Aboriginal Parental Involvement/Engagement for Student Success

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Abstract

An increasing body of knowledge links parental involvement with student success but few studies address Aboriginal parental involvement in urban settings. While some critics argue traditional Aboriginal knowledge is best delivered at home, Aboriginal children who share parents' stories in the classroom benefit other children who draw connections to these stories. Moreover, Aboriginal learners need to function in mainstream Western society and in public school settings in which educators often have a difficult time engaging Aboriginal parents. Consequently, this research sought to explore the perceptions and sense of engagement of parents/caregivers in the Aboriginal Student Program (ASP) in a publicly funded secondary school in Ontario. The study was an extension of the researcher's existing work and focused specifically on a sample of parents/caregivers taking part in an Aboriginal feast at an Ontario secondary school. Nine individuals accepted an invitation to participate in a Talking Circle and shared perceptions of their children's educational experiences. Data were collected and coded, and findings indicated that parental involvement in children's educational journeys contributed significantly to a sense of parental engagement in the school and in Aboriginal programs. Results also suggest that Eurocentric pedagogy can be modified in mainstream secondary schools to directly involve Aboriginal parents/caregivers. Although many participants' stories revealed they experienced racism during their own schooling, study findings demonstrate that the parents/caregivers want to be involved in their children's education nonetheless. This thesis discusses the data that were grounded in the participants' voices that in turn led to several key recommendations.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This project investigated urban Aboriginal parental involvement and engagement in their children's educational experiences at one urban secondary school in Ontario. Garnering the perceptions of parents/caregivers in light of their involvement in the Aboriginal Student Program (ASP) at the aforementioned secondary school was a means of honouring their voices; study results will reveal the significance of such voices for future research in the area of urban Aboriginal parental involvement in mainstream publicly funded schools. It is important to note that I was invited by the Principal Investigator of a related research study to become involved in one aspect of a larger study; namely, to examine the perceptions of Aboriginal parents/caregivers in light of their children's educational experiences in one public school that offers culturally specific programming for all Aboriginal students. To truly provide justice to this thesis, I first needed to place myself as an Aboriginal researcher in the context of existing research that was already initiated by other scholars.

Also of note, I use the term Aboriginal in this thesis to refer to Indigenous, Indian, Native, and Canadian First Nations, Metis, and Inuit persons. I wanted to respect all participants and therefore chose a term with which they seemed most comfortable, and one that reflects the fact that the Aboriginal peoples of Ontario are indeed diverse in their socio-cultural and linguistic worldviews and traditions.

My Journey

Some of the earliest memories I have of my Aboriginal ancestry originate from my grandfather. My family visited my grandparents on the weekends. Although there was

minimal exposure to Indigenous knowledge, the little I became privy to piqued my curiosity in later years.

As a family, my two brothers, my parents, and I travelled a short distance in the car to see my grandparents and enjoy their company for a few hours. It was not on a reservation. My grandparents lived in a rural area just outside of a city. My grandfather sat in his chair, smoked his pipe, and only occasionally interjected comments into the conversation that was going on at the time. My brothers and I typically dismissed ourselves and went to the basement to play darts or roll around on the scooterboards my grandfather had made. Only subtle indicators of Aboriginal traditions were visible anywhere in the house. Some traditional artwork and small pieces of jewellery were seen in the house but no direct traditional ways were conveyed to my brothers and me.

My grandfather was born on the Tyendinaga reserve near Kingston, Ontario. He was very secretive about his short time spent on the reserve but made it very clear that he would not return. He moved to Hamilton, Ontario as a young child and later joined the Royal Canadian Navy as a result of which he would be disenfranchised by the Canadian government. True to his word, he did not return to the reserve after serving his tour of duty. Instead, he married a non-Aboriginal American woman and lived in urban Hamilton. He was a large man who was not a conversationalist and therefore any traditional knowledge he had was not bestowed upon me. Aboriginal culture and traditions were not rooted in me and therefore had very little effect on my education. Sadly, when I look back now it seems he was embarrassed to be Aboriginal and therefore my earliest memories of traditional knowledge are minimal and not very positive.

As a child, and even into my adult years, my views of Aboriginal people were skewed by the traditional stereotypical portrayals by the media and by society within the urban setting. I envisioned Aboriginals as uneducated and lacking culture. This distorted vision I had of Aboriginal people did not create the need for me to initiate this thesis but rather the need to become a more complete teacher. A colleague and good friend of mine informed me of a program being offered for Aboriginal people to complete a Master of Education degree. After being immersed in the Six Nations cohort for a year, I realized that my previous knowledge about Aboriginal people soon would be discarded.

Aboriginal Master's Cohort

I was not an active participant in discussions during class because I lacked traditional Aboriginal knowledge and felt what I had to say would not be taken seriously. Over time I felt as if I had a place with my classmates and realized I was not being judged for what I did not know as an Aboriginal person; instead, I was judged on what I could add to our discussions. I began to feel my input was valid to the classroom discussions. My scant knowledge of Aboriginal cultures began to increase as the cohort classes progressed, as did my ability to research and learn about people.

This educational experience (at age 44!) gave me a better understanding of Aboriginal epistemology and how much Indigenous people have to offer to Eurocentric thinkers in North America. I now view knowledge differently in my profession as a teacher. I embrace not only Aboriginal knowledge but also knowledge from other minority children whom I teach. The narrative discussions that I have periodically with many of my students and parents serve a greater purpose to how I teach their children in my classroom. Interestingly enough, other colleagues who still place more capital on their own knowledge

compared to the community parents' knowledge are still prevalent at the school in which I teach. This ignorance is profoundly amplified when I listen to staffroom conversations about how my colleagues try, "but there is just no support from home."

Therefore, even though The Creator found another place for my grandfather many years ago, his subtle wisdom and quiet demeanour provided me with the curiosity to pursue this thesis.

Identifying and Positioning Myself as an Aboriginal Researcher

When I first began my Master of Education in Aboriginal Studies program, I did not envision myself as an Aboriginal researcher. However, over the past 3 years I have gathered a significant amount of knowledge not only about my family but also about Aboriginal people in general and about how education differs greatly for them compared to the schooling I received while growing up in suburban Hamilton. My educational career was typically Eurocentric in nature and did not include traditional knowledge. It was quite different than the experiences of my colleagues in the Graduate Degree program in Aboriginal Studies at Brock University. Prior knowledge of Aboriginal issues was minimal for me compared to others in the program. This lack of Aboriginal knowledge in my childhood years became amplified and produced some difficult situations when the Master's cohort met for classes. At times I was uncomfortable trying to understand why a particular professor scheduled to teach the class caused such a concern for most of the students.

There existed a great deal of apprehension within the cohort in regards to who would be teaching the classes that took place on the Six Nations Reserve. I did not comprehend why this was an issue or how a non-Aboriginal professor could affect an

entire class of educated adults. Over time and cautious deliberation on my part within the classroom setting it became clear to me how difficult teaching this class must have been for any professor who came to teach. Historical past events between Aboriginal people and Europeans were still evident in the classroom setting. I found myself in a place where subtle tension in the classroom about the professor's pedagogy collided with my own epistemology. As an Eurocentrically educated person, I found it difficult to cast aside some of the beliefs I had as an educated person in a Western society. However, as I completed my classroom commitments and progressed through this thesis, it became apparent to me that Battiste (1995) was correct when she wrote that the two differing worlds of knowledge both Aboriginal and Western need to work harmoniously in today's society. Therefore, this thesis—with the help of parents, caregivers, and the community—seeks to add to the gradual acceptance of traditional and noble Aboriginal knowledge.

Purpose of the Study

Minzey and LeTarte (1994) visualize a little island set apart from the mainland by a moat. When the day begins, the drawbridge lowers and the part-time inhabitants enter this island only to have the bridge raised during the day to keep the island separate from the mainland. At the end of the day the drawbridge lowers and the island inhabitants return to the mainland, only to do it all over again the next day. The inhabitants in Minzey and LeTarte's narrative are students, whose separation during the day from the mainland reflects the fact that mainland people will have little to no input in the students' daily rigour. This description by Minzey and LeTarte creates an image that is particularly relevant to this research. What is most interesting to me is the fact that the island typifies

the secondary school where my research took place, while the "drawbridge" symbolizes the research. In this light, parents and caregivers would be able to go to public school freely, offer their input, and get involved in their children's learning. Minzey and LeTartes' description thus represents to me the empowerment of Aboriginal parents and caregivers in public education.

This study investigated Aboriginal parents' and caregivers' perceptions and experiences of the ASP regarding their children's educational journeys in an urban setting. With very little previous research done on this topic, I sought to gather data and make recommendations that could better serve my and other school communities. The study's findings could be adopted by other publicly funded secondary schools and quite possibly by ethnic groups other than Aboriginal persons.

Talking Circle Questions

The Talking Circle is a process that respects Aboriginal peoples' cultural beliefs. It invites participants to share their experiences and observations in an informal conversational style (Hodson, 2004). Although Talking Circles are generations old in Aboriginal communities, Talking Circles are relatively new to Eurocentric methodology (J. Roberts, personal communication, March 20, 2013). I posed three open-ended interview questions to participants (see Appendix A) that provided the opportunity for parents and caregivers to share their personal perceptions and stories. I encouraged participants to extrapolate on any ideas, perceptions, and experiences that they deemed relevant. I did not intend to direct or sway the conversation between participants; instead, the semi-structured questions provided participants with a context in which to ground their perceptions.

Scope and Limitations

This research study has several limitations. The number of participants was somewhat limited since the research was concentrated in a single urban high school. Also, because the Talking Circle was scheduled in the evening, some individuals indicated that they were not available to participate due to familial and employment commitments. Specifically organizing the logistics of the research site and participant schedules proved to be a rather daunting task. Last, the specificity of this research undertaken within a single urban high school with Aboriginal parents and caregivers made it difficult to generalize the findings across broader demographics and across ethnic groups.

Another significant limitation rests in the fact that there is relatively little research on the topic of Aboriginal parental involvement/engagement in urban public schools. In the school system where I am employed, there appears to be a great urgency for research in the area of Aboriginal parental involvement in an urban setting. It has become clear to me as a result of my extensive research in these areas as well as my conversation with a pioneer in these fields of study, Debbie Pushor (Personal communication, August 21, 2009), that minimal work has been invested in Aboriginal parents and caregivers in the Canadian context. Although some research exists in the areas of parental involvement and engagement, this is not the case with Aboriginal parents in urban school communities. It was my intent to qualitatively investigate the Aboriginal parent/guardian participants' perceptions of their children's educational journey in light of the ASP. My underlying objective was to provide respectful research towards Aboriginal parents, students, and communities. The school where the study was conducted is located in the

inner-city of a large metropolis and contains a large percentage of Aboriginal students. Using the information provided from an existing study that focused, among other topics, on Aboriginal students' perceptions of the ASP, it became evident that the voices of the parents and caregivers needed to be heard. Through the use of grounded theory, the study analyzed the parent- participants' reflections.

Outline of the Remainder of the Document

Chapter 2 includes a detailed investigation of historical accounts related to traditional Aboriginal learning. Aboriginal people in present day Canada had first contact with Europeans in 1492 and education for the Native persons in this country began to take some drastic changes. This thesis outlines the historical events for Aboriginal people and the effect the European settlers had on them. An understanding of the significant events will contribute to a better comprehension of how education changed for Aboriginal people. The comprehensive literature review also attests to the gap in Aboriginal research related to parental/caregiver involvement and engagement in urban public schools

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used to collect data and some of the issues that underscore the study. The Talking Circle was an appropriate means of honouring the voices and experiences of the study participants but also had its challenges. Two broad categories emerged from the data analysis; specifically, Culturally Relevant Programming/Parental Involvement/Engagement and Educational Experiences Both Past and Present/Aboriginal Identity. The data were collapsed in one of the two aforementioned categories and described in detail according to the respective properties belonging to each category.

Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the findings derived from categorized codes established within the transcripts. The coded data and categories ground the participants' responses and are collated. The first category includes Culturally Relevant Programming/Parental Involvement/Engagement as well as a number of subcategories: learning styles, relationships, advocacy, and parental involvement. The second category includes Educational Experiences Both Past and Present/Aboriginal Identity, with subcategories of Educational Experience, Generational Reality, Identity, Self-identification, Culture, and Community.

Chapter 5 concludes the thesis. It summarizes the results and discusses possible implications of the research in regards to increasing future Aboriginal parental involvement/engagement for students' success. The chapter also outlines a validation of the research process. Lastly, the chapter discusses the transformation that I experienced during the process of completing this thesis.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

A chronological review of educational precedents related to Aboriginal education will provide the necessary context for this study. Many of these events have influenced how Aboriginal parents and the Aboriginal community view education. Prior to 1492 and up to and including the present era, historical events have shaped the Aboriginal learner. It is critical at this point to provide a historical overview (1492 to present) of the transformation that has taken place in education with the intent of assimilating the Aboriginal people.

Understanding how parental involvement/engagement has changed drastically within the past 600 years and most notably the past 150 years will reveal how Aboriginal parents can have a positive influence on their own children's education. The relevant literature pertaining to Canadian urban Aboriginal parental involvement research is scarce. By introducing other minority ethnic groups' research findings into this review, parallels can be drawn to Aboriginal groups. This research reveals important findings relative to my and perhaps other communities. Understanding the past will in turn help us to understand what is possible for Aboriginal parents/caregivers in the future in terms of their involvement/engagement in public schools.

Pre-Contact (Prior to 1492)

Prior to 1492 the Aboriginal people had no contact with any European people. Knowledge and traditions were grounded within the Aboriginal community. An Aboriginal scholar by the name of Solomon (1990) wrote the following:

> The traditional way of education was by example and experience and by storytelling. The first principle involved was total respect and acceptance of the

one to be taught. And that learning was a continuous process from birth to death.

It was a total continuity without interruption. Its nature was like a fountain that

gives many colours and flavours of water and that whoever chose could drink as

much or as little as they wanted to and whenever they wished. The teaching

strictly adhered to the sacredness of life whether of human or animals or plants.

But in the course of history there came a disruption. And then education became

"compulsory miseducation" for another purpose, and the circle of life was broken

and the continuity ended. It is that continuity which is now taken up again in the

spiritual rebirth of the people. (p. 79)

Solomon's excerpt provides a synopsis of education for Aboriginal learners. He speaks to

traditional Aboriginal knowledge and what it is supposed to entail, what it became for many

years, and how it is beginning to be acknowledged again. Much of this literature review

provides a better understanding of Aboriginal education through a historical lens.

Pre-Contact—Indigenous Overview

Battiste and Youngblood Henderson (2000) state that there is no short answer for

what Indigenous knowledge embodies. It is different from traditional Eurocentric

thought. Indigenous knowledge is more of the person's inner cognition of the world

rather than accepting external knowledge from various sources and accepting it as the

truth. Indigenous knowledge does not parallel the Eurocentric concept of knowledge. The

idea of self is emphasised as only being part of the whole since individual knowledge

helps the entire band. Aboriginal knowledge is also considered by these scholars as

diverse in that it is passed on to all members both young and old. Aboriginal knowledge

is part of a clan, band, land, community, and even the individual, and cannot be separated

from the bearer to be codified into a definition. Battiste (1998) describes the destructive process of defining all of Aboriginal knowledge as cognitive imperialism (p. 9). She further deconstructs cognitive imperialism as the emphasis one person or groups of people with the same beliefs place on their knowledge as being superior to other people's knowledge. This self-proclaimed imperial power contributed to the demise of Aboriginal values and worldviews, including their linguistic traditions.

Ermine (1995) states that Aboriginal people believe their languages and cultures are crucial in the transformative learning process (p. 102). Miller, Cassie, and Drake (1990) have formulated three specific orientations of the transformation: skills that promote personal and social transformation; a vision of social change that leads to harmony rather than control over the environment; and the attribution of a spiritual dimension to the environment (p. 4). The first orientation Miller et al. refer to is the skill needed to socialize appropriately, both personally as well as function within a community. The second point speaks to a vision that requires the learner to make decisions that are best for not only themselves but also for what best serves their community. The third orientation emphasises how the spirit relates to one's self and how inwardly they feel and are received by the community. All three skills require the inward wholeness and harmony to which Ermine refers and all three implicate the betterment of the community. The third orientation refers to needs that need to come from the child's extended family and community and not from external Eurocentric pedagogy as typically practised in mainstream public schools. The self, the spirit, and the unknown encompass the learning. This triad of knowledge embodies traditional Aboriginal knowledge and is, in effect, holistic. Removing any part of the three may be detrimental to the Indigenous

learner because all three are necessary to complete a system of lifelong learning. The
Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP, 1996) shares a similar vision to Ermine
in regards to knowledge and the Aboriginal person. However, the RCAP also includes the
emotional and physical dimensions to their vision. The holistic visions that RCAP,
Ermine, and Battiste have for encompassing a lifelong journey are not stagnated in the
present day but rather look to the future for Aboriginal learning.

Many Aboriginal scholars cite that the Western style of learning is not successful
in light of Aboriginal pedagogy. The Western world has capitulated to a dogmatic
fixation on power and control at the expense of authentic insights into nature and origin
of knowledge as truth (Ermine, 1995, p. 102). Ermine speaks to the concept of power and
control as evidence of fragmented thinking that does not align conceptually with the more
holistic approach to Aboriginal knowledge. Instead, Ermine perceives power and control
as a hindrance to personal cognitive growth as it ignores internalization and
understanding of the Aboriginal person's surroundings. Aboriginal knowledge is more of
an inward thinking approach and embodies what can be both observed and thought
(Battiste, 2005). Battiste further believes the Aboriginal learner might internalize this
knowledge and use and adapt it to transfer one situation into other life learning episodes.
Experience is knowledge (Ermine, 1995, p. 109) and the visions Aboriginal people value
come from their inner self. Ermine states, "Western education systems that our children
are subjected to promote the dogma of fragmentation and indelibly harm the capacity for
holism. The mind-set created by fragmentation impedes the progress towards inwardness
that our ancestors undertook" (p. 110). Through this holistic approach to knowledge the
Aboriginal learner is educated differently from the colonialist. Education is the

transmission of cultural DNA from one generation to the next (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, v. 3). Changes to how Aboriginal people traditionally learn could continue to have a lasting effect on generations of other Aboriginal people. Some of these changes will be noted in this literature review.

First Contact (1492)

In 1492 the first contact was made between the Aboriginal people of Turtle Island[1] and the Europeans settlers. The two worlds had totally different trajectories towards knowledge. Although forced conformity to Eurocentric knowledge would not begin until the late 1800s with the Davin Report[2] , increased contact between the two groups of people began to capitulate into a trusting bond: "The relentless subjugation of Aboriginal people and the discounting of their ideas have hurt those aboard the Aboriginal voyage of discovery into the inner space" (Ermine, 1995, p. 101). Eurocentric pedagogy and Aboriginal pedagogy proved to differ greatly.

The educational process to which the Aboriginal families gradually would adhere took many years but slowly they began to relinquish the influence of traditional education of their children. The partnership and trust the Indigenous people initially shared with the French settlers contributed to the demise of the parent or community involvement the children had experienced for generations before. The Europeans believed they had plenty to offer the Native people whom they perceived as savages (Parkman, 1963). Parkman

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[1] The traditional Haudenosaunee name for North America.

[2] In 1876 Nicholas Flood Davin was sent to the US to study the Indian education system. Davin recommended that four denominational industrial boarding schools be established so that Indian children could learn Christian morality and work habits away from the influences of the home.

(1963) stated that the savages were, in the eyes of the settlers, quite uneducated. As early as 1632, the Jesuits startrd to project their religious beliefs upon the Aboriginal people. Trigger (1965) states that contact with the local Indigenous people intended to fulfill two objectives. The first was to open up the fur trade to the French and the second was to begin to win North America for the Roman Catholic faith. The Jesuits sought to educate the Wendat[3] nation in religion and provide knowledge, and expected the Wendat to continue to supply the French with furs through a bond of trust (Parkman, 1963).

The control the Jesuits had over the Wendat was considered necessary by the church and government so the latter forces could provide the foundation of external knowledge and impose these paradigms upon Aboriginal peoples and learners. In the same instance, such an adverse influence in the schools contributed to the lessening of power that Aboriginal families and communities originally shared with their youth. Ermine (1995) states that Aboriginal languages suggest inwardness, where the real power lies (p. 108). The Jesuits had different understandings. The French Jesuit priests tried to force their worldviews and educational practices on Aboriginal people and learners not long after first contact in 1492. To the French, forcing knowledge upon Aboriginal youth was acceptable. However, the Haudenosaunee[4] , enemies of the Wendat, found this to be unacceptable and the Jesuit priests became enemies to the Haudenosaunee as well. Over time, the Catholicism that was being forced upon the Wendat began to lessen out of fear for repercussion from the Haudenosaunee. The Wendat themselves began to feel oppressed by this new religion and started to question some of the Jesuit priests' motives.

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[3] Wendat is the Aboriginal term for Huron. Huron was the term given to a group of Indigenous persons by the French upon arrival.

[4] Haudenosaunee is the Aboriginal term for Iroquois or "People of the Longhouse."

Trigger (1965) reported that this onset of religious knowledge took less than a year and shortly after the first year of Wendat–Jesuit contact, there was widespread disease that afflicted the people of the St. Lawrence and eventually led to the demise of almost half of the Wendat nation. Smallpox and measles contributed to the illnesses and by 1640 there were only approximately 10,000 Wendat alive (Trigger, 1965). The Jesuit priests attempted to baptise the dying young but the Wendat saw this as witchcraft and thought the priests were murdering their children. Trade avenues had been established for the Wendat and the Jesuit priests were no longer needed. However, Catholicism was now part of Aboriginal rituals and would later mark the near end of the traditional Aboriginal epistemologies (Trigger, 1965). The trust and mistrust confused the Wendat and in turn challenged their traditional Indigenous beliefs. The cross-cultural partnership of the fur trade and military alliances that had dominated life in Canada since the late 16th century changed. Those partnerships, anchored in Aboriginal knowledge and skills, had enabled the newcomers to find their way, to survive, and to prosper (Milloy, 1999).

In 1867 educational practices and objectives across Canada changed and the Catholic Church was situated at the forefront of this reform. Conformity was seen by the church as a necessary part of education. Perceived as uneducated savages who were only getting in the way of what Canada was to become, the government began to change how Aboriginal people would learn. The Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN, 2011) shows that Nicholas Flood Davin, a Conservative Member of Parliament, was asked to research the United States' way of educating Native American people and report back to Sir John A. Macdonald. Davin documented that the education of Aboriginal youth was no longer the primary responsibility of the parents. In fact, the Church and the

Canadian government viewed the traditional knowledge bestowed upon the youth by the community as no longer viable knowledge and needed to be changed (Claes & Clifton, 1998). Aboriginal communities needed to be disrupted (Milloy, 1999, p. 23). The Legacy of Hope Foundation (LHF, 2003) views this attempt at assimilation as "social engineering" or "ethnocide" (p. 18).

Residential Schooling (1879-1996)

Claes and Clifton (1998) along with Miller (2004), the LHF (1998), The Royal Commission (1977), and Haig-Brown (1988) offer a summary of residential school history in Canada. According to these scholars and agencies, the following is a list of the key dates and events related to residential schools:

- 1620—Franciscans open the first boarding school for aboriginal children in New France, but give up by 1629 for lack of students. The Jesuits follow, moving their schools closer to native villages, but still fail to attract students.

- 1668—Ursuline nuns establish a boarding school for girls, but also get discouraged by lack of attendance.

- 1800s—Early Indian industrial schools are established by various churches; attendance is not compulsory.

- 1820s—Homesteaders demand that Indians be somehow neutralised or removed from the land.

- 1830—Jurisdiction over Indian Affairs becomes civilian, when it is clear that native people are no longer needed as military allies.

- 1845—Government report to the legislative assembly of Upper Canada recommends that Indian boarding schools be set up.

- 1846—Government is committed to Indian residential schooling. Major

  denominations operate schools in Manitoba, Alberta, and B.C.

- 1847—The Ryerson Report supports creation of Industrial schools.

- 1857—Boarding schools are established at Metakatla and Mission.

- 1867—The British North America Act makes Indian Education a federal

  responsibility. Indian Day Schools are being set up in accordance with Treaty

  provisions of the 1850s.

- 1876—The Indian Act makes all native people wards (children) of the

  government. (Claes & Clifton, 1998, p. 11)

From 1879 to 1996, therefore, the education of Aboriginal children was drastically altered by residential schools. Understanding of traditional learning was violently interrupted for Aboriginal learners by the practices of assimilation. Traditional epistemology was replaced with day schools and colonial knowledge. However, even day schools proved to be ineffective from colonial opinion since they could not produce lasting effects on the Aboriginals students because they were allowed to return to their traditional homes and communities each evening. The influence of the wigwam was stronger than the influence of the school (CHIN, 2010). The LHF (2003) notes that these schools had limited hope and influence on the children. Cultural transitioning of Eurocentric knowledge lost much of its authority after returning to a traditional knowledge base within the home and the community (Milloy, 1999). Milloy (1999) concludes that schools needed to be built off the reserve to have an impact in the assimilation process of the Aboriginal youth and those same children needed to be removed from their parents on a fulltime bases to have any lasting effect. Boarding

schools and industrial schools that resembled the ones in Pennsylvania were opened in

Canada along with the residential schools in the late 1800s and very early 1900s.

However, boarding schools and industrial schools would be replaced with residential

schools.

The residential schooling initiative included very clear objectives on the part of

the Canadian government and the Christian faith. "Prompt and persistent obedience to

authority, order, and discipline were virtues of civilization, and in a civilized society one

of their servants was punishment" (Milloy, 1999, p. 43). Throughout much of the

duration in which residential schools educated Aboriginal youth, corporal punishment

became greater and greater. Quite often in the most rural of schools, corporal punishment

became overly violent. Fournier and Crey (1998) cite a personal log from an Aboriginal

girl indicating that sisters were separated in transit on the way to the school and sexual

acts were initiated by the priest. This type of brutality would continue once the students

were boarding at the schools and out of the watchful eyes of the parents. Unable to be

monitored closely, the parishioners who ran the school took it upon themselves to inflict

this violence upon the children when they spoke their native tongue (LHF, 2003). What

was supposed to be a "culture of care" (Milloy, 1999, p. 129) soon transformed into one

of violence. The Department of Education ignored many Aboriginal parents concerned

with the conditions and treatment of their children. There was no parental involvement in

residential schooling because the government and the churches believed Aboriginal

parents did not know what was best for their children in the ever-changing country. The

government relinquished much control to the Catholic Church and this carte blanch

control was exploited to the extreme (Claes & Clifton, 1998). Milloy (1999) states that

schools became "mini-monarchies" (p. 134). The LHF (2003) claims that "Aboriginal children did not enter these schools uneducated: rather they were re-educated to fit a European model" (p. 17).

The cultural and epistemic demise of Aboriginal worldviews, as previously discussed, adversely affected the children and their communities and thereby changing their lives forever (Claes & Clifton, 1998). Colonial rule proclaimed that Aboriginal adults were too set in their own traditions but the younger Indigenous people could be manipulated (LHF, 2003; Milloy, 1999). The strategy of civilizing Aboriginal people and "re-socializing the children by a movement from circle to square: from a world to be navigated by belief, dreams, and spirit guidance to one of secular logic and reasoning," as well as from "rhythms that came from the body and needs of the child to those in which the child was to respond to the corporate needs of the school" (p. 136) was the vision of education in Canada for the late 19th century and much of the 20th century.

Aboriginal Parental Involvement

Traditional Aboriginal learning is considered to take place within the home (Maynes, 2001). Battiste (2005) concurs with Maynes but goes on to state that even though traditional Aboriginal knowledge is best delivered at home, when children share parents' stories within the classroom, other students reciprocate with their own meanings and draw connections to these stories. Aboriginal learning fosters the exchange of information between parent and child and in turn encourages children to share their stories in more formal classroom environments (Maynes, 2001). Aboriginal pedagogy is holistic (Battiste, 2005; Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000; Ermine, 1995; Green, 2002; Maynes, 2001). Battiste concurs with Maynes's conclusion that traditional

Indigenous ways of knowledge need to be successfully integrated with more Eurocentric

learning paradigms. In doing so, the demise of traditional Aboriginal education systems

can be restored. Placing Aboriginal epistemologies into traditional Aboriginal education

is, according to these scholars, a necessary first step.

Moreover, Friedel's (1999) study of Aboriginal parents' participation in creating

traditional curriculum within an existing structure of typical Eurocentric public education

is noteworthy. Friedel observes that Aboriginal parents are apprehensive in accepting and

trusting non-Aboriginal school administrators based largely on the mistrust experienced

during their own education. The Aboriginal parents in Friedel's study believe that the

mainstream school administrators had predetermined views of Aboriginal parents in

general and attributed minimal degrees of validity to the suggestions of Aboriginal

parents. Ho and Willms (1996), Lareau (1987), and Pushor (2007) use the term "cultural

capital" to exemplify the notion that the school's culture takes precedence over traditional

Aboriginal culture even in modern times. According to these researchers, public school

administrators resist opening lines of communication with Aboriginal parents and

essentially listened passively to their concerns. Freeman's (2004) study includes non-

Aboriginal participants and concludes that there must be some "visible validity" placed

on parental voices in order to have authentic parent involvement. "Visible validity"

includes meaningful and genuine action that stems from the concerns of Aboriginal

parents and benefits student learning directly. Simply listening to Aboriginal parents and

not implementing any of their initiatives further widens the communication and

involvement/engagement gap between school, parent, and community. Aboriginal and

non-Aboriginal scholars note that Aboriginal education is vital to giving voice back to the

Indigenous people but there are some obstacles that still need to be dealt with for Western and Aboriginal knowledge to coexist.

Epstein and Sanders (2006) postulate that true parental involvement includes a review of structural, organizational, and attitudinal factors found in education. Garcia (2004) posits that teachers' efficacy typically has a bearing on parent involvement. Arrogant conversation hinders communication with parents who feel overwhelmed or subdued by talking with their child's teacher or principal. Opening lines of meaningful communication between all parties, including parents/caregivers and teachers, is crucial for student success. Carr (2006) lists five basic strategies to validate Aboriginal parents' ideas in education: talk less, listen more; relationships rule; transparency builds trust; work in public/fight in private; and tell your story. When these strategies are in place, the probability exists for a more personable foundation to be grounded in the school culture. Researchers caution that some teachers may assume that the educational traditions of their past is still entirely applicable to contemporary educational practices (Graue & Brown, 2003). These preconceived ideas can hinder communication between parents, teachers, and school communities. Epstein and Sanders (2006) believe that teachers need to review structural, organizational, and attitudinal factors associated with difference. Carignan, Pourdavood, and King (2006) believe that a framework needs to be in place that clearly defines the roles from administration to parents. Scholars observe a direct correlation between student success and parent involvement when these framework elements are put into practice.

Research has shown there needs to be a greater understanding of how Aboriginal parents deal with their children both at home and at school (Battiste, 2005; Battiste &

Youngblood Henderson, 2000; Green, 2002). Aboriginal learners have revealed

differences from other children in the class in how they learn and quite often the school

will marginalize the parents of these same children. Gorski (2008) states that teachers and

administrators need to be prepared to address classist structures, policies, and practices

instead of the marginalized learners/communities oppressed by them. The persistent and

aggressive assimilation plan of the colonial Canadian government and churches

throughout the past century, the marginalization of Indigenous knowledge in educational

institutions committed to Eurocentric knowledge, and the losses of Aboriginal languages

and heritages through modernization and urbanization of Aboriginal people have all

contributed to the diminished capacity of Indigenous knowledge (Battiste, 2005, p. 2).

Involvement and Engagement (20th Century)

Desimone (1999) metaphorically defines involvement and engagement as a

continuum that places involvement at one end and engagement at the other end of the

same continuum. Harper (2001) defines the word engagement in these terms: the prefix

"en" means to "make" and the latter part of the word "gage" means "pledge." In the

Western style of learning and in the definition of the word engagement, the meaning

implies a pledge. Engagement enables the parents to take their place alongside educators

and organize their knowledge with that of the teachers' (Pushor & Ruitenburg, 2005).

Pushor (2007) also makes the very important distinction between parental involvement

and parental engagement. Parental involvement is understood as the schools' efforts in

teaching and informing parents about various strategies that foster student learning at

home. To a greater extent, parental engagement reflects the parents sharing their

knowledge, skills, and experiences in their children's schools in order to inform decision-

making, the determination of agendas, and the individualized programming and planning

in place for their children at school. Vincent and Martin (2000) use the terms high

parental involvement to describe parents' consistent physical presence in the school and

their contributions to the practices and policies implemented within the system.

According to Lopez, Scribner, and Mahitivanichcha (2001) some parents might view

their parental involvement "in terms of informal activities such as providing nurturance,

instilling cultural values, talking with their children, sending them to school clean and

rested, checking homework, and a variety of other non-traditional activities" (p. 256).

Based on the research done on the concepts related to parental involvement and

engagement, parental interaction in the school can be exercised in different ways and in

varying degrees; yet, the positive influence on students' success remains consistent and

should not be understated. Although there are various connotations to the terms

involvement and engagement, the research indicates clearly that there is a positive

relationship between student success and parental involvement and engagement.

Many studies highlight the importance of parental involvement and student

success (Booth & Dunn, 1996; Carvalho, 2001; Constantino, 2003; Samaras & Wilson,

1999; Sook Lee & Bowen, 2006). Pushor and Murphy (2004) explain that "parental

involvement in schooling fosters more positive student attitudes towards school,

improves homework habits, reduces absenteeism and dropping out, and improves

academic achievement" (p. 22). There are similarities and differences across the research

in terms of what constitutes involvement and engagement in regards to parents and

schools working harmoniously for the purpose of academic success. Epstein (1995) views

parental involvement in light of a Venn diagram. One circle is considered involvement

and the other engagement. The extent to which they overlap and encroach upon one another can be adjusted depending upon the level of parental involvement. The two spheres overlap to create a metaphoric example of a caring community for students (Epstein, 1995). The theory of the spheres recognizes that the realms may overlap and influence the outcome for success (see Appendix B). Christenson (2004) believes that family, educators, and the combination of family and school communities create a blend in which open communication between all parties could halt and become an issue. In essence this could hinder lines of communication. Christenson also emphasizes that all stakeholders need to authentically communicate and collaborate in order to maximize student success. Simply providing dialogue between all persons without any visible authenticity to the families' words would appear counterproductive. Common in the literature of effective engagement, therefore, is purposeful parental and school interaction.

Numerous researchers, including Berthelsen and Walker (2008), Christenson (2004), Desimone (2001), Garcia (2004), Ho and Willms (1996), Lightfoot (2004), Pushor (2007), and Pusher and Murphy (2004) cite Epstein's six types of parental and school involvement. Epstein (1995) identified a hierarchy of involvement that crescendos from least to greatest. These stages include the following:

1. Parenting: supporting, nurturing, and rearing.
2. Communicating: relating, reviewing, and overseeing.
3. Volunteering: supervising and fostering.
4. Learning at home: managing, recognising, and rewarding.
5. Decision making: contributing, considering, and judging.

6. Collaborating with community: sharing and giving. (p. 705)

The stages are not necessarily dependent upon one another but may be considered as foundations for each other. Pushor (2007), Berthelsen and Walker (2008), Desimone (2001), Ho and Willms (1996), Lightfoot (2004), Garcia (2004), Christenson (2004), and Pushor and Murphy (2004) also attest to Epstein's (1995) findings that there needs to be incremental progress, connection to curricular and instructional reform and the ability to redefine staff development for the purpose of student success (p. 708). A caring community, in this light, can be built on purpose (p. 709). Organizing common and mutually benefiting goals between educators and school communities can redefine education as being more inclusive of parental voices and represent a positive means of improving student achievement. Battiste (2005) believes that a common ground of knowledge is necessary when one wants to involve or engage Aboriginal parents with the school. The common ground is the meshing of Eurocentric and Aboriginal knowledge. She also views Aboriginal knowledge and Western knowledge as an amalgamation of contemporary education across school communities.

Traditional Aboriginal knowledge includes an understanding that parents are directly involved in their children's education (Green, 2002). However, according to Samaras and Wilson (1999), family background, language barriers, inequalities of parents' resources, conceptions of parent-teacher roles, and communication and contact between teachers and communities may affect families' interactions with mainstream publicly funded schools (p. 502). Bourdieu's (1986) use of the term "cultural capital" describes the beliefs, languages, resources, and social networks that influence the life experiences of individuals. The cultural capital of Aboriginal parents may differ

significantly from that of mainstream educators, urban schools and parents of the dominant culture within the community (Pushor & Murphy, 2004); therefore, Aboriginal parents may feel as if they do not possess the essential skills required to adequately converse with educators and fully support their children in the school.

Defining Cultural Capital

Cultural capital currently is viewed as a multifaceted concept. Carreon, Drake, and Barton (2005) and Monkman, Ronald, and Delimon Theramene (2005) believe that cultural capital involves material resources, social networks, beliefs, and life experiences that influence students' academic success. Bourdieu (1986) describes three forms of cultural capital. The embodied state is the first form of cultural capital that exists within a person and represents his or her knowledge, skills, and talents. The objectified state of cultural capital is represented by cultural goods such as artefacts, literature, music, dance forms, art, historical sites, and museums. Tangible materialistic goods can also be earned as material capital. Finally, the third form is institutional cultural capital such as academic credentials and qualifications that can potentially empower individuals in society. It would appear that institutional capital is the one that manifests itself most often in contemporary public education (Bourdieu, 1986).

Bourdieu (1986) conceptualizes cultural capital as a way for students to bring their own history and resources into the classroom to benefit their learning. However, cultural capital can also be used to explain Aboriginal parental involvement in schools. In Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau's (2003) study on parental involvement, the parents of the dominant culture were able to better support their own children because of their ability to acquire information and services through their social ties within their respective

communities. They were able to acquire the embodied state of cultural capital by gaining knowledge about the education system through family and friends. However, many Aboriginal parents feel marginalized and left out of the decision-making model most prevalent in the Western school system and choose to deal with educational concerns on an individual basis (Green, 2002). As Green (2002) observes, by not having access to the information that gives Aboriginal parents the necessary voice and the confidence to make requests and express concerns, the mainstream education system negatively influences how Aboriginal parents view public education.

Bourdieu (1986), Lareau and McNamara-Horvat (1999), Horvat et al. (2003), Carreon et al. (2005), and Monkman et al. (2005) do not suggest that underachieving students and uninvolved and disengaged parents lack cultural capital. According to Lareau and McNamara-Horvat, all individuals have cultural capital; however, "cultural capital does not have the same value in any given field" (p. 39). Simply stated, the cultural capital valued in one setting might not be as pertinent in another environment. Lareau and McNamara-Horvat use attendance at art museums and baseball games to demonstrate how cultural capital is valued in different settings. The researchers believe that higher status or capital is attributed to attending an art museum in comparison to a baseball game. They draw another analogy to parents who visit museums with their children. This may be viewed by the dominant culture as a gesture of involvement in their children's education because this form of cultural capital is reflective of the dominant culture.

Aboriginal and Ethnic Minority Parents Visiting Schools

There are many similar reasons why some ethnic minority and Aboriginal parents choose not to visit the public schools that their children attend. There are certain

parallelisms between ethnic minority and Aboriginal parents that may compensate for the lack of research in regards to Aboriginal parental involvement and student success in publicly funded schools. Parents of minority students often share some similarities to Aboriginal parents in terms of their involvement and engagement in public schools. Studies reveal that educators perceive parents who are not physically present in their children's schools as uninvolved and uninterested, and these parents are often blamed for the underachievement of their children (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Samaras & Wilson, 1999). Lopez et al. (2001) explain that sometimes professionals meet with ethnic minority parents only when problems occur; therefore, under such circumstances, parents are often perceived as lacking resources, such as experience, knowledge, and skills to provide meaningful home educational experiences for their children.

According to Delpit (1998), the act of blaming poor academic achievement on the children, their families, and their cultural disadvantage is known as deficit thinking. Munn (1993) explains that educators have negative and stereotypical views of ethnic minority parents because they have not been trained to deal with ethnic minority parents on a professional level. Delpit suggests that deficit views of ethnic minority families exist because White, middle-class homes are considered to be the norm; therefore, the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that do not reflect the norm are viewed as the causes of students' underachievement. Yosso (2005) describes deficit thinking as one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in schools: "Deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child's education" (p. 75). Therefore, according to

Yosso's research the deficit views put the blame on the students and their families. Negative behaviour and underachievement in school is the fault of the student and their families and has no bearing on the school system or how it is run.

Lopez et al. (2001) argue that minority parents cannot provide their children with meaningful educational experiences when Eurocentric educators believe such parents lack cultural capital relative to community norms. Therefore, this can further alienate parents from their children's school. Ethnic minority parents can potentially feel marginalized since the cultural resources that resonate most with their understandings of traditional knowledge seem to be ignored in public schools at the peril of their children's learning. Lopez et al. view this as a significant hindrance to children's learning potential. It would appear from Lopez et al.'s and Yosso's research that the notion of deficit thinking in regards to ethnic minority parents significantly marginalizes ethnic minority students.

Educators may quite often rely on this deficit thinking and downplay or completely ignore what the ethnic minority parents are willing to provide (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Samaras & Wilson, 1999). Auerbach (2007) identifies a group of parents as the "Supporters" in her study of parental involvement. She describes how racial and ethnic minority parents involve themselves in the education of their children by stating that minority parents stress the importance of education and some of the possible careers they could have pursued with a higher education. All too often minority parents use themselves as negative examples of what education, or lack thereof, has done for their career aspirations. Behaviour and social expectations within the community are instilled at the home and provide a foundation to acquire knowledge (p. 263). In essence, ethnic minority parents provide a framework for their children of why and how to be academically

successful. However, the moral and emotional support provided by ethnic minority parents simply emphasises Epstein's first level of involvement. Parents want more and better opportunities for their children and see education as a means of befitting their future.

Yosso (2005) proposes community cultural wealth as a concept that has the potential, if understood, to change the process of schooling and the attitudes and beliefs of the system regarding marginalized students and parents. Yosso describes community cultural wealth as "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (p. 77). In this light, mainstream educators would shift their thinking about community cultural wealth from what the students are lacking to the potential that their students represent in the classroom learning environment. Ethnic knowledge could enhance mainstream pedagogy and not compete against the standard curriculum. In addition to identifying the various forms of knowledge, skills, and experiences of culturally diverse students, teachers could further familiarize themselves with students' community cultural wealth by recognizing their students' familial capital, social capital, aspirational capital, and linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005). Yosso also utilizes the term community cultural wealth as a knowledge base in which culturally diverse students and communities can incorporate their rich diverse schemes into mainstream educational communities. This would allow the parents of these students to become more knowledgeable about their children's school simply because of the cultural bond created between the home and school. A greater appreciation and understanding of community cultural wealth could possibly engage ethnic minority and especially Aboriginal parents into the broader school community.

If educators could better understand and respect community cultural wealth, the knowledge the ethnic minority parent can provide would be more visible in the classroom and school community. Civil and Bernier's (2006) study of parental involvement in mathematics education demonstrates how ethnic minority parents can serve as intellectual resources in the classroom. These researchers conclude that there is a need for all parties involved in education. Parents and teachers work together to create and offer workshops for other parents across the school community. Civil and Bernier make it clear that they are "dedicated to creating a space to have an authentic dialogue about mathematics and to look for and value families' funds of knowledge" (p. 327). The "funds of knowledge" represent the wealth of knowledge that all people could bring to the classroom and not just the teacher's knowledge. Civil and Bernier's funds of knowledge parallel Yosso's (2005) theory of accepting the experiences and skills that culturally diverse students bring to the classroom. Reciprocity between parents and educators is positively fostered when familial and traditional values and knowledge are accepted as capital in public education classrooms and schools. This reciprocity may foster parental involvement in the school and in their child's educational journeys. As Pushor (2007) also acknowledges, it enables parents to become engaged in their children's learning. Consider the potential learning on the part of all students if diverse linguistic traditions, life experiences, and varied cultures are incorporated into the Eurocentric standardized curriculum as a complement to teachers' pedagogies (Enright, 1989; Maynes, 2001). Enright describes "the rich potential of using students' family narratives and stories in class in order to support students' literacy development and to develop literacy discourse" (p. 185). Maynes (2001) further states that parents may not be directly involved in writing the family narratives with their

children, but knowledge of the task might create enough confidence for them to initiate a conversation or extended dialogue with the teacher about the nature of the assignment. Student voice in terms of the sharing of traditions and worldviews can bring cultural wealth to their learning and serve as a means to include the parents themselves in the learning activities of the classroom (Maynes, 2001).

Pushor (2007) declares that parental engagement needs to also include initiatives related to multilingualism within the school and across the school community. Diversity of culture including languages spoken in the community could benefit the relationships with the school and the parents. As well, Leistyna (2002) recognizes that the knowledge, skills, and abilities of ethnic minority families should not merely involve inviting parents to the school to show off and celebrate their cultures. Leistyna believes that parental participation of ethnic minority parents should "be about real political inclusion in the basic processes and decisions of everyday school life" (p. 8). Leistyna states that a visible language support staff from different cultural backgrounds within a school community may lessen some of the anxiety felt by minority students and parents alike in regards to sharing their ideas and opinions about the school and more specifically about the curriculum. Facilitation of new cultural ideas can be meaningfully incorporated into the school and learning environment. Creating an environment for the sharing of multilingual dialogue and diverse opinion reflects Pushor's (2007) notion of parental engagement by demonstrating how community cultural wealth can be used as a framework to improve parental involvement of ethnic minority parents.

According to Sook Lee and Bowen (2006), educators must recognize that "there are variations among parents with different backgrounds in terms of when and how they are

involved in their children's education" (p. 215). If schools can begin to understand how ethnic minority parents are involved in their children's education, adaptations to daily routines and pedagogy can be altered to accommodate these differences. Minority parents might no longer be perceived as uninterested or uninvolved. Deficit thinking hinders the academic progress and social integration of ethnic pupils. Creating relationships between the parents, students, and schools through language and other pertinent cultural bonds can make the curriculum more relevant to the students and parents. Common across the researcher related to parental involvement in public schools is the conclusion that positive relationships between parents, educators, and school communities results in improved student learning and a heightened sense of social inclusion.

Summary of Literature Reviewed

Mainstream educators' comprehensive understanding of the often profound distinctions between Aboriginal and Eurocentric knowledge can provide the necessary foundation for meaningful change in public schools and classrooms that can better serve the Aboriginal learner. The chronological journey provided in this chapter frames many of the issues that need to be recognized so that traditional Indigenous pedagogy has a context in the light of more Eurocentric pedagogy (Battiste, 1998).

Parkman (1963) speaks of betrayal of the Wendat by the Jesuit priests after first contact. Exploiting the Wendat for their trapping capabilities and knowledge of the land served to build on the Western style of obtaining knowledge. The acquisition of the Wendat information provided the Europeans with the means to survive the new land they had begun to inhabit. The trust of the Wendat people was manipulated and religious beliefs and ideologies were forced upon many of the Wendat people (before they viewed

the Jesuits as witches). Trigger (1965) states that the demise of the Wendat nation due to disease and war began to make the Wendat question the Jesuits. The European settlers' trust for the Aboriginals began to wane and what the Aboriginal people had to provide began to become trivial and less important. Marginalising the Aboriginal word began to take shape and rooted itself negatively in religion.

According to educational history after contact, deceit, exploitation, oppression, and then distrust alienated Aboriginal parents from mainstream. Then they were victimized by the system and wanted nothing to do with it. This historical pattern of interaction between people is similar to the present day minority and marginalized persons in education. They do not see themselves as having a meaningful voice in mainstream schools. Previous research has shown the importance of having Aboriginal parents getting involved and engaged in their children's learning. Many modern day studies show the same results. There is a direct and positive correlation between parental involvement and student success (Constantino, 2003; Epstein, 1995; Pushor, 2007). A number of studies reveal that ethnic minority parents' perceptions and beliefs about the education system controls the extent to which these same parents may get involved. The meaningful inclusion of ethnic ideas and values into mainstream schooling practices increases ethnic parental involvement and engagement (Carr, 2006; Friedel, 1999; Horvat et al., 2003; Pushor, 2007; Samaras & Wilson, 1999; Sook Lee and Bowen, 2006). The research supports the fact that Aboriginal and ethnic parents share a very similar predicament in terms of their initial resistance to become involved in mainstream public school communities.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

I chose a qualitative grounded theory approach for the data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory generates theories regarding social phenomena. The main purpose of grounded theory is to provide a higher level of understanding that is "grounded" in or comes from a distinct analysis of data. These data are not significant in regards to testing a hypothesis but rather to draw a theory through the close analysis of the data. Glaser and Strauss concluded that grounded theory is appropriate to use when social interactions are being studied. In this thesis, Aboriginal parental involvement and engagement was studied and the social interactions took place at a local high school in the form of a Talking Circle.

For some, including Hodson (2004), the Talking Circle methodology is understood at one level as similar to Straus and Corbin's (1990) grounded theory. Moreover, Foy's (2009) theory of a Talking Story is also relevant to establishing a comprehensive understanding of the methodology of this study. Foy's conceptualization of a Talking Story encompasses all the aspects of the Talking Circle approach employed in this research; however, and of significance, Foy's concept differs in that there is no set pattern of dialogue in the evolution of the Talking Story. Specifically, participants are free to interject ideas throughout the Talking Cirlce, but the subsequent conversation does not necessarily have to follow a circular pattern as is usually typical of the Talking Circle format. Foy distinguishes that participants can freely contribute to the discussion as it progresses (given that they respectfully honour the ideas of the other participants).

The grounded theory employed in this research does not test an existing theory but instead respects the voices of the Talking Circle participants. Grounded theory

requires the researcher to commit to and engage in the various stages of data collection (Cherubini, 2007). Through careful deliberation of responses provided by subjects, the researcher codes and categorizes the data to create an inductive analysis of the data (see Appendix C). This study's literature review provided a contextual reference for the open-ended circle questions. A more in-depth examination of the pertinent literature was completed after the identification of the initial codes and themes. In doing so, the emerging themes and their respective properties were considered in light of the data that were drawn from the participants' answers.

The research process followed the principles of grounded theory and represents a synthesis of the theory itself. Other research at Soaring Heights Secondary School (SHSS) included different stakeholders; namely, teachers, students, and administrators. This research concentrates on the perceptions of parents and caregivers associated to the ASP. The approach I took with the grounded theory methodology moved systematically through code and category generation based upon the Aboriginal parent participants' responses to open-ended questions. As a researcher the grounded theory research methodology provided a framework that was flexible, rigorous, and simultaneously rigid in terms of the organization of the emerging findings. This research study sought to explore Aboriginal parents' and caregivers' perceptions of the ASP and further develop a comprehensive understanding of the nature of Aboriginal parents' involvement in their children's education.

Rationale for Research Method

Within the literature review holistic learning was referred to and embodies First Nations people traditional learning style. A vital part of holistic traditional teachings is

oral communication. Although over the years Eurocentric pedagogy has altered and at times attempted to eliminate Aboriginal worldviews and approaches to traditional learning, the nucleus of knowledge for the Aboriginal learner is embedded in oral communication (Cajete, 2000). Therefore the use of semistructured interviews with the participants for data collection enabled the Aboriginal parents and caregivers to speak freely about those experiences related to education that they determined to be particularly relevant. As conversation progressed, a trusting rapport between all members of the Talking Circle developed. This was evident by the willingness for the participants to speak freely during the Talking Circle and the comfort in the tone in which they spoke.

Aboriginal Student Program

The Aboriginal Student Program (ASP) in (SHSS) provides a culturally based educational and personal support program for Aboriginal youth. The circle included parents and caregivers whose children participated in the ASP. The open-ended questions were intended to allow participants to freely discuss their own educational experiences as well as the educational journeys of their children at SHSS. The grounded theory design best suited this qualitative study because the research itself is grounded in the experiences of the participants. Because the main objective of this study was to examine Aboriginal parental perceptions of the ASP, I utilized the traditional Talking Circle in conjunction with the grounded theory in order to juxtapose differing perceptions of knowledge.

Participant Recruitment

Participants consisted of eight Aboriginal women and one Aboriginal man. The eight women were either mothers or caregivers of Aboriginal youth attending SHSS and involved in the ASP. The participants were first approached during an Aboriginal feast at

the same local high school in the fall of 2009. Initially, many parents and caregivers appeared apprehensive to participate but the support from the Aboriginal youth counselors employed by the ASP put many participants at ease. The ASP's youth counselors graciously made some phone calls to prospective study participants and coordinated convenient meeting times. This proved to be essential to the initial process. As well, one of the participants worked at a local Indian Centre and spoke with many Aboriginal people who showed interest in the study. Networking with participants within the community was critical in creating a nucleus of participants. All persons were asked to participate with the understanding that their personal information would be kept confidential and all would be provided aliases to protect their identity as best as possible. Of course, complete anonymity could not be guaranteed since the circle brought all participants together in a common forum. Many of the participants were asked to use their choice of an alias when they introduced themselves during the Talking Circle. However, as conversation progressed most did not continue to introduce themselves as the initial alias and therefore one was provided. A honorarium for their participation in the research project was provided.

Description of Participants

Nine individuals participated in the study. The following section presents a brief profile of each participant:

1. Jordan is the only male participant. He is between 17 and 21 years of age and a graduate of the ASP. During a nutrition break and as part of an external conversation to the Talking Circle, Jordan informed us that he was raised off the

reserve in a lower socioeconomic sector of the city and now resides with his aunt near SHSS.

2. Katie is the youngest of the female participants (between 16 to 20 years of age) and sister to Jordan. She too graduated from the ASP and recently had a child of her own. Like Jordan, she was raised in the inner city by the same aunt as Jordan.

3. Sandra is a middle-aged woman, between approximately 45 to 55 years of age. She does not have a secondary school diploma. She is the aunt to Jordan and Katie and is the sole provider to the children. Sandra also has a younger son of her own who is presently in the ASP. Sarah was employed at the local Indian centre. She provides other education opportunities within the Indian centre to local Aboriginal children that have difficulty in the mainstream schooling system. Sarah is also a graduate of the ASP. She was instrumental in assisting with other possible participants for this study.

4. Linda is a middle-aged woman (between 45 and 55 years of age) and mother to Sarah. She returned to complete her high school diploma later after having Sarah.

5. Sarah is the most outspoken participant in the group. She is a strong voice in the community and works at the local Indian centre. She provides other education opportunities within the Indian centre to local Aboriginal children that have difficulty in the mainstream schooling system. Sarah is also a graduate of the ASP. She was instrumental in assisting with other possible participants for this study.

6. Charlene is in her 50s and spoke earnestly about the ASP. She was pursuing a graduate degree at the time of the study.

7. Andrea is the only non-Aboriginal participant. She has been married to an Aboriginal man for 22 years. Andrea is between 35 and 45 years of age and has a postsecondary school diploma.

8. Susan is also a middle-aged woman. At the time of the Talking Circle she had three children attending SHSS. Susan is a university graduate.

9. Roxanne is a middle-aged woman (approximately 40 to 45 years of age). She did not have an overly successful educational career but brought with her many experiences that she shared with the group.

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Data Collection and Analysis

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Data were collected, organized, and analysed. There were some significant challenges and ethical considerations while undertaking the Talking Circle. Some of these are discussed in the following sections.

Recording of Data

Conversations during the Talking Circle were recorded using a digital recording device. All participants were informed of this at the onset of the Circle. The discussion was recorded using an MP3 format and later transcribed. Two separate sessions of recordings were taken the night of the Talking Circle with a brief refreshment break between. The recorded sessions were placed on two separate compact discs for safe keeping and the original MP3 interviews were also saved on a Universal Serial Bus (USB) flash drive. The participants could request a copy of their conversation.

Coding

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) and Creswell (2008) describe coding as organizing and managing the most meaningful bits of data by assigning tags or labels to the data.

Coding allowed for the dialogue to be transferred into meaningful data. The data were scrutinized line by line to find pertinent topics that were coded. A research team consisting of a professor of Aboriginal studies, an Aboriginal graduate student, an Aboriginal undergraduate student, and I read the transcript and coded the participants' conversation. The codes were hand written in the right margin of the transcribed worksheets. It is important to note that the other persons involved in coding this research provided their expertise as they have duplicated the same procedure numerous times and in varying contexts. Many pertinent codes were created during this process. A list of codes is found in Appendix D. The codes were not predetermined prior to the Talking Circle but rather arrived at by consensus by the research team. The data were cross-checked with the PI to triangulate the results and increase the study's validity and reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Challenges

There were a number of challenges during the study. Logistics related to the soliciting of parent and caregiver participants, and arranging a convenient meeting place and time were particularly noteworthy as nearly 10 weeks elapsed between the feast and the Talking Circle. Also noteworthy was the fact that organizing the data was a time-consuming task given the grounded theory methodology used in this analysis.

Coding large amounts of data sets that resulted from 3 hours of conversation was a rather daunting task. Listening to the voices on the recorder and matching the voice to the participant was difficult. After applying the appropriate name to the words spoken, we coded the data as a team, then returned to it for clarification, and triangulated it with the supervisor to ensure that the voices of the participants were front and centre, which

proved to be an exhausting task. This was done prior to having to take the time and energy to distinguish the inductive results grounded in the data. Articulation of this data was placed into concise statements that contributed to the eventual grounded theories. The realistic challenge of making all of this happen with many members of a research team living their own busy lives was very difficult. Figure 1 shows the blue print of the grounded theory.

Ethical Considerations

The Brock University Research Ethics Board granted clearance for this component of the study (File No. 08-275), as did the respective board of education. The selected participants volunteered to engage in the study of their own consent. Permission forms were distributed to parent and caregivers before the start of the WTC. Participants were informed of their right to decline participation in the data collection from the WTC. Parents' and caregivers' identities were not disclosed at any stage during the data analysis.

Conclusion

Grounded theory is dichotomous in nature. It is a rigorous process of inductive analysis. It forces the researcher to account for the perceptions and experiences of the participants themselves. Charmaz (1983) states that qualtiative researchers need to generate ideas that later can be verified through tradtional logico-deductive methods (p. 47). Participants' reflections determined the analysis because it was their experiences that grounded the data. The next chapter presents the respective results.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the results of the Talking Circle. Using grounded theory as a qualitative means of analysis, the data and results are categorized to identify the participants' perceptions of the ASP. The data are coded into categories that emerged from the participants' reflections. This chapter presents the respective categories and analysis that were outcomes of the Talking Circle.

The open-ended questions that guided our Talking Circle discussions are as follows:

1. What have been your experiences with the ASP, including teachers, administrators, and, possibly, senior administration within the public school setting?

2. How have these experiences influenced your perspectives in regards to your children's journey through public education?

3. How has the ASP experience affected your view of how public education can be improved to foster more success for Aboriginal youth?

The data analysis evolved into two categories. Each of the categories is supported by coded dialogue taken from the transcribed Talking Circle interviews. Collectively, the findings support the importance of Aboriginal parental involvement/engagement for their children's academic success. Specifically, the two dominant categories that emerged from the data are: (a) Culturally Relevant Programming: Parental Involvement/Engagement, and (b) Educational Experiences Both Past and Present: Aboriginal Identity. These two categories and their respective properties are discussed in detail in this chapter.

Culturally Relevant Programming: Parental Involvement/Engagement

The first category grounded in the data relates to participants' perceptions about the need for cultural relevance to be a meaningful part of students' education. The ASP is an important hub that connects students' in-class learning with traditional knowledge stemming directly from the interventions and programs related to the ASP. Further, educational programming across subjects and programs need to be cultural relevant in order to have a lasting effect for Aboriginal students, parents, and the wider school community. As Sarah indicated, "If maybe the cultural component had been part of schooling when we were there [in school], we might have been more engaged into the program." As parents and caregivers provided their opinions and ideas about the ASP, a true sense of urgency was noted in that they needed to feel connected with their children and the culture and the ASP often would provide the forum in which they made a connection. The parents' and caregivers' previous experiences in formal education did not allow for this; however, the participants attested that they are starting to sense this connection as a result of the open communication between them, the Aboriginal youth counsellors working in the ASP, and the school itself. Sarah further went on to say, "the culture was in there and we saw ourselves as one big family and that was the camaraderie needed." For these parents and caregivers, the sense of culture is starting to filter back into the urban environment through the children's education and this has allowed the parents to become knowledgeable and proud of their own culture.

Cultural Inclusion

Cultural inclusion was directly attributed to the support of the Aboriginal youth counsellors and teachers who built some Aboriginal knowledge into their everyday

program. Parents spoke highly of educators who did not marginalize what the people of

the ASP were doing for their children and recommended similar educative programming

across the education system. As Charlene stated, "The ASP was definitely an asset

because I think it was made available, and I think we are so much more aware of cultural

diversity, we can talk about Aboriginal traditions and everything is not so taboo." She

also made reference to the silence she felt in her house maturing as an Aboriginal girl.

She indicated that Aboriginal traditions and the availability of the people that run the

ASP break this silence between her and her children. All of the participants had similar

sentiments but stated that there needs to be some adjustments as the program progresses.

It was noted that the Aboriginal youth counsellors still need to emphasise the importance

of all of the children's education and that the Native Room allocated to the Aboriginal

students cannot be a means of avoidance from the rest of their academic subjects.

Charlene supported this notion by stating, "Some students do take advantage and hang

around when they just don't necessarily need to." However, it was clear throughout the

Talking Circle that the benefits of having the dedicated space and culturally appropriate

programming definitely outweighed the possible negative issue of wasting time in the

Native room.

Sandra, the caregiver aunt of two children in the program, said that the culturally

sensitive tutoring support offered by the ASP has provided the opportunity and support

for her children to achieve better grades. This academic success allows the children to

bestow some of that knowledge upon her when they return from school. "They help me

with some things at home… I know I have life experience but they have helped with my

learning disabilities, I'm proud of them for that." Keeping students in school and earning

their secondary school diploma s viewed by the participants as one of the most important goals for their children and all Aboriginal students. Participants personally reflected that with the counselling assistance and educational help from the ASP there has been a noticeable improvement in the graduation rate of Aboriginal students. Sarah stated, "I can't speak about academic progress but I can definitely say that I think the retention rates are going to be higher due to the fact that ASP has expanded and is supporting more types of learners." The participants had a particular interest in ensuring that teachers' pedagogy is sensitive to their children's and dependents' needs as Aboriginal learners and the comments made by many of the participants exemplify this direction the teachers need to take for the students to be successful.

Aboriginal Students' Learning Styles

As a property of culturally relevant programming, the participants also spoke to the distinct epistemological realities of Aboriginal students. According to many of the participants, success for Aboriginal students depends upon teachers' instructional practices that include placing capital on Aboriginal knowledge as well as programming that includes Aboriginal knowledge. Sandra indicated that trades education (auto mechanics, wood working, plumbing, cosmetology) are ideal for some students, including her son. "It was a struggle to get him in [a local vocational school] and he's one of those kids that learns with his hands and a trade school wherever would be good." Sandra referred to a neighbouring vocational high school that also offers an ASP. It was noted that many of the parents are very grateful for the ASP at the local composite high school but feel there needs to be more Aboriginal programming offered to their children and others with similar learning styles. Sandra clearly indicated her opinion: "I'm glad

they've got it at the local vocational school now but I just wish there was more of it."

Through the differentiated instruction and the hands-on approach to learning, the

participants also identified that students' learning styles as well as life-skill requirements

are being addressed by the people that run the ASP. According to Sarah, "The ASP is

providing so much more and we are all about transitioning for these different kinds of

learners so they are successful. I think this will be very positive especially for the young

male population."

Meaningful Relationships

The relationships created between the participants and the youth counsellors,

some teachers, the principal, and the elder were instrumental towards fostering parental

and caregiver involvement in the school. There was a strong connection between all that

the ASP offered and the students that utilized that service. Sandra indicated the

connection her children have with the counsellors because as she states, "The confidence

[counsellors] provide makes me feel more relaxed because they are thinking about their

future." Even though her son has graduated, he continues to speak with one of the

counsellors. Both Sandra and Katie (Auntie and niece) stated that "[counsellors] have

helped me keep my youngest one in school, steer him in the right direction, and help him

graduate." Accounts of counsellor support for Aboriginal student learning were

consistent throughout the discussions and in fact permeated many of the related

participant observations. Not only did the Aboriginal youth counsellors address academic

issues but students' nutritional needs as well. Susan was quite pleased to state, "The

[counsellors] are cool and they provide my child with lunch every day if they need one.

Go to school and not be hungry because I know how that is." Susan reflected on the lack

of support throughout her own high school journey and compared it to how her children are being taken care of by the counsellors in the ASP. A very interesting account came from two participants who indicated that they made a very positive connection with the same school administrator who was instrumental in the creation of the ASP at the secondary school. Sarah stated early on in the discussion, "He connected me with music… just kind of pushed me through…sent me to the office when I needed to." She further went on to explain the same person "pulled her all the way and that the small Aboriginal population had the camaraderie to see themselves as a family." The uncertainty of support the participants felt when they attended school is not prevalent in the ASP for their children.

The traditional Aboriginal teaching methodologies and the connections the children make with all the people supporting and using the ASP were seen to be crucial in juxtaposing the traditional knowledge with Western education curriculum. Sandra was very outspoken and shared the following: "More and more the kids and my friends are being pushed into going back to school; they found the value in education where my generation didn't get the encouragement." She further went on to state, "In a school with more than 80 different languages spoken, for the kids to be able to identify with a culture that might not necessarily have been part of them before is huge." The parents and caregivers connected the importance of their culture and language with the success their children have had already and with the future success that could be obtained with a culturally relevant education.

Aboriginal Student: Community Advocacy

The participants were particularly concerned with the concept of advocacy both

for their children and themselves in the context of mainstream schooling practices and community. Many of the participants spoke of not having a support person when they were in school and some made reference to the fact there was only a small group of Aboriginal students with whom they could connect. In the past when they needed to speak with a teacher or administrator at the school, most participants spoke of their profound apprehension. A distinct sense of relief was felt when many of the parents and caregivers realized someone was available at the school for their children's academic and social wellbeing. Sarah stated, "It takes advocates, role models, and leaders like [counsellors] and administration to be so absolutely vital."

Participants discussed that it is also very important to take some of the academic intangibles like relationships with counsellors and other Aboriginal students or the availability of the ASP room and utilize this to assist in the students' academic success. For example, Sandra also stated that it is essential to "build up their self-esteem and to encourage them over and over again." Some parents confirmed that advocacy came at a cost as well. The children and parents needed to realize that often the school rules needed to be enforced and although the administrator was very supportive, he or she was required to enforce the prescribed consequences. Charlene reiterated a conversation she had with the same administrator that supported her and her family, "Your children are skipping [truant] today and he went on to apologize for having to implement repercussions. He would take the time to pull my little family aside and have conversations about my children." The parents and caregivers felt that not only did the administration in the school need to be advocates for their children but other staff too needed to support Aboriginal learners. Administration, teachers, and other support staff

are necessary, according to participants, to establish trusting bonds between the school community and the neighbourhood community.

Counsellor support and advocacy was also considered essential. Andrea said, "I have just one more thing to say is that the counsellors have all helped my kids." Andrea's perception of counsellors' support for her children was very passionate. The participants believed that the counsellors were the strongest advocates for their children. Roxanne stated, "It was because of the counsellors helping and supporting her giving her what she needs to go from 20% and 30% to 80%." Sandra added, "They've got more support, I had one teacher who pushed me along, but now they have more." There was a great deal of understanding from the participants in regards to who the support people would be on staff. Whether it was administration, guidance counsellors, or ASP counsellors, the level of support and advocacy was very evident with the participants' dialogue. One of the most outspoken caregivers, Sarah, spoke to the hierarchy of advocacy when she said, "When I was going to school Mr. B. [a guidance counsellor] was actually still a teacher [at the local high school] and he actually advocated a long time ago for Aboriginal education." Throughout the discussion with the participants it became clear that they understood that advocacy would come from the ASP, teachers, and administration. All parties are essential in creating a successful academic high school career for the children.

Parental Involvement

The importance of parental involvement was also made clear in the dialogue during the Talking Circle. There were a number of instances where the participants made a direct reference to parental involvement. Linda stated,

I think that the ASP is allowing parents and students to voice their concerns about

their education, I think it is more parent involvement. More asking your kids,

what did you do today, what did you learn, is their homework? Parents are more

aware of the value of education now than ever before and how to access what's

out there.

Often the parents spoke of wanting to be made aware of the support and traditional

knowledge that could be provided for their children in the school so that the programs

will continue. Sandra, the auntie of the two children, speculated, "The schools should be

pulling the parents in more to make us aware of what facts are and then maybe at that

point if we had the information then we'd be able to voice more to make these programs

stay put." The importance of the ASP as a provider of cultural and educational support

was made very evident. Participants recognized the benefits of being proactive in terms

of getting involved with their children's education, and most importantly, felt more

comfortable in doing so. "Once again, the parents have to make that extra dedication to

drive from the mountain [escarpment] down to the school to get the education they feel is

their right."

Recognizing the needs the parents' and caregivers' children have in regards to

education, supporting the education system the children are immersed in, and interjecting

Aboriginal knowledge into that system were emphasised. The "true history" was in

reference to what actually happened to the Aboriginal people in Canadian history. Andrea

stated she involved herself with the children's learning by knowing what was being

taught in history class, asking her children to be respectful to this knowledge but placing

more credibility on Aboriginal history. She was cognizant of the Eurocentric history

program but was able to emphasize Aboriginal knowledge. Andrea was also respectful towards the history program in the Ontario secondary school curriculum. One of the last points made by a participant involved the notion that Aboriginal parents are being asked to do too much in today's society. Charlene acknowledged the fact that "We are being overanalysed, asked to do surveys and to do this and that, eventually it becomes too much. PTA (Parent Teacher Association) and whatever else and still providing a greater dedication in the Aboriginal community to ensure the proper education creates an issue for the Aboriginal parent." However, this participant believed that involvement is necessary for the betterment of their children in terms of academic achievement. What was made most apparent was the concern these participants have for their children's future and their understanding of the significance of education. Many of the participants recognized that combining both Western education with Aboriginal knowledge provided by the ASP, many parents are more aware of what is occurring in the school and are comfortable in getting involved with their children's education.

Educational Experiences Both Past and Present—Aboriginal Parental Identity

Parents and caregivers who participated in this study had a great deal to share in regards to their educational experiences. Their own identity as an Aboriginal person came out during conversations and their history revealed the desire for their children to have a strong Aboriginal identity.

Educational Experiences

The participants not only perceived the need and were grateful for the advocacy provided by the Aboriginal youth counsellors, the school administrators, and other teachers but also readily compared this emerging need and necessary support to their own

educational journeys whereby such assistance seemed relatively absent. During the Talking Circle participants were often critical of the educational practices that they themselves had to endure. On the contrary, many of the participants viewed the interventions and support systems offered by the ASP as more positive and beneficial experiences for their children and hoped that it will contribute to their success. Sarah spoke of her experiences in school: "it was interesting, I was definitely a bad student. Lots of drugs and alcohol involved when I was growing up." She described a time when there was a lack of direction for Aboriginal students in her high school. As well, there was also a lack of support for her and other Aboriginal students. Graduating from high school was a rarity for some of the participants. Sandra in particular admitted to only making it to Grade 10: "I'm glad I went to high school, high school was a good time for me and I appreciate my experiences both good and bad." Charlene's' statement is also noteworthy:

> When I was growing up it seemed to me that, well my parents had a Grade 6 education in school so school wasn't the top priority. I don't remember my parents saying things like, when you get to college or university and this is probably why I only have my Grade 8.

There was reference made by Charlene in regards to her academic life experiences and how she was able to complete her high school diploma and then further her education in a postsecondary school institution. "I took the adult Aboriginal education program here at and Ontario University; it was a great, great experience." She recognized the necessity to have transitions for the children from high school to postsecondary. She referred to them as "continuums" but understood these need to be brought to the students' attention so that

they can see the importance of education. "Today I'm finishing my Master's in Social Work." She was candid and made significant reference to the ASP as one of the "continuums." For many of the participants the lack of emphasis placed on education in their past was evident during the discussion. Equally noteworthy were the positive influences of the advocates that the Aboriginal adults, parents, and caregiver participants declared were having a profound influence on Aboriginal students. This influence began to create a comfortable means to which the Aboriginal children could begin to identify themselves as an Aboriginal person.

The participants made it clear that they wanted their children to understand their Aboriginal identity. The need to take pride in who they are and in their self-identity as an Aboriginal individual was not understated. As parents and caregivers spoke, the urgency to having their children understand their own culture was crucial. The participants' generational reality that took place during their educational experiences was not positive and this was shared during the Talking Circle. When coding the Talking Circle conversation, there were some patterns that seemed to emerge related to Aboriginal identity. These included: generational reality, identity, pride, self-identification, cultural inclusion, and cultural identity.

The data revealed that the participants recognized that their children were portraying a true sense of Aboriginal identity and that was prevalent because of the opportunities the people of the ASP provided. "I've noticed a huge improvement in [participants' children] attitude. They look forward to coming to school and I think it is because of the [ASP] that they have a sense of belonging within the school and that their identity is out there." When Susan referenced "out there" she was referring to the school

and city community. Sandra used the cliché, "North end is a good end!" Her reference was in regards to the geographical location in the city where SHSS is located. She spoke with assurance and distinction. She later added, "Through education I got I was able to instil in my children to be proud of who they are and be strong for who you are and teach those people [non-Aboriginals] what our natural gentle and caring way is." One of the themes that emerged in much of what the participants were saying concerned a sense of pride and identity. It was not only evident in the participants' voices but also the way they [participants] would speak to the ASP and the nurturing way that the counsellors would work with their children. Susan proudly stated, "I was really amazed when my boys brought home their hand drums. I was just so honoured I had to come in and see the counsellors to thank them." A significant aura of Aboriginal immodesty was very obvious when this parent spoke about how the people of the ASP influenced her children to take pride in being successful in school and value the importance of Aboriginal knowledge.

Self-Identification

Charlene used the term "taboo" as a parallelism to Aboriginal identity when she spoke of how society viewed Aboriginal people in the past. Admitting to being Aboriginal in years past stifled much of the pride and identity that the participants had when they were younger. Self-identifying as an Aboriginal person was made significantly easier with the comfort and self-assurance the people of the ASP provided. This was apparent in the voices of the parents and caregivers during the Talking Circle. Self-identification was one of the most important aspects to which the participants referred. Without the initial understanding and acceptance of who the children are, the parents and

caregivers stated that they would not be privy to how the people of the ASP could help their children. Charlene stated, "Part of the problem is self-identification. We don't know how many Aboriginal youth are in the schools. There are so many Aboriginal youth that are not being reached because they don't identify." Sandra told a story of family members that would not identify as being Aboriginal because they felt they would not get as many "opportunities." She further went on to say, "You will but you will have to fight for it." According to the participants, taking the initial step to self-identify as an Aboriginal person is beginning to allow for more possibilities to be successful in mainstream education as compared to an earlier time when many of the participants struggled to succeed and hesitated to self-identify. The generational realities that the participants endured in school consisting of biased pedagogical practices and the inability to self-identify for fear of repercussions was unmistakable in their voices during the conversations.

Culture

The parents and caregivers spoke candidly in regards to the Western educational philosophies that were being taught to their children. Specifically, the Eurocentric epistemology was referred to as being thrust upon "our people" [people of Turtle Island] and how these ideas and ways differ greatly from the traditional way of learning. "I think that's where that European influence comes in which changed our whole value system," said Linda. She further stated that Aboriginal people "were thrown into mainstream society without even an understanding of the language being spoken to us." This was quite troubling to the participants because curriculum did not reflect and honour Aboriginal knowledge. Specifically, the modern day history classes lacked accuracy

relative to Aboriginal history. Sandra adamantly stated, "The right history, the true history needs to be taught." Another parent spoke to the notion that she is aware of Aboriginal geography curriculum being created by the Ontario Ministry of Education but not Aboriginal history. The parents questioned the epistemological reality being taught to their children. The participants all agreed that the ASP that takes place in SHSS provides a medium where cultural inclusion can be initiated by way of utilizing Aboriginal knowledge and materials. They further went on to state that there needs to be more ASP-type programs with more Aboriginal resources and support programs in other schools where there is a strong Aboriginal population in the community. Roxanne made note of the fact that there was a great deal of money invested in the ASP and much of it was spent on books that were written by Aboriginal scholars and therefore the ASP had its own resource library. The participants realized this was only a starting place for true Aboriginal knowledge but was more than what they were privy to during their time in formal education.

Generational Reality

Numerous participants admitted that some of the same challenges with substance abuse that existed in their own past are still evident in their communities: "The problems really haven't changed that much, drugs, alcohol, and all the other stuff that took place back then. However, there are more advocates now than before." Sarah suggested that advocacy for their children in education have evolved to better their children's academic success. Even during the time of this research one participant made reference to residential schools and how she felt the inability to get involved with her daughter's education because of the tragic experiences of her parents as children. The LHF (2003)

refers to situations where violence was inflicted on the Aboriginal children for simply

trying to speak their language. The Residential Schools initiative is still having a lasting

negative effect on even the participants in this study. Sandra stated, "Residential school

and she had a really tough time of it. It made me feel so I couldn't go out there, didn't

want to go out there, and get involved." Roxanne spoke of a lack of confidence as she

progressed from childhood to her teen years and an era where she would not seek out

other Aboriginal children at school or even speak up for herself. However, she admits

that the new generation is different: "kids today are more encouraged, and the self-

confidence is there." These statements, and others like them, depict a context relevant to

the participants wherein household discussions had nothing to do with education but

rather just survival.

Aboriginal Community Involvement in Public Education

The degree in which the Aboriginal community has an impact on student success

was made quite apparent by the participants. Aboriginal parental contribution

incorporates a holistic approach to learning that includes Aboriginal tradition and

community involvement. Traditional learning embodies all persons within the Aboriginal

community. Immediate family, educators, and Elders provide knowledge for all people in

the community. This was most evident with the diversity of Aboriginal caregivers that

created the participant base. The high school in the urban setting in which the Talking

Circle took place provided a sanctuary for the students to feel comfortable and accepted

as an Aboriginal person. One of the participants noted that this school environment

provided a significant increase in support for Aboriginal children which in turn keep

them in school. The ASP provides a means to where the parents and caregivers can see

the involvement the community can provide for their children. "I'm grateful [the ASP] is in place and that just goes to show we are getting stronger and I think coming together and just getting bigger." Kind Woman made reference to the ASP in conjunction with the supportive neighbouring community. The school and neighbourhood communities are accepting to the participants and directly involved with the Aboriginal students. Sandra also acknowledged the pivotal role of the local Native Centre. She indicated that through the Native Centre and going back to school she "found herself." She was referring to her daughter but made note that she is slowly getting back to her own culture because of the opportunities offered in the community.

Summary

This chapter presented the results of the data analysis from the transcripts of the Talking Circle. The Talking Circle allowed for the participants to speak candidly and without interruption. It is clear that the parents and caregivers perceive a great deal of significant progress in regards to their children's educational experiences. Specifically, the ASP was created and is supported by the counsellors, administration, and teachers of SHSS and has provided an opportunity for their children to be academically successful in an urban setting. Parental involvement and support for the program appears to be increasing because of the comfort the all person involved with ASP provides to the parents when they want to speak with a teacher or advocate for the child at school. Coding of the responses created this culmination of ideas into four broad categories. The categories attest to the fact that parental involvement and engagement underscores Aboriginal student success. The ideas presented in this chapter provide a powerful basis for discussion in the concluding chapter that follows.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

This study sought to investigate Aboriginal parents' and caregivers' perceptions and experiences of the Aboriginal Student Program (ASP) regarding their children's educational journeys in an urban setting. The participants were forthright in regards to the challenges and oppressive conditions of their own educational journeys in light of the sense of advocacy and culturally relevant programming that benefits Aboriginal students through the ASP. Minimal research exists relative to urban Aboriginal parental involvement. This thesis makes a contribution to the literature as it discusses the perceptions of Aboriginal parents/caregivers in one urban secondary school. Most significantly, it points to several key findings, including the necessity to have programs to assist the Aboriginal learner and more importantly to this thesis, the need to allow parents and caregivers the opportunity for involvement with their children's learning.

Nine adults participated in the study. Data were collected and qualitatively analyzed. Interactions amongst professionals and the local Aboriginal parent community were facilitated; key issues were identified, discussed, and reflected upon through careful deliberation using grounded theory. These data were gathered during the Aboriginal Talking Circle. The circle provided the comfortable atmosphere for the participants to speak candidly, reflect, and discuss present day issues in regards to their involvement with their children's education.

Two key categories emerged from the participants' experiences and were grounded in the data. They included (a) culturally relevant programming and involvement/engagement, and (b) educational experiences both past and present and Aboriginal parental identity.

The results developed into a more distinct understanding for the participants of how Eurocentric traditional educational processes at SHSS and how the ASP better serves their children's needs. It became apparent to parents and caregivers that the people that run the ASP are helpful in so far as to assisting in the meshing of the Western curriculum taught by SHSS and with traditional knowledge. The Native Room is a place where the ASP takes place and the Aboriginal children of the program can get both the academic support and social support. Teachers' pedagogy at the school and topics for the curriculum being taught in history has proven to need some revamping based upon the participants' dialogue. Through conversations with the participants, it became apparent that there are many advocates who support Aboriginal students within the school, such as teachers, counselors, and even administrators. The participants began to feel they could be part of their children's education and hence have more involvement with the school and their children. in particular was noted that a greater role through Aboriginal community members, such as Elders, could facilitate bonding communication for the schools and Aboriginal community. The data and respective findings are intended to further provide the schools and the board of education that is affiliated with the ASP with significant evidence that Aboriginal parental support is critical in educating Aboriginal youth within urban school settings.

Discussion

This discussion further clarifies the need the participants voiced in regards to having their children receive culturally appropriate programming within the school they attend. Also, the ASP parents and caregivers have made it quite clear that their voice in

the school could provide the necessity for a more holistic style of learning as they become more involved.

History has shown that generations of Aboriginal people have been stymied by mainstream educational practices. Eurocentric learning and teaching styles have proven to be less successful since they often do not represent holistic approaches to teaching and learning for Aboriginal students. The research participants clearly recommend that more traditional knowledge needs to be incorporated into the provincial curriculum. However, the role of the teacher is underscored throughout the data since the curriculum must be delivered in culturally respectful and appropriate ways in order to truly enhance the achievement of Aboriginal students both in and out of the classroom. Cherubini and Hodson (2008) state that teachers teach what they know and therefore the disconnect between teacher and pupil widens when the educator's pedagogy differs from the student's epistemology. Bishop and Glynn (1999) refer to this as a domination of invisible majority capital. The ASP coordinators and stakeholders figuratively narrow the gap for Aboriginal learners between Eurocentric curriculum and Aboriginal knowledge and in turn draw the parents and caregivers into the school and further into their children's education. The curriculum needs to include Aboriginal traditional capital so that Aboriginal students can view their epistemologies and worldviews as equally valid to mainstream pedagogies and values. The "right person for this job" does not necessarily have to be an Aboriginal teacher but rather a knowledgeable empathic teacher for Aboriginal students who can relate to their unique capital as a people and as learners.

Culturally relevant programming that embodies Aboriginal epistemology and culturally appropriate activities are very important to parents and caregivers. Resources

that reflect a more traditional and accurate portrayal of true Aboriginal knowledge and historical facts are also significant to the participants. These resources would provide some stability in terms of delivery and design of programs in Eurocentric urban high schools. In addition, including culturally appropriate resources would create a welcomed sense of culture and tradition by Aboriginal parents and caregivers particularly in the context of the predominantly Western pedagogies and orientations of Ontario public schools.

The parents and caregivers spoke about many situations where their children were provided with traditional Aboriginal programs in the context of their classrooms. These examples spoke to the potential of the ASP to align more western-based pedagogies with Aboriginal student epistemologies. The participants shared examples of lessons taught in Canadian History courses that included extensive perspectives from First Nations peoples. They spoke of instances when teachers relied more heavily on examples and demonstration to convey lesson instead of the typical emphasis on reading and the written word. Students who preferred more hands-on activities to demonstrate their learning were not shunned or relegated to the margins of the public school classrooms. Rather, they were provided with varied opportunities to learn according to their strengths. There were also stories of their children making hand drums as one example of extracurricular activities at the school. Participants spoke readily about the nature of the open dialogue between their children and the Aboriginal youth counsellors in the Native Room. This dialogue strengthened their personal relationships with counsellors as parents and caregivers suggested that their children benefitted from the care that the counselors demonstrated and acted upon. The parents and caregivers appreciate that their children, in

the context of the above relationships, discovered a sense of engagement in their

education. SHSS is not perceived by participants as a location that serves to merely

alienate their children further from formal schooling, as it had done for many of them.

Instead, the ASP represents their children and honours how they learn best.

Moreover, the necessity for a greater adoption of the Talking Circle in public

school classrooms and school councils could open the lines of communication between

not only Aboriginal students and teachers but also Aboriginal community members and

school administrators and teachers. Although Talking Circles are age-old traditions in the

Aboriginal community, mainstream education and Western society has been using them

for less than a decade as a means of communication (J. Roberts, personal communication,

March 20, 2013). The openness of the Talking Circle and unstructured nature of the

conversations can be mediums that are conducive to open dialogue. It worked very well

for this research thesis and I am convinced that the school that I work for could easily

implement this means of discussion. Talking Circles might be implemented in public

schools to resolve issues between students, families and teachers, and families and

administration. Moreover, Talking Circles could be a component of school board,

meetings to allow for a comfortable environment for not only Aboriginal parents but also

other parents who feel their input is valuable to their children's education.

The most significant contribution this research makes to mainstream education is

that it provides results that are taken from Aboriginal parents and caregivers within an

urban community. The results are indicative of caring Aboriginal people and not that of

the distant savages that were once depicted by churches and government. It is important

to note that generations of Aboriginal people from the reserve, or in the case of this thesis

the urban Aboriginal community, have a lack trust for colonial educational institutions. This has contributed to the silencing of Aboriginal community members. The willingness of the participants in this research study to share their stories and perceptions suggests that future research with Aboriginal parents in regards to their involvement and engagement in public education is not only possible but could facilitate change within an urban educational environment. Trust is not established with Aboriginal communities as a result of only one research project. Establishing trusting relationships involves a lengthy process of open and inviting collaboration with the Aboriginal community. Only then can one establish meaningful engagement and future discussions with Aboriginal parents and caregivers.

Many of the participants made reference to residential schooling issues. This was not a result of their participation in residential schools but rather their parents' stories of some of the atrocities they endured. The inhibitions the participants had in regards to formal education were conveyed during the Circle and reflected in their voices and dialogue. Much of the mistrust the participants had that was compounded as a result of residential schools is now changing to a community of trust because of the ASP. The betrayal of schooling for many of the participants is lessening with the assurance the ASP provides for their children. The parents and caregivers are comfortable when they enter the school because their perspectives of SHSS differ greatly as compared to the conceptions of residential schools. The parents spoke of an identity that is being instilled back into their children's lives because of the ASP and reflected on the loss of identity in years past. Although all of the participants were not directly involved in the residential schooling initiative, many of the outrages established by residential schools were very

evident in their voices. Fortunately the parents and caregivers feel the ASP provides a means to alter these intergenerational consequences.

Personal Reflection—Initial and New Perceptions

The parent/caregiver participants' perceptions of education are beginning to be transformed by the success the students are having after being part of the ASP and the caregivers and parents realization that they are involved in that success. One of the most recent documents on this topic published by the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) (2010) states:

> Thus, parents not only play an important role within the school community, but they also have a significant impact on their children's education through the attitudes they help to shape and the direct support they provide to their children. (p. 7)

Aboriginal parents want the opportunity to be involved with their children's education but through the Talking Circle discussions it was clear that they are often unsure how to be involved or engaged. The data revealed that there is uncertainty and apprehension for the parents and caregivers when it came to attending their children's schools for the purpose of involvement. Specifically Sandra articulated that there existed a negative generational reality associated with Residential schools. She stated that she did not want to get involved as she felt she could not go and get involved.

Oppression placed upon Aboriginal people by the French Jesuits during first contact in 1492 and later by the Catholic churches and the Canadian government stymied a great deal of traditional knowledge that is attempting to be recaptured today by Aboriginal people. Generations of culturally plagued Aboriginal people are starting to be

given the respect and opportunity to provide some traditional knowledge into their children's education. Through carefully organized schooling initiatives (residential schools) by the government and churches, the cultural genocide placed upon the Aboriginal people for more than 100 years is starting to be slowly mended as evidenced by the voices of the participants in this study. Their hope is that more programs that offer traditional learning and allow for open dialogue with parents and caregivers can be put in place for other Aboriginal students and parents to benefit from the changes.

A Valid Voice

According to participants, the services offered by the ASP, the aboriginal youth counsellors, Elders, and NSL programs that empower language provide inner city Aboriginal youth a place to feel welcome and gain strength from other Aboriginal youth in a publicly funded mainstream secondary school. As many of the parents and caregivers stated, culturally relevant programming is necessary to providing a culturally important knowledge for the children. Many of the participants' previous educational experiences were not positive. Often it was noted that the education they received contained minimal traditional knowledge and excessive racism. The programming that took place in their elementary and secondary schools did not include any significant Aboriginal programming and any reference to traditional knowledge was futile at best. Therefore, the previous "miseducation" that Solomon (1990) refers to is starting to be altered by the programs that are being into place like the ASP where the people who are responsible for running these programs are more respectful and inclusive to Aboriginal people. The parents and caregivers felt slighted in the past but are starting to perceive the importance

placed on traditional knowledge and Aboriginal epistemology in so far as how they see their children beginning to be successful in school.

The true sense of pride for the participants' children and the programming and assistance that is being offered at SHSS is indeed prevalent. Culturally appropriate programming in many of the disciplines provides the children with a greater sense of their cultural identity that had been lost to their parents' and grandparents' generations. Authentic and valid knowledge is infused into many of the children's daily classes. Susan said that not all the teachers were creating a culturally inclusive program in their class but some were trying. By building traditional knowledge into Aboriginal students' school programs, parents and caregivers feel more at ease when they speak with their children and with the youth counselors, teachers, and administrators at the school. Whereas in the past these participants were hesitant to approach the teachers and administration in the school they shared their growing confidence in becoming actively involved in their children's schoolwork and culturally relevant extracurricular activities offered by the ASP. The youth counselors, teachers, and administrators in the school are perceived as more approachable and inviting according to the participants since they provide a welcoming place for parents and members of the Aboriginal community to speak candidly. In this way Aboriginal parents and community have a valid voice in their children's education and culturally appropriate programming.

Involvement/Engagement

Because of the emerging sense that their voice is valid within the school community, parents feel they can be more involved in their children's education. The Aboriginal parent participants are very outspoken and eager to involve themselves in

their children's academic lives. The parent/caregiver participants are openly critical of the education that they endured and recognized the potential of the services (e.g., drumming groups, language, Aboriginal arts and crafts, counselling groups, and other Aboriginal students) related to the ASP that are having a profound effect on engaging their children into the mainstream school culture, but also are pivotal in fostering parental and community involvement in the school. In this way, parents themselves see a purpose to be involved in formal and informal discussions with youth counsellors, the Elder, teachers, and principals. They feel that their voices are not perceived by mainstream educators as token contributions but instead as a resource for culturally relevant programming for the benefit of all students and not just Aboriginal learners. Therefore, the participants believe the potential for their involvement in their children's education is markedly different from even their own experiences in school. Aboriginal knowledge prior to the Davin report in 1867 was founded upon shared wisdom within the community, however it all but vanished in the 119 years following the report.

The participants in this study see a return to a more traditional style of learning where the Elders and parents have input into what and how their children are taught. The silence that was once most predominant amongst the Aboriginal parents in mainstream educational communities is being broken by these Aboriginal parents and caregivers. One participant used the term "taboo" when referencing Aboriginal traditions and cultural diversity. Another made a point by indicating the "silence" she felt in her own house growing up. In this case, her parents were not given the opportunity to involve themselves in their children's education and therefore "taboo" and "silence" were words commonly used by all participants. Other parents in this study spoke of having their

children bring the traditional knowledge and language home so that it can be shared. Participants take pride in the knowledge that was not prevalent in their younger years. Academic initiatives like NSL or history books with accurate accounts of Aboriginal history allow children to receive some traditional knowledge with the assistance from the people in the ASP room. The bond between the parents/caregivers and the children and also the configuration of the ASP has provided open communication with the participants' children and the school.

The Talking Circle provided the participants with the opportunity to reflect upon their past and present perceptions of education and schooling. It is interesting to note that most spoke of their educational past in a derogatory manner but had hope for their children as a direct result of all the people involved with the ASP. Although at times they admitted some hesitancy to be completely involved in the school community, many spoke candidly about the counsellors and administrators that advocate for their children when they could not. Participants were relieved to discover that other parent/caregiver participants had similar experiences earlier in their lives. After a quiet beginning to the circle, one by one the participants shared their stories with the group and spoke of similar situations of exploitation from their own educational journeys. Participants alluded to their own experiences of feeling isolated in mainstream classrooms and disconnected from the curriculum but took solace in the fact that their children were experiencing a different reality in public school—a reality where they perceived that they belonged to the school at large and could appreciate teachers who infused Aboriginal teachings into their pedagogy.

Parents and caregivers expressed their comfort and felt welcome in the school through a couple of introductory initiatives. In fact, the feast wherein I extended an invitation to the community to share their stories was another opportunity for the parents and caregivers to assume an active role in the school community. Moreover, housing the feast within the school cafeteria grounded the sense of involvement within the school for the participants. It was a very comfortable environment. R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd. (2002) speak of the lack of understanding and empathy on the part of educators as to difficulties experienced by, and challenges unique to, Aboriginal parents and families. Fortunately, I have a colleague with whom I previously worked who is very active in the Aboriginal urban community. She was willing to introduce others to me. These introductions by a trusted member in the community broached some visible anxiety between whom possible participants for this study and myself. As the participants understood more about what the Talking Circle was going to allow them to say, they gained confidence in getting involved in this study. The open forum for discussion that was being offered to them provided another chance for involvement within their children's education.

The data identified that it is a priority for Aboriginal parents to be involved in their children's education. In fact, some participants are adamant about their need to be involved with their children's learning. Sarah stated that parents want "that kind of involvement" where parents and caregivers believed the greater the opportunity to come to the school and speak with a teacher, advocate, or administrator, the greater the possibility their children will succeed in school. Elders attending the school to provide knowledge, drumming, and NSL programming, represent viable traditional learning

opportunities for the children. The parents and caregivers see this as opportunities for their children to learn the traditional knowledge and customs that they were not provided when they attended school. The traditional Eurocentric style of teaching and curriculum imposed by the ministry of education during their days at school was not acceptable to the participants. Conversations during the circle revealed that "something was missing" due in large part to the cultural insensitivity of predominantly mainstream teachers' pedagogy. Participants perceive that their teachers believed that all children need to learn the same way and the textbooks supplied by the ministry of education professed 'the truth' as the dominant knowledge. Traditional knowledge was not a priority in their schooling experiences. Through involvement from the Aboriginal community, the lack of traditional knowledge is now being addressed with many of the initiatives the ASP offers. This is being met with great approval from the parents and caregivers alike.

Participants admitted to their lack of knowledge about the Eurocentric education system and they believed that this contributed to widening the gap of open dialogue and communication between themselves and their children. According to participants, their children bring home very little work from school and conversations between them and their children are often muted. Participants have difficulty becoming involved in the day to day business of their children's education because their queries are either met with silence or dismissal. It was quite evident in the conversations with the participants that pertained to the ASP that many of the children are rejuvenated with education and the parent involvement at home changed drastically. By allowing for the parents and caregivers the opportunity to be part of their children's learning, open dialogue at home is revitalized and parent trust for the education system has begun to be restored

No aspect of a culture is more vital to its integrity than its means of education (Hampton, 1995). Hampton (1995) spoke of culture as having an integral effect on education. Today at SHSS, Aboriginal culture (language, drumming, art, and traditional history) is represented as vital pieces of learning for urban Aboriginal children. Drumming, art, language, and Aboriginal history are referred to by participants as components of holistic education that are required for their children. These are being offered by the ASP and are perceived by participants as a crucial piece of education for their children. Cummins (1986) proposes that real change needs to be done when relationships of power take place (p. 34). The date of the Cummins article is interesting in the fact that a quarter of a century later the parents/caregivers are seeing visible changes of power within the urban setting. The feast, the respective cultural interventions, the extracurricular activities, the ceremonies, the sensitivity to Aboriginal linguistic diversity, and the parents' voices have an impact on their children's education. The supporters of the ASP have provided the children with what Friedel (1999) refers to as a "natural cultural support" (p. 152). The "natural cultural support" Friedel speaks of allows for the parents and caregivers to feel that they are part of the program and their children's education by keeping them informed through the children. However, Friedel also stated that, in the past, there were situations where the natural cultural support was a token gesture by the people in power at the board level and at the local school level.

The participants in this study view their support as being accepted. One simple conclusion I noted was that the administration in the school put an emphasis on the program and outwardly supported it. Second, the program leaders are Aboriginal. Fiedel and Hampton speak of Aboriginal representation and a valid voice within a school

community and these two initiatives are being addressed in the ASP. The importance of

culture for the Aboriginal youth cannot be understated. In fact, the Royal Commission on

Aboriginal Peoples (1996) states:

> Cultural approaches start from the belief that if youth are solidly grounded in their
>
> Aboriginal identity and cultural knowledge, they will have strong personal
>
> resources to develop intellectually, physically, emotionally and spiritually. The
>
> ability to implement culture-based curriculum goes hand in hand with the
>
> authority to control what happens in the school system. Cultural programs can be
>
> added to the school curriculum, or the whole curriculum can be developed around
>
> a cultural core. The most established cultural programming can be found in school
>
> governed by Aboriginally controlled boards. (p. 478)

It would appear from what I examined in my work that the Royal Commission on

Aboriginal Peoples' idea and approach to parental involvement is infiltrating the local

school board. This has been done through initiatives like the ASP and is supported by

local boards of education and the people who immediately interact with the children (i.e.,

principals, teachers, and counsellors).The participants realized that they cannot change

their past but wish to have input on changing their children's future.

Vision for Schools

It is important to note that during the Talking Circle the parents/caregivers looked

towards a change in how the school implements curriculum for their children. Traditional

knowledge and culture are viewed as important components to their children's academic

careers. Getting this from non-Aboriginal teachers or facilitators seems counterproductive

to the participants. Although some of the participants do not feel they could provide

justice to traditional teachings, they also feel their input is being accepted and often the most qualified people have been given the opportunity to teach their children. The drumming group and the NSL possibilities have given them hope that a more holistic education is beginning to be taught to the children. The participants recognize that the purpose of education, both traditional and formal, is to allow for the children to be complete learners and be proud of their knowledge.

It would seem after conversing with the participants that they see their children's education as more than just what the local high school can provide them. Berger (2001) defines Euro-Canadian education as the means of structures and practices usually associated with school operating in the dominant culture in the Canadian provinces. To many of the participants, the ASP is a place where traditional knowledge can be intertwined with Euro-Canadian curriculum. Having spent the majority of my life as a student or teacher in the Eurocentrically designed education system, I can comprehend how it may be somewhat perplexing to implement a traditional Aboriginal style of learning with the Western style of education. The two worlds of knowledge struggle to be intertwined and the dominance of European knowledge for the past 200 years may take longer to alter than it did to implement. Aboriginal parental involvement/engagement for student success has taken a number of directions in the history of Aboriginal people in Canada. Historically, traditional knowledge involved the parents and Aboriginal communities working harmoniously and then the people that implemented the curriculum through the Residential schooling initiative altered the process in which Aboriginal children received their knowledge. Now, some traditional knowledge is once again being infused into SHSS and some parental support for Aboriginal children is visible.

Therefore, the Aboriginal students at SHSS can begin to find a good balance and meaning to the education they receive.

In some capacity the participants in this study parallel some of the issues found in a previous paper written by R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd (2002). In the past the participants found they were provided limited engagement with the school, dissatisfaction with school and parent communications, lack of teacher and administrator awareness and understanding of Aboriginal culture, and distrust and antipathy expressed by Aboriginal parents of the public school system in their region. Therefore, the practices needed to overcome these issues would include the necessity to implement a different approach to modern day educational practices and incorporate traditional style methods of learning. The complexity of the problem associated with not having parent or caregiver access to some school reform is not a simple task to overcome. Listening to the parents and caregivers it became clear to me that quite often the simplest answer to a problem would not require a great deal of effort on the part of the mainstream educators and school community as a whole but rather just listen to what the parents have to say about what they feel may work best for their children. The parents and caregivers believe that infusing language and culture back into the curriculum is an approach that will work for their children.

Opening lines of communication with the parents through newsletters, blogs, web page posts, or a simple phone call can initiate the necessary trust between the parents and the school to start the process of involvement. Although this suggestion serves as a possible means to which involvement and engagement could be initiated, future research in this area may provide results that would support this notion. Many of the participants

voice their concern in regards to "not knowing" how their child was doing in school until it seemed too late. Prior to the ASP initiative at SHSS, the gap between Aboriginal parental trust with the school system and the school appeared to increase simply because of a lack of communication. Building trust with Aboriginal parents quite often is no different than building the trust with other non-Aboriginal parents who are concerned about their child's education. Conversation that builds dialogue and trust and not limiting communication to issues can strengthen relationships with all people involved.

As a result this research makes a significant contribution to the literature insofar as underscoring the perceptions and experiences of Aboriginal parents/caregivers in the context of culturally sensitive and respectful school programming. The reader is encouraged to make note of how the participants define and perceive the role of their involvement in public schools, and also how they describe this to transition to genuine engagement (as defined by the literature). Engagement was the term used by many of the participants but verbalized comments were more directed towards the traditional involvement that many of the scholars capitulated within their research. Examples of asking their children how their day went or reading and reacting to a report card at home would give way to entering the school and being part of what was occurring within the ASP (drumming, feasts, and traditional historical knowledge). With this research it has become quite apparent that the valid and accepted voices of Aboriginal parents, caregivers, and other Aboriginal community members must be heard in publicly funded schools. Therefore, this research represents an important step in developing a valid voice to be heard from the parents and caregivers at SHSS. Participants no longer have to hesitate to interact with teachers and administration because they are beginning to believe

their word will be taken as valid seriously. Communication between home and school can be perceived as open channels of genuine dialogue between parents and school personnel. The availability of the ASP and the people that run the program have proven to provide the means of overcoming some of the obstacles that hinder Aboriginal parental involvement and engagement.

Research on Urban Aboriginal Parental Involvement in School

The dearth of research on urban Aboriginal parental involvement in publicly funded schools provided an opportunity for this study to make an authentic contribution to the literature. Although parental involvement/engagement has been researched heavily in the traditional Western educational system, this work is instrumental in providing some necessary research in regards to urban Aboriginal parental involvement in an urban setting. Therefore, this thesis might provide some critical knowledge in allowing urban Aboriginal parents' voices to be heard in Eurocentric education systems.

The Research Process

Overall, I believe the research process I undertook for this thesis went very well. The Talking Circle was ideally suited to the traditional way Aboriginal voices are to be heard. The dichotomy of participants in respect to their formal educational provided many diverse perspectives of their educational experiences and what they perceive as instrumental for their children's education and how they see themselves being part of that educational model.

After researching traditional Aboriginal knowledge and how it was typically obtained within an Aboriginal community, it now appears it can be quite difficult to provide urban Aboriginal children traditional knowledge. However, with the parents' and

caregivers' support and involvement, urban Aboriginal students have a greater chance of holistic learning. The ASP program has instilled some traditional pride and the participants appear to be supporting this initiative by getting involved at home and in the school.

Who I Have Become

This journey for me has taken many turns and come up against many obstacles in the number of years I have been working on this thesis, from the initial conception of the idea of undertaking a master's thesis as a middle-aged family man and school teacher to the conclusion that I face now. Chronologically I see that this has been a greater journey than 5 years but rather 45 years. Seeing my grandfather stoically sitting in his chair and not being proud of his heritage, hesitant to admit who he was, made it almost somewhat ironic for me to self-identify as a Haudenosaunee person. However, my research into Aboriginal history has made me aware of some of the possible ramifications of maintaining Aboriginal status in years past. I can better appreciate why it was so difficult to self-identify or maintain Aboriginal status years ago. Residential schools, racism, and removal of cultural identity are only a few reasons why it was difficult to keep faith in who we were as a race of people. I am not judging my grandfather for his decisions. I am enlightened on why he made the choices he did. Now that I have been immersed in this thesis, it is becoming somewhat clearer to me that the jigsaw puzzle that makes up my life is becoming more complete.

I find myself feeling quite fortunate after 23 years of teaching to be given the opportunity to complete research that could affect the school community in which I teach. The ideas and acuities I had in years past have been drastically altered by this research.

Acceptance of being an Aboriginal person has become important to me and I am proud to admit to others I am Aboriginal. I do not look for exclusive recognition of being Aboriginal but rather an understanding from others that there is more to me than the White Euro-Canadian I appear to be. My traditional Aboriginal knowledge may not be as extensive as many other Aboriginal people but I now have a greater depth of knowledge that has embodied the holistic ways of Aboriginal people. I feel fortunate to have some of both worlds of knowledge now.

I realize that my world views have always reflected respect for others but now I am aware that another part of my knowledge and perspectives of others is now being challenged by the insight I have in regards to Aboriginal parental support. Being a good Aboriginal parent and educator has been influenced by this research. Cautious deliberation prior to voicing opinions about Aboriginal people's importance to education and not placing cultural capital on my own Eurocentric educational upbringing has altered me as person as well as my pedagogical views towards my students. Understanding where some of the issues have originated in regards to Aboriginal parents getting involved in their children's education has enlightened a different part of who I am now as a professional. Not only being a good Aboriginal person but rather just a good person has become an ever changing test for me.

Brothers and Sisters:

These words are a prayer of hope for a new

path to wisdom and power.

Anguished hearts, minds, and bodies

are the profound reality of our world.

We have lost our way

and the voices of our ancestors go unheeded.

This is our ordeal.

There are those who remember

what has had meaning since time began

but we are deaf to their wisdom.

Why do we not hear them?

Suffering ; the dragons of discord.

Wipe the tears from your eyes

Open your ears to the truth

Prepare to speak in the voice of your ancestors.

This is a discourse of condolence.

A prayer of hope for a new path.

Taiaiake Alfred (1999)

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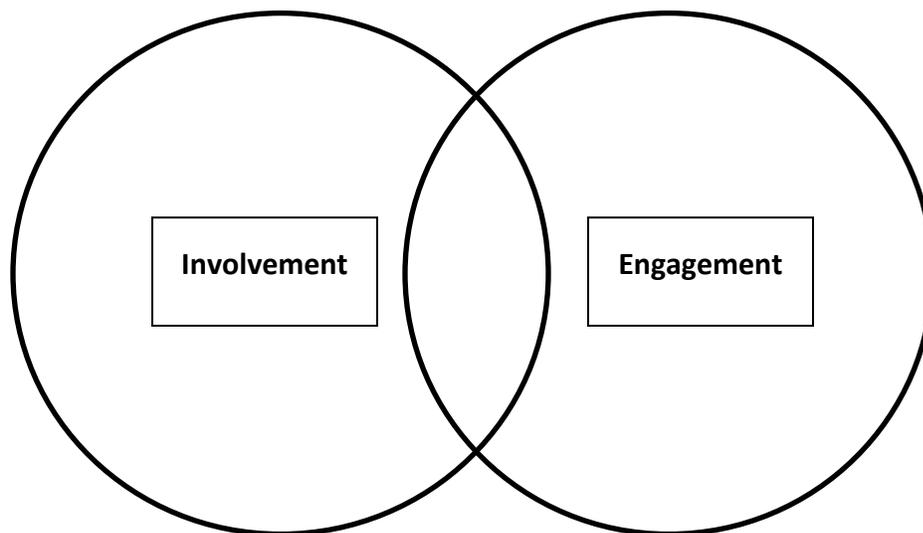community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, *8*(1), 69-91.

Appendix A

Talking Circle Question

1. What have been your experiences with the ASP? These experiences could have
    included teachers, administrators and, possibly, senior administration within the
    public school setting.

2. How have these experiences influenced your perspectives in regards to your
    children's journey through public education?

3. How has the ASP experience affected your view of how public education can be
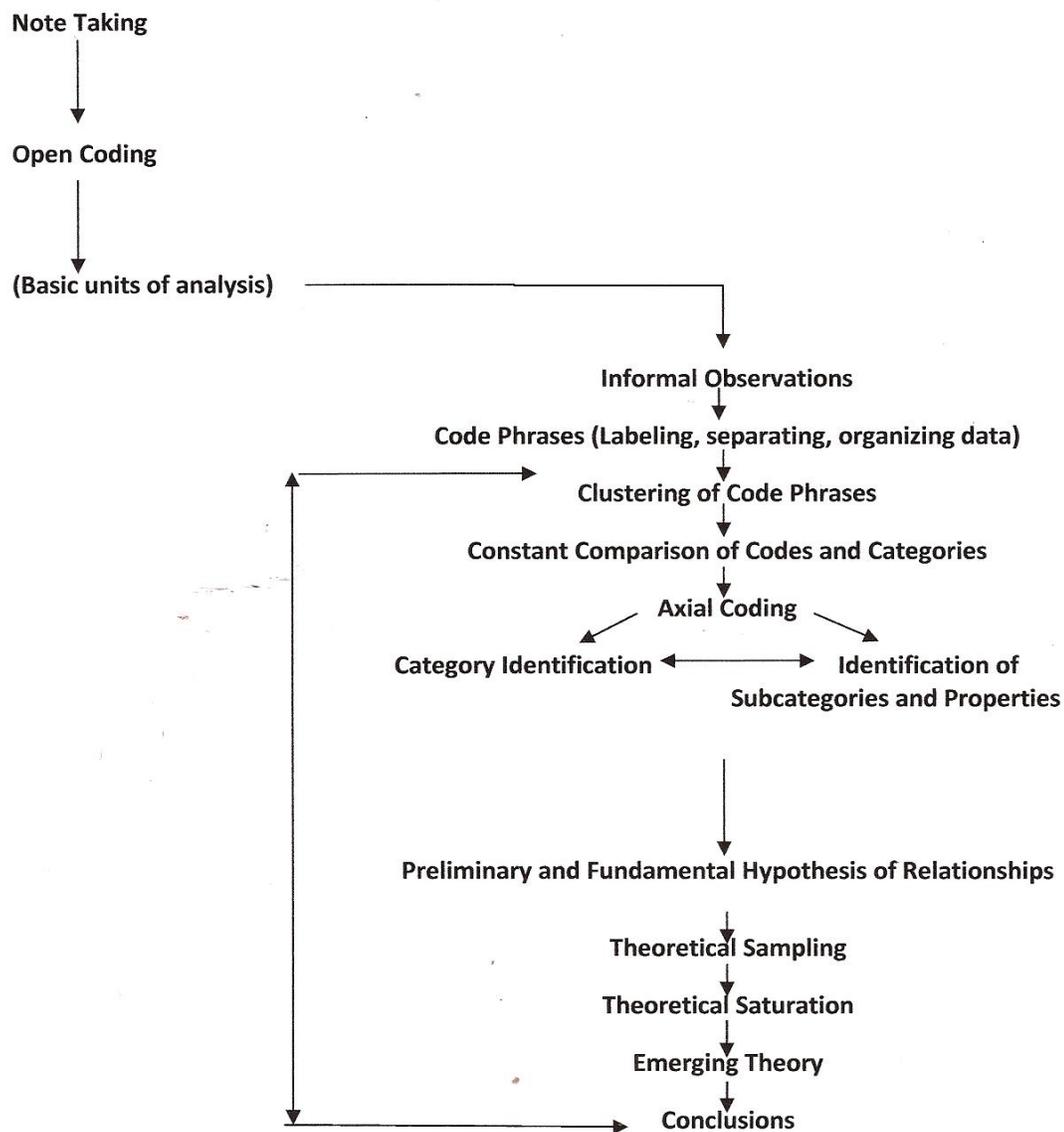   improved to foster more success for Aboriginal youth?

Appendix B

Epstein's 1995 Theory of Overlapping Spheres

Involvement

Engagement

Appendix C

Blueprint of a Grounded Theory Design[5]

Note Taking

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Open Coding

↓

(Basic units of analysis) ──────────────────┐

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Informal Observations

↓

Code Phrases (Labeling, separating, organizing data)

↓

Clustering of Code Phrases

↓

Constant Comparison of Codes and Categories

↓

Axial Coding

↙ ↘

Category Identification ←────→ **Identification of Subcategories and Properties**

↓

Preliminary and Fundamental Hypothesis of Relationships

↓

Theoretical Sampling

↓

Theoretical Saturation

↓

Emerging Theory

↓

Conclusions

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[5] From: Cherubini, L. (2007). Un impianto originale per un progetto di grounded theory: Una riflessione critica. *Encyclopaideia, 21*, 101-118. © L. Cherubini 2007. Reprinted with permission.

Appendix D

List of Codes

NEE – Negative Educational Experiences

ADV – Advocates

CON – Connections

GR – Generational Reality

CU – Cultural Intervention

CS – Counsellor Support

CI – Cultural Inclusion

RS – Reflection of Self

EE – Educational Emphasis

R – Relationships

PA – Parent Advocacy

NW – Nya Weh

CR – Community Ripples

CID – Cultural Identity

PI – Pride and Identity

PI/PA – Parental Involvement/Parental Engagement

SID – Self Identification

LS – Learning Styles