here" (Elder 1, 2012). Elders can help to educate university staff about Aboriginal culture and protocols.

It was noted in the talking circle that Aboriginal support staff served as an important bridge between Aboriginal students and instructors when a death has occurred in the students family or community. It was shared that for funerals for Aboriginal people, "it doesn't take like two hours or half a day, it takes four days you know and I think that if any of the faculty, or any of the people don't understand that, then I think that they should come to us" (Elder 2, 2012). Another participant shared that support staff have also helped to talk to the Aboriginal student's

instructors. An Elder recommended the need for an Aboriginal policy dealing with funerals as the Elder shared "I personally see a protocol book … where you can negotiate, once you have it written down, you can negotiate I need this time off, so, I think it's important otherwise some of our students can get into a lot of trouble" (Elder 1, 2012). Universities need to develop a policy that is culturally sensitive for a death in an Aboriginal community.

The spiritual aspect of the medicine wheel of Aboriginal student completion of a university program in summary has several aspects. Aboriginal students have identified that they want more cultural activities. As well as increased access to Elders that could either mean more Elders added to the Elders in Residence program or increasing the current time for the Elders already on campus. Elders could assist with cultural activities and educating university staff about Aboriginal funeral ceremonies.

5.3 Emotional

Figure 5.3. Circle of Relationships

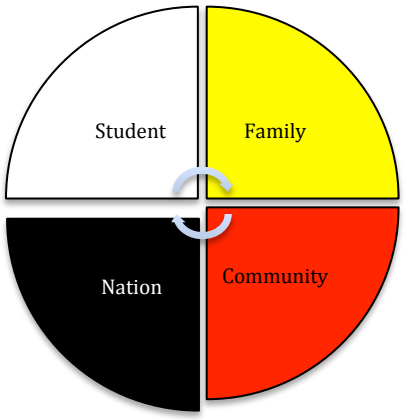
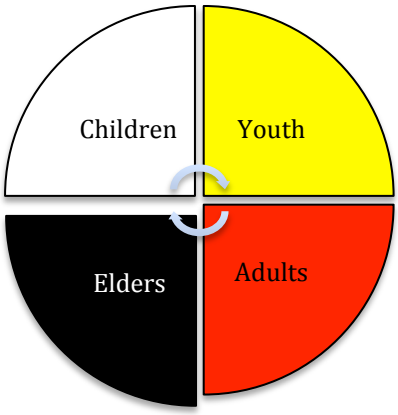


Figure 5.4. Intergenerational Relationships at University



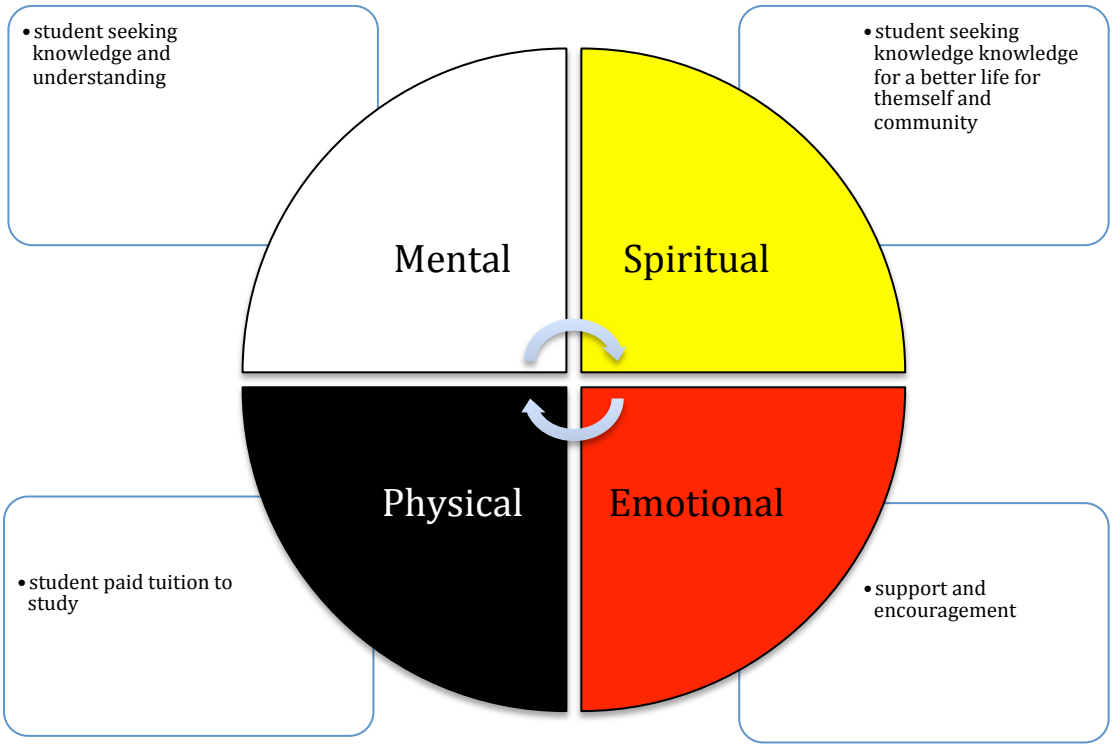
The emotional aspect of the medicine wheel of Aboriginal student retention includes relationships that were seen as an important aspect for Aboriginal students completing their

university program in the survey and talking circle. Relationships between students and instructors are seen as an important source of support (Embelton, 2011; Hardes, 2006; Looker & Lowe, 2001; Madgett & Belanger, 2008; Pidgeon, 2008; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Timmons et al., 2009; University of Victoria, 2008; Verjee, 2003; Young, 1999). Eighty-three percent Agreed and Strongly Agreed that they have or have had a good relationship with the faculty at the university. Two percent Strongly Disagreed and 15% were undecided (see Figure 4.7). University instructors can be allies and mentors with Aboriginal students while they are studying at the university. It was noted in the talking circle the instructors need to initiate the relationship with students as Aboriginal students can be timid. It was also shared in the talking circle that the Gathering Place was seen as a positive and safe environment for Aboriginal students. Perhaps instructors can reach out and attend the feasts that are held at the Gathering Place at the beginning of the academic year and in December to help facilitate further relationship building. Relationships also are important between Aboriginal students and instructors as outlined according to the medicine wheel (see Figure 5.5). The recruitment of Aboriginal faculty is important for the success of Aboriginal peoples in post-secondary education (Hogue, 2012; Holmes, 2006; Kompf & Hodson, 2000; Malatest, 2004; Orr et al., 2008; Preston, 2008; RCAP, vol.3, 1996; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Verjee, 2003). The university needs to focus on establishing recruitment strategies in hiring Aboriginal faculty. Good relationships could also be attributed that Thompson Rivers University is a university with 13, 914 students for the 2011-2012 academic year with smaller class sizes (Thompson Rivers University, 2012).

It is important for faculty to establish relationships with Aboriginal students but they must be respectful relationships. As faculty could be using the Aboriginal student to gain access to an Aboriginal community for their own research gain. Universities will need to establish protocols

to address such concerns of Aboriginal students and communities. An example could be to have an Aboriginal community member to be a member of Thompson Rivers University's research ethics committee. Faculty can be indifferent and not realize that like other students, Aboriginal students may need special consideration at times like attending funeral ceremonies. Faculty can also be allies with Aboriginal students. Faculty can be doing research with Aboriginal communities and not on Aboriginal communities. This relates to my opening story of the Ojibway people who were told of the coming of the light-skinned people. They were told that they would either come with a face of brotherhood, with an open hand of sharing their knowledge or a hand armed with a weapon of colonization. Faculty are needed to be allies with Aboriginal students and communities to help "to restore balance, justice and good health to our lands and our peoples and to have good relations with settler governments and peoples based on respect" (Simpson, 2011, p. 87).

Figure 5.5. Importance of Instructors Need to Build a Relationship with Aboriginal Students



Ninety-one percent of those surveyed Agreed and Strongly Agreed that they have or have had a good relationship with other students at the university. Six percent Disagreed and 4% were undecided. Peer relationships are important to reduce or eliminate alienation reported in past research as a social barrier (Cherubini, 2012; Cowin, 2011; Danziger, 1996; Embelton, 2011; Mendelson, 2006; Orr et al., 2008; Schwartz & Ball, 2001). Again it seems that from the talking circle that the Gathering Place serves as an important space for Aboriginal students to study, but also as a place for friendship and support. Aboriginal students are not necessarily in a cohort program together, but the Gathering Place creates a place where students in diverse academic studies gather to serve as a cohort that supports one another. The majority (91%) are in agreement that Aboriginal students have or have had a good relationships with others students.

This was also supported in the talking circle that being at the university is part of building a family. As well there is the holisitic intergenerational acknowledgment:

> When you think about community, there's kids, little kids here on campus at the daycare, you have your mature students, you have your students coming out of high school, so when you think about community, Elders are the next piece, right, the next piece that would be missing if everybody else is here on campus. (support staff 1, 2012) (see Figure 5.4)

Student relationships serve as a surrogate family for support especially for those students that have had to move away from their community.

Non-academic services at a university provide emotional support for Aboriginal students to complete their program. Support from the university to help students cope with non-academic issues had a diverse result of findings from the survey. Forty-two percent of Aboriginal students Agreed and Strongly Agreed that the university helped them to cope with non-academic issues. Thirty-one percent Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed, and 27% were undecided. Only 42% of survey results support the conclusion that counselling and support staff are important for the success of Aboriginal peoples in post-secondary education (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Danziger, 1996; Embelton, 2011; Gunn et al., 2010; Hardes, 2006; Holmes, 2006; Hogue, 2012; Kompf & Hodson, 2000; Malatest, 2004; Preston, 2008; RCAP, vol. 3, 1996; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Timmons et al., 2009; Verjee, 2003). Non-academic services could include support for: sexual abuse, drug and alcohol dependency, suicide, career counselling, housing assistance, funding, scholarships, and advocacy. However, the question asked about non-academic issues but there is no clear definition, only the possible context provided of the example of 'family'. This question can be interpreted differently as a result from each Aboriginal student's

perspective. Different perspectives can have this question relate to several non-academic issues such as the Gathering Place services, transportation concerns, medical and health services on campus, recreational and athletic facilities, career and employment services or personal counseling.

A number of Aboriginal students Disagreed, Strongly Disagreed, or were Undecided (58%) that the services helped them. I think that this discrepancy can be attributed to the fact that Aboriginal students may not realize the extent and availability of services to help them succeed at university. So the services might be available to support Aboriginal students, but the student needs to initiate contact with support staff. Support staff can make an effort to help students, but the student also needs to make an effort. An example is that students are provided information on scholarships, but the work of applying for the scholarship must be done by the student.

Aboriginal students may have several reasons as to why they feel that the university did not help them to cope with non-academic issues. Support services have helped Aboriginal students succeed at university, but this is not always recognized in the everyday life of students. An example is when Aboriginal students are talking about relationship challenges in their life and are getting help about making time for their partner or child, they may not realize they are getting emotional and social support from support staff. It is also means the student may disagree with non-academic services such as when an Elder spiritually "knocks them between the eyeballs" (Elder 1, 2012) concerning addictions issues. There are also non-academic issues that university staff cannot help with, such as when some Aboriginal students feel guilty about university studies taking time away from their family, knowing that the short term sacrifice could help them in the longer term. Aboriginal students may also feel uncomfortable at university as they may be the first ones in their family to attend university. As well, a student may have an emotional

unease as they want to complete their university education for a better life for themselves and their community, but the Aboriginal community may perceive the Aboriginal student as giving into the dominant societies values and beliefs. Especially when many Aboriginal students report that they want to use their education to help their own communities (Battiste, 2004; Danziger, 1996; Pidgeon & Hardy Cox, 2002).

As well, Aboriginal students may have taken for granted that a physical space is provided to them through the Gathering Place. A support staff shared that when they first went to university they were not successful, but it was not about academic issues, it was that they had left their community. It was also shared that the Gathering Place helped students to develop a sense of community and family at the university. Sometimes it is not necessarily about support staff only, but making a space for Aboriginal students to gather and support another. The Gathering Place as mentioned earlier serves as a one stop shop for Aboriginal services. However, it was also mentioned that Aboriginal students can be timid.

The emotional aspect of the medicine wheel of Aboriginal student completion of a university program in summary has several aspects. Aboriginal students have identified that they want more cultural activities. Aboriginal students Agreed and Strongly Agreed (83%), that faculty had or have had good relationships with Aboriginal students. The need for good relationships was reflected in the talking circle and the faculty needs to help by initiating the relationship. The university needs to look at recruitment strategies specifically for Aboriginal faculty. Aboriginal students had good relationships with one another and that the Gathering Place provides a supportive space for Aboriginal students. Non-academic services are important for Aboriginal students but may not also be realized and recognized by Aboriginal students.

5.4 Physical

There are different perspectives regarding funding for post-secondary Status Indian students. First Nations is the preferred term and used when possible to refer to Status Indian students. First Nations believe that education is a treaty right as several of the numbered treaties promised education (Cowin, 2011; Danziger, 1996, Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007; RCAP, vol. 3, 1996). Oral history, as told by the Elders, was that education was negotiated as a treaty right that would provide a livelihood sufficient to live in the new economy of the settler's society (RCAP, vol. 3, 1996). The Canadian federal government denies that post-secondary education is a right (Danziger, 1996; Orr et al., 2008; RCAP, vol. 3, 1996). The Canadian government policy is to provide education for kindergarten to grade 12, but funding for post-secondary education is only provided to close the university educational gap between First Nations and Canadians.

The physical aspect of the medicine wheel of Aboriginal student retention includes funding and housing. Poverty and lack of financial support has been reported as barriers to Aboriginal post-secondary education (Anonson et al., 2008; Embelton, 2011; First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008; Holmes, 2006; Malatest, 2004). For Status Indians, "funding for the PSE [post-secondary education] Program has been capped at 2% annual growth since 1996" (Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007, p. 6). That policy was implemented by the Minister of Finance who at the time was Paul Martin. This fact was referenced by participants in the talking circle, as inflation has exceeded the two percent cap on funding. The other factor that also needs to be taken into account is the growth in the population as the Assembly of First Nations cited in the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada Indian Registry: "First Nations population growth in this period has been

25%-growing from 610, 874 in 1996 to 763, 555 in 2006-an average of 2.5% per year" (2006, p. 1). Funding is only in place specifically for Status Indian and Inuit students, but not for Non-Status Indians and Metis students.

Past research has identified poverty and lack of financial support as being issues, but a combined total of 64% of Aboriginal students responded on the survey that they Agreed and Strongly Agreed that they had the financial support that they needed to succeed. Twenty percent Disagreed and Strongly disagreed that financial support to take their program part-time would them to succeed and 17% were undecided. The survey results (see Figure 4.1) seem to contradict past research, but it could explain why 28% Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed. After examining the survey data collected, 50 out of 54 students identified as First Nations. Past research has identified financial barriers exist for Aboriginal peoples to attend post-secondary education (Anonson et al., 2008; Atkinson, 2008; Critchley & Bull, 2011; Danziger, 1996; Embelton, 2011; First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008; Malatest, 2004; Mendelson, 2006; Parkin & Baldwin, 2008; Preston, 2008; Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007; RCAP, vol. 3, 1996; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Timmons et al., 2009; Usher, 2009; Vedan et al., 2010; Young, 1999). The other four identified as 'Aboriginal, Native, Metis, or was left blank.' Fifty respondents or 92% of the survey respondents may be eligible and are receiving funding under the Post-Secondary Education Program through the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. Funding is not always guaranteed. As well, the government reports that First Nations student financial support levels fall below the allowances set for other Canadians under the Canada Student Loan Program (Indian and Northern Affairs, Evaluation of PSE Program, 2005). First Nations people who did not get funding to attend university, were not at the university to complete the survey. So the

survey would have a bias as those that could have identified the need for financial support did not participate in the survey. There is a lack of credible data regarding the funding distribution of Status Indians that is presently based upon previous years' allocation and not the actual costs, in which unfunded students are also not tracked (Orr et al., 2008; Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007).

It was mentioned by a person in the talking circle that more Aboriginal people are wanting to attend university and are often competing with other First Nations people from their community. In addition, in the talking circle it was shared that Aboriginal students are also working part-time while at university. A person in the talking circle shared that "I think that economically speaking that ya, that it's a deciding factor whether a person is going to school or not and that sometimes depends if there getting band funding or an alternative source of funding" (support staff 2, 2012) in which they have succeeded in getting funding as they were attending university at the time of the survey. Funding was viewed as a special 'gift' as more First Nations students are attending univeristy with more competition for funding with limited resources.

There are implications with more First Nations students competing for funding with limited resources to attend university. Currently there is no set standard that all First Nations must use in determining which students will be funded. A First Nations Band may decide to fund students based upon their high school marks that would encourage students to get better grades. However, Aboriginal students tend to be older and funding based upon long past high school grades may not be a good assessment. A First Nations Band may also decide what education is needed for their community and decide to fund the students that seek that education. An example is a community that needs people in the medical field, that they choose students that are studying to become a doctor or nurse.

The majority of students who Agreed and Strongly Agreed that they had the financial support could be attributed to them receiving funding. As well, that this funding is seen as a special 'gift.' The funding may not be enough, but that the additional funds needed could be attributed to students working part-time. The Assembly of First Nations also identified inadequate funding "that First Nations students receive only enough funding to cover 48% of the estimated average provincial cost per student per academic year" (Malatest, 2004, p. 21). This is also further supported by the government's own report that student support levels fall below even the allowances set for other Canadians under the Canada Student Loan Program (Indian and Northern Affairs, 2005). Survey results could be different if Non-Status or Metis students were additionally selected as they are not eligible for funding and rely on their family or student loans. Perceptions by non-Aboriginal people of Aboriginal students having all of their education paid for by the government was identified in the talking circle as not all Aboriginal students receive funding. It is my own experience with perceptions by non-Aboriginal people that I have encountered that question regarding why a university education should be funded for First Nations stduents, that I refer them to the Treaties signed in other parts of Canada. My direct and blunt response is that if they do not believe that a university education should be funded that was agreed upon in the Treaties, that the Treaty is void and they can leave Canada. In exchange for non-Aboriginal people to live in Canada, they agree to help Aboriginal people obtain a university education is rather a good deal for Canadians in the bigger picture in exchange for all the benefits that non-Aboriginal people receive for living in Canada.

Further analysis of the survey for financial support showed no significance differences for gender (female mean = 3.42, male mean = 3.47)**.** However, "there is also a lack of support for Aboriginal women, especially single mothers" (Malatest, 2004, p. 38). A talking circle

participant acknowledged that there are financial challenges especially for women with children. The key issues for retaining Aboriginal women at a university were housing, childcare, and transportation (Hardes, 2006). Childcare may not be such an issue, if the students that have children, have not moved far away from their home community, other family members can assist with child care. A person in the talking circle had shared that not having to move away from your community was important for succeeding at university for the additional family support.

Sixty-two percent of Aboriginal students Agreed and Strongly Agreed that financial support to take their program part-time would help them to succeed. Twenty percent Strongly Disagreed and Disagreed, and 18% were undecided (see Figure 4.2.). The survey did reveal the need to receive part-time financial support and could coincide with the need for more flexibility to complete their post-secondary education (Embelton, 2011; Hardes, 2006; Schwartz & Ball, 2001; Timmons et al., 2009). Implications for this are that if Status Indian students need to study part-time to complete their university program, policies from the Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs need to change at the band level for First Nations students. The policy needs to change as currently part-time funding only covers tuition and books, but no living allowance. Additional funding for a living allowance could be needed for financial support to complete their education. The need to study part-time would coincide with family responsibilities for children and could not be realistic for an Aboriginal student to complete their program part-time. Again I also note from Malatest that "there is also a lack of support for Aboriginal women, especially single mothers" (2004, p. 38).

Figure 5.6. Sources of Financial Support

Housing has been identified as an issue by the city of Kamloops and had a diverse response rate on the survey. Forty-three percent of Aboriginal students Agreed and Strongly Agreed of that housing was readily available. However, 39% Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed that housing was readily available and 18% were undecided. Housing challenges could be the result of students having to relocate due to the distance from home to the institution (Cowin, 2011; Critchley & Bull, 2011; Danziger, 1996; Embelton, 2011; First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2008; Holmes, 2006; Mendelson, 2006; Orr et al., 2008; Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007; Timmons et al. 2009; Usher, 2009). As well, the additional cost of studying away from home reduces enrollment among students from lower-income families (Shaienks et al., 2008). Thompson Rivers University has housing accommodations on campus but it does not have any family housing. Logic dictates that since that there is no family housing, that there are no families at Thompson

Rivers University, which is not so, but they are overlooked. Other universities in Canada have family housing. The housing that is available at Thompson Rivers University, like other universities, is more expensive than finding housing in the community. It was mentioned earlier that Aboriginal students tend to be older and have family responsibilities. In addition, Thompson Rivers University has international students that also require housing while studying in Kamloops. The only affordable option for Aboriginal students is to be put on a waiting list with social housing through Kamloops Native Housing. Kamloops Native Housing charges rent based upon the percent of a persons income and allows for housing to be more affordable. It is not known if any university has ever partnered with a social housing organization. Thompson Rivers University accommodations are a private business not operated by the university.

The physical aspect of the medicine wheel of Aboriginal student completion of a university program in summary has several aspects. Aboriginal students contradicted past research that they had enough financial support. However, this could be attributed to the students who completed the survey could already be receiving support as a First Nations student. For those Aboriginal students receiving funding, the talking circle shared it is perceived as a special 'gift' and that students are working part-time as well as the funding is inadequate. There needs to be policy changes from the Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Canada concerning part-time studies to allow for some type of living allowance. Currently at Thompson Rivers University, I believe there are no Aboriginal bursaries, scholarships, or awards provided by Thompson Rivers University. Thompson Rivers University needs to have bursaries, scholarships, or awards for Aboriginal students, especially for Aboriginal families and single parents. Housing was identified as a concern for Aboriginal students.

5.5 Summary

The medicine wheel allowed for a holistic analysis and discussion for the findings of the survey and talking circle. The medicine wheel provided a framework for the interrelated aspects. The mental portion looked at academic support with the need for academic assessment as high school marks may not be an accurate academic assessment. As well, Aboriginal students may need help in certain academic areas after being absent from school for a while as they tend to be older. Academic interventions could be used to identify students that are experiencing academic problems and help identify what can be done to assist them. Student and alumni can serve as mentors. Exit interviews be done by universities to help identify any issues as to why the student did not succeed academically and also provide guidance as to how they can return to the same university or resume their studies at another university.

The spiritual aspect of the medicine wheel of Aboriginal student retention includes cultural activities, Elders, and cultural sensitivity for funerals. Increased cultural activities help to promote a positive self-identity for Aboriginal students and maintains their 'cultural integrity. Increased access to Elders help Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students either one-on-one or in the classroom. Elders continue their role as educators. There needs to be cultural sensitivity for when an Aboriginal student needs to attend a funeral ceremony in their community. Aboriginal students are also able to access counselling services for support at university.

The emotional aspect of the medicine wheel of Aboriginal student retention realizes that relationships are an important aspect for Aboriginal students completing their university program. Relationships include the student, family, community, and nation. As well, that there is a reflection of intergenerational relationships on campus. Relationships between students and faculty were important as reflected in the survey and talking circle. Aboriginal students are also

supported by non-academic services at the university that might not be readily realized by the students. The Gathering Place was seen as important space that helps to foster relationships.

The physical aspect of the medicine wheel of Aboriginal student retention includes funding and housing. The survey contradicted the literature review that funding was an important factor for Aboriginal students to completing their university education. The contradiction could be explained that the majority of the survey respondents may be receiving financial support according to survey information and how it could be perceived as a special 'gift' as shared in the talking circle. There was a need identified for additional support to be able to study part-time that would require a policy change for those that receive funding from Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada to have a living allowance. The need for housing also stood out in the survey and is also shared as a concern for the city of Kamloops.

"If one comes to understand and appreciate the power of a particular knowledge, then one must be ready to share and teach it respectfully and responsibility to others in order for this knowledge, and its power, to continue"

(Archibald, 2008, p. 3).

Chapter Six: Future Considerations and Conclusion

6.1 Strengths and Weaknesses

The survey provided data from Aboriginal students and the talking circle provided data from those working with Aboriginal students. Combining the data provided insight into Aboriginal student retention. Weaknesses for the talking circle were that with five participants, it may not be representative of people working with Aboriginal students in general. Survey sampling bias could have been created as Aboriginal students were selected to participate at the Gathering Place. As well, this research sought to address Aboriginal student retention, however the vast majority of survey repsondents (92%) identified as being First Nations with only one Metis student completing the survey. Strengths of the research are that Aboriginal students, Aboriginal support staff, an Aboriginal instructor, and Elders, were able to further expand and explore issues around Aboriginal student retention. An additional strength was to be able to use a culturally sensitive research method, the talking circle to gather data. However, combining the data from the survey and talking circle provided further knowledge and insight into Aboriginal student retention by synthesizing the data. It also should be noted that Thompson Rivers University is a Canadian university and not an Aboriginal specific post-secondary institution.

6.2 Aboriginal Demographics

The Aboriginal population is growing significantly and could mean more Aboriginal people attending and completing university in the future. The Aboriginal population had a 322% growth rate between 1971 and 2001, compared to the non-Aboriginal population with a 37% growth rate for the same time frame (Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2007). Further Aboriginal population growth resulted with the court challenge won by Sharon McIvor in which Status Indians who had lost their status due to gender

discrimination have had it restored under Bill C-3. In addition, at the time of this research on January 8, 2013 the Federal Court of Canada ruled that 200, 000 Metis and 400, 000 Non-Status Indians are indeed "Indians" under the Constitution Act (Federal Court of Canada website, 2013). This may have the implication of Metis and non-status Indians possibly also qualifying for the Post-Secondary Education Program through Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

The growth rate for Aboriginal people is higher compared to the Canadian population, but there is also the dynamic that the registered Indian population is younger, estimated median age = 24 years on reserve, 30 years off reserve, with the Canadian estimated median age at 40 years in 2009 (Statistics Canada cited by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2012). As well, more Aboriginal people are attending and completing their postsecondary education. An example is Aboriginal women between the ages of 25 and 54 in 2001, with a 41% completion rate that increased in 2006 to 47% (Statistics Canada, 2012). Implications are that the Aboriginal population is growing with also an increase in university attendance.

6.3 Considerations for Educational Leaders

Educational leaders will need to take into consider the increasing university participation rates of Aborignal people. Tomorrow's leaders according to Lambert as cited by Robertson and Webber that they "must be able to develop and maintain a positive, compassionate, inclusive working environment that facilitates the learning of all members of the educational community" (2002, p. 525). This is further supported by Begley and Zaretsky:

> Democratic leadership is desirable for schools because it reflects socially mandated ethical commitments to collective process and and is professionally justified as necessary to lead schools effectively in increasingly culturally diverse communities

> and a world transformed by the effects of technology and the forces of globalization. (2007, p. 99)

Education systems are developed and delivered through the dominant cultural framework and need to change to facilitate the creation and critique of knowledge through shared meaning-making beyond the dominant cultural group (Robertson & Webber, 2002). This means that educational leaders must "move across the boundaries of business, government, and schooling effectively, in ways that were unrecognized and unanticpated even a few years ago" (Robertson & Webber, 2002, p. 525). I would also add, to move across boundaries that include Aboriginal communities and nations. Educational policy-makers to help Aboriginal students complete their education "are likely to need, and exercise the right, to challenge policy guidelines or boundaries that other players may consider sacred" (Robertson & Webber, 2002, p. 549). Serving Aboriginal students with the changing demographics and projected increase in university enrollment will be that "it can be argued that schools and their communities need to become learning organizations, consciously and continously pursuing quality improvement" (Webber & Mullford, 2007, p.121). Ultimately it is up to each individual educational leader "to increase their capacity to attend to school-community issues and educational leaders must take up this challenge more that they have" (Webber & Mullford, 2007, p.139). Helping Aboriginal students requires the assistance of educational leaders.

6.4 Summary

For Aboriginal students attending university is a new way of life, as articulated by an Elder, but is also recognition of cultural adaptation. Aboriginal student success is growing and is assisted with universities adapting to assist Aboriginal students. This research is an example of Aboriginal scholars cooperating on the topic of Aboriginal student retention. The research

incorporated the students' survey responses from the research project titled *Aboriginal Student Retention in a Canadian University: Findings from student interviews, talking circles, and secondary databases* and the data from a talking circle with Aboriginal people working with Aboriginal university students.

The research questions were: "what will Aboriginal students agree or disagree as issues or concerns in their experiences at university for completing their program", "what will Aboriginal university support staff identify as key obstacles and supports for Aboriginal students to completing their programs", and "what will Aboriginal university support staff identify as programs or practices that would increase Aboriginal student retention"? The research specifically anaylzed and synthesized Aboriginal student survey results and talking circle data from those that support Aboriginal students at university. People working with and supporting Aboriginal students were able to articulate the concerns, issues, supports, and success of Aboriginal students as a result of their ongoing work. Collaborative research with other Aboriginal scholars at a university can assist in exploring different facets of Aboriginal student retention. Supporting Aboriginal students in completing university programs is a growing area of research.

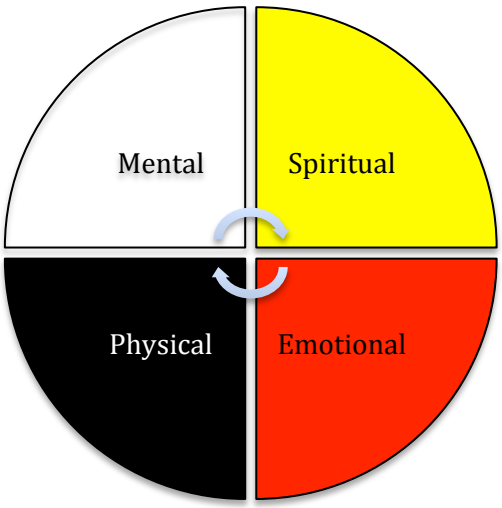
"Communitism also recognizes that we are communities of communities and that we must act respectfully towards other communities and their individuals as we are all connected" (Hart, 2009, p. 36).

Chapter Seven: Further Questions and Recommendations

7.1 Further Questions

1. When and how do we identify Aboriginal students in need of an academic intervention?
2. What are key obstacles and supports for Metis students to completing their programs?
3. What childcare service are needed for Aboriginal students?

7.2 Recommendations



Mental

1. Organized but organic mentorship program of Aboriginal students mentoring current students. Mentorship groups also be established that include past alumni that are linked with current students.
2. Academic placement assessments be available for Aboriginal students as high school marks may not provide a realistic academic level of preparation.
3. Universities to develop and implement timely academic interventions to help Aboriginal students that are failing.

4. Universities have exit interviews to learn why an Aboriginal student could not continue in their program. As well as well flexible readmission policies.

Spiritual

5. Universities work with Elders to have them leading workshops to help educate instructors about Aboriginal culture and protocol.
6. University instructors attend Aboriginal communities and events to learn more about the Aboriginal communities in their area.
7. Universities provide an environment for increased cultural activities to take place in consultation and development with Aboriginal students.

Emotional

8. Non-academic support services continue to be offered specifically for Aboriginal students.
9. University instructors need to take the initiative and establish relationships with Aboriginal students.

Physical

10. Universities develop internal awards, bursaries, fellowships, and scholarships specifically to support Aboriginal students in completing their educational journey.
11. The issue of housing be re-examined in partnership with Kamloops Native Housing.

General

12. Universities develop future plans for the increased enrollment of Aboriginal students.
13. Hiring of additional Aboriginal faculty and administration.

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Appendix A: Student Survey

School of Education, Faculty of Human, Social and Educational Development
Thompson Rivers University wants to improve the success of Aboriginal students, and we are pleased that you have consented to be interviewed. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Thank you for participating.

A. Please circle the number below that best describes your view.

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I had the financial support I needed to succeed.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Financial support to take my program part-time would help me to succeed.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Housing was readily available.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Child care services were available to support me.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The university gave me the support to succeed academically.	1	2	3	4	5
6. The university helped me to cope with non-academic issues (e.g., family).	1	2	3	4	5
7. More Aboriginal cultural activities would help me at university.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I can speak my Aboriginal language.	1	2	3	4	5
9. More access to elders on campus would help me to succeed.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I have the writing skills to complete university programs.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I have or had good relationships with the faculty at the university.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I have or had good relationships with other students at the university.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix B: Talking Circle Questions

1. What do you think the roles of Elders can be at a university?
2. What is the importance of non-academic services at a university for Aboriginal students? What do you think Aboriginal students need help with at a university?
3. What is the importance of having the Gathering place for Aboriginal students?
4. What is the importance of Aboriginal student relationships with faculty and what recommendations do you have for faculty in building those relationships with Aboriginal students?
5. Is there anything that instructors need to take into consideration when there is a death in an Aboriginal community and the students need to go to the funeral?
6. Do you think that Aboriginal students have enough financial support?

Appendix C: Consent Form

Thompson Rivers University

900 McGill Road
Box 3010
Kamloops, BC
V2C 5N3
Telephone (250) 828-5000

Informed Consent by Subjects to Participate in a Research Project or Experiment (Talking Circle)

Note: The University and those conducting this project subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort, and safety of subjects. This form and the information it contains is given to you for your own protection and full understanding of the procedures, risks and benefits involved in this research project or experiment.

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more details, feel free to ask at anytime. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

I have been asked by James Shawana, cell (250 819-7586), supervised by Dr. Patrick Walton of the School of Education, Thompson Rivers University, telephone number 250-828-5378, to participate in a research project entitled **Why Do Aboriginal Students Stay or Leave University?**, which encompasses the following:

The main goal of the research project is to identify the key factors which support and work against students completing their programs at Thompson Rivers University. We plan to have a talking circle with about 15 people in Kamloops. Each talking circle will include current and former Aboriginal TRU students, Aboriginal support staff, TRU faculty, and representatives from the local Aboriginal community.

I understand that the talking circle will take about one to three hours, and the talking will focus on factors related to the retention of Aboriginal students at TRU. Notes will be made during the talking circles. An audio recording will also be made to ensure accuracy. The talking circle will be held in a private meeting room on campus.

My identity and all records will be kept confidential. The findings of the project may be presented in reports, at conferences, and in research journals.

The following questions will be asked during the talking circles interviews, and there may be other questions:

a) How can the social environment at the university be enhanced at TRU?
b) How can relationships with students and faculty be enhanced at TRU?

c) What non-academic issues (e.g., financial, home issues) are related to retention and attrition at TRU?
d) What are the key factors related to the retention and attrition of Aboriginal students at TRU?

Participants may become upset during the talking circles and participants will be offered information to access support services at TRU at the Counselling Centre (250-828-5023) OM 1631. As well, at all talking circles participants will have access to an information sheet of community resources to offer to participants. (Interior Indian Friendship Centre 250-376-1296, White Buffalo Aboriginal Health Society and Resource Centre 250-554-1176, Interior Métis Child and Family Services 250-554-9486).

My signature on this form indicates that I understand the information regarding this research project, including all procedures and the personal risks involved, and that I voluntarily agree to participate in this project as a subject.

I understand that my identity and any identifying information obtained will be kept confidential.

I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw my participation in this project at any time without consequence. My involvement or non-involvement in this project is in no way related to my status as a student.

I understand that I may ask any questions or register any complaint I might have about the project with either the chief researcher named above (James Shawana, 250-819-7586, jamesshawana@gmail.com) his supervisor Dr. Patrick Walton, 250-828-5378, pwalton@tru.ca) or with Cindy Piwowar (Chairperson, School of Education) of Thompson Rivers University, telephone number,250-371-5666, cpiwowar@tru.ca

If I have any questions or issues concerning this project that are not related to the specifics of the research, I may also contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee – Human Subjects, telephone number, 828-5000 or see the Subject Feedback form.

I have received a copy of this consent form and a Subject Feedback form.

Name: (Please Print) _____

Address: _____

_____

Participant's signature_____ Date _____

Investigator and/or Delegate's signature _____ Date_____

……

I agree to have audio data collected which entails recordings of the talking circle interview and will be

used for research on factors related to the retention of Aboriginal students at TRU to be stored with Patrick Walton for a period of seven years. After seven years the memory device will be deleted. The audio tape will be transcribed. Once the audio is transcribed, the audio recording will be destroyed, so that no voices can be identified. If a person chooses to no longer participate in the research, their data will be removed from the transcript.

Participant's signature_____ Date_____

Investigator and/or Delegate's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix D: Ethics Approval

Patrick Walton
FoHSED\Education
Thompson Rivers University

File Number: 100035
Approval Date: January 01, 2012, Amended Date: November 12, 2012
Expiry Date: January 01, 2013

Dear Patrick Walton & James Shawana,

The Research Ethics Board has reviewed your application titled 'Why Do Aboriginal Students Stay or Leave University'. Your application has been approved. You may begin the proposed research. This REB approval, dated January 01, 2012, is valid for one year less a day.

Throughout the duration of this REB approval, all requests for modifications, renewals and serious adverse event reports are submitted via the Research Portal. To continue your proposed research beyond the expiration date, you must submit a Renewal Form before January 01, 2013 . If your research ends before this date, please submit a Final Report Form to close out REB approval monitoring efforts.

If you have any questions about the REB review & approval process, please contact the Research Ethics Office via 250.852.7122. If you encounter any issues when working in the Research Portal, please contact the Research Office at 250.371.5586.

Sincerely,

Chair, Research Ethics Board