

**Cross-Cultural Organizations and the Empowerment of First Nations Learners**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

By examining the tensions around First Nations learners wedged between competing organizational visions, this research exposes the conflicting funding enticements that impede maximized empowerment for First Nations adult learners. In a mixed methods ethnographical case study using a social justice theoretical framework, this study documented promising levels of empowerment for the students at the beginning of the program. These levels of empowerment were eroded, however, by the Eurocentric funding model that pitted the expectations of First Nations organizations against those of the institutions offering the program, and the needs of the students themselves. The data indicated that the mandatory workplace courses delivered to the informants later in the study were generally below the informants' ability range. Ensuing levels of empowerment of the learners near the end of the study appeared to reflect the economic streamlining decisions with data that indicated disempowerment across several quantitative categories as run through SPSS and supported by the study's side-by-side qualitative data. Endorsements for Ministry of Education and Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to focus their funding models on quality, rather than the quantity, of programming are among the recommendations that emerge from the research. Recommendations also include utilizing graduate level teachers working with management rather than under management to facilitate assured and embedded front line input into program development.

*This work is dedicated to my Mom, Marjorie Pearl Shields who passed on during the writing of this dissertation. She taught me with fire, empathy, wisdom, passion, and courage. This dissertation is additionally dedicated to my father, John Kenneth Shields, who taught me that compromising the most important aspects of life is not an option, and that we are never too old to learn well.*

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **The Background of the Study**

In 1994, I was studying Electrical Engineering at a university in northern Ontario. I was enrolled in an elective course called “Native Canadian Worldviews” that enlightened me on many continuing atrocities pertaining to Aboriginal peoples. I had permanent full-time teaching status at a college, so I felt comfortable approaching the Coordinator of Native Studies about what I was learning. After listening to my concerns, the Coordinator opened a binder that contained several pages of names with highlighted columns adjacent to them. “These,” he said, “are all First Nations students who have high school diplomas. The highlighted regions are their actual grade equivalencies. They are all at Grades 7, 8, and 9. Do you know what happens to these students when they come here expecting to get into a college program they are interested in, and find out that their equivalencies are too low?” he asked me pointedly. “No,” I replied quietly. “They go back up to their communities and commit suicide,” he answered.

Twenty years later, I was asked by a local First Nations adult education organization to work as a mathematics tutor. A First Nations support organization and an adult education credentialing organization were partnering to create a pilot project funded by both federal and provincial coffers. The funding for this partnership was meant to support learners who travelled from remote communities to local cities to complete high school credentialing in order to secure employment with a planned mining project. Many had limited educational experiences, ranging from Grade 1 to Grade 10. The majority tested at a Grade 4/5 level of mathematics, English, and science (Malatest & Associates, 2002; Shields, 2012; Silver et al., 2007).

Our hopes and expectations for maximized empowerment of the student body were high. The staff members involved from the beginning of the pilot project were optimistic and hopeful

that learners, who had never before been provided with ideal conditions to complete their high school credits, were now being presented with an optimal, supportive learning environment. Based on this optimism, I approached both organizations to request their involvement in a study of the pilot project. I felt that if we could document a working model of quality education for the unique needs of students from remote communities within reasonable funding guidelines, we could disseminate this “success” to other communities.

Even as the program appeared to be empowering learners in the first cohort of students, my document searches revealed that the funding models of the two organizations were in competition with one another. It was not until the end of the first cohort that the discrepancies between the funding models of the two organizations began to dampen my enthusiasm for the quality of programming being offered to the student body. The students in the first cohort were completing their course requirements when I was asked to help meet the needs of the incoming, second cohort of students. The manager from the adult education organization asked me to support essential/workplace-level mathematics. Workplace-level mathematics courses are non-skills building courses that result in credits for students who are not intending to pursue applied (college) or academic (university) mathematics programs (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005b). After 10 months of upgrading and tutoring a first cohort of students to encourage them to open their worlds through the education being offered to them, I was asked to support a more prescribed and less flexible education program for a second cohort of students. I was left to wonder: “What is really going on here?”

The vision of the First Nations organization, that is, the students’ community, focused on student empowerment through a flexible program that graduated students who were college-ready, university-ready, and/or job ready. However, the goal of the adult learning organization,

struggling to meet provincial funding mandates, was to meet student needs as cost effectively as possible. This meant delivering programs that prioritized obtaining a high school diploma (OSSD), rather than college and university readiness. It became obvious that the goals and visions of the two organizations were incongruent, and I was intrigued as to how the relationship between these organizations affected the students. I decided to explore the effects of organizational policies, practices, and funding models on the empowerment of adult First Nations learners in the program.

*Theoretically at least, a worker can leave his class and change his status, but within the framework of colonization, nothing can ever save the colonized. He can never move into the privileged clan; even if he should earn more money than they, if he should win all the titles, if he should enormously increase his power. (Memmi, 1965, pp. 73-74)*

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to examine the tensions that occur when First Nations learners are caught between competing organizational policies, practices, and funding models. Most First Nations communities promote all-inclusive learning approaches, which means that First Nations' adult education programs require partnerships with established provincial education sectors for credentialing and program delivery. Government ministries may seem to be supporting quality First Nations adult education through the funding of pilot projects across the province of Ontario, yet the policies, programs, and funding models responsible for delivery of the education programs may not support one another, thus creating a situation where student focus and achievement is compromised (Government of Ontario, 2011; Matawa First Nations, 2012; Sumner, 2008; Welton, 1997).

## **A Rationale and a Background for the Study**

In 2004, The Right Honourable Paul Martin declared: “If young Aboriginals don’t succeed then all of us fail. For too long we have turned our back on this moral and economic reality” (Martin, 2004). First Nations youth continue to be marginalized in realizing their educational goals with norms that are far below the equivalent standards of mainstream Canadian society (Auditor General of Canada, 2005, 2011). The processes and policies that organizations employ for addressing the needs of adult First Nations learners influence their education and employment opportunities (Malatest & Associates, 2002; Neegan, 2005). This study is an examination of these policies. Its rationale is rooted in the reasons for the adult upgrading processes themselves. To illustrate these reasons, I will tell you the story of Roger.

Roger, the only informant in this study that I taught and marked work for, offered me an interview after he graduated from the First Nations support organization (FNSO). FNSO is a pseudonym I use throughout this dissertation to protect the identity of my informants as well as the organization. I do not wish to be a whistleblower on a particular organization. The problems the organization exhibits are steeped in colonialism, not corruption, although admittedly one can lead to the other. My mathematics upgrading class was the first mathematics class Roger had ever attended. He said:

I remember when I was 4 or 5, my mom used to drag me to school. I never realized why I didn’t want to go to school. I went to Kindergarten. They bumped me up by age until Grade 5, but my grandfather took me out of school for about half of the school year. He took me into the bush. One time my teacher gave me a lot of work to take with me into the bush. My grandfather said that paper you are working on isn’t going to do you any good in the bush. Most of my marks were D’s. He would grab us when school would

start. He took us without my mom knowing. He said she wasn't reliable. He took three of us siblings. After Christmas we went to school but we were lost. They didn't want us to go to school because we were so far behind. My mom always wanted us to get our education. There were times though that the teachers would let us fight. We got hurt. We were bullied. Sometimes the teachers would hurt us. One hit me with his ring and left a scar on my shoulder. I told my grandpa about five years before my grandmother passed away that I didn't know how to read. I didn't know how to add. I used my fingers for math. I wanted to do something with my life but I couldn't. I finally told him that he took my education away from me. He admitted to me that I was right. He apologized to me. I was in my early 30s when I learned how to read. I am 48.

Roger's story, one of the most poignant of informant narratives in this study, connects to the experiences of many of the students in the program. Roger graduated from Grade 12 with his OSSD six months after entering into the Adult Education Organization (AEO) academic program. To illustrate the impact that Roger's diploma could conceivably have later in his life, one informant (who was not surveyed and not provided with upgrading by the FNSO) was also interviewed early in this study. He told his story:

When I came from my reserve, my level of education was low. I was told in high school that [workplace-level] courses were a good match for me. I graduated with those courses. I did attend university and I made it through a Bachelor of Arts, but it was very hard. I know that my writing was not as good as other students. Now I am in the professional year of the Education program. I hope to become a teacher. My math is so low though, that I applied to teach primary grades. Now I tell my own children to take higher-level courses even if they are told to take workplace-level.

When asked what he would recommend for a student similar to himself that he might teach in the future, the informant replied: “I would recommend tutors. There should be lots of tutors to help out with the low levels coming from the reserves.”

This informant later dropped out of the one-year professional Bachelor of Education program. When asked why, he replied, “I don’t want to teach in primary. It isn’t a good fit for me.” His story, along with Roger’s story, became the impetus for the research questions that follow.

### **Research Questions**

Placed against a background of the struggles of two organizations meant to meet the needs of dissimilar cultures, the following research questions emerged:

**Primary question.** *What are the effects of organizational policies, practices, and funding models upon the empowerment of adult First Nations learners?*

My thesis statement is that the incongruence of organizational policies, practices, and funding models have a negative impact on the empowerment of adult First Nations learners.

#### **Secondary questions.**

*(a) What are the organizations’ views of students, and how do they affect learner empowerment?*

This question is cast as a reflection of Knowles’ (1970) expressed concerns about the view that organizations have of the student body they are meant to service: “One can sense rather quickly on entering an institution, for example, whether it cares more about people or things, whether it is concerned about the feelings and welfare of individuals or herds them through like cattle” (p. 47). This question explores how the students are viewed by both of the funding organizations, and how these views affect the empowerment of the students themselves.



*(b) What are the levels and processes of communication between the First Nations support organization and the adult education centre, and how do these impact learners' empowerment?*

This question explores the extent and processes of communication between the two educational organizations and their potential to affect student empowerment.

*(c) How do learners' perceptions of their empowerment when they leave the First Nations support organization differ from the realities they experience post-First Nations support organization?*

This question investigates the congruence between the learners' view of their potential to achieve upon exit from the FNSO program and their actual potential to achieve after they have engaged with their chosen developmental outcome, either gainful employment or further post-secondary pursuits.

### **The Structure of the Dissertation**

Chapter One provides an overarching foundation for understanding the importance and context of this research. It outlines the primary research question and secondary questions that propel the study.

Chapter Two situates the research within historical and contemporary contexts. It examines the literature that bounds the study's theories and concepts, provides definitions for key terms, and discusses the theoretical framework used to examine the research.

Chapter Three discusses the mixed methods approach and the ethnographic methodology I have used, and outlines my personal and cultural background, research methods, procedures, and data analysis process.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six together present findings to answer the primary research question, *What are the effects of organizational policies, practices, and funding models upon the empowerment of adult First Nations learners?* Chapters Four and Five present the findings from staff interviews, documents, and student quantitative data. The data in Chapter Four speaks to the separate funding models of each organization, while Chapter Five explores the policies and practices of both organizations in the partnership as well as the problems encountered in the study period. Chapter Six presents the cross-cultural data that has the potential to affect student empowerment. Chapters Five and Six answer the first section of secondary questions (a) and (b).

Chapter Seven organizes the raw student data into charts that have been generated by the statistical program for the social sciences (SPSS). This quantitative data is supported by side-by-side qualitative data. The qualitative data, from comments written on surveys and shared in interviews, are presented to give meaning to the quantitative component. The quantitative and qualitative data are thus presented together. Chapter Seven answers the second sections of secondary questions (a) and (b), and answers secondary question (c). The analysis of data presented throughout Chapters Five, Six, and Seven provides explicit answers to the primary and secondary research questions.

Chapter Eight includes a research summary, discussion, conclusions, limitations, and recommendations. It also discusses the clash between cultures within the organizations, affecting the empowerment of informants in the study. The Epilogue describes an additional Research Ethics Board (REB) process that was necessary after the organizations in the partnership study withdrew their support at the end of the study period.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

This chapter explores the scholarship required to provide depth and understanding to the analysis in Chapters Four through Eight. This literature review highlights the significance of my research while revealing gaps that help to situate it among the major works. It begins by providing an overview of the political and social injustices that have resulted in historical impacts on First Nations contemporary issues, and an exploration of the current process of providing upgrading to a body of students that were impacted by an educational system that failed them. It continues with the evolution and structure of adult education, and the organizational structure of partnership schools. An examination of empowerment that is the backbone of the framework of this dissertation follows. The literature review ends by outlining the theoretical framework of this dissertation, along with a glossary of acronyms and definition of terms.

In this review, I explore the potential for contrasting organizational policies, practices, and funding models that emerge when First Nations tribal organizations partner with provincial adult learning centres. I examine key concepts such as the history of residential schools, adult education (including descriptions of several existing models in use), and adult learning. I then explore the unique needs of First Nations learners, many of which have developed from the continuing legacy of residential schools. The current situation of First Nations learning is examined, including the dependence on academic partnership organizations. The complex interdependence between the First Nations support organization (FNSO) and the adult education organization (AEO) is discussed.

Empowerment is a key theme in my research. To explore this theme, I use Aslop and Heinsohn's (2005) World Bank model of empowerment, which is based on extensive research in

developing communities around the world. I examine teacher empowerment for its potential to affect the empowerment of students, as the bonds between teachers and students are critical for learning and students rely on teachers to convey their needs. As the cost of teacher empowerment clashes with funding efficiency, funding models are examined for their overall potential to influence the empowerment of learners. Finally, I outline the theoretical framework of my research, to guide the reader through the remainder of the dissertation.

There is an abundance of literature on First Nations education but very few studies have been carried out by Aboriginal scholars and disseminated among the First Nations research community. The majority of studies on ERIC, ProQuest, Sage, Scholars Portal, EBSCO Host, JSTOR, Education Research Complete, and Google Scholar databases are Eurocentric. Studies by Aboriginal authors do exist, but they are more difficult to find. In 2013, Chief Shawn Atleo, previously National Chief for the Assembly of First Nations, celebrated the 250 years since the Royal Proclamation of 1763 (Assembly of First Nations, n.d.), by pointing with pride to the 30,000 Aboriginal people who are now in post-secondary studies in Canada. But this has only been the case for the past 10 to 15 years. In a country of 35 million, this figure amounts to very little meaningful inclusion of First Nations learners in higher education.

## **Historical**

Historical impacts on the lives of the respondents in this study are critical to understanding the data presented. Central to these impacts are the historical, residual effects of residential schools.

**Residential schools.** The Indian Act of 1876 was developed over time through separate pieces of colonial legislation (Acts) meant to deal with Aboriginal peoples across Canada. These Acts, first known as the Gradual Civilization Act of 1857 and then the Gradual Enfranchisement Act of 1869, and their revisions, were consolidated as The Indian Act (The Indian Act, 1876). Addressing these consolidations, The Honourable John A. Macdonald, first Prime Minister of Canada, said, “The great aim of our legislation has been to do away with the tribal system and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the other inhabitants of the Dominion as speedily as they are fit to change” (Official Reports of the Debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada, 1889).

Residential schools were the direct result of the government’s intent to “assimilate the Indian people.” The first residential school opened in 1879 through legislation that created a system of state-funded, church-administered Indian Residential Schools. The Indian Act regards Indians through the government’s fiduciary relationship with Indian people as children under the law. Although the Act has since been amended, failure of an Indian parent to surrender a child to residential schools carried a jail term (The Indian Act, 1876). By 1905 the number of residential schools exceeded 100 through the efforts of Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs Duncan Campbell Scott (Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Salem-Wiseman, 1996). Scott held the position of Superintendent of Indian Affairs from 1913 until his retirement in 1932. His work had a major impact on formulating and carrying out policies that affected the child-rearing practices and traditions of Canada’s Indigenous peoples.

Scott was persistent in his vision that the government’s responsibility for Indigenous people, along with distinct Indigenous culture, would disappear through gradual assimilation into civilization (Bentley, 2006). Scott’s famous words helped to sow the seeds of attitudes that

continue to echo through the halls of schools that fail to adequately educate First Nations students:

I want to get rid of the Indian problem.... Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department, that is the whole object of this Bill. (cited in Chrisjohn & Young, 1997, p. 42)

The schools were not without their detractors. In 1907, Dr. Bryce, Chief Medical Inspector for the Department of Indian Affairs, toured western Canadian residential schools and wrote a report on the “criminal” health conditions he encountered in them (The Truth Commission into Genocide in Canada, 2001). Bryce reported that Indian children were infected with diseases like tuberculosis and were being left to die without the barest minimum of precautions. In an article, Bryce (1922) cited an average death rate between 35% and 60% in the residential schools:

In his report upon the Indian boarding schools in Manitoba and the Northwest, Dr. P. H. Bryce, chief medical officer of the Indian department, emphasizes the absolute necessity for greater care in the selection of pupils and for sanitary precautions in the schools to prevent the spread of disease. During his recent tour of inspections Dr. Bryce instructed the principals of all the schools to report to Ottawa direct upon the past history and present condition of the health of the children who have been pupils at the schools. Summarizing the statistical statement thus obtained, Dr. Bryce says, after alluding to the defective records of the schools: “It suffices for us to know however, that of a total of 1,637 pupils reported upon, nearly 25 per cent, are dead, of one school with an absolutely accurate statement, 69 per cent of ex-pupils are dead, and that everywhere the almost

invariable cause of death given is tuberculosis.” Dr. Bryce’s description of the schools shows them to be veritable hotbeds for the propagation and spread of this disease. In fact in only one school which the medical inspector visited was attention paid to the most ordinary requirement of ventilation of the dormitories. The total school attendance in Indian schools of every class was 2,691 last year. Only about 62 per cent of Indian children between the ages of seven and seventeen attend school, and the attendance at the industrial schools is decreasing. (Bryce, 1922)

Bryce was expelled from civil service because of his report (Bryce, 1922; *The Truth Commission into Genocide in Canada*, 2001) and Duncan Campbell Scott continued to administer the Federal Canadian government’s assimilation policy until his retirement in 1932 (Salem-Wiseman, 1996).

Chrisjohn and Young (1997) contend that the goal of residential schools was to *unmake* the children, not to produce a new self, but to produce children with no self at all. They argue that this interference with the identity process produced deeply traumatized people carrying problems of alcoholism and sexual dysfunction. Many of the students in this study are second and third generations from the parenting of people who never themselves learned how to parent. Residual effects continue into the contemporary lives of the communities.

### **The Historical Impacting the Contemporary**

**The continuing legacy of residential schools.** Data from the Silver et al. (2007) study shows that “the high proportion of high school students with a parent and/or grandparent who attended residential school makes clear that the effects of residential schools are not just an historical phenomenon, but are present daily in the home” (p. 12). Students returned to their communities without parenting models to build their own parenting skills to counter the

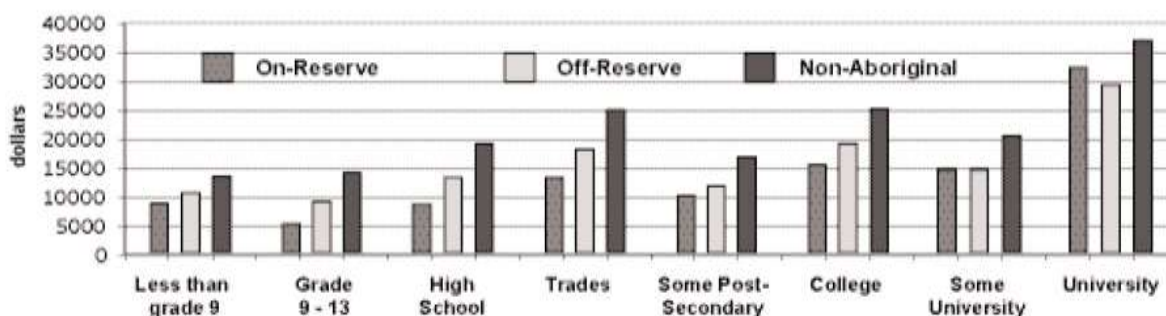
disempowerment that comes when there are significant disconnects within families and community (Chrisjohn & Young, 1997). The children of these survivors were caught between the values of the residential school system and the values of their community. Many had to contend with parents who had suffered abuse, and who reached for alcohol and drugs to dull the pain because appropriate psychological supports were not available (Chrisjohn & Young, 1997). Children born into the third generation were caught in a vicious circle of disempowerment, untreated emotional and physical trauma, suicides, strong disconnects within their own communities, and accompanying poverty (Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Silver et al., 2007).

Governmental attempts at assimilation have resulted in a proliferation of First Nations adult learners who need education and skills upgrading. Many of these students are overwhelmed with ongoing grief due to the loss of multiple family and community members to suicide and environmental cancers (Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Spangler & Reid, 2010; Vecsey, 1987). Little or no grief counseling is available to help with the healing process, so many First Nations learners arrive at their learning environments battling addictions to the alcohol and drugs they use to numb their pain. These learners are often influenced by friends and family living similar lifestyles, who may look to them for help. They arrive from communities where fresh vegetables and fruits are limited, so healthy cooking and eating is even further from their grasp than it is for other marginalized peoples. English, the language of the colonizer, is not the first language of many First Nations adult learners. They are often expected to learn from teachers who have little or no understanding of Ojibway, Cree, or Ojicree. These languages do not have English as a second language (ESL) status, and therefore do not qualify for the funding for ESL supports. Students thus arrive at First Nations support organizations (FNSO) with anywhere between Grade 1 and Grade 8 equivalencies, with most averaging around Grade 5. Many of these low



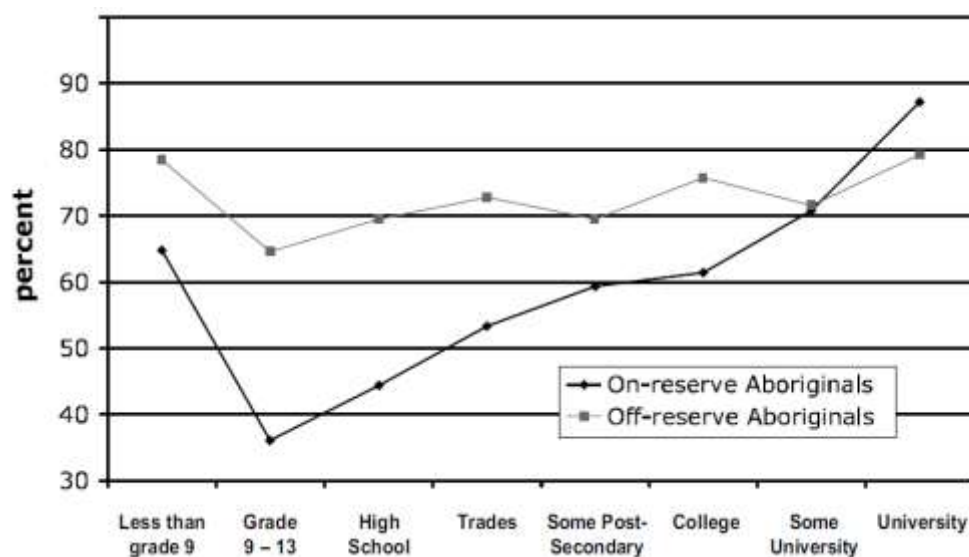
equivalences can be traced directly to the effects of governmental policies on First Nations children: residues from residential schooling, lack of funding needed to attract competent teachers and administrators to remote communities, lack of community outreach by teachers and administrators, abuse, direct or indirect effects of community suicides, lack of parental trust in the education system, inadequate education infrastructures, and poverty (Shields, 2012).

The link between income and education levels among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians can be clarified through census data. Figure 1 depicts 1995 median incomes for non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal adults, across eight levels of education with the Aboriginal informants separated into on-reserve and off-reserve populations (Drost & Richards, 2003). As education levels among the Aboriginal population rise, their median incomes follow:



*Figure 1: Median incomes of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal income recipients by education level. (Richards & Vinings, 1995, p. 203)*

To illustrate the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal gap in income, Richards and Vinings (1995) set the non-Aboriginal median income to 100 and adjusted the Aboriginal incomes appropriately, separating on-reserve and off-reserve Aboriginal people, as shown in Figure 2.



*Figure 2.* Normalized median incomes of on-reserve and off-reserve Aboriginal income recipients by education level, 1995 (non-Aboriginal medians equal 100, all education levels). (Richards & Vinings, 1995, p. 205)

Figure 2, like Figure 1, illustrates that as education levels rise, income levels follow. Designated on this graph is the income gap between on-reserve and off-reserve populations. The on-reserve increase in income gap in the higher grades in high school, as compared to reserve informants, may be an indication of higher welfare provisions due to living in a remote community (Richards & Vinings, 1995).

Since 1995, little has changed. According to the 2010 Canadian Auditor-General report, Aboriginal students are lagging 28 years behind mainstream society (Auditor General of Canada, 2011). This education gap refers to the proportion of high school diploma holders living on reserves compared with the overall Canadian population.

Approximately 1.5 million Aboriginal people, living on- and off-reserve, make up 4.3% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2011). Approximately 30,000 Aboriginal students, or 2% of Aboriginal people across Canada, attend either college or university (Assembly of First Nations, n.d.).

The importance of education has long been recognized by First Nations tribal organizations, and a widely held view among First Nations communities and others is that the educational needs of First Nations learners are different from those of the provincial norm (Agbo, 2002; Battiste, 2002; Canada-Aboriginal Peoples' Roundtables, 2004). Distinct support processes and mechanisms, along with flexible program delivery, must be incorporated into adult education programs for First Nations community members who are attempting high school credentialing while contending with the aftermath of colonization (Malatest & Associates, 2002; Silver et al., 2007) — that is, the previously mentioned grief due to ongoing community deaths, addictions, conditions of poverty, low elementary school equivalencies, and difficulties with English as a second language (Alston-O'Connor, 2010, Canada-Aboriginal Peoples' Roundtables 2004; Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Silver et al., 2007).

Tribal councils representing First Nations communities across northwestern Ontario are eager to service their communities with upgrading programs that will prepare community members for jobs, as well as college and university programs (Bell et al., 2004). The First Nations support organization (FNSO) that provided the focus for this study is a government-funded pilot project organization, meant to prepare cohorts of First Nations learners from nine communities for employment prospects in the planned development of extensive mineral resources in northern Ontario. The FNSO assists the communities in bringing learners to the neighbouring city and offers support services such as living allowances, housing, childcare, counseling services, workshops, access to elders, access to methadone clinics, and liaisons with prospective employers, colleges, and universities. The FNSO is currently contracting the academic portion of the upgrading program out to a local Adult Education Organization (AEO) for their credentialing services. The FNSO structure provides flexibility to support the holistic

needs of learners, while AEO (the credentialing organization), led by the policies and economics of provincial mandates, is concentrated on a less-flexible education delivery model. This model is not tolerant of the ongoing and diverse individual struggles of First Nations learners, and streams learners into workplace-level programming as part of their upgrading practices (Government of Ontario, 2011; Matawa First Nations, 2012; Sumner, 2008).

### **Current Upgrading Practices**

In April 2014, the Ministry of Education's new action plan/vision document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014) outlined goals for education in Ontario had this to say about the mandate of adult education: "Ensure that the adult education system better supports adult learners in their efforts to finish high school and successfully transition to post-secondary education, training or the workplace" (p. 13).

First Nations learning has evolved over the centuries from pre-contact learning to residential schooling to modern day urban/community federally funded education programs. This study examines the experiences of adult First Nations learners, over the age of 22, who found themselves immersed in the credentialing programs available to mainstream Canadian adult learners. Two models of adult education are explored in this review: the General Education Development program, and local board upgrading programs.

### **Evolution of Adult Education**

As First Nation tribal councils across Northwestern Ontario currently negotiate upgrading programs for their communities to prepare learners for jobs and/or college and university programs, education sectors are scrutinized by tribal education councils for their ability to provide holistic, quality education programs (Matawa First Nations, 2012). Adult education programming that provides identity-strengthening supports, and builds on the gifts that each

student brings to the classroom, is essential for the needs of First Nations students and their communities (Cajete, 1994). As income incongruities between First Nations and the wider population narrows with higher levels of education, post-secondary education represents an essential foundation of hope for First Nations communities striving to increase their economic status (Battiste, 2005a). Bell et al. (2004), who investigated education for First Nations people, quote the following vision statement of one school in their study:

Together, we must ensure that all our students are attaining high levels of academic, cultural and individual success, empowered with the tools of knowledge, skill and experience to compete on any level, anywhere, as we move into the 21st century. (p. 30)

**The structures of adult education.** In 1970, Shroeder identified four categories of organizations that provide adult education programs.

(a) The first category meets the educational needs of all adults, rather than special groups of adults within populations. This includes correspondence, business, and technical schools.

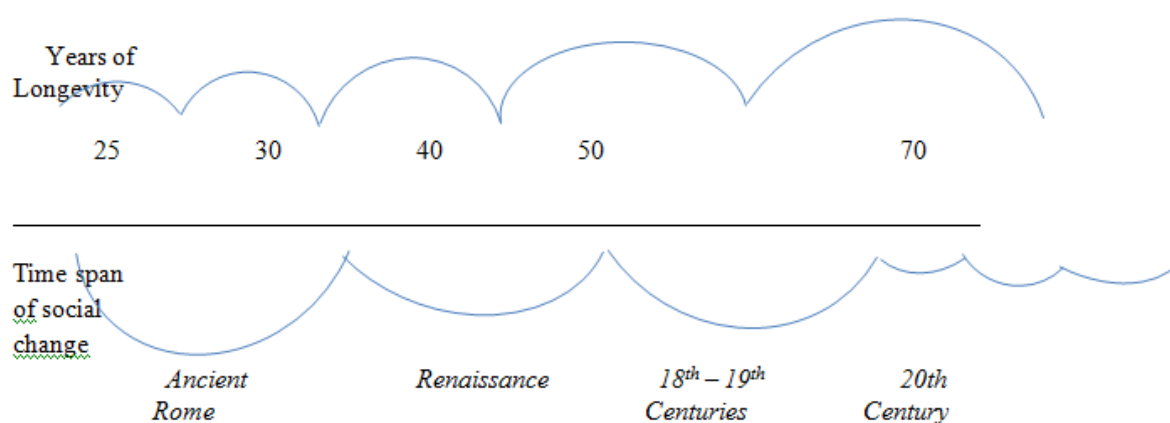
(b) The second category covers general extension divisions of organizations that were established to meet the needs of youth who assumed responsibility for adult education. In today's terms, this would include access and upgrading programs within colleges and universities.

(c) The third category services both the non-educational and educational needs of communities. This includes health and welfare agencies, libraries, and workshops for parents within language immersion programs.

(d) The final category includes unions, not-for-profit organizations such as churches, and business and industry. This represents the adult education of special interest groups that promote their own interests and ideologies (Shroeder, 1970).

The categories listed above, still in existence today, continue to struggle with the funding that created them and the funding guidelines that define them.

From the launching of adult learning in the 1920s, it quickly became evident that adult learners require more from their learning than do children. Later, it was introduced by Whitehead (1931) that adults' learning needs differ from those of children, in that adults are less likely to accept what they are learning if the time-span of what they are learning is less than their expected life-span. As the time-span of major cultural changes decreases (through changing technologies and associated societal adjustments), we have reached the point where time-spans for cultural changes are far less than human life-spans. This even accounts for increasing life-spans in recent history, as depicted in Figure 3 (Knowles, 1970; Whitehead, 1931).



*Figure 3.* Adapted from Knowle's (1970) relationship of the time-span of social change to individual life-span (assuming a higher age of longevity and a shorter span of social change time for the 21<sup>st</sup> century).

The representation of social content as a driving force for adult education seems to have lessened its footing within the International League for Social Commitment in Adult Education, established in 1984 (Ghosh & Ray, 1991; Promoting Adult Learning, 2014). This International League was founded on a promise to address oppression, poverty, and the politically powerless

to bring about change in economic, political, cultural, and social aspects of society. The focus of its international organization's website, however, seems to have recently shifted. Its "role of education and skills in tackling poverty and low pay" has been reduced to a "special issue" of its flagship magazine, *Adults Learning*. Adult education has thus changed over past decades, from assuming a role in "tackling poverty" to that of models adhering to economic accountability through an agenda steeped in a neoliberal ideology. Martinez, & Garcia's (1996) definition of neoliberalism includes:

Cutting public expenditure for social services like education and health care. Reducing the safety-net for the poor, and even maintenance of roads, bridges, water supply -- again in the name of reducing government's role. Of course, they don't oppose government subsidies and tax benefits for business.

Deregulation. Reduce government regulation of everything that could diminish profits, including protecting the environment and safety on the job.

Eliminating the concept of "the public good" or "community" and replacing it with "individual responsibility." Pressuring the poorest people in a society to find solutions to their lack of health care, education and social security all by themselves -- then blaming them, if they fail, as "lazy" (p. 1).

### **Models of Adult Education**

Two models of adult education currently in use are the General Education Development (GED) process, in which students challenge an equivalency exam, and the gradual accumulation of High School credits. Each presents its own difficulties and concerns.

**General Education Development (GED).** The General Education Development (GED) equivalency program is an internationally recognized Grade 12 standardized testing protocol

program that leads to a diploma. Candidates are required to pass five examinations over a two-day period to demonstrate their competencies in all subject areas. The GED program has been the credentialing choice for some communities across Ontario in recent years. The process has been criticized, however, because in some cases colleges and universities do not recognize the credentials, there is a high failure rate, and the advantages associated with a high school diploma do not appear to extend to students who received their credentials via this route. Research indicates that GED credentials are often not acknowledged and failure rates are high (GED Testing, 2012). Kurens (2010), who argued that colleges and universities do not recognize GED credentialing for their entrance requirements, further contends that only 47.5% of New Yorkers who take the exams pass them.

The difficulty with GED credentialing in northern schools was documented by Shields (2012). In her study of 11 informants in a northern remote First Nations community, she found that the GED program set many of her students up for failure because of the short expected turnaround time in the program. The informants in her study were given three-and-a-half months to move their skills from Grade 4/5 to Grade 12. Shields observed that many of the students found creative ways to opt out of a serious commitment to their exams in the final hour, perhaps in order to preserve their identity.

Another argument against the GED model is that it may not offer the advantages promised by the process. Zajacova and Everett (2013) found in their United States 1997-2009 National Health Interview Surveys that GED recipients are worse off than high school graduates in numerous social and economic developmental outcomes. After analyzing the general health among working-age adults with GED credentials, working-age adults with high school diplomas, and high school dropouts, the authors found that high school graduates had significantly better



health than GED recipients. Even more alarming, the health of GED recipients of both sexes was comparable to that of high school dropouts in their study.

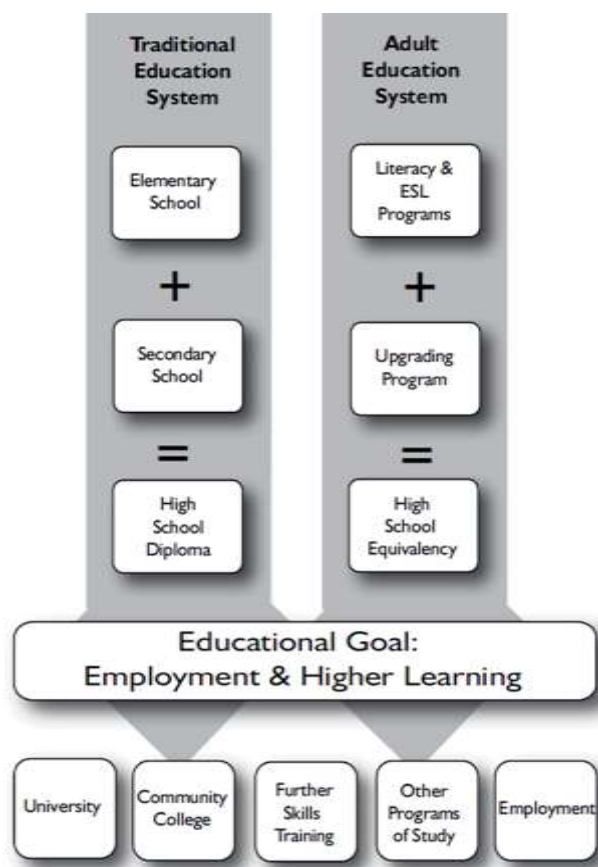
### **Credit Accumulation**

High school credit accumulation seems the most popular way to obtain credentialing toward high school diplomas within local board upgrading organizations. Students may return to take upgrading courses, or they may apply for Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) to receive credit for skills acquired by other means.

The PLAR model is used to evaluate skill levels and life experiences for credit toward an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD). Mature Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) is an evaluation and credit-granting process where adult learners are able to obtain credits for their prior learning. Prior learning comprises the skills and knowledge that they have acquired, in both informal and formal ways, outside of high school. Students may be evaluated against the expectations outlined in the provincial curriculum documents to earn credits towards their OSSD. The PLAR process involves two components: equivalency and challenge. The equivalency process is the procedure that is adhered to for the assessment of credentials from outside provincial jurisdiction. The challenge process takes place when students' prior learning is evaluated for the purpose of granting Grade 10, 11, or 12 course credits (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014).

The boards are responsible for developing and implementing PLAR policies and procedures that are consistent with provincial policy. All credits are granted through either the PLAR challenge process or the equivalency process. The granting of credits must represent the same equivalent standards of achievement as those that are granted to students who have taken the associated courses (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014).

Under either model, that is, the GED or the credit accumulation mixed with the PLAR, the process is neatly delineated by Pound's (2008) model, as shown in Figure 4.



*Figure 4.* Traditional education system versus adult education systems (such as GED and college-level upgrading programs) leading to employment and higher learning. (Pound, 2008, p. 6)

### **Funding Adult Education**

Funding issues have plagued adult education since its inception in the 1920s.

Approaches to education, even within the well-established credit accumulation system, appear cyclical as struggles ensue for the societal needs of developmental outcomes and means of program delivery.

Lowe (1975) denigrated the hierarchical model of adult education in the 1970s and welcomed the more flexible organizational structures that were emerging at the time. It seems,

however, that funding demands of programs are, once again, expected to adhere to a top-down approach in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Christoph (2009) argues that lack of funding in adult education in recent years permeates all areas of adult education, including that of modified programs needed to fulfill Bell et al's (2004) vision of program delivery within high schools. Further, the philosophy of adult education, although historically "informed by passion and outrage and rooted in a concern for the less-privileged" (Nesbit, 2006, p. 17), has altered its role in society and is increasingly set up to service the power of corporate interests. These interests aspire to skill-train adults to prepare for a global market (Sumner, 2008).

Welton (1997) further contends that life-long learning has become "life-long adaptation to the 'needs' of the 'new' global economy" (p. 33), shifting funding models, policies, and practices in its wake. With the combination of funding cuts to adult education programs across Canada and existing funding driving market economies geared to productivity, students with emotional and language issues in varying circumstances are destined for sidelining when these issues threaten to compromise learning (Cullinan & Sabornie, 2004; Harrington-Lueker, 1997).

The following section describes the literature on some of the unique characteristics of marginalized learners who return to school to obtain their high school credentials. The evolution of adult education is examined to set the stage for organizations that offer potential solutions to First Nations adult education needs and empowerment.

## **Empowerment**

**Adult Learning.** Upgrading may be particularly poignant for adults who return to the classroom carrying preconceived notions about how learning should take place in school. Knowles (1965) argues that even when adult students arrive in the classroom with an expectation that the teacher will feed them knowledge as though they are dependent vessel (Freire, 2003),

teachers need to realize that adults are self-directing. If adults are not permitted to be self-directing they will, more often than not, find themselves battling an inner conflict that will interfere with their learning (Boyer, Edmondson, Artis, & Fleming, 2014; Knowles, 1965; Pew, 2007). Program designs need to factor the differences between the teaching of youth and the teaching of adults into their strategies and policies as they plan for optimum student engagement.

Adult learners returning to school to obtain their high school credentials can carry with them previous learning experiences that promote deep-seated perceptions that they are not smart and cannot succeed in the academic environment. Knowles (1965) contends that these students need to get past that barrier and for some students, particularly marginalized students who remember being disrespected in the school system, learning will not occur until they do. He further argues that the allocation of marks can be problematic for adult students. He writes, “nothing makes an adult feel more childlike than being judged by another adult; it is the ultimate sign of disrespect and dependency, as the one who is being judged experiences it” (p. 49). When adult learners begin to realize that adult education is different than what they remember, through experiencing success with the material, trust begins to form. Many of these students require one-on-one learning to build that trust, both with their teachers and with their own belief in their ability to learn.

When adults appreciate that they are able to self-direct, Knowles asserts that they often experience a sense of liberation and delight in their own learning, and approach their studies with strong participation that is closely tied to their egos (Pettit, 2012). When this breakthrough occurs, the results can be astonishing to both themselves and their teachers. Knowles (1965) reports: “Teachers who have helped their adult students to achieve this breakthrough report repeatedly that it is one of the most rewarding experiences of their lives” (p. 47).

Knowles's self-direction theories have informed adult education for the past 40 years, but his theories are not without criticism. Kerka (1999) suggests that self-directed learning may not be possible when the goals of cultural groups conflict with those of the individual. She notes that some authors challenge the notion that all people are autonomous all of the time. She further questions whether democratic participation and social action are necessarily the goals of self-directed learning. Guay, Ratelle, and Chanal (2008) cite Guay and Vallerand's (1997) study which shows that autonomous motivation predicted greater success in a one-year study period. The authors contend that school performance is enhanced with investment, because of perceived importance and student identification with pleasure:

The more students endorse autonomous forms of motivation, the higher their grades are, the more they persist, the better they learn, and the more they are satisfied and experience positive emotions at school. Moreover, research using a person-centered approach has shown that a motivational profile characterized by high autonomous and controlled motivation is generally associated with positive outcomes, but that the most positive educational outcomes ensue from a purely autonomous profile. (Guel et al., 2008, p. 238)

Teacher behaviour toward students likely sets the tone for autonomous learning, more than any other component in the learners' environment. Learners quickly discover whether teachers see them as vessels to partake of their wisdom (Freire, 2003), or if they are interested in the learners enough to engage them in the planning of their own participation. Knowles (1965) argues that when teachers impose all of the activities on them without soliciting input, students react by experiencing "apathy, resentment and probably withdrawal" (p. 48). Ghosh and Ray (1991) suggest teacher education programs should be offering mandatory courses in adult education and practicums in prisons, factories, and community-based agencies.

The term “andragogy” (meaning “man-leading” in Greek) is a practical and theoretical approach to the teaching of adults (Knowles, 1970). Knowles describes andragogy as a necessary approach to replace pedagogy when teaching adult learners. Andragogy works with the assumption that a teacher cannot control learning, but instead assumes the responsibility of helping the learners learn. Andragogy is premised on, but not limited to, four crucial suppositions about learners which differ from the suppositions upon which traditional pedagogy is based. That is, as people mature:

- 1) Their self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward being a self-directed human being;
- 2) They accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasingly rich resource for learning;
- 3) Their readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of their social roles; and,
- 4) Their time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly, their orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of performance-centeredness. (Knowles, 1970 p. 44-45)

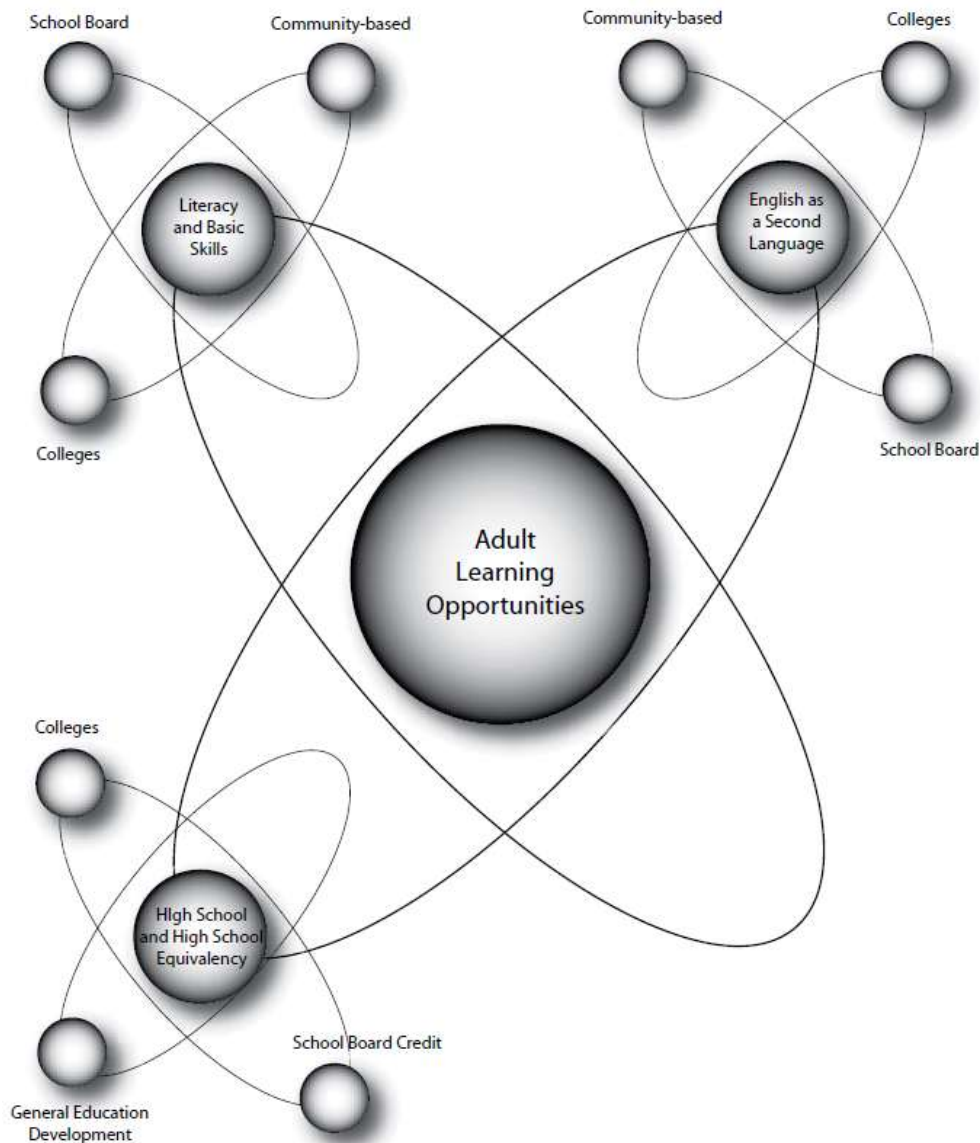
Knowles argues that because we have reached the point where what we learn in our 20s is often obsolete, along with that associated with careers in our 30s, adult education needs have changed to that of life-long learning strategies. He contends that adult learners need to focus on *how* to learn and how to accumulate self-directed inquiry skills (Boyer et al., 2014; Knowles, 1970). Citing the work of Houle (1961), Knowles defines adult education as falling into three categories: goal-oriented, activity-oriented, and learning-oriented. In goal-oriented education,

education is used to meet a well-defined objective. Activity-oriented education often evolves through learning itself, where meaning is identified and pursued by the learner that has no connection to the stated goals of the learner. Learning for the sake of learning and accumulation of knowledge constitutes the third category of learning-oriented education.

As First Nations students attempt to meet their education goals through contemporary adult learning environments, tribal organizations' models of accountability for schools need to be examined for their congruence with policies that inform student learning. The next section examines educational organizational partnership models for their potential to meet the needs of First Nations learners. Through this examination of partnership education organizations, we are able to develop a full spectrum of perceptions of the issues surrounding the impact of the policies, practices, and funding models on the empowerment of First Nations learners.

### **Organizational Structures of Partnership Schools**

The term “partnerships” has become ubiquitous in its meaning, because partnerships are all-too-often thrown together in a rushed manner to respond to the criteria laid out for project funding (Pound, 2008). Pound (2008) maintains that effective partnerships are difficult under such conditions. Emphasis is placed on partnerships in many aspects of community life, including that of schools because of their resource-sharing potential and ability to foster improvements to communities. Pound points out that, much like a recipe, there are many wrong ways of “doing” partnerships, but only one right way if the partnership's full potential is to be realized. He charges that time and resources are both lacking with many service deliverers to properly realize potential in the timeframes given by funding agencies. Pound shares a visual depiction of how adult learning opportunities work within their partnerships to meet the needs of the developmental outcomes of students, as shown in Figure 5.



*Figure 5.* Adapted from Pound (2008, p. 1): Some adult learning opportunities within partnerships (universities are excluded under this model).

Elliott (1981) proposes that there are two models of accountability for schools in general: the productivity model and the responsive accountability model. In the latter, the school has the freedom to make decisions based on their student population, and teachers are given the freedom and right to act based on their professional status. In the productivity model, public coffers are the primary interest. Ingersoll (2003) also proposes two theoretical approaches to explain school



organizational structure: the bureaucracy model and the decentralized model. The bureaucracy model views schools as disorganized and influenced by increased economic accountability and hierarchical power structure. A contrasting decentralized model supports parent, community, teacher, principal, and school culture empowerment. Ingersoll positions schools as being the byproduct of both models but fails to include race, class, or gender dynamics that are at play within the structures.

Becher, Eraut, Burton, Canning, and Knight (1979) make the distinction between “moral, professional and contractual accountability, representing one's individual relationship with one's clients” (p. 219). Policies, practices, and funding models of organizations inform client relationships which, in the case of First Nations adult education, potentially impact student achievement potential when Elliott's two models of accountability collide.

Huxham and Vangen (2000) argue that partnerships involving schools need to be of benefit to all parties in the agreement. The authors call this form of partnership “collaborative advantage” (p. 222). Bennet, Harvey, and Anderson (2004) researched collaborative interactions with organizations in their qualitative study based on interviews with six chief education officers. They observed that surrender of autonomy by all parties in a partnership is necessary for collaboration to take place in an arrangement where the goals are shared and the accountability is mutual. Without shared goals, they contend that the partnerships will not meet with success. Battiste (2005a) claims that all First Nations education in Canada has been implemented without Bennett et al.'s (2004) shared goals that inform collaborative partnerships. As she notes in her 2004 paper (Battiste, 2004), the treaties agreed in many cases to maintain a school for their associated communities, but did not agree to Aboriginal input into curriculum, policy, practices, and/or standards of education for their people.

Bennett et al. (2004) understand that complementary forms of expertise will be shared and experienced when partnerships are focused on the same goals. In their study, they found that successful partnerships required two-way collaboration and trust between parties, with all factions demonstrating what they called “organizational maturity” (p. 228). Organizational maturity is necessary to deal with the points of friction that are inevitable in all organizations at times. Bennet et al. conclude that how schools perceive themselves will affect the terms of the partnerships and how they carry out their policies and practices. Partnerships within organizational structures may be seen as a vital link to partnerships between organizations and the overall success of the system.

Sumner (2008) and Christoph (2009) argue that economic productivity controls current adult education programs across the province, while First Nations tribal councils look to provide all-inclusive programming to their community members. Revitalization of First Nations culture means restoring and strengthening values that empower the whole person, values that have endured 500 years of assaults and attempts at assimilation. Revitalization is an initial step toward moving out of cycles of disempowerment, as evidenced by apathy, abuse, alienation, and victimization, through unshackling the chains of oppression needed to fully engage in learning and achievement (Cajete, 1994, Freire, 2000).

Welton (1997) contends that adult learning in Canada has become an “adaptation to the ‘needs’ of the ‘new’ global economy” (p. 33). The cuts to funding for adult education programs across Canada mean that existing funding is driving market economies, which leave students with emotional and language issues sidelined when these issues threaten to compromise learning (Cullinan & Sabornie, 2004; Harrington-Lueker, 1997). As First Nations tribal organizations liaise with both the provincial and federal governments to oversee and account for dollars

dedicated to the FNSO (First Nations) project, AEO (credentialing organization) funding issues undermine the flexibility of their philosophy. For an adult learning environment to maximize its potential, the relationship among the teachers, elders, counselors, adult education centre administrators, tribal board members, employment sectors, colleges, and universities must not be seen to compete in their policies, practices, or funding models.

A study of the policies, practices, and funding models of both FNSO and AEO partnership organizations exposes incongruence between the goals and visions of the organizations. The needs of both organizations must be met when First Nations communities look to provincial learning centres for their credentialing. The congruence is essential for strong working relationships with shared goals and accountability (Bennet et al., 2004).

First Nations communities have tried various credentialing organizations for upgrading programs. The General Education Development (GED) program was attempted in conjunction with the first cohort in this pilot project. The GED program upgrades students toward a set of examinations that are administered over a number of days, whereas the AEO program tests students throughout the program as learners progress through the materials. As fewer students passed the GED examinations than those who graduated from the AEO program, the decision was made to use AEO for further academic credentialing. Other possibilities for academic credentialing existed, however, including an on-site learning centre, Independent Learning Centre (ILC), college upgrading programs, and contracting out to other learning centres in the city. It is hoped that a close examination of the policies, practices, and funding models of both FNSO and AEO organizations will reveal feasibility criteria that could replace repeated “trial and error” selections for credentialing for First Nations learners.

## **The Current Situation**

At present, First Nations responsibility for education is an extension of the bureaucracy set out through the guidelines of the Department of Indigenous Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND), rather than a replacement for its complex and deeply troubled framework. With DIAND operating within a centralized administration, locally controlled schools remain an abstract reality, lacking in the legislation needed to transfer education from the Minister of DIAND to Indian Bands (Kirkness, 1999). Agreements with public and separate boards, ministries, and religious and charitable organizations are authorized, but not First Nations bands. Under the present system, First Nation bands derive funding from “various Treasury Board authorities, covering a range of educational and student support services, which extend from kindergarten to post-secondary school programs” (Kirkness, 1999, p. 12). With a lack of legislation preventing a full transfer of control, schools in First Nations communities became known as band “operated” schools, rather than band “controlled” schooling. The view that First Nations people are not capable of providing their own system of education to meet their own needs spills over into education systems across the country, as First Nations people are afflicted with domineering practices that patronize and demean the people they are meant to service.

**The problems with the current situation.** Sentiments that are the basis for conflicting funding goals and failure to address empowering issues for First Nations people, communities, their heritages, and their education are deeply steeped in Canadian history (Fisher, 1992). The following problem areas are described in this section: (a) poverty and a need for survival, (b) dysfunctional families, (c) overt and covert racism in the school systems, and (d) colliding worldviews.

Silver et al. (2007) raise concerns about inner-city First Nations families in Manitoba, with one community worker in their 2007 study claiming that survival needs are paramount. Student focus on survival affects attendance, they argue, when learners are needed at home to help look after younger siblings and when the stress of school becomes part of the problem. Lack of learning, engagement, and attendance are all outcomes when people exist in “survival mode,” largely determined by conditions of poverty (Silver et al., 2007). Kirkness (1999) also notes that the missionaries and governments have failed to provide effective educational programming for First Nations students, and bases her claim on cultural realities for students and families clashing with meaningful programs, lack of qualified teachers, and inadequate facilities. Progressive economic, social, and political factors that influence First Nations learning require funding models that support the policies and practices that address these issues.

As long as covert and overt behaviours continue to uphold lingering views from previous decades, empowerment will be a struggle for oppressed people. Overt racism can be heard echoing from the walls of institutions through the arrogant cries of newly decolonized students who ask, “what can I do?” Even the deeply sympathetic, it seems, have a belief in their superiority to create social change where First Nations people “cannot” (Vickers, 2002). As Vickers (2002) notes, this claim to superiority is systemic and not limited to views about First Nations students, even in college and university classrooms where the professor represents the supreme authority. Vickers claims that this superior/inferior relationship reinforces an inherently oppressive education system. She argues that beliefs supporting the superiority of educators prevent educators from broadening their own worldviews to include the policies and practices of Aboriginal culture.

Brady (1996) credits Radwanski (1987), who found a link between socio-economic backgrounds and how students were placed into high school programming. In this Toronto Board of Education study, 30.7% and 32.6% of students with families in the lowest and second-lowest occupational categories, respectively, were in workplace-level courses, compared to 6.4% 7.2% of students in the highest and second-highest socio-economic categories. Ninety-two percent of students from the highest socio-economic circumstances and 87.9% of those from the second highest were in advanced-level programming.

Brady (1996) charges that the fact that the socio-economic status of many First Nations people in Canada is lower than that of mainstream society is consistent with First Nations youth being streamed into non-academic course selections. King (1980) notes that out of First Nations students attending provincially operated schools in 1984, 26% were receiving workplace-level programming, 59% were at the general level, and a mere 15% were streamed at the academic level. At the same time, 60% of mainstream students were enrolled at the advanced level, 33% were taking general-level programs, and only 7% were enrolled at a workplace level.

In the Mackay and Myles (1989) study, it was found that “Native students are consistently ‘placed’ willingly and unwillingly in general and basic levels” (p. 56). This practice is not showing significant improvement and is not confined to Ontario schools. In Wilson’s (1992) study from Western Canada, First Nations students were “forced into low-level courses because everyone around them assumed that they were incapable of handling university preparatory work” (p. 52). Given the results of these earlier studies, it is no surprise that the dropout rates among First Nations community members continue to be cause for alarm (Auditor General of Canada, 2011; Brady, 1996;).

**The call for decentralization.** McPherson & Rabb (2011) argue that youth have “either tried to silence the oppressor within with drugs and alcohol, gas or glue; or the oppressor within has dominated, resulting in dysfunctional families and communities with the highest suicide rate in the world” (p. 207). They agree with the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Dussault & Erasmus, 1996) report in that the problems can only be addressed by education, but they stand with Battiste (2005a) when they argue that the wrong kind of education will worsen the situation. The RCAP reported that despite the painful residual effects of first, second, and third generations of the residential schooling system, First Nations people still view education as the hope for a future void of poverty, and inclusive of core empowering values for their communities and themselves (Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Dussault & Erasmus, 1996; McPherson & Rabb, 2011; Silver et al., 2007). All of these difficulties have resulted in a call for decentralization, that is, schooling for Aboriginal students by Aboriginal people.

Where McPherson and Rabb claim that the only solution to the problems is for First Nations people to take back their power and control the education their children receive, Battiste (2004) charges that provinces continue to control the education and devolution back to school boards continues to take place. Battiste claims that decentralization of this kind takes back any chance for First Nations student empowerment because of its diminishing effects on the opportunities of learners to immerse themselves in the education policies and practices that represent their own culture. She says the lack of power sharing necessary for First Nations people is evidenced in the “add and stir” (p. 7) model of education, where First Nations knowledge and history are used as a tool to motivate learning for First Nations students, rather than “the” knowledge that all students would benefit from. Battiste (2004) calls this the “Humpty Dumpty” (p. 15) of First Nations humanities, as students find themselves “fragmented and

shattered” inside of provincial education systems. Appearances of compliance, inclusion, and power sharing are not limited to provincial school systems, either, but are also experienced inside of the learning environments in First Nations communities (Battiste, 2004).

As Weissberg (2000) states: “Empowering the poor means creating powerful anti-poverty agencies. Statism is the hidden agenda” (p. 20). Becoming comfortable with education that is delivered using Eurocentric practices and policies, and is internalized differently for First Nations students than it is for the mainstream population, means becoming comfortable inside conditions of oppression that both disempower and undermine learning (Freire, 2000). Frideres (1987) delineates the “cultural discontinuity theory,” as applied to First Native learners, when he writes:

Schools, to a certain extent, reflect the dominant social values of society. ... Today then, the educational process instills the business creed into students, stressing the practical usefulness of education, competitive success and making students conform to middle-class standards. Any student unwilling to adopt and internalize this dominant value will find the education process frustrating and useless. (p. 284)

The need for adult education of First Nations learners arises out of a situation in which the current school system continues to fail Aboriginal people. In recent years, there has been a concerted effort to correct the problems ingrained in the system by providing adults with educational upgrading intended to offer them choice in employment opportunities.

Decentralization is seen as a resolution to this apparent dilemma, both on and off reserves, by some authors in the literature.

**Decentralization.** Decentralization of governmental functions has increased in popularity around the globe because of its inherent promotion of developmental and democratic goals



(Hutchcroft, 2001). Freidman (1998) and Holsten (1998) suggest that decentralization is more efficient than government control, where Hutchcroft contends it produces more just and equitable outcomes because localized control is more functional than governmental control. Agrawal and Ribot (1999) assert that greater participation in public decision-making is a constructive good in itself, in that it democratizes government powers (Agrawal & Ribot, 1999; Ribot, 1999).

Fainstein (2000) argues the radical viewpoint that advancements in social change can only take place with a transfer of power to those who were formerly omitted from power. This transfer requires participation (Fainstein, 2000; Pettit, 2012).

The process of decentralization assumes government control at the onset (Agrawal & Ribot, 1999; Battiste, 2005a; Ribot, 1999). In the case of First Nations communities, McPherson and Rabb (2011) argue that this criteria for decentralization does not exist in that First Nations people have never given up their right to educate their own children, despite forced governmental control of Indian education. Some authors contend that transfer of control of education is all about the transfer of money. Agbo (2002) sees the devolution of education back to First Nations communities as inundated with problems given emerging education needs for global participation. Cries for decentralization and community-based decision making must be resolved with local community interests (Agbo, 2002; Courtner & Moote, 1994). Agbo argues that decentralization is a process that is not well-defined for First Nations communities. Battiste (2005a) cries for decentralization that does not include local school boards, while Agbo (2002) warns that the lack of effective constructs of education needs render First Nations' control of First Nations education less than beneficial to most communities. Agbo (2001) further contends that people in most First Nations communities do not have the skills to develop flourishing education programs. He points out that in 1996, the highest grade of an education coordinator in

a particular First Nations community was Grade 8. This reality is slowly changing, although he maintains that “everybody and nobody seems to be in charge of schooling for children in some band-operated schools” (2001, p. 297). He argues that when political control of schools is decentralized to band councils, the bands will not allow the schools to control their education mandate. He claims that decentralization can, and does, result in schools having less control of their education needs than they did under the guise of government.

Battiste (2005a) notes that First Nations people have a responsibility to be accountable for their own learning. “Learning requires strength” (p. 6), she contends, and, in particular, emotional strength is essential to continue striving with education goals. Empowerment, she argues, feeds the emotional strength needed to overcome issues that undermine learning. Cognitive dissonance, she believes, is an outcome of community suicides and other social ills. Cognitive dissonance, in this context, is the sense of distressing tension that arises out of an attempt to embrace two conflicting notions in the mind at the same time. To illustrate, she uses the following Venn diagram to show what she calls “Jagged World Views Colliding,” referring to the academic work of Little Bear (2000) and the socio-cultural space between First Nations people and the wider population:



*Figure 6.* Area of cognitive dissonance: Contrasting cultures resulting in colliding worldviews. (Adapted from Deer, 2011, p. 7)

Colliding worldviews, as shown in the overlapping area of Figure 6, result in alienation of First Nations learners when they find themselves immersed in an education system that is set up to meet the needs of another culture (Cajete, 1994). Perhaps even more alarming is Gramsci's (1971) concern that the power source working through government, media, courts, prisons, universities, and of course schools results in the "pickling and marinating" of oppressed peoples that become comfortable with their position within their daily lives. These positions, Deer (2011) would contend, lie within the overlapping area in Figure 6, where collision of worldviews takes place. Contentment with one's own oppression was, for Gramsci, the covert result of the implied and subtle changes to morals, values, and beliefs of the oppressed. These shifts, in the rational thoughts and values of society, uphold and socially sanction the source of power for the hegemonic ruling class (Gramsci, 1971).

With most First Nations communities promoting all-inclusive learning approaches, adult education programs require partnerships with education sectors for their credentialing and program delivery. The challenges that some First Nations adult learners are contending with due to the many obstacles they need to, and have, overcome, set the stage for their adult education needs. As we examine mainstream adult education programs, vulnerability to policies, practices, and funding models that drive learning may be scrutinized for their potential to impact the empowerment of learners.

The disempowering effects of historical policies and practices on First Nations people make it especially important that empowerment is fostered through educational organizations that include all aspects of the needs of learners. Battiste (2005b) contends that First Nations academics have identified that learning outcomes are directly impacted by the degree to which cultural and developmental needs of First Nations students are met. Education, says Battiste,

should be viewed as “a lifelong process that must be shared in a holistic manner given the spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual dimensions of human development,” both for learning outcomes of individual learners and the “collective well-being of [their] communities” (Battiste, 2005b, p. 2). Shields (2013) adds that “in this way learning identity motives are explicit rather than implicit, opening up potential for an honest, open, and empowering learning experience for all learners” (p. 65).

Battiste (2005b) recognizes that advances in educational development for First Nations youth take place more slowly than for mainstream youth, as power struggles over issues of funding, policies, and practices take place. First Nations populations continue to grow at almost three times the rate of the wider Canadian population, and 51% of First Nations people do not hold a secondary school diploma, compared to 31% of the wider population (Statistics Canada, 2004). The implications of this data lend themselves to further research into the experiences of prior education models inflicted on First Nations people.

Battiste’s (2005b) call for “holistic” learning that recognizes that people are not made up of intellect alone. She claims that we are emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual beings, affected by emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual issues. Not all of the scholarship, however, agrees that special support mechanisms need to play a role in First Nations education. In their book, Widdowson and Howard (2008) mention examples of enhancements in a First Nations-run elementary school, perceiving that “these improvements were not made by instituting ‘culturally sensitive’ programs, but through a focus on ... academics, and objective assignments” (p. 259). The authors found that the students were “out of control” and had no demands placed on them prior to the implementation of the Eurocentric education program. They

argued that before implementation of the program, students battled with feelings of disempowerment.

Dissenters of Widdowson and Howard argue that emphasis on program delivery flexibility, as well as separate supports, must be adopted by First Nations adult education programs (Battiste, 2005b; Chrisjohn & Young, 1997; Gramsci, 1971; Silver et al., 2007). With the onslaught of barriers that have affected all aspects of First Nations learners' ability to function in many areas of their lives and cultures, "holistic" (Battiste, 2005b) learning must be moved to the forefront for First Nations adult learners to thrive and opportunities for empowerment to grow.

In recent years, First Nations tribal organizations have begun assuming more responsibility for the upgrading education of the learners in the communities they service (Shields, 2012). Local adult education centres are increasingly asked to partner with First Nations organizations, while pressured to adhere to fiscal constrictions that satisfy both their funders and student bodies. These economic constrictions can create a challenge for remote First Nations learners who are hoping to engage with a quality educational learning environment, some of them for the first time in their lives. Tribal organizations are seeking flexibility in educational program delivery, while partnerships with adult education centres operating under economic constraints may serve to undermine overall program delivery. It is within this potential for the repetition of the prior educational experiences of the informants that I situate my research. The research problem emerged as a question of how organizational policies, practices, and funding models might affect the empowerment of the students enrolled in the program. It is through the lens of these historical impacts on adult student learning for First Nations students

that I set the framework with which to investigate the effects of contemporary organizational policies, practices, and funding models upon learner empowerment.

*Even the poorest colonizer thought himself to be — and actually was — superior to the colonized. (Memmi, 1965, p. xii)*

## **Empowerment**

While empowerment of learners appears to embody a transfer of power made possible by the policies, practices, and funding of academic organizations, empowering practices are not impervious to abuse (Weissberg, 2000). Weissberg claims that empowerment is broadly misused in research, as it is often more about the empowering of academics than the people the research is meant to empower. When considering the empowering of “others,” notions of transfer of power from the *empower-er* to the *empower-ee* need to be scrutinized. Weissberg (2000) charges that at its worst, the unethical use of the term “empowerment” results in disempowerment and inculcation. Gore (1992) also writes about the unintended consequences of considering empowerment as a mere transfer of power. Gore says:

If empowerment is constructed as the exercise of power in an attempt to help others to exercise power (rather than as the giving of power), we confront the unforeseeable and contradictory effects of the exercise of power and must be more humble and reflexive in our claims. It is not at all clear we can do anything. (p. 62)

The warnings from Weissberg (2000) and Gore (1992) are relevant to my research because Aboriginal education is steeped in assimilative policies and programs designed specifically to indoctrinate First Nations people into mainstream society and to modernize their way of life. For the most part, historical attempts have been disempowering and covert in that

they have deliberately not involved any decision-making from the communities that were affected (Cajete, 1994; Chrisjohn & Young, 1997).

I adopt Aslop and Heinsohn's (2005) definition of empowerment as "a person's capacity to make effective choices; that is, as the capacity to transform choices into desired actions and outcomes" (p. 4). The authors argue that "choices" that people make must be "informed choices" for empowerment to flourish. Mindful of Weissberg's (2000) and Gore's (1992) critiques, I have embraced Aslop and Heinsohn's work because it has been developed and validated among several different countries that have applied it to their own national populations, in numerous cross-cultural environments.

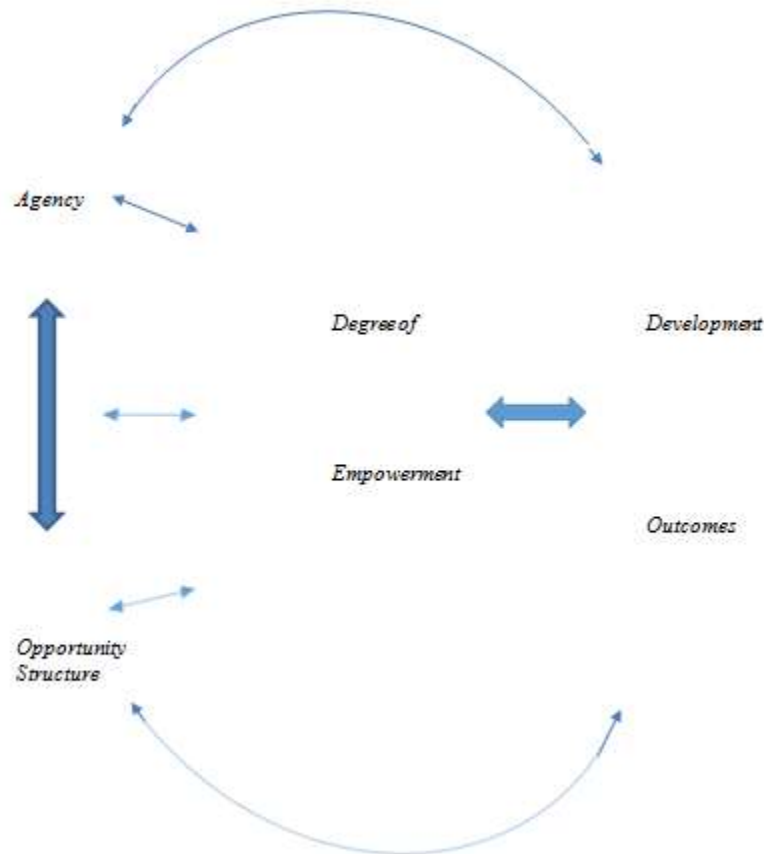
Empowerment and participation are "deeply complementary" (p. 2) in terms of both processes and outcomes (Pettit, 2012). Pettit acknowledges that both participation and empowerment require power shifts within the academy that support the autonomy and flexibility needed for students to act and think without constraints.

When a person or an organization is engaging in a process of empowerment, they are said to be developing the capacity to make choices that have the potential to be transformed into chosen outcomes and actions (Aslop & Heinsohn, 2005). Aslop and Heinsohn argue that agency, as well as "opportunity structure," influence the ability to make effective choices. Agency, the authors contend, is the ability to understand available options to make meaningful choices. "Opportunity structure," they reason, is the context within which these options operate. The authors provide an example of an illiterate farmer needing to fill out several forms to apply for a loan. The regulation that the forms need to be filled out would represent opportunity structure as an obstacle to his procurement of the loan, and thus an impediment to his ability to make an effective choice. The combination of opportunity structure and agency, the authors argue,

embodies varying degrees of empowerment. Following Alsop and Heinsohn (2005), empowerment can be measured through assessment of:

- “1. Whether a person has the opportunity to make a choice;
2. Whether a person actually uses the opportunity to choose; and,
3. Once the choice is made, whether it brings the desired outcomes” (p. 7).

The desired outcome is what Alsop and Heinsohn term the “developmental outcome,” which is the language I use throughout this dissertation. This is depicted in Figure 7.



*Figure 7.* The relationship between outcomes and correlates of empowerment. (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005, p. 6)



Empowerment is a powerful lens through which to consider First Nations learners' experiences. Lifelong schooling and the expanse of academic knowledge are important aspects of education for First Nations people, but without all-inclusive approaches that help to meet cultural needs, while still preparing students for the world at large, First Nations education will fall short of optimum measures of success (Battiste, 2005b; Kirkness, 1995). Inasmuch as Aslop and Heinsohn's (2005) framework offers a model to measure empowerment of the informants in the study, it also provides a means to measure the effects of cultural dissonance within the partnership.

In the next section of this literature review, scholarship on teacher empowerment is considered for its potential to provide a "bottom-up" approach to informing the policies and programs that address the needs of learners. The empowerment of teachers was a key component in the FNSO (First Nations support organization) environment because it was understood by staff, teachers, and students that the learners needed to bond with the teachers for their learning to progress. These bonds created pathways of communication between learners and teachers that were valued and acted on by the FNSO organization. All of the teachers in the study were hired by the AEO (Adult Education Organization – the credentialing organization), yet their level of empowerment was impacted by the partnership as a whole.

### **Teacher Empowerment and the Capacity for Organizational Learning**

Inasmuch as Elliott's (1981) responsive accountability school model seems preferable for an inclusive, collaborative, and holistic education, devolution of adult learning curriculum delivery back to school boards may result in teachers adhering to a productivity model under their terms of employment. Potential for a power struggle between the vision of the tribal

education council and that of the adult education organization may hinge on the ability for teachers to collaborate fully within (and with) the organization.

Marks and Louis found in their 1999 quantitative study that high-quality teaching performance had a statistically significant correlation with democratic relationships within the environment and the ability for individual teachers to act. They termed this ability to act as “teacher empowerment.” Based on their findings, the authors argue that organizational learning is proportional to the strength of the schools; they see the intersection of both as a “central thrust for future school reform” (p. 708). Strong capacity for organizational learning, they argue, will only take place when teachers are influencing the school’s decision-making process. They found that when teachers are unable to influence school-wide issues, they sometimes create sub-groups within the community that foster disagreements and conflicts which undermine the cohesiveness and decision-making of the school. Conversely, where power is shared among teachers and staff and targeted on a common goal, student performance is positively affected.

Morgan and Ramirez (1983) and Wheatley (1992) contend that as long as organizations are preoccupied with power, they will experience the wrong solutions to the wrong problems. Ingersoll (2003) makes use of regression analysis to show that teacher autonomy regarding behaviour and social issues is correlated with reduced student-teacher and administration-teacher conflict, greater cohesion, and higher teacher retention. He argues that teachers have little control over decisions in their work that influence a measure of effectiveness in socializing students beyond graduation. He writes that the productivity model of education does not recognize or value teacher influences and control over academic and social judgments. He emphasizes both accountability and teacher empowerment models for school cultures.

Marks and Louis's survey (1999) of teachers responding to school culture pointed to organizational learning as similar to individual learning, in that it is a process that produces new knowledge and/or new tools to increase knowledge. The authors found that organizations, unlike individuals, must learn as a collective of individual members, and they emphasize that their definition of organizational learning is based on sociocultural aspects of emphasis, rather than a simpler "intersection between the individual and the context" (p. 711). Marks and Louis (1999) recognize that teachers do not teach in isolation, and that open dialogue and sharing based on development of a common base of knowledge, including classroom practices, result in a school culture related to student achievement. In order to reach optimal standards, however, the organization requires the autonomy to determine their own policies and practices, and how they are best moved forward within the individual school culture.

Marks and Louis argue that strong, quality organizational learning produces teachers who exercise high empowerment levels. Teacher empowerment, they found, was far more important when fostered in a community school culture than when it was experienced in isolation. Among the questions asked of teachers in their survey was, "From the beginning of the current school year, about how much time per month have you spent meeting with other teachers on lesson planning, curriculum development, guidance and counseling, evaluation of programs, or other collaborative work related to instruction?" (p. 734).

McCharen, Song, and Martens (2011) conducted a quantitative study to determine the driving factors for innovative, supportive learning cultures that foster teacher autonomy and collaborative school settings. Their study examined the relationships within the settings and their influence on learning cultures. Watkins and Marsick (1993) advocate learning cultures that are supportive and encourage collaborative learning by providing leadership that is strategic, and

that fosters strong connections within the department. All members should be encouraged to engage in a continuously creative collaborative learning process that is capable of responding to internal and external changes (Argyris & Schön, 1996). Collinson and Cook (2011) maintain that teachers in mainstream education programs are not given the time to share knowledge among staff in all levels of the organization. This strains the ability to sustain long-term innovative practices in school systems. The Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, and Hann (2001) study found that innovation is responsive to educational needs and will occur in reaction to a strong, clearly stated vision by school leaders. Education needs, they found, were the root motivators for innovation.

McCharen et al. (2011), however, found that “federal and statutory accountability policies may constrain teachers’ classroom autonomy more than the individual school policies and practices” (p. 687). As the authors explain, “opportunities to explore the dynamics of relationships between educational leadership and school achievement are rare” (p. 688). Any policies, practices, or funding models that have the potential to interfere with teacher autonomy also have the potential to interfere with inter-organizational collaboration. This collaboration is necessary for valuing community, as well as valuing the measures of student achievement and empowerment that are consistent with Aboriginal perspectives (Agbo, 2002; Battiste, 2005b; Cajete, 1994; McPherson & Rabb, 2011).

Nevertheless, it is clear that Elliott’s (1981) responsive accountability school model relies on teachers as the major front line players to advocate for student needs. Elliott’s (1981) responsive accountability school model seems to represent the ideal standard of education that First Nations academics are demanding, to fulfill Bell et al.’s (2004) image of First Nations students as able to “compete on any level, anywhere” (p. 30). The literature notes that consistent funding models are required to maintain the resource organization’s vision for learners to

experience the empowering aspects that Battiste (2004, 2005b), Bell et al. (2004), Cajete (1994), Freire, (2000), and McPherson and Rabb (2011) mandate. Fundamental to their directives is a stipulation for consistent policies and programs as First Nations tribal councils move into the next phase of their education aspirations. Richards and Vinings (2003) write:

Although quality schools matter, deciding what this means in terms of Aboriginal educational policy is problematic, because knowing the output of good schools as reflected in test scores and its subsequent impact on earnings (valuable though it is for some purposes) does not directly help policy-makers *design* good schools. For this purpose, policy-makers need to better understand the relationship between school inputs and school outputs. Unfortunately, the relationship between various input measures and quality of education is murkier than the broader link between educational levels and incomes. (p. 202)

Meeting the challenges specific to First Nations learners and facilitating teacher empowerment may work together to ensure that First Nations organizational structure models are responsive. How the policies, programs, and funding models of First Nations organizations interface with that of their partners may have bearing on learner empowerment while students are attempting to meet their education goals within the parameters of an organization. My study aims to measure the impact of the effectiveness of this congruence upon the learners in one First Nations partnership organization.

Many adult First Nations learners in this study had health issues including dental issues, unidentified vision issues, and diabetes, all creating conditions that interfere with learning. Most had children and some had grandchildren, all with issues of their own. Many learners in this study had not lived in a city prior to being selected for the program, hence did not know how to

use the city's public transportation facilities, how to use an elevator, how to understand their landlord or tenant rights, or police harassment rights. Many were missing critical pieces of identification such as birth certificates and social insurance numbers. Some had criminal records, and others battled with head injuries due to living in and around violent environments. Trevethan (2003), Director of Community Research, Correctional Service of Canada, writes that First Nations people account for roughly 2% of Canadian adult population, yet in 1991 Aboriginal people represented 11% percent of the federal inmate population (CSC, 1991). Just over ten years later, the Aboriginal federal inmate female population had increased to 25% percent (CSC, 2002). First Nations people are incarcerated at about nine times the rate of the mainstream population.

The final section of this literature review focuses on the theoretical framework of this study, utilizing critical theory.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is theoretically grounded in critical theory. Critical theory, according to Giroux (2001), entails a commitment to critical thought as a “precondition to human freedom” (p. 19). Giroux describes critical theory as referring “to the need to develop a discourse of social transformation and emancipation that does not cling dogmatically to its own doctrinal assumptions” (p. 8). Blake and Masschelein (2003) claim that “critical theory questions the transparency of society to the individual consciousness, and with it, the transparency of self to self” (p. 44).

Giroux (2001) shows how literacy education, and education that enables people to make their own decisions, can act as tools for political and social transformation. Embedded in the ideas of the critical theorists that came before him, Giroux solicits citizens to act as if the world

were fair and just in a way that encourages social action and a deep commitment to a prolonged in-depth understanding. He calls for educators involved in critical theory to think with vision and act in accordance with their dreams for a better world. These educators will have a “transformative aspect” when critical pedagogy, critical theory in education, is adopted as a premise for teaching. Blake and Masschelein (2003) write that “a teacher might perhaps come to be seen as being as good as her or his own sense of dissatisfaction” (p. 55).

Social justice seems to compliment critical theory in the realm of a theoretical framework, whereas critical theory seems able to “protect” a social justice research theoretical framework. . Bell (2007) views social justice frameworks as facilitating both processes and goals and reiterates the importance of participation and democracy to its premise. Social justice should be “inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to create change” (p. 2). A social justice theoretical framework must encompass measures of empowerment at its core. Selecting an exclusive social justice theoretical framework, however, creates trepidation for me that is tied to perceptions of social justice in general. The concept of social justice carries negative connotations in First Nations communities, where there is sometimes the perception that justice is being interpreted as “just-us.” It could be argued that “just-us” policies have been working “on,” rather than “with,” First Nations people for centuries. Gewirtz (2006) writes:

...so in evaluating justice practices, judgments about what counts as success need to be made in the light of considerations about the particular justice conflicts, the mediation of justice, and the contexts and levels of enactment which impinge on the practices being evaluated. (p. 80)

I have been cautioned that newly decolonized researchers need to resist asking the question, “What can I do?” as if they are somehow entitled to act on behalf of the oppressed, that they are in a position to “help” because of their inherent superior rank (Vickers, 2002). I have therefore resisted an exclusive social justice theoretical framework and have chosen to also explore Kumashiro’s (2009) notion of “anti-oppressive” education.

Kumashiro includes four approaches to teaching for social justice. Educators need to:

- (a) [Commit to improving] the experiences of students who have been treated in harmful ways;
- (b) Strive to rid the teaching environments of the stereotypes and myths that have provided the impetus for people to be treated in harmful ways;
- (c) Challenge how privilege has traditionally operated to benefit some groups while marginalizing others; and,
- (d) Admit to the challenges of teaching toward social justice. (Kumashiro, 2009, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii)

My research takes place at the junction of two intersecting partnership organizations belonging to separate cultures. One culture represents the oppressed and the other the oppressor. How learning takes place under these conditions is a testament to the willingness of both organizations to give up their autonomy to meet singularly envisioned goals (Bennet et al., 2004). Teachers who worked for AEO (the Adult Education Organization) but worked in the FNSO (First Nation support organization) environment acted as a bridge between the two organizations. Thus, the empowerment of teachers was very closely tied to the critical theory/social justice/anti-oppressive education theoretical framework of this study.



Teachers, empowered through their own experiences, levels of education, and ability to remain flexible within the teaching environment of the organization, can and do engage in negotiation with the learners in their classrooms (Freire, 2003; Knowles, 1970; Marks & Louis, 1999). To accomplish this, teachers must recognize how the student is positioned not only within the organization, but within the experiences that define who they are (Bell, Washington, Weinstein, & Love, 1997). This is the first main goal of the theoretical framework: to recognize student positionality.

Bell et al. (1997) argue that for social justice to prevail in a learner environment, “social identity is central to the content” (p. 300) for the students and the teacher. Knowles’s (1970) “andragogy” replacement for “pedagogy” in adult education is central to this point. A sense of Nesbit’s (2006) “passion and outrage ... rooted in a concern for the less-privileged” (p. 17) means First Nations’ learners require an organizations’ supports; these supports are critical for negotiating power and developing a meaningful learning experience for both students and teachers. Teachers, in turn, must deeply appreciate how their own history has impacted the learners and recognize the knowledge students bring to the classroom (Horwitz, 1998).

Ayers (1998) explains that social justice educators teach in ways that encourage and engage students, acting to teach learners how to exercise power (Gore, 1992). As Ayers argues:

Teaching for social justice demands a dialectical stance: one eye firmly fixed on students – Who are they? What are their hopes, dreams, and aspirations? – Their passions and commitments? What skills, abilities and capacities does each one bring to the classroom? – And the other eye looking unblinkingly at the concentric circles of context – historical flow, cultural surroundings, and economic reality. Teaching for social justice is teaching that arouses students, engages them in a quest to identify obstacles to their full humanity,

to their freedom, and then drive to move against those obstacles. And so the fundamental message of the teacher for social justice is: You can change the world. (1998, p. xvii)

The First Nations support organization (FNSO) mandated policies to address potential abuse by students toward teachers or others. Change was slow in the FNSO environment, often painfully so. Front line staff workers worked as a student-centered team to re-engage students who were struggling, while respecting that the students had the right to make their own mistakes in their own ways. Convincing learners to trust, through the building of relationships, was key to working as a team in the FNSO. Building of relationships required responsibility to those relationships, and for teachers working within a partnership organization, this sometimes required difficult choices in terms of where loyalties lay when the oppressing cultural organization (AEO) was seen as making choices that were not in the best interests of the oppressed students. Certainly communication played a vital part when speaking with one's employer about the situation at hand, but what does a teacher do if their employer cannot or will not make an adjustment? Does the teacher break the rules to meet the student's empowerment needs, or does he/she continue with the status quo, setting the student aside while she/he waits for change? Where culture meets culture, changes in policies cannot take place overnight, especially when the changes have implications elsewhere within the boards of mainstream student populations.

Outlining Oakes and Lipton's (2003) context for social justice in education, Hytten (2006) contends that social justice education demands that educators analyze and question the values and motives that frame educational policies and practices, question who benefits from their existence, and provide empowering alternatives to the injustices that drive them. Questioning, in Hytten's view, is key. For Ayers (1998) to be in line with Hytten's argument,

staff must understand the root cause(s) of the problems before they can provide creative student-centred alternatives.

Freire (2000) implores educators to learn to be aware of “social, political, and economic actions, and to take action against oppressive elements of reality” (p. 35) for dialogue to be meaningful. Memmi (1965) contends that:

the colonialists are perpetually explaining, justifying and maintaining (by word as well as by deed) the place and fate of their silent partners in the colonial drama. The colonized are thus trapped by the colonial system and the colonialist maintains his prominent role. (p. 70)

Freire would assert that FNSO staff must think critically about the wider world, and how it works to intersect with their student body. He argued that the crucial element of dialogue requires hope, love, and naming of the world. He wrote:

True dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking — thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them — thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than static entity — thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of temporality. (2000, p. 92)

Critical thinking dialogue is an essential piece for a theoretical framework to drive social justice in this study. Without it, all of the elements that have shaped the negative view of social justice will rise to the surface and dominate discourse within the organization.

This chapter has examined the scholarship that weaves meaning into the data discussed in Chapters Four to Eight, and has delineated the critical theoretical framework of my research. The

literature discussed in this chapter reveals the relevance of my research while situating it among related scholarship. In the next section I outline a glossary of acronyms, definition of terms, and course designations to guide the reader through the remaining chapters.

### **Glossary of Acronyms**

AEO – Adult Education Organization. AEO is a pseudonym for the adult education organization responsible for providing academic programming and credentialing for students seeking Ontario secondary school diplomas (OSSD) and college and university readiness.

CSO – Client Support Officer. A CSO is a person hired by the First Nations support organization (FNSO) to counsel students, track student attendance, and communicate with landlords on behalf of students.

FNSO – First Nations support organization. FNSO is a pseudonym for the First Nations support organization in this study. FNSO was responsible for providing various levels of supports to students arriving from remote communities, to help acclimatize and transition them to urban life and learning environments.

GPP – A code used by the Ontario Ministry of Education for a “Guidance leadership and peer support” course. GPP is used as an elective by AEO inside of FNSO.

GLS – Guidance learning strategies course. GLS is used as an elective by AEO inside of FNSO.

ILC – Independent Learning Centre. The ILC offers courses for independent study at a distance that meet the requirements of the Ontario Ministry of Education for high school accreditation.

OLC – Ontario Literacy Course. The OLC is a mandatory course for all students who do not pass the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test required for graduation from high school.

OSSD – Ontario Secondary School Diploma. The OSSD is the secondary school diploma granted to high school graduates in the province of Ontario.

MTCU – Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. MTCU is the Ontario government funding branch that is a primary funder of FNSO.

PLAR – Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition. PLAR is an evaluation and credit-granting process that allows adult learners to obtain credits for prior learning. Under PLAR, students are evaluated against the provincial curriculum expectations to earn credits to be used towards their OSSD.

REB – Research Ethics Board at the university where this research took place.

SEA –Senior Equivalent Assessment. SEA is the credit-granting portion under the PLAR process that assigns credits based on the prior learning of students. There are junior and senior components to SEA.

SPSS – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. SPSS is a computer program used for statistical analysis for this research.

TCPS – Tri-Council Policy Statement. The TCPS is a document that specifies the processes to be used to promote ethical conduct for research involving human subjects.

## **Definition of Terms**

**Accountability:** The terms “accountability” and “models of accountability” are used in this study to describe the link between fiscal agreements and responsibilities, as well as organizational goals, learner attendance, retention, and achievement. All organizations (in this study, AEO and FNSO) are accountable to their funders through agreements that make up their funding models (Becher et al., 1979).

**Adult Learning:** This includes the learning environment set up to meet the physical needs of adults, including conditions of support, respect, acceptance, and self-directivity. Adults are keenly aware whether an educational institution cares more about them or the number they represent to the ministries the organization is accountable to (Knowles, 1970).

**First Nations:** First Nations refers to status and non-status Indian peoples in Canada (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada and Canadian Polar Commission, 2013). There are, at present, 617 First Nations communities, representing over 50 nations or cultural groupings and 50 Aboriginal languages, in Canada. This study was limited to the nine First Nations communities under the umbrella of the associated Northern Ontario tribal council.

**First Nations Adult Learners:** The definition for First Nations adult learners includes some or all of the conditions that may apply to oppressed and colonized people, as well as conditions outlined for the general adult learner population (Freire, 2000; Memmi, 1965). First Nations adult learners in this study arrive at their learning environments with the characteristics of adult learners but also characteristics unique to First Nations people. All of the First Nations learners in this study are aged 22 or older, so references to “adult learners” in this study should be interpreted accordingly.

**Decentralization:** Decentralization refers to the transfer of government education powers to community decision-making bodies (Agbo, 2002; Battiste, 2005a). Effective local control must include objectives that empower First Nations students by closely linking school governance and pedagogy (Goddard & Shields, 1997, in Agbo, 2002).

**Developmental outcomes:** Developmental outcomes refer to a learners' goal choices after leaving an educational program, and their ability to meet those goals within and after the program.

**Empowerment:** For the purposes of this research, Aslop and Heinsohn's (2005) World Bank model of empowerment, based on the combination of agency and opportunity structure in facilitation of a developmental outcome, is employed. Agency for the learners is a measure of their understanding of what education and career options are available to them when aggregated with their upgrading course selections. The opportunity structure is the participants' ability to adjust to the classrooms within which they are expected to learn — in this case, the learners' ability to acclimatize to living and studying in an urban setting.

**Funding models:** Funding models for this study include the formulas, allocation methods, and funders involved in the funding of both education organizations involved in the research. Core funding for First Nations education organizations can, and does, depend on government funding at the federal level in the form of money allocated for the education component of tribal organizations. The funding for adult education programs in the province of Ontario comes from provincial coffers.

**Nomenclature:** "Aboriginal" and "Indigenous" are all-encompassing terms. They include First Nations (Indians), Inuit, and Métis peoples. The term "Indigenous" is used in this research to denote Aboriginal people outside of Canada, although the term is still applicable within

Canada. The terms “Indian” and “Aboriginal” are not interchangeable in that all status Indian people are not Aboriginal, and vice-versa. The term “First Nations people” includes both status and non-status, as defined by The Department of Indigenous Affairs and Northern Development, Canada (DIAND, 2013). In this research I use “First Nations people” where appropriate. When speaking to the legal framework, I use the term “Indian” as it is written in The Indian Act. When speaking from a personal perspective, I use the term “Indian” because that is the term we use around our dinner table, as do many other First Nations families, from my experience.

**Practices:** Practices, for both general adult education programs and First Nations support organizations, refers to the implementation of policies set down by organizations to advance the goals of the organizations. That practices adhere to policies is important for organizations to retain funding, and to define the working boundaries that are likely to maximize goal-setting potential.

**Policies:** Education policies are a set of strategies outlining what students should be learning (the curriculum) and what is needed to achieve that learning. Curriculum, as defined by Merriam Webster (2015), is “set of courses constituting an area of specialization.” Organizations offering education have policies guiding practices by outlining codes of conduct and expectations of performance. The implementation of policy is open to interpretation by the various players within an organization (Ghosh & Ray, 1991). Policies for First Nations support organizations include guidelines intended to advance student retention and deal with issues that might foreseeably impact student learning and/or student development. Policies for organizational structures must adhere to funding requirements and restrictions.

**Tribal Councils:** There are 14 First Nations Tribal Councils in the province of Ontario, representing various First Nations communities. They are as follows: Bimose Tribal Council,



Independent First Nations Alliance, Keewaytinook Okimakanak Council, Matawa First Nations, North Shore Tribal Council, Pwi-Di-Goo-Zing Ne-Yaa-Zhing Advisory Services, Shibogama First Nations Council, Southern First Nation Secretariat, United Chiefs & Councils of Manitoulin Island, Wabun Tribal Council, Waabnoong Bemjiwang Association of First Nations, Windigo First Nations Council, Robinson Superior, and Treaty Three tribal councils. These Regional Chiefs Councils provide not-for-profit advisory and resource services and program delivery to their member-Nations, including but not limited to employment and training incentives and support, target wage subsidy, business development, learning centres, environmental sustainability and support, apprenticeship training, and partnership development. They are funded by subscription from the members they represent.

*I have often noticed that the deprivations of the colonized are the almost direct result of the advantages secured to the colonizer. (Memmi, 1965, p. xii)*

### **Course Designations and Codes**

The following course codes are used in this research:

Mathematics:

MEL 3C: Grade 11 workplace-level mathematics

MBF 3C: Grade 11 college entrance level mathematics (skills building)

MAP 4C: Grade 12 college entrance level mathematics (skills building)

MCR 3U: Grade 11 university entrance level mathematics (skills building)

English:

OLC 4C: Under the new OSSD guidelines, a student must pass either the literacy test or the OLC course in order to graduate (skills building)

ENG 3C Grade 11 college level English (skills building)

ENG 4C Grade 12 college level English (skills building)

Science:

SBI 3C Grade 11 biology

SCH 4C Grade 12 chemistry

Figure 8 shows the prerequisites for mathematics programming from Grades 9-12, demonstrating the flow of “academic” and “applied” programming. Note that Grade 12 Mathematics for Work and Everyday Life (Workplace-level MEL 4E1, at the bottom right-hand corner of the chart) does not lead to college entry.

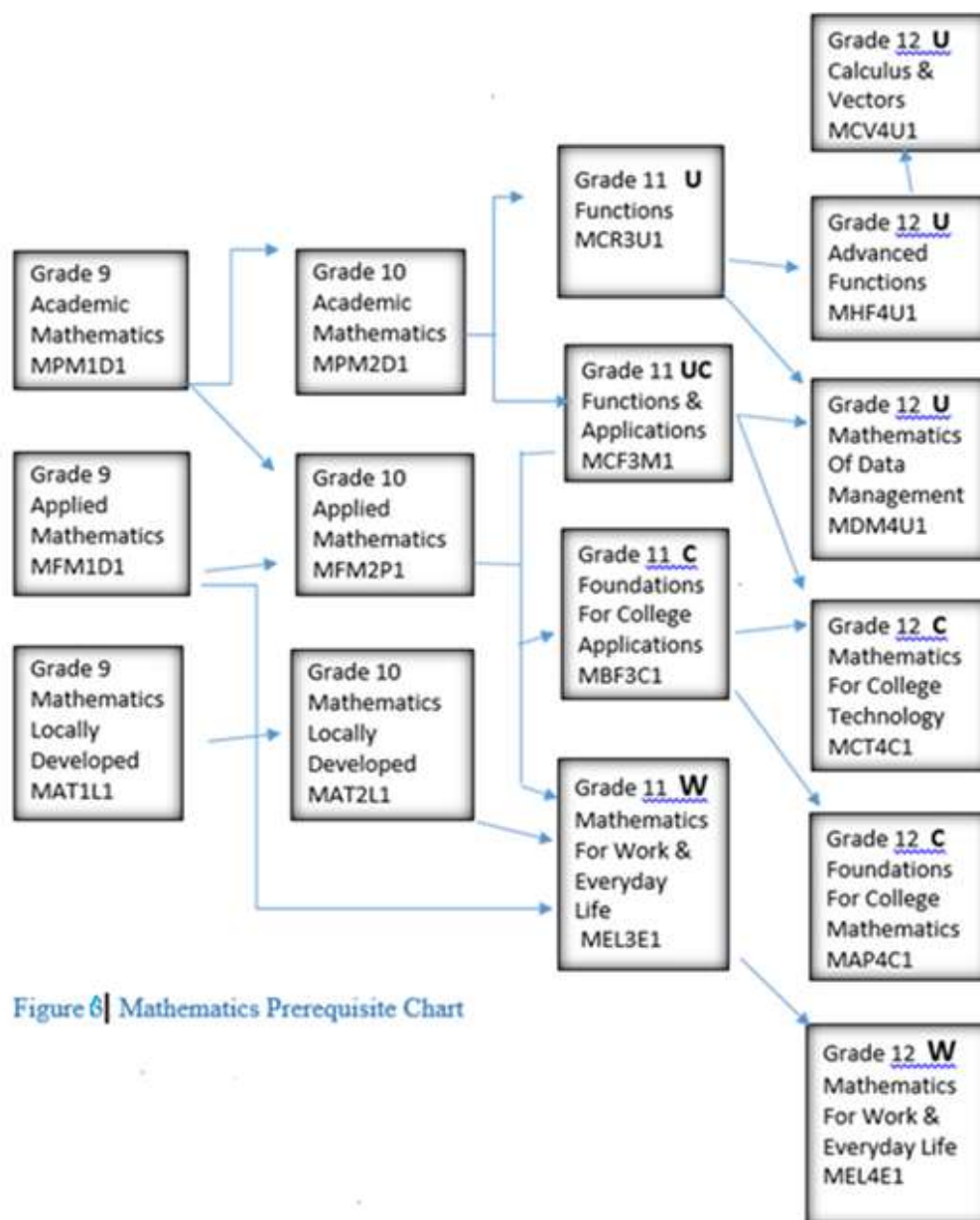


Figure 6 | Mathematics Prerequisite Chart

Figure 8. The Ontario Mathematics curriculum, Grades 9-12. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005b, p. 10)

Chapter Three describes the methodology and methods used to carry out my research. Justification for a mixed methods approach, along with the choice of an ethnographic methodology, is discussed. A personal and cultural introduction helps make explicit my personal situatedness in this work.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods**

Creswell (2012) writes that the issues the social sciences address are often too complex for qualitative or quantitative methods alone. Greene (2007) agrees, and continues:

The core meaning of mixed methods social inquiry is to invite multiple mental models into the same inquiry space for purposes of respectful conversation, dialogue and learning from one another toward a collective generation of better understanding of the phenomena being studied. (p. xii)

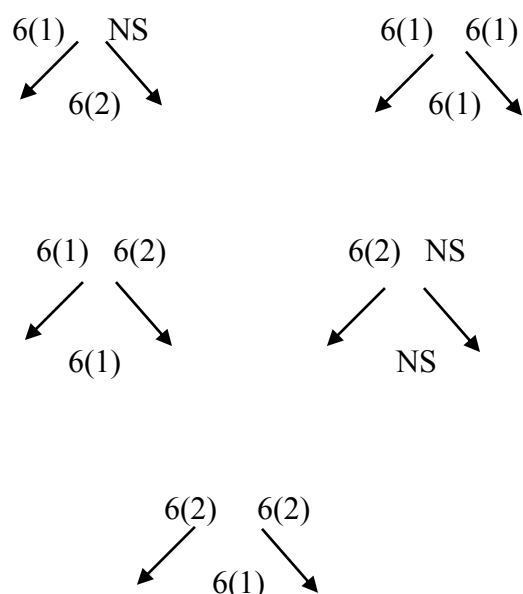
Neuman (2003) writes, “Theories within the same framework share assumptions and major concepts” (p. 62). I employ a mixed methods model in this study (discussed further in this chapter) to maximize my ability to respond to my research questions wholly.

My personal and cultural introduction is relevant to this study for reasons of trustworthiness in my research. For critical theory, social justice theory, and anti-oppressive education theory to co-exist, the findings that are embedded in my perspective must be explicit and overt, so this is where I begin.

#### **Personal and Cultural Introduction**

One of the interesting aspects of doing research with First Nations communities comes to light when social issues come up against issues under the law. The legal divisor between status Indians and all other Canadian citizens under the law is complex and defined by section 6 of The Indian Act (The Indian Act, 1985 – see Figure 9). In my case, I was born and raised on the edge of the Scarborough Bluffs escarpment in a middle-class neighbourhood. I am non-status. If my husband, who is status Indian under section 6(1) of The Indian Act, and I had married before April 17, 1985, I would be a status Indian. However, because we married after this date, I remain non-status. As shown in Figure 9, our children, who are of a person registered under section 6(1)

of The Indian Act and a non-status person, are registered under section 6(2) of The Indian Act. The impact of this means their children will be ineligible for registration under the Act should they marry persons of non-status. If, however, they marry persons who are either registered or entitled to be registered under either section 6(1) or section 6(2) of the Act, their children would become eligible to be registered under section 6(1). This is illustrated in Figure 9.



Section 6(1): Everyone registered or entitled to be registered under previous Act.

Section 6(2): Person with one parent who was registered or entitled to be registered under the Act.

NS: No status

*Figure 9.* Status Transmission Rules. (The Indian Act, 1985)

With the revisions to the Act under Bill C31, a person who is the issue of two parents who were registered or entitled to be registered has status designated under section 6(1) of the Act. If a person with 6(1) designation produces a child with a person of no status (NS), the child will be eligible to be registered under section 6(2). If this child were to produce a child with a person registered or entitled to be registered under section 6(1) of the Act, the child would be

entitled to be registered under section 6(1) of the Act. If the 6(2) child produced a child with a person of NS, then child would be NS. Alternatively, if the 6(2) child produced a child with a person who was also 6(2), then child would be eligible to be registered under section 6(1) of the Act. This complexity speaks to the legal situation, but not a social one.

I could list many reasons why I identify with the plight of First Nations people, but suffice it to say that I relate strongly to life near to and in the bush, having spent most of my life depending on what nature has to offer humankind. I am deeply introverted and reflective naturally (although this is also likely from months spent in the bush on my own) and was brought up to “root for the underdog” through values that were passed down to me, mainly through the “potato famine” Irish immigrant side of my family. I married into an Aboriginal family of three step-children, who have produced ten grandchildren and six great-grandchildren, all of whom are registered as either 6(1) or 6(2) status Indians. As a nuclear family, we talk about “Indian issues” every evening around our dinner table.

I believe the mainstream population may discuss the plight of “Indigenous people,” “Aboriginal people,” “Indians,” or “First Nations people” once or twice a year in their homes, while Indians discuss Indian issues every single day of their lives. I stress this because it is important to understand that normally, people do the most thinking and engage in the most discourse about their own, and their family’s, situations.

The fact that my husband champions Indian causes complicates the playing field in terms of where I stand as a researcher. Through discussion and living with someone who views the world far differently than I was formally taught to view it, and, I suspect, through osmosis, I am sure that both my personal and cultural perspectives have shifted considerably throughout our relationship. My heart aches for the stories that my teens bring home, steeped in racist attitudes.

This has created a gulf between who I was before I married, and who I am becoming. I might understand myself far more than I did 20 years ago, but in this transformative process, I relate to the wider world very differently.

This might mean to some that I am emic to my research because of my perspective, but I do not believe this to be so. To others, I will always be etic because I do not carry the lived experiences from childhood that my informants do, nor was I brought up in a remote fly-in community for all that means in the lives of people who were. Etic to my research is far closer to reality, in my opinion, regardless of what the law might say, or what my experiences in this blended family might mean. I understand the issues well, but many of them were not involved in developing me into adulthood. In the end, and for this research, I declare myself etic because my husband's community is not one of the communities involved in this study. This etic position, however, carries with it a personal and cultural perspective that at once creates and calms my trepidations about, and guides my choices of, a theoretical framework that is appropriate for the nature of this research.

In the following section, my methodological selection process is examined.

### **Methodological Selection Process**

Ethnography is comprised of research in the natural setting of participants' cultural experiential learning environment. It allows data to be analyzed based on cultural behaviours, values, and beliefs of the informants (Morse & Richards, 2010). Morse and Richards argue that culture both responds to groupings that come together for a shared interest, and construes the ways in which people see their worlds. As the informants in my study were all placed in a physical learning environment that was founded by the tribal council that oversees the nine communities, ethnography seemed ideal for my research. The First Nations support organization

(FNSO) provided the cultural characteristics that generated a natural learning environment, despite the fact that the classrooms and building that housed the students were not located in the students' home communities. Utilizing ethnography, my research was carried out in the natural setting of my participants' learning environments. As such, I needed to examine my data based on cultural values, beliefs, and behaviours of the informants (Morse & Richards, 2010).

Ethnography necessitated that I approach the community and build trust with the participants. To use ethnography as my methodology, I needed informant cooperation as part of the process. I was content with these criteria and was confident that I was able to follow through at the withdrawal stage (Isaac & Michael, 1997; Neuman, 2006; Morse & Richards, 2010) when nearing the end of my project.

In my research I carried out semi-structured interviews asking pre-defined questions that I felt were necessary to define my data. I employed observations and artifacts such as written work to complete my data collection techniques (Neuman, 2006). Prior to choosing ethnography as my methodology, however, I took a close look at case studies for their potential to meet the needs of my study.

Holland and Ruedin (2012) argue that case studies are used to highlight themes and issues supported by a wider analysis. In my research, incorporating qualitative data allowed narratives to be given the voice needed to resonate and connect with policy makers. In this way, it is hoped that this research will inspire and challenge future policies and practices. Creswell (2009) defines case studies as a "strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program...or one or more individuals...using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time" (p. 13). The bounded nature of the FNSO program made case studies a good fit.



I chose to do an ethnographical case study because it allowed me to examine participants' cultural perspectives, obtain depth of meaning in the research findings, and represent the boundaries of the FNSO program (Creswell, 2009; Morse & Richards, 2010).

Empowerment, according to Aslop and Heinsohn (2005), involves a transformation of informed choices to outcomes that are desirable to the empowered. Empowerment describes a central thrust of my research, so I wanted FNSO administrators to guide my work. The project manager of FNSO provided input into the survey by requesting that the questions increase their qualitative components. The project manager also added probing quantitative components to the survey. I wondered, however, if the student informants had the academic or organizational maturity to direct the course of the research. Additionally, I did not feel confident that the FNSO organization as a whole was sufficiently aware of the potential for harm to themselves, and to their student body. The research design became critical to the direction of the study.

### **Research Design**

Aslop and Heinsohn (2005) maintain that empowerment cannot be measured without developmental outcomes. Learner perceptions of where and how they think they will fit into the world may differ from how they feel they *do* fit into the world. As Pettit (2012) argues, empowerment and participation complement each other; one does not exist without the other. In the FNSO program, students are given an eight-month window of opportunity to achieve success within a provincial education academic program while provided with many (if not all) supports they need to meet their goals. Until, however, the learners participate and engage with their developmental outcomes outside of the learning structure, the degree of empowerment cannot be measured (as described through Aslop and Heinsohn's (2005) model of empowerment in Figure 7). For that reason, the collection of survey data for this study took place in a two-step

process: during the program and after its completion. Using Aslop and Heinsohn's model of empowerment, students were asked to fill out the survey prior to leaving the program, and again after they experienced (or did not experience) empowerment factors outside of the education opportunity structure, while engaging with their developmental outcomes. These outcomes, as defined by the participants, could include employment or continued education in a college or university.

Survey instruments were distributed to collect student data. The survey answers were computed using Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and a survey instrument to compare and track participant answers separated by time. I distributed surveys to the informants with follow-up interviews to give all student informants the opportunity to express their views in both written and oral form. The first stage of the student surveys were administered concurrently with the semi-structured interviews, with research questions guiding the specifics of both methods.

In administering the surveys and conducting the interviews, I needed to remain aware that cultural norms and experiences vary from family to family with the student participants, influencing levels of trust, confidence, comfort, and ability to express themselves. For example, for some student informants in this study, reading, interpreting, and writing are challenging, because English is a second language. For others, reading, interpreting, and writing is a passion they enjoy outside and inside of the school environment. For many, speaking is a challenge, even when among friends and family. Added to this complicated mix is the level of assimilation that influences each student's ability to converse both orally in English and with the written English language. For some participants, the experience living in a city is limited to their time interacting with the program, while others have lived in the city in the past. Further, residential schools have

affected all families differently in the decisions they made in the upbringing of their children in response to their own experiences (Chrisjohn & Young, 1997).

### **Research Questions, Data, Source of Data, Method, and Analysis**

**Primary question.** *What are the effects of organizational policies, practices, and funding models upon the empowerment of adult First Nations learners?*

In order to answer this question, the documentation on each program (FNSO and AEO) was assessed. Document analysis was also conducted on the policies, practices, and funding models available in the public domain, such as documents from the Ontario Ministry of Education regarding policies, practices, and funding models of adult education, and those relating specifically to the education of First Nations adult learners. Document analysis on funding models was the impetus for my choice of theoretical framework, because the documents revealed potential for conflict between the funding models of FNSO and AEO. Finally, observations, and artifacts such as written work of the informants (with permission) were employed, where applicable, to help answer the overall question of student empowerment.

To answer the primary research question, student survey instruments were distributed to provide a broad understanding of how the organizations' policies, practices, and funding models impact student empowerment. The first set of survey instruments was distributed after the informants completed the FNSO program. As the selected model for empowerment requires an understanding of developmental outcomes, a second survey was distributed about six months after students left the FNSO program, and compared with their answers to the first survey. The survey categories were a mix of ordinal and nominal data, and focused on factors relating to empowerment within the FNSO environment and larger community.

The distribution of two sets of survey instruments, separated by several months, was intended to provide insight into the difference between what the students thought they had received when they left the program, as compared to what they actually received in relation to their developmental outcomes. SPSS was utilized to analyze the quantitative data.

The interviews were offered to all informants who filled out survey instruments. The interview questions were designed to probe changes in goals, feelings of confidence and enjoyment of subject material from the beginning to the end of the program, and to gauge a sense of belonging in post-secondary institutions. The interviews were offered by the researcher concurrently with the first set of survey instruments to broaden understanding of the first set of survey data.

Students were interviewed for the qualitative portion of this mixed methods study, to give meaning to student experiences. The interviews also allowed the students, many for whom English is a second language, to use another form of communication with which to give deeper meaning to their responses. The interview data was analyzed by searching for emerging themes. Atlas TI was employed to extrapolate meaning from the interviews.

**Secondary questions.** *(a) What are the organizations' views of students, and how do they affect learners' empowerment?*

Knowles' (1970) requirements for the critical factors that must exist within adult education learning environments and the crucial elements that are unique to First Nations learners suggest that the organizational views of students are important. To gather this data, surveys were used to collect students' perceptions of organizational views. The two-step process discussed above was employed to evaluate how well the informants' needs were met within the program, and as they related to their developmental outcomes after leaving the program. I also

explored policy documents and relied on staff and student interviews to inform the organizations' views of the students. The documents and interviews gave deeper meaning to the survey answers. Observations and artifacts, such as student work, were also used where applicable.

*(b) What are the levels and processes of communication between the First Nations support organization and the adult education centre, and how do these impact learners' empowerment?*

Crowther et al. (2001) argue that organizational innovation responds to a clearly stated vision in a partnership environment. The study by Bennett et al. (2004), conducted with six chief education officers, revealed that "organizational maturity" can only exist within a collaborative partnership when autonomy is surrendered. Relinquishment of autonomy, however, is only possible when the goals and accountability of the partnership organizations are the same (Bennett et al., 2004). Data from the staff and student interviews, along with survey instrument data, informed the analysis to explore this question. Staff interviews informed the study about the communications between the two organizations.

*(c) How do learners' perceptions of their empowerment when they leave the First Nations support organization differ from the realities they experience post-First Nations support organization?*

To investigate this question, two survey instruments were used. Students were asked to answer survey questions at the end of the FNSO program, then answer the questions again when they had an opportunity to engage in their developmental outcomes.

Ethnography and case study were working in tandem for the qualitative approach to data collection. In line with Creswell (2009) and Yin (1994), case study methodology utilizes a

diversity of data collection procedures. This study used observations, artifacts, and semi-structured interviews to meet these criteria, each augmenting the trustworthiness necessary to safeguard the individual data collection components. The consistency and dependability that resulted from using several data collection procedures speaks to the reliability of the research data. Neuman (2003) writes:

Qualitative researchers consider a range of data sources and employ multiple measurement methods. They question the quantitative-positivist ideas of replication, equivalence, and subpopulation reliability. They accept that different researchers or researchers using alternative measures will get distinctive results. This is because they see data collection as an interactive process in which particular researchers operate in an evolving setting and the setting's context dictates using a unique mix of measures that cannot be repeated. (p. 185)

Neuman goes on to say that different dimensions of the subject material of the research are illuminated through increasing the reliability of the research. It was hoped that utilizing a partnership between ethnography and case study speaks to the reliability of this research.

It was hoped that with ethnography, case study, and quantitative data working together, optimum triangulation will result in a process in which the previous stages of data collection and analysis inform the next stage (Yin, 1994). In this way, measures of both reliability and trustworthiness are satisfied.

My survey research followed a deductive approach as suggested by Neuman (2003), who writes, "He or she begins with a theoretical or applied research problem and ends with empirical measurement and data analysis" (p. 267). I have developed my instrument modeled after that of the World Bank's extensive cultural empowerment survey (Aslop & Heinsohn, 2005), which was

developed with the input of several developing countries. Each question relates to empowerment either directly or indirectly, and was altered as necessary for the language and norms of the informants in this study. The survey instruments were distributed as hard copies to minimize the chance for interference that online surveys can produce. In this way, reliability was respected and protected.

This study used purposive sampling in that it “used the judgment of an expert in selecting cases or it selected cases with a specific purpose in mind” (Neuman, 2003, p. 213). Neuman (2003) writes that “a researcher may use purposive sampling to select members of a difficult-to-reach, specialized population” (p. 213). For this study, I used the judgment of the program manager of FNSO as he selected community members from nine remote First Nations communities after poster dissemination in all of the communities about the research. Out of the 60 potential informants (informants who attended AEO and were in the program at the time of my poster dissemination) selected by the program manager, I disseminated posters at FNSO to obtain a sample size of 36 participants. Neuman argues that for populations under 1000 people, a large sample of about 30% is needed for accuracy. For this study, a sample of 60% (36 out of 60) was obtained for the first survey and student interviews, and a sample of 31% was obtained for the second survey.

Data collection for this research followed a quantitative (descriptive)-qualitative (explorative) approach, that of mixed methods. A mixed methods approach was chosen for two reasons. The first reason is that many of the student informants struggle with communication in both written and verbal form. The second reason was to give opportunity for the qualitative data to provide meaning to the quantitative data. Using a combination of survey instruments and one-on-one interviews allowed the informants to inform the research using the method of

communication with which they were most comfortable. The quantitative data was useful to correlate responses from different cohorts of informants. The staff informants carried the interviews in the direction that signified importance to their contributions to this study. Merriman (1998) describes the qualitative research process:

Data collection and analysis is a simultaneous activity in qualitative research. Analysis begins with the first interview, the first observation, the first document read. Emerging insights, hunches, and tentative hypotheses direct the next phase of data collection, which in turn leads to the refinement or reformulation of questions, and so on. It is an interactive process throughout that allows the researcher to produce believable and trustworthy findings. (p. 151)

The informants in this study were provided with an understanding of the study as required through the ethics procedures. Policy documents of both AEO and FNSO were analyzed. The policy documents for FNSO were requested and explored alongside that of AEO public documents. I used a combination of public documents and interview data based on informant interpretations to explore funding models.

Eisenhart (2001) described ethnographic methods as including semi-structured interviews, participant observation, reflection, and journaling by the researcher, as well as analysis of records. “They are the mainstays of ethnographic methods, and they depend fundamentally on first-hand, personal involvement in the lives of people who are being studied” (p. 18). Observations, artifacts, surveys, and interviews provided data for the policies of both organizations involved in my research. Journaling helped with the documenting of the observations and interviews, to help to triangulate the observation data.



Participant observations as well as journaling and reflections were ongoing throughout the study. As I was a tutor/teacher helping students progress through the mathematics section of the program, I had an opportunity to involve myself with all of the student and staff informants in an interactive manner that is consistent with ethnographic data collection. My observations and artifacts gave me an illustration of what was going on. The testimonials supplied substance to the observations. Through my selected methodology, I was looking for the commonalities between my survey instrument, interview data, and observation/artifact data.

### **Establishing Trustworthiness**

Morse & Richards (2010) write, “Any study is only as good as the researcher” (p. 190). Ensuring reliability in qualitative research is crucial for establishing credibility, quality, and rigour. Credibility is a major component for trustworthiness and confidence, as are transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Isaac and Michael (1997) utilize Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) techniques to ensure the credibility of a research project. The first criteria is integrity of the researcher’s observations, which is made up of three elements that can be found in “prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). Prolonged engagement must build in an adequate amount of time for the building of trust and understanding of the culture involved. I established a strong rapport with all of the informants through tutoring and teaching sessions in this study. Additionally, I developed a considerable understanding of the lived culture of the informants over a period of several years. Similarly, I have had the opportunity for persistent observation over many weeks due to the time involved in the teaching and tutoring sessions.

Qualitative research is augmented through the use of observing different viewpoints through the process of triangulation for validity (Isaac & Michael, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morse & Richards, 2007; Neuman, 2006). For this study, triangulation took place with analysis of the quantitative, qualitative, and document analysis data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) write that member checks aid in triangulations; in this research, opportunities were built in for informants to verify interview transcripts and see a full draft of the research. Through triangulation, categories of data can be validated against at least one additional source. In this study, that source was the informants themselves, due to the self-reporting nature of the survey and interview questions. This met the criteria for the integrity component of a research project.

Peer debriefing is the second category for credibility. Peer debriefing was comprised of a disinterested colleague who, by playing devil's advocate, explored my data interpretations to help develop my next step in the analysis (Isaac & Michael, 1997).

The third credibility technique was met by negative case analysis. This credibility technique is the process of "revisiting the hypothesis with hindsight" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 309) to unremittingly revisit a hypothesis until, without exception, all known cases are accounted for. Negative case analysis was considered after the data was collected to provide opportunity for emerging contradictions and patterns.

Establishing referential adequacy safeguards the fourth criteria for credibility. All interviews were audiotaped, thus confirming referential adequacy. Neuman (2006) writes that member checks occur when the interviewer takes the data back to the informants who are, in turn, able to review them for their accuracy. Member checks validate the interpretation of the data with the data itself, and are crucial to establishing credibility (Isaac & Michael, 1997).

Transferability or external validity criterion, the final criterion as outlined in Isaac and Michael (1997), took place when the scholarship was compared to the findings. I have also safeguarded copies of all audio interviews, notes, journals, artifacts, and surveys for a period of five years after the commencement of this study. In this way, I established confirmability for this study.

### **Data Analysis**

Neuman (2003) explains that qualitative research requires exploration over time. He argues that it is sequential in that there is an order to the sequence of events, and that the order is integral to seeing data evolve and develop over time. In this way, causal relationships and processes can be perceived. Context is critical. Coding also carries a sequential order to its process, one that is essential for accuracy.

Once all the interview data were transcribed, and the survey data entered and run in SPSS, the quantitative and qualitative data was examined using the following five analytic stages: (a) Description, (b) Coding, (c) Creating of categories, (d) Interpretation and assertions, and (e) Testing of the assertions (Creswell, 2009).

During the first stage (“Description”), survey instruments were distributed and collected and the interviews transcribed. In addition, the interview settings were documented. The interview questions were used to direct the dialogue exchange, with the purpose of stimulating conversation.

In the second stage (“Coding”), findings were obtained using SPSS to analyze the survey data, creating tables and graphs. Coding for quantitative data means reorganizing the raw data that is readable by SPSS (Neuman, 2003). Interview data was coded using keywords such as “English,” “mathematics,” “goals,” and “contacts” attached to each description.

Categories were created in the third phase (“Creating of categories”) using SPSS data correlations and relationships, and the patterns evident in the interview dialogues expressed by the students. It was necessary to leave room for fluctuations of the categories after both quantitative and qualitative data were examined.

In the fourth stage (“Interpretations and assertions”), interpretation of the data based on the categories was conducted and assertions were compiled, constructed on the overall data. Qualitative data that was collected from the interviews was integrated with the quantitative student survey instruments, thus embedding the qualitative data into that of the survey data (Creswell, 2009). The data was then compared for combinations of convergences and divergences (Creswell, 2009). Quotes from the interview data were used to support that of the survey data. Discrepancies were handled by revisiting the source for further clarification.

In the final stage (“Testing of the assertions”), the assertions were tested by critically assessing the relevance of the data and developing understandings that could be explored throughout the analysis. It was essential to search for all conceivable explanations for the data. Guided by Creswell (2009), I engaged a “concurrent triangulation” approach and employed “mixing by comparing the results side by side in a discussion” (p. 213). This involved a presentation of the quantitative statistical data, followed by interview quotes that indicated convergence or divergence with the data. Out of consideration of all optional explanations, I let the data do the talking. I remained flexible so that I could modify the categories and the assertions based on critical assessment of the data.

### **Plan and Timelines**

Student survey instruments were administered when the students finished the FNSO program. They were followed up by one-on-one interviews, which were audiotaped and lasted

approximately 30 minutes each. All interviews took place outside of classroom and staff paid hours. The second set of survey instruments were distributed by email, approximately six months after the student upgrading program finished. The initial survey and interview questions aided in the development of the second survey instruments by informing the research questions.

Interviews with FNSO staff members and teachers were ongoing throughout the research, taking place during mutually beneficial, pre-arranged personal and unpaid times.

### **Ethics**

Names and individual identities are not revealed in this study. In some cases, multiple pseudonyms were assigned and genders interchanged to protect informants' identities. The researcher is written into the dissertation as an informant in the study with pseudonym(s) for consistency. Names of family members or other identifying information is withheld from the written outcomes of the study. In line with the ethical policies of Lakehead University, informed consent was obtained from each participant.

The data will be securely stored within the Faculty of Education for a period of five years, and only accessed by the researcher and the researcher's supervisor. This study does not carry any potential ethical problems beyond common everyday risk factors. I did not test or mark any of the work of the survey informants in any manner, either during or after the survey or interview timeframes. The informants did not benefit from being involved in the research other than direct feedback for their learning. The researcher is not an authority figure to the informants in her role as their tutor. Anonymity was maintained and all informants had the right to withdraw at any point throughout the study.

Research findings will be disseminated within the academic community by means of a dissertation, conference presentations, and refereed articles in professional and/or scholarly

journals. A copy of the dissertation will be made available to the informants and a summary with accessible language and technical aspects of the dissertation. The Lakehead University Research Ethics Board reviewed the study and approved it as REB Project # 118 13-14, Romeo File Number 1463705 with amendment approval.

In this chapter, I provided justification for a mixed methods approach to this research and outlined the ethnographic methodology I employed. I also included my personal and cultural background, research methods and procedures, and an outline of the data analysis used. An outline of the ethics agreement was discussed.

The next three chapters are organized according to the overarching research question, *What are the effects of organizational policies, practices, and funding models upon the empowerment of adult First Nations learners?* Chapter Four structures the data first using document searches to explore AEO funding and augments this data with staff interviews, to investigate staff interpretations. This procedure is then repeated for FNSO funding models. The data are presented chronologically and divided by cohort for Chapters Four and Five.

Chapter Five makes use of document searches, interviews, and quantitative data to define the policies of both organizations, and to explore the practices as interpreted by staff and student informants. This data is also chronologically divided into cohorts to indicate two different AEO management periods and their effects on student empowerment.

Chapter Six synthesizes the cross-cultural data, particularly dealing with points of junctures that have potential to affect student empowerment. Staff interview data is organized by cohort to create a chronological narrative according to the experiences of the learners. The synthesis of data in Chapter Six is supported with data from Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight.

Chapter Seven structures the raw student data into field charts that have been generated by SPSS. The quantitative data underpins the side-by-side qualitative data. The qualitative data is derived from comments written on the survey instruments as well as student participant interview data, and is meant to add deeper meaning to the quantitative component as it relates to learner empowerment. The data is divided chronologically into cohorts to provide a comparison of the effects on informant empowerment under two AEO management styles or practices.

Chapter Eight provides conclusions and recommendations. The Epilogue describes an additional REB process that was necessary after the organizations in the partnership withdrew their support at the end of the study period.

All methodology, collection of data, analysis of responses and the intersection among students, staff, and administration of upgrading programs took place in the context of an ever-changing backdrop of the experiences of the people involved in the program. I give the chronology of events here to help the reader understand the complexities of the analysis which follows. On the surface, this is what happened:

1. FNSO formed a site and a partnership to provide upgrading for First Nations adults in Northern communities. AEO was selected by FNSO to provide the credentialing and the programming. FNSO, represented by a Board, a program manager, a project manager, an education coordinator, a counselor, and several other non-front line staff members, was responsible for selection of students and providing ongoing support.

2. The first cohort of 25 students was formed. They were taught in an FNSO classroom environment for a period of approximately 10 months (some were granted extensions) by a group of one teacher and one tutor. The academic program was administered by the first AEO manager.

There was input from the FNSO education coordinator, counselor, teacher, and tutor at monthly meetings, as well as on an ongoing basis.

The PLAR review process was used to assign credits and the program was tailored to meet the needs of individual students. In particular, the level of mathematics programming was flexible and based on the comfort level of each student (students that had prior negative experiences with mathematics were placed into workplace-level mathematics to build confidence). Teachers encouraged students to take college-level mathematics courses for their mandatory Grade 11 mathematics credit, regardless of their short-term goals after graduation from the program (e.g., university, college, or a workplace).

3. A joint decision was taken, at the end of the pilot project, to make AEO the official provider of the ongoing upgrading process within months of the retirement of the first AEO manager and the hiring of the second AEO manager. The second cohort of 25 was admitted. One teacher was let go shortly after the second manager took over and when the Cohort 2 students began the program. A new classroom in the same building was provided for Cohort 2 students, because the Cohort 1 students had not completed their program. There was an overlap of time for the two Cohorts. The program began to change under the second management style. There were now two teachers, one tutor, and approximately 40 (Cohort 1 and 2) students. The program focus began to shift to standardized teacher-directed delivery, and most students were being streamed into the workplace-level mathematics course. At this stage, two teachers attempted to prevent the workplace-level mathematics placements. Several students from Cohort 2 did not take workplace mathematics at this stage because of teacher concerns communicated to both organizations.

4. The program manager's son (in Cohort 2) committed suicide three weeks into his program. His sole reason for being in the program was to upgrade his mathematics from the



workplace-level mathematics course he received in high school. This required that he work through his elementary upgrading, then PLAR for Grade 9 and 10, and finally be placed into a college-level mathematics course.

5. The FNSO education counselor left the program and was replaced by another FNSO staff member.

6. The AEO guidance counselor (not working on-site) filed a union grievance.

7. A third cohort (of approximately 40 students) were given an initial evaluation. Those who performed at a Grade 9/10 level were offered college/university-level mathematics courses. Those in need of upgrading were placed into a fast-tracked (approximately five-week) elementary mathematics upgrading program, then placed directly into workplace-level mathematics.

8. The classes were shifted around without warning.

The study was conducted from the end of Cohort 1 to several months after the graduation of Cohort 3. There were 36 student informants and 5 staff members comprised of teachers, tutors, and administrators who participated in the study. Information about the exact numbers of teachers, as well as how long they were in the program, is withheld from this study to protect the anonymity of the informants. The feedback on the study was continuous and disconcerting. There was an attempt to halt the study altogether.

Understandably, the analysis of this research is complex as the perceptions and understandings of everyone involved were changing throughout the course of the study. At times it may appear that blame is being placed on individuals, particularly the “second manager.” This is not the intention of this research. The analysis illuminates the complications and internal struggles within one small attempt to provide education in the context of a great injustice

perpetrated over hundreds of years. The hope is that by documenting these struggles and providing some understanding of the complexity of the issues, this research will allow individuals caught in similar situations to extricate themselves in order provide the educational opportunities that these students deserve.

In the next chapter, the funding models of both organizations are examined for their congruency and potential to empower learners in the program. The chapter begins with an exploration of AEO funding.

## Chapter Four: Funding Models

This chapter investigates the funding models of both organizations involved in the study as part of addressing the primary research question, *What are the effects of organizational policies, practices, and funding models upon the empowerment of adult First Nations learners?* Since each organization serves different functions within the partnership, the funding models also reflect each organization's unique contribution to, and influence on, the partnership. The aim of this chapter is to delineate the funding models used by the two partnership organizations and to consider how those funding models impact the empowerment of adult First Nations students. The established funding of the AEO organization is discussed first, followed by the less stable funding of FNSO. The discussions are then drawn together to examine the impact on the power structure and managerial shifts that took place within the partnership.

The AEO distribution of funding is discussed by cohort (group of students served by the funding): Cohort 1, Cohort 2, and Cohort 3. The reason for discussing by cohort is because there was a change in AEO management toward the end of Cohort 1, and the program offered through AEO began to change under the second management style. The funding model for AEO is discussed through data compiled from document analysis and staff interviews. This data indicates the extent of established funding for the adult education funding model and delineates its strengths and weaknesses for program delivery. The data shows one creative solution used by a teacher in an effort to maintain the quality of programming that was experienced in the first cohort, despite the funding restraints imposed on the program by management through subsequent cohorts.

The funding model for FNSO is detailed in the staff interview data, when staff members were asked to describe the funding model they were required to work within. Descriptions of the

supports that FNSO funding provided is found later in this chapter, along with discussion of the credentialing choices that FNSO faced. Differences in funding allotted to FNSO between the one-year pilot project and the one-year project are discussed through staff interview data, with an analysis of the potential implications of the differences. The pilot project was meant to be a test before possible project status was assigned, a year later. On the surface, FNSO funding was independent of AEO funding within the organization.

### **AEO Funding**

The principal funding ministries that finance AEO are the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU). Together, they deliver approximately \$239.3 million in funding annually to adult education and training in the province of Ontario (Government of Ontario, 2005).

In 1997, the province of Ontario developed a funding formula for elementary and secondary education (People for Education, 2015). Prior to 1997, provincial funding, along with local property taxes, provided the basis for education funding. The difficulty with this funding method was that boards in large urban centres with larger tax bases were able to spend much more on education than those with small tax bases. People for Education (2015) describes that the purpose of the funding formula, and its many adjustments since 1997, was to make education more equitable across the province. The basic structure of the formula remains in effect today, and much of this formula is tied to per-student enrolment.

Funding for heat, light, maintenance, and repairs is dependent on the number of students in a program. In 2002, there was funding to maintain 104 square feet per elementary student, 130 square feet per secondary student, and 100 square feet per adult education student (People for Education, 2015). Once a year, the Ministry of Education announces education funding changes

that affect all school boards. Money is provided to boards based on the number of students in the board, the number of English as a second language learners, and the geographical needs of the board.

The Ministry of Education adult day school credit program (for individuals over the age of 18) received \$15.5 million in 2003-2004 and was projected to receive \$25.8 million by 2014-2015 (Government of Ontario, 2005). The continuing education credit program through the Ministry of Education (for individuals over the age of 18) received \$102.2 million in 2003-2004. Eleven years later, the projected funding rose to \$129.9 million for Continuing Education, to be allotted as follows:

- Adult Day School – \$25.8 million
- High-Credit Day School – \$9.8 million
- Summer School – \$32.1 million
- Continuing Education – \$60.2 million
- Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) – \$1.9 million. (Government of Ontario, 2005, p. 58)

Under PLAR, \$120 per student per assessment is allotted for the Senior Equivalency Applications (SEA), with a limit of one assessment per year per student (Government of Ontario, 2005).

The literacy and basic skills program (for those with literacy skills below Grade 9 of the Ontario curriculum, or individuals above Grade 10 who wish to access higher skill training) received \$62 million in the same timeframe (Government of Ontario, 2005). These programs are offered at no cost to students. In 2003-2004, the program grants were provided at an amount of \$2,429 for every full-time equivalent pupil. Projections for 2014-2015 provide \$3,341 per full-

time student. Adult students under the age of 21 who are enrolled in day school credit programs are funded at the same per-student rate as a regular day school student (Government of Ontario, 2005).

A recent province-wide memorandum from the Deputy Minister (Zegarac, 2014) backs the agenda set out in *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario* to develop an adult education system that is high quality, responsive, and accessible. This approach speaks to concerns that were raised by the Government of Ontario (2005). The strategy, although claiming to address quality, simultaneously “address[es] the need for clear learner pathways that take adult learners on the shortest and most effective route to their goal and the need to improve transitions between adult education programs, post-secondary education, training and the workplace” (p. 49). Despite this wording, education dollars have risen by almost \$912 per student in the past 11 years.

Funding allotted to special education represents the only monies that cannot be spent on programs other than special education (People for Education, 2015). Many funding decisions are made at a board level, meaning that monies (other than special education funding) can be moved from one category to another. School boards make decisions about individual schools’ budgets, and it is the principals (or program managers) who receive a budget for their school and allocate the funds (People for Education, 2015). Principals decide about school maintenance and repairs within the budget, and decide upon the distribution of teachers and class sizes.

The following bullet points describe general funding accountability for adult education funding in Ontario (Government of Ontario, 2005).

Ministry of Education funding provides:

- Support for government priorities;

- Incentives for innovation and local partnerships;
- Links to a broad range of agreed-upon outcomes;
- Links to return on investment across a number of indicators;
- Accountability and clear roles and relationships among funding ministries and delivery agencies;
- Accountability measures for achievement of economic, social, and personal development goals;
- Accountability mechanisms for monitoring and continuous improvement;
- Accountability mechanisms to enable flexibility and innovation to meet local needs; and,
- Efficiency and effectiveness. (p. 45)

In this study, all of the categories listed above were the responsibility of the manager of AEO to meet as the partnership moved forward.

There are two ways that adult education is funded through the Ontario Ministry of Education. The first is through funding allotted for each lesson that a student completes. The second is through attendance-based courses, such as courses that are offered under guidance and career education. These courses include a learning strategies course (coded as GLS by the Ministry of Education) and a leadership and peer support course (coded as GPP by the Ministry of Education) (Government of Ontario, 2005). In order to deliver on the fourth bullet listed above (“Links to return on investment across a number of indicators”) and last bullet point listed above (“Efficiency and effectiveness”), income through funding must be generated before teachers can be paid. The Ministry of Education thus releases funding to AEO when students complete lessons in many of the courses that are also offered to academic, applied, and essential

secondary school students. This funding allows the manager to pay the teachers through the allotted funding.

When students do not complete enough lessons to pay for the teacher under the first model, a second funding model is available to the manager: concurrent courses such as GLS and GPP can be run primarily for funding reasons. These courses may be used to replace what other schools use as electives. Instead of the courses being funded for every lesson that the students hand in, GLS and GPP are funded by attendance in the courses. If students attend, the manager is able to top up what he or she needs to pay for the teachers.

Students in the first cohort of FNSO were provided with an individual learning plan, meaning they were given an initial evaluation that determined their areas of need. Based on this evaluation, the teacher put together a plan for what their upgrading and course needs were. The English teacher put together the English plan and the mathematics teacher put together the mathematics plan. Some consultation with AEO's guidance counselor took place with the English teacher, the mathematics teacher, and the student present, particularly once the student completed the upgrading.

The money generated by the lessons completed in the courses and attendance in the GLS and GPP courses is provided to AEO by the Ministry of Education. Some direct (teacher-led) learning took place with GPP and GLS courses, but to a large degree, teachers assisted students on a one-on-one basis through their upgrading and course selections. However, the funding model was not consistent for all aspects of curriculum. For example, the Ontario Literacy Course (OLC) is a mandatory English course for all students below the age of about 30 (depending on whether the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test was a requirement when the student attended high school) who have not passed the mandatory Ontario Secondary School Literacy



Test. The OLC course is sufficient for student upgrading needs. This would mean that AEO would be funded for the majority of the English upgrading through the completed lessons of the OLC course. Most of the students in the FNSO program continued on with a second English course, such as ENG 3C (Grade 11) and often ENG 4C (Grade 12).

For mathematics there is no similar upgrading course, so for Cohort 1, there was no direct funding from the Ministry of Education to pay for the wages of the mathematics teacher. The first manager used creative methods to shift funds as permitted by the Ministry, to balance AEO funding for that period (People for Education, 2015).

The difficulty with using MEL 3E workplace-level mathematics for funding is that the course is also offered to students who are otherwise seen as unable to be successful in the regular applied or academic stream. In theory this number of students should be low – in 1985, 93% of the mainstream student population graduated with either applied or academic mathematics (King, 1980). If students are required to take MEL 3E for funding reasons, their Grade 11 mathematics credit is the only mathematics credit necessary for them to graduate. Learners are offered college-level mathematics and English courses, but this offer will not be made until *after* they have a sufficient number of credits to graduate with their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD). If learners have decided to apply for college or university programs that do not require mathematics as a prerequisite, they may not choose to upgrade to college-level mathematics because they no longer need a mathematics credit to graduate. When the MEL 3E course was made mandatory by the second manager for the majority of students in the FNSO program, this meant that three mandatory courses needed to be taken by students to stay in the program.

Due to the relationship between the mandatory courses and available funding, staff were asked about their understanding of the AEO funding model.

**Staff participants: AEO.** In this section, data are reported from staff informants (including teaching and non-teaching staff), who were asked about the AEO funding model, how they perceived it works, and how it provides for quality teaching and learning under the partnership arrangement. As well, teachers were encouraged to describe how the perceived freedoms and constraints influenced student empowerment within the learning environment.

Five staff interviews took place as the Cohort 3 students were graduating. Staff members who had left the program were contacted through Facebook when necessary to request interviews. Each staff member was given two pseudonyms to protect their identity, so throughout this document 10 staff informant names are listed in total. The gender of informants has also been changed in some cases. The ‘S’ designation denotes “staff,” followed by a number and an informant pseudonym. The pseudonyms are Dennis (S1), Marjorie (S2), Collins Rice (S3), David (S4), Joan (S5), Laura (S6), Sarah Abby (S7), Ann (S8), Rockman (S9), and Matilda (S10).

Marjorie (S2) and Dennis (S1) describe how the funding was distributed within the program, as well as the associated effects on what they perceived to be the quality of programming by cohort. Marjorie (S2) suggested that Cohort 1 received a quality individualized mathematics program under the AEO funding model:

The first cohort students were given entrance assessments when they entered the program. This took place in all of the cohorts. In the first cohort we spent 2 months upgrading student math skills. Then we put them into the PLAR workbooks if they needed more instruction and they went through that course. That took them up to Grade 10. Then they took either a Grade 11 or Grade 12 applied math. So the skills were revisited three times. They were pretty strong when they graduated. FNSO had been allotted funds

for teachers and tutors so I suppose that is why the two organizations could afford it.

(Marjorie, S2)

Dennis (S1) describes the funding he was asked to work around:

There are two ways to get [AEO] funding. Teaching a course that students have to attend is one. Or, funding can be allotted by marking the correspondence courses. In this case, the funding comes from the number of lessons that are handed in. Those are the two ways. Sometimes the students are not handing in enough lessons to pay for the teacher so they run a concurrent course that they will get funded for, like GLS or GPP. Then the student will also get credit for it. There are pots of money that are designated for different reasons. (Dennis, S1)

If money was designated for different reasons within the AEO organization, those reasons began to change at the end of Cohort 1.

**Cohort 2 and beyond.** As the program moved into the second cohort, and due to the quality of education and number of graduates in the first cohort, a recommendation was put forward by FNSO and AEO staff to select AEO as the credentialing partner who would credential the students with a high school diploma when they finished the program. When making this choice, FNSO not only vetoed the GED program, but also rejected working with the credentialing agency offered by their own tribal organization. AEO as a credentialing partner would provide the academic portion of the program and academically credential the students upon exit from the program. Staff members from both organizations provided their input into this decision.

This choice coincided with a change of management in AEO, however, and a subsequent decision was made by the new AEO management to streamline the program to adhere to a more

fiscally responsible program than was done for the first cohort. This move appears to be in keeping with what Ingersoll (2003) describes as a “bureaucracy approach,” one that views schools as disorganized and in need of increased economic accountability.

The Ministry of Education has been described in this section as the predominant funder for AEO. Two distinct funding models were described by Marjorie (S2), Dennis (S1), and the Government of Ontario (Government of Ontario, 2005). The first funding model involves funding according to the number of lessons that the students complete. The second model relies on attendance of students in the classroom. In Cohort 1, student academic needs were met on an individual basis. Beginning in Cohort 2, however, the academic program became more bureaucratically efficient and MEL 3E was introduced to help generate funding for AEO. These changes took place independent of FNSO funding during the study period.

### **FNSO Funding**

Funding for FNSO was provided exclusively by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU). In Cohort 1, FNSO was a pilot project, meaning it was a testing situation for project status. Start-up costs were issued by the Ministry for items such as furniture, renovations, and supplies. Money was also made available for teaching staff and tutors as necessary. A partnership was a mandatory requirement for the funders because FNSO was not a credentialing organization. Credentialing was necessary so students could secure employment and college and university entrance.

FNSO was given the freedom to choose their credentialing partner. For Cohort 1, FNSO had a credentialing partner other than AEO. This credentialing partner was a local community college that offered trade programs to graduates of the academic program. The General Education Development (GED) ran concurrently with, and parallel to, the AEO program during

Cohort 1. The GED program was funded by MTCU through FNSO funding and was housed in a different classroom from AEO classes. The GED class began with 25 students. If students dropped out, or stopped attending, they were replaced with new intakes from the communities.

The graduation rate of the AEO program exceeded that of the GED program. Consequently, for Cohort 2, the GED program was terminated. FNSO selected AEO to be their sole accreditation partner as they moved from a pilot project into a project by Ministry designation. If the pilot project was a one-year experiment, MTCU had deemed it a success, and was ready to implement project status to secure funding for another year and to intake 100 more students. Different credentialing organizations offered dissimilar credentialing, all either equivalent to a secondary school diploma or in the case of AEO, their OSSD. The college credentialing program is recognized by the workforce, colleges, and many university programs. The tribal organization that represented FNSO had its own credentialing, but FNSO chose not select them for their students' credentialing needs as they started up their partnership.

If FNSO had selected a program (such as the GED program) instead of AEO, there would have been additional costs. As AEO was already funded by the Ministry of Education, additional money from MTCU was not made available to FNSO for teaching or tutoring staff as they moved from the pilot phase into the project phase. MTCU funding continued to sustain FNSO supports such as the provision of counselors, elders, student workshops, offices, and learning materials.

There were other changes as well. Living allowances had been provided to the students in the pilot project but in Cohort 2 students were asked to apply to Ontario Works for financial assistance. FNSO was able to provide a top-up allowance for the students, which was put toward bus passes, coffee and tea, outings, money for graduation, flights home at Christmas, and

extenuating circumstances. Post-secondary money was allotted on a case-by-case basis for students who were unable to secure funds for their post-secondary education through the tribal organization or their own bands.

**The importance of slippage funding.** The FNSO project manager was responsible for writing proposals to MTCU to apply for slippage funds (money that was not used from other Ministry projects and freed up for organizations that needed it), for whatever was not covered by the project funding. This included, but was not limited to, staff workshops and graduation funding.

Staff informants were asked about the funding models of FNSO: how they impacted on teaching and learning, and what constraints and freedoms they provided for the program. Also, the informants were encouraged to explain how the funding freedoms and constraints affected student empowerment within the FNSO learning environment.

To understand their perceptions of these changes, staff informants were asked how the funding for the pilot project differed from that of the project, and how these differences might affect student empowerment. Informants were aware that there was less money available. One said “we got less as a project. There were no set-up costs.” FNSO funding was provincially based:

The funding came from the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities. Some money had to be applied for, like monies for cultural awareness. I think [the FNSO project manager] was very good at getting money and distributing it. I always thought it was a shame that [the tribal council] didn't provide the credentialing because it would have been a great model to hold up [for other First Nations education programs].

(Rockman, S9)

Rockman (S9)'s reference to the tribal council's education centre seems to reveal his view that monies for cultural awareness were duplicated unnecessarily. The importance of an understanding of cultural awareness was predominant for other staff members within the organization. Concern about its priority was beginning to build:

The majority of funding comes from MTCU. There is slippage funding though from MTCU that was allocated to other programs but it wasn't all used. It has to be applied for, for professional development for staff and for graduation. We can assist with suicide prevention workshops for staff, compassion fatigue for staff because our clients are high needs and we don't want our staff to exhaust themselves... mental health first aid which introduce the staff to a variety of different disorders, anxiety, depression, to take away the stigma of mental health issues so that we can understand clients that have these issues. By no means... We are not ready to develop special education, I am not saying that. We offer two-spirited workshops so that staff understands what struggles a two-spirited person may encounter, and elders and education circle at the [university] [free]. The [university] conference helped us connect with different elders instead of just one. The training [suicide prevention] was opened up to all FNSO staff including AEO staff. It was offered to the AEO manager that his staff could come [the slippage funding was paying for all the training]. To my understanding, none of them came [because permission was not granted by the AEO second manager]. If we have a better trained staff, we can give the students what they need. It is important. If the staff are trained they can give the knowledge to the students so the students can understand themselves better as a natural step to improving themselves. (Sarah Abby, S7)

Despite the fact that AEO was not taking advantage of the workshops, the slippage funding benefited FNSO in many different ways, including providing funds for graduation:

The slippage funding for graduation was empowering because someone from the community who other people might have written off due to not having a very good past, has now graduated and [their] family can see that. So now the community can see the student has done it so they can do it too. To celebrate that is very important. (Sarah Abby, S7)

Sarah Abby (S7) continued, delineating that AEO provided their classrooms with support for holistic aspects of the program:

The funding is from FNSO for the workshops, but AEO is letting us use their classrooms [which they are funded for]. At the beginning of the pilot program there were a number of extensions, because we didn't know if the funding was going to happen and AEO accommodated them. They gave us instructors and were flexible for the extensions. (Sarah Abby, S7)

Slippage funding was available throughout the pilot project and after the FNSO organization gained project status.

### **Analysis**

The funding available for the programs changed when the program became a project rather than a pilot. This forced FNSO to rely on “slippage funding” for the workshops needed to train staff, and other expenses such as graduation costs. Despite FNSO's mandate that students receive college and university level credentialing, constraints on AEO's funding model forced the assignment of mandatory workplace-level programming for the majority of the students (Laura, S6; Joan, S5).



For the first eight months of the twelve-month pilot project, the first AEO manager made budget decisions that staff and administration at FNSO considered to be in line with the visions of the FNSO program. The allocation of funds within AEO was largely a choice made by the manager. When the second manager took over, the Cohort 2 intake was being processed and FNSO needed to make a decision about their credentialing partner. AEO was recommended by all staff members, including those who were teaching in the GED program. In doing so, the GED teachers understood that their recommendation was making their jobs redundant. This potentially self-defeating career move was indicative of the amount that the teaching staff cared about the program they were teaching in and the pride they felt in it.

When the second AEO manager took over, he began to make changes based on economics that the FNSO program had not previously experienced (Joan, S5). Sumner's (2008) claim that a shift in the philosophy of adult education, from being, as Nesbit (2006) wrote, "informed by passion and outrage and rooted in a concern for the less-privileged" (p. 17), to serving the power of corporate interest in order to train adults for a global market, may have taken root.

Perhaps not wanting to be seen by their MTCU funders as being unable to choose a compatible partner, especially when AEO had delivered impressive graduation numbers for Cohort 1, FNSO decided to continue with AEO despite growing concerns of decreasing quality in programming that appeared to be the result of economic streamlining. AEO's funding model, it seemed, was set up to reward efficiency rather than quality of education. Agbo's (2001) contention that people in most First Nations communities do not have the skills to develop flourishing education programs may or may not have been a factor in their decision to continue with AEO under the shifting circumstances. It is certain that the decline in funding increased

friction among the people most directly affected by the change. Although FNSOs particular funding model mandates the support of the holistic needs of learners while they are in the program and beyond, Ministry funding no longer paid for teaching or tutoring staff.

Local control of funding would have allowed for a different focus of the support. Some of the teachers wished that FNSO could partner with the tribal council's education centre to service the credentialing. However, credentialing programs such as the tribal council's education centre and the GED program are not publically funded programs, so there would have been a need to apply for additional MTCU dollars if FNSO had chosen a partner other than AEO or the local publicly funded college upgrading program. This may have decreased FNSO's ability to move the pilot project into a more stable project because of the additional costs involved to the approving funder. As it was, FNSO's ability to partner with anyone other than AEO or the college was strained.

This funding model limitation has the potential to affect the empowerment of adult First Nations learners in the program. Any shift in power that forces the FNSO organization away from its mandate to provide education for community members controlled by First Nations people for First Nations people is a step backwards. This research will demonstrate how this move appears to be a step toward First Nations education being controlled, once again, by a colonizing education system. The diminishing funding structure has the potential to reduce, if not eliminate, the empowering mandate of the FNSO program.

Chapter Five will explore the policies, practices, and challenges of the partnership organization. As the goals and visions of organizations propel practices that are guided by policies, the chapter begins by examining the goals and visions of both organizations.

## Chapter Five: Policies, Practices, and Challenges

This chapter primarily investigates the research question: *What are the effects of organizational policies, practices, and funding models upon the empowerment of adult First Nations learners?* In addition, it addresses two secondary research questions: *What are the organizations' views of students, and how do they affect learner empowerment?* and *What are the levels and processes of communication between the First Nations support organization and the adult education centre, and how do these impact learners' empowerment?*

The chapter begins by exploring the goals and visions of the partnership organizations, followed by an investigation of the compatibility of those goals and visions. The goals and visions of both organizations provide a broad overview of the rationale for the policies and practices of the partnership organizations. From this investigation, the policies and practices of AEO and FNSO are made explicit to set the background for the various challenges experienced during the study period. These challenges relate to English as a second language, levels of support for teacher empowerment, teacher training specific to the population, student input, FNSO support, and academic equivalencies of the student body.

The attendance policies are reviewed next, to reflect the substantive changes that occurred over the course of the research. Other substantive changes were also made to mathematics programming, including the introduction of workplace mathematics, a focus on economic accountability, mandatory delivery of workplace mathematics, and the role of direct teaching. The increasing tension between the organizations led to the AEO union attempting to bring the partnership “under control.” The final sections of the chapter provide an analysis and concluding comments.

## Goals and Visions

The goals and visions of the partnership organizations determine the policies and practices within each organization. When organizational goals and visions are unclear, policies and practices can be seen as open to interpretation. The results of this can be seen in the concerns of Laura (S6), who stated that the goals and visions of both organizations were unclear:

I don't think FNSO or AEO stuck to their goals. I don't think they were being honest about what they were doing, that the real reason was for "on-paper outcomes." After the [AEO] management change, the goals became very unclear. There was no real attempt on the part of [AEO] to "pin down" what FNSO really wanted – "quick" diplomas or to help the students realize their individual goals. (Laura, S6)

The following section explores the specific goals and visions of FNSO.

**FNSO goals and visions.** The perception among staff was that FNSO was aiming at a future in which there would be jobs in the mining industry:

It seemed that the vision of FNSO was mining and jobs. I don't think they [the students] will all go into mining. I think until the mining happens, these students will have to find other things to do. We didn't really get a vision statement from FNSO but the focus was on mining and jobs so I figured that was how they were approaching [the program]. My vision for them is not for mining, but for future leaders and career building. (Ann, S8)

At monthly FNSO staff meetings, it was made clear that the vision and mandate of FNSO was to empower students through facilitating their post-secondary credentialing, and/or to promote the visions that each individual student had for his or her own life. This was evidenced by Collins Rice (S3), who maintained that "their [FNSO] vision is still student success." To remain flexible as an organization was fundamentally important to FNSO, as delineated at almost

every meeting: “I think that as staff, we were reminded on a bi-monthly basis at the meetings what the goals and visions are, and what the students need to succeed, what they need to stay on track” (Collins Rice, S3). David (S4) noted that: “FNSO wanted more flexibility.” FNSO’s visions and goals included that of empowerment for the student body, as discussed in the next sub-section.

**Empowerment of students.** There were many ways that FNSO showed that their goals and visions included the empowerment of students. For some students, empowerment included the ability to stay physically active; FNSO would pay for health memberships. For others, it included the ability to drive a vehicle; FNSO would pay for licensing and driver’s education programs. When students made requests that would clearly facilitate a healthy next step of their whole person, FNSO attempted to provide the means to make it happen. Similarly, there was support for further education. If students registered and enrolled in college and university programs and were turned down for funding from their communities or the tribal organization, FNSO made every attempt to help the student. When learners had difficulties in their lives, the issues would be discussed in light of how this was affecting their ability to move ahead in the program. If the learner decided to talk to a teacher about their issues, the teacher would be responsible to FNSO to communicate this, both in bi-weekly written communications to FNSO administration and at the meetings. If an unengaged student was communicating their issues with FNSO or AEO staff, FNSO would make every effort to support her/him until she/he was ready to re-engage.

Similarly, students were encouraged to make use of the opportunities that FNSO offered. Student commitment was gauged by their communication with FNSO, their attendance, and their overall commitment to the program, and was discussed on an individual basis at meetings.

Learner and community empowerment was at the forefront of the decisions made at the monthly FNSO meetings after funding requirement issues were met. This was discussed in staff interviews: “FNSO wants to help their students and their communities. It is their mandate. They bend over backwards to make it happen” (Rockman, S9).

With the goals and visions of FNSO in mind, the goals and visions of AEO are explored next.

**AEO goals and visions.** The AEO goals and visions were less consistent, and varied according to the management style of the two managers within the study period. For example, under the first AEO management style, there appears to have been a goal of aligning the work of AEO with FNSO. As an example, teachers were initially given the freedom to adjust their practices within the policy guidelines, in order to meet the FNSO vision. Teachers sat with the AEO guidance counselor and students to help decide the courses that the student needed to meet their individual academic goals. Students were given the time they needed to upgrade their elementary mathematics levels through individual learning plans — even though there was no direct funding to pay the upgrading mathematics teacher.

Changes associated with the second management style seemed to indicate that economic feasibility had become both the vision and the overall goal for AEO. Direct teacher instruction replaced individualized workbook teaching strategies; a guidance learning strategy course (GLS) replaced elementary upgrading; and the workplace-level mathematics course, MEL 3E, became mandatory for most students. These changes were perceived by the AEO staff to be based on financial exigencies, rather than student-centered goals. One staff informant noted:

There are problems. FNSO can't speak for AEO. AEO on site only has their instructors. The guidance counselor does come but there is a waiting period and we can lose a

student. It can be causing the student stress or the student will be working on something too easy for them. There probably is some un-empowerment because the students only select what they want to get into. AEO practices under the new manager do not include electives so they don't get to choose any courses. Those are chosen for them. Un-empowerment probably isn't a word! (Collins Rice, S3)

Even as FNSO was aiming to maintain flexibility in its work with students, the apparent change in goals of AEO made the compatibility of the organizations' goals and visions an obvious area for examination.

**Compatibility of goals and visions.** The communication of goals and visions inside of the partnership was a central theme that emerged from staff interviews. Policies between the two organizations differed fundamentally in regard to the clientele they were set up to service. While FNSO looked to upgrade and empower those students with primary equivalencies to graduate with college-level courses, AEO had visions of servicing those students with necessary high school equivalencies, and quickly bringing those students to the point where their program (along with the associated program funding) could be implemented:

I feel that AEO has way more of a monetary background, they may not understand our needs fully. I think the educators and instructors understand our needs but the administrative staff that are not in the front line with the students...I don't think they fully get to see it or that student success is not their first priority. They [AEO] see success more as numbers, rather than student success. (Collins Rice, S3)

Allegations of AEO using the program to get out of debt were made by some of the informants (Sarah Abbey, S7; Collins Rice, S3):

I get the impression that AEO is in debt and the only way to get out of debt is to show that the program is successful by pushing students through. The people they have sitting down in the classroom are the people they get funding for. I think that is their model for success and that FNSO measures success differently than [AEO] measures success. I think that both partners do have their own separate vision. (Sarah Abby, S7)

Staff recognized that compatibility could still exist within economic constraints experienced by one partner:

If AEO is in enough debt that their program will be shut down, then there will be no instructors or signing-off principals so it is valid that AEO thinks like that and they have come to the table with it. But I think it is good that FNSO has not necessarily backed down... that their vision is still student success. We do need there to be someone like AEO or a different partner that have instructors, that have curriculum documents and that are able to sign off. (Collins Rice, S3)

David (S4) agreed with Collins Rice (S3) that the organizations were divergent in their approaches, but he pointed out that the two organizations were able to work together: “AEO wanted more structure while FNSO wanted more flexibility. It caused divergence. Everyone adapted though. They worked it out” (David, S4). “AEO are working with us on the one hand but on the other there also needs to be communication and that communication needs to be open” (Collins Rice, S3).

The compatibility of both organizations is also influenced by the number of graduates in the program:

AEO and FNSO have two different ideas [mandates]. FNSO wants to help their students and their communities. It is their mandate. They bend over backwards to make it happen.



But their mandate is also numbers too. I saw that a lot. They were under a lot of pressure to get the numbers. (Rockman, S9)

Collins Rice (S3) and Rockman (S9) both pointed out that the practices of FNSO, although concentrating largely on delivery of supports, include being economically accountable to the funders. This shared mandate coincides with Ingersoll's (2003) claim that both bureaucratic and decentralized education models should ideally exist in support of programs. FNSO supported students in ways that Eurocentric academic organizations do not. Despite AEO's structure not being set up to meet the equivalencies of the FNSO population, FNSO staff continued to push their mandate for flexibility forward:

I watched students grow up in there. Students who were not ready in the beginning, who were battling drug issues. They learned very slowly. Under any other model they would have been given up on. But FNSO didn't do that. They waited the students out and that made me very proud to work there because students did turn around. Students you would think might be learning disabled at the beginning whipped through the materials when they got their lives under control. It was heartwarming. It was also funding-dependent. (Marjorie, S2)

David (S4) spoke about needing to create conditions under which learning can occur while still working inside the program design. He expressed that the AEO program vision was meant to meet a different clientele than it was being used for, "but that they were stuck with it." An example of vision mismatch may have surfaced when students entered the program at significantly different grade levels, as described by David (S4), Joan (S5), and Laura (S6), yet were all expected to thrive under a direct teaching model meant for learners who had achieved similar prerequisites.

Staff observed differing visions between the organizations and the immediate consequences of learners attempting to work while stressed, as the numbers of lessons they finished trumped what and how they were learning:

AEO has blended its program to accommodate us, however, more growth can be done in that partnership. Setting the number of lessons a week that a student must meet does not always work because the students are all at different levels. None of them come in at the same level. It stresses students. I think it stresses students out that the number of lessons is more important than student success. (Collins Rice, S3)

Under Ministry of Education policy guidelines, and in conjunction with the policy that only students under the age of about 30 need the OLC course, a mature student who enters the FNSO program with Grade 1 can graduate with an OSSD within three months, after completing three courses. On the surface, and according to the understanding of staff in the program, rapid graduation was not the mandate for FNSO and ran counter to the staff's understanding of their goals and vision for the student body. Yet after the union grievance, FNSO appeared to give in to AEO's demands for changes in their academic program. This decision may have represented a cultural clash that FNSO administrators felt they could not win, and where the best scenario was to be seen by the funders as being able to "get along" with their partner. The decision to go along with the speedy graduation may have been prompted by the perceived need to fill the seats in the trades program also funded by MTCU. Whatever the reason, staff was clearly not made aware of the reasons.

The policies and practices of FNSO are discussed in the next section, in sequential order where pertinent. This section also shows the development of the policies that resulted in the changing practices within FNSO.

## **Policies and Practices**

As each organization served different functions within the partnership, it is important to understand how their individual policies and practices operated in relation to those functions and in relation to each other. The policies and practices of FNSO were designed from a more holistic view of supporting each student's well-being: from the physical to the spiritual to the academic. The policies and practices of the AEO, as designated by government Ministries, were more clearly focused on the "business" of education: academic guidance, programming, provision of teaching staff, and credentialing. For the benefit of students, there clearly needs to be cohesion between these organizational functions and their attendant policies and practices. There is, however, clearly potential for tension and challenge.

**FNSO policies.** Policies within FNSO were initiated as the program progressed. As a pilot project, all of the FNSO policies were dynamic and vulnerable to the entrenched colonial AEO policies. FNSO policies became more stable after project status was obtained. The most clearly articulated policies concerned student behaviour (see Appendix D). Even when clearly articulated, policies were still subject to change, as discussed below in relation to the guidelines around student behavior.

*Staff perceptions of student behaviour policies.* During the pilot project, the policies were changing with the needs of the students and the program. "In the beginning for the pilot project, the policies were a living document. They were difficult to follow because they were changing" (Collins Rice, S3). Policies such as the locking of bathrooms and signing for the key were implemented to control the perceived use of washrooms for drug use. The interview data that follows represents individual interpretations of FNSO dissonance, rather than a policy dissonance:

Policies were kind of “fly by the seat of your pants” for a lot of the time [during the pilot project], I mean there are student policies that we had, we kind of made them on the fly, some policies were not that well thought-out, like locking the bathrooms. It was tough for me to tell what the policies were sometimes, a lot of policies seemed adaptable, but sometimes they were too loose. (Matilda, S10)

Evolving FNSO policies were problematic but necessary as the pilot project policies attempted to respond to distribution of funding and recruit students from their communities, while providing learners with behavioural guidelines, reviewing and creating partnerships, and hiring staff, all simultaneous to one another and the development of the program.

Monthly meetings represented the forum in which staff would come together and assess how well the policies were meeting the mandates of the program. If adjustments needed to be made, administration staff would meet to change policy. The constraints to this method of development of FNSO policies were likely assumed by the students:

Especially with at-risk students, in my experience. At-risk students want to know what’s happening. I’m not saying you always have to have an iron-fist of “this-is-what is going to happen, and nothing else is going to happen.” You don’t have to be that rigid, but there definitely needs to be a little bit more. People need to know what to expect. (Rockman, S9)

The development (and implementation) of policies seemed to plague the pilot project because planning for policies and practices relating to students’ supports, transportation, and housing could not take place until the funding from MTCU was distributed. This meant that at the same time that FNSO was searching out potential, and mandatory, credentialing partners, the program had to be developing its policies: policies that needed modifications within a highly

dynamic opportunity structure. The dynamic nature of the policies and practices gave the program time to adjust and work around the inflexible policies of AEO. The dynamic nature of policy development also gave rise to the possibility of colonization aspects to the program, when the First Nations partner (FNSO) needed to adjust its policies to AEO's Euro-western policy standards.

Students in FNSO under both project statuses were expected to assume responsibility for their actions, get along with others, respect differences between individuals, respect and believe in others and in themselves, and adhere to the student code of conduct within a positive learning environment (See Appendix D). Some policy development recommendations were made in staff meetings out of which came recommendations presented to MTCU by FNSO administrators. The shift in firming up the policies took place in meetings between the MTCU funders and FNSO administration, as a requirement for the project funding. The next section discusses FNSO practices involving the selection of students from their communities, and student attendance in the program.

**FNSO practices.** Practices inside of FNSO included administration of student supports to meet a variety of different needs, including how students are chosen from the communities and the complexity of retention of students. Practices aimed at retention had an impact on the viability of the program and the funding related to it. Practices included the tracking of attendance, administration of living allowances, and making sure that students were post-secondary ready wherever possible within the time constraint of the program.

The student selection process involved at the front-end of the program helped to shape how the program was able to respond to the individual needs of learners.

***Student selection process.*** Students were initially selected from their communities based on their perceived ability to succeed in the program. It soon became apparent from the interviews that this was a complicated process, and that the selection process was only a part of the larger issue of student retention and ultimately, the funding of the program. FNSO practices included the process of selecting students from the communities:

We have an extensive list, a 13- or 14-page intake package. I feel strongly that this is the most undiscriminating. The student can say they need supports like mental health issues. We definitely take in a variety of students. We try to have a consistent number of seats for each community within [the tribal organization]. Other than that there really isn't much constraint. We want the students to succeed. Even if students leave or are dismissed, they can still come back if they write a letter or have an interview. No one is blacklisted from attending. Our goal is always student empowerment. The program will succeed if the students succeed. It is the same identity. (Collins Rice, S3)

Not all staff perceived the student selection process as involving set guidelines:

I don't think there was much thought put into choosing people in the community. We wanted stable people so staff were asked to take notes about the candidates. I think that was eventually thrown out the window when we needed bums in the seats. It didn't matter if they had kids. Some people had addictions issues that they were working on. I would have liked to have known who was addicted. The teachers can keep it confidential. But teachers need to know so they can understand how to make decisions. We just kind of went with whoever we thought seemed good. For students that were not chosen, they needed to be told to keep in touch. (Rockman, S9)

Decision-making about the FNSO intake practice was difficult, especially when students that wanted to begin the program were not chosen:

Students that aren't chosen are upset because they think it is based on when they apply. But sometimes [the client support officers] try to contact them and they do not have contacts where we can reach them. They don't update their information. If [the program] is bringing in a single mother with five children and she doesn't have any supports here in the city, then we won't bring her in because it would not be a good situation for the student. So we will discuss the possibility of the kids being looked after by grandparents. If we ask them upfront what impediments they might have, some are honest, [but] some say that there are none but then they show up when they are in the program. We don't put blame on them because the state of their lives is always changing. (Collins Rice, S3)

Being selected for a program such as FNSO is a major step for a person who has been marginalized by the education system. Learners expressed deep pride in their accomplishments within the program, as is evidenced in Chapter Seven. Rockman (S9) referenced concern to FNSO students ending up "being statistics" (i.e., committing suicide) when they are sent home. This of fundamental concern, especially given the reality that students are coming from communities where the suicide rate is claimed to be the highest in the world (McPherson & Rabb, 2011).

Concerns were expressed that assessment to determine the learners' academic readiness was not a part of the FNSO intake practice:

I don't believe any real assessment of the individual coming into the program was done, and this was before. People were brought into the program, and I'm not sure how they were picked but they, they were very low-levelled, a lower level than we were going to

be starting to teach them at. So that creates a gap in learning that was a design issue. I think the government should have looked at this before the students were brought in, to do a pre-screen, to design a program around the actual true needs of the student, as opposed to trying to adapt something. You try to make it work as a teacher but you're under pressures from management to produce credits and get these people graduated. We also have a very short timeframe to get people done, and we underestimated the time that would be required. So that created issues too. The actual teaching part, I thought went pretty well, like you just accept the stuff you can't change and, and work on the things you can the best you can. (David, S4)

David (S4)'s concerns and frustrations with the program being up and running before it was ready was brought up by more than one staff participant. As described earlier, upfront program design was not possible when the funding was obtained at about the same time as the pilot project was expected to be operational.

One staff member felt the program should be redesigned with both partners at the table setting out goals. He expressed concerns that in practice, the FNSO project policy document addressing attendance was used as a recommendation only:

I felt that they spent a lot of energy on getting the students to come to school. It ended up being a more negative part of the program. It became a chronic condition, worrying that they aren't here... A better decision might have been to let them go and to bring some new people in. There were a lot of people wanting to get into the program. I will bet you that if the students were selected only on their desire to be here, there would be an 80% success rate... if they were not chosen based on politics, not based on community, not



based on anything but the desire to learn. If you want your students to succeed, you need to choose the best candidates. (David, S4)

The practice of choosing students for the program did not appear to consider the academic equivalencies of the students, much to David (S4)'s apparent frustration. It was instead assumed that the chosen academic partner (AEO) was prepared to undertake this fundamentally important aspect of the FNSO program. Did FNSO not realize that AEO was not set up to fund the teaching of students at the low equivalencies presented by the FNSO population? If AEO understood, upon the first intake, the academic equivalencies of the students, why did AEO agree to this partnership in the first place? AEO adhered to the attendance policies and practices of FNSO, while appearing to control attendance through the use of direct instruction. As the program progressed, and the deficit model of direct instruction to control attendance and lateness became firmly embedded in the program, FNSO models to address attendance were moving away from a deficit model to a model where students were encouraged to take ownership of their level of involvement in the program. FNSO did not, however, alter the practice of locking washroom doors to address concerns about drug use during the course of this study.

Inasmuch as FNSO policies and practices had influence over the experiences of the students within the organization, AEO practices, determined by AEO policies, were paramount to students' realities inside the classroom. AEO policies, which are fundamental to the underpinning goals and visions, are discussed in the next section.

**AEO policies.** AEO policies set the stage for how practices were bound within the AEO organization, and were overseen by a single funding ministry. Rather than policies and practices that relied on a singular funding arrangement, AEO relied on policies that, although they did

allow for some flexibility, were mandated by the Ministry of Education. The policies of AEO inside of the FNSO learning environment included three related policies:

- (a) The use of PLAR, which uses the Senior Equivalency Application (SEA) to give credit based on the life experiences of students;
- (b) The use of previous transcripts to be interpreted for the allotment of courses needed for students to graduate; and,
- (c) The tracking of attendance that was imperative for funding as required by the Ministry of Education funding rules.

The benefit of using the PLAR system, besides its flexible practices as described below, was the SEA. Based on the SEA:

...up to sixteen Grade 9 and 10 credits may be granted to a mature student at the discretion of the principal following individual assessment. These Grade 9 and 10 credits must meet the diploma requirements that would usually be met through successful completion of the Grade 9 and 10 program. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003b, p. 1)

This means that under the manager's discretion, all of the students in the FNSO learning environment may be granted 16 Grade 9 and Grade 10 credits with no documentation required. Under SEA, students would write out their life experiences and be granted courses based on them. This helped them to receive a high school diploma within the 8-10 month period of the FNSO program, and allowed them time to do college-level preparation courses.

Additionally, "Certificates of Apprenticeship and Certificates of Qualification for apprenticeships granted by or recognized by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities [or] other appropriate documentation of learning gained from other programs, courses, or work experiences" could be accepted for Grade 11 and Grade 12 credits along with

appropriate documentation that is needed for verification purposes (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003b, p. 1). Under the PLAR guidelines, “the principal is responsible for ensuring that equivalent credits are granted to mature students only if their transcripts or other documents show evidence of learning that relates directly to the Ontario curriculum expectations for specific courses” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003b, p. 1). In the FNSO environment, the decision to grant credits was made by the manager of the AEO program at the time. How the PLAR system was administered was representative of the practices of AEO at the time.

Respondents were asked about the policies and practices that were followed by AEO within FNSO to determine what courses a student would take. It should be noted that the following interview data is not reflecting AEO policy dissonance, but rather is an individual interpretation of policy. Laura (S6) noted:

The AEO guidance counselor will get the student transcript and see what course they have and need. It will depend on when they went to school and what the requirements were at the time. There are a couple of options. A student might just finish off their required courses, or they could do the PLAR assessment to see if their life experience fits into a course that they might get credit for. Generally speaking they need to do their senior math that they need and two senior English. It would also depend on what their goals are. If a student wants to go to college, they will need the courses and the prerequisites. If they need a math to graduate, I would personally recommend a college-level math. (Laura, S6)

That Laura (S6) was permitted to recommend college-level graduating mathematics courses with students was dependent on AEO practices.

**AEO practices.** The changes in program delivery between the first and the third cohort are used here as an example of the difficulties associated with the changes in AEO visions under two different management styles.

PLAR was one AEO policy that was put into practice in the FNSO learning environment and sanctioned by FNSO administration. For the first cohort, AEO gave initial evaluations in English, mathematics, science, and history/geography to each student upon entry into the program. These equivalencies were then marked to determine the placement of the student in the program. Each student, with the help of the AEO guidance counselor and both teachers, chose their senior-level mathematics course according to their ability and interest in grasping mathematics concepts, and their post-secondary goals. Teachers were involved in the process, as the initial evaluations gave them the information they needed to create individual learner plans.

The policy designations for marking the PLAR were “university level,” “college level,” “workplace-level,” or “redo.” The practices in Cohort 1 ensured that students were evaluated, put into their individual plans, then put into PLAR upgrading workbooks after which they were permitted to rewrite the initial evaluation. Most students would be assessed at college level after the two months taken to bring them to that point. Then they would be put into college-level or university-level mathematics, and Grade 11 ENG 3C if they had completed their mandatory OLC English.

Cohort 2 students were evaluated and given one month of half-days of upgrading. For English, this upgrading was the OLC course. As discussed earlier in this chapter, most students were streamed into workplace-level mathematics courses using a direct teaching model in lieu of students choosing their own final senior-level mathematics course needed to graduate.

The PLAR policy was being implemented inside of the AEO classrooms and OLC was being taught where required by the Ministry of Education, while the challenges within the partnership organization were setting the tone for the experiences of the students within the partnership organization.

### **Challenges within the Organizations**

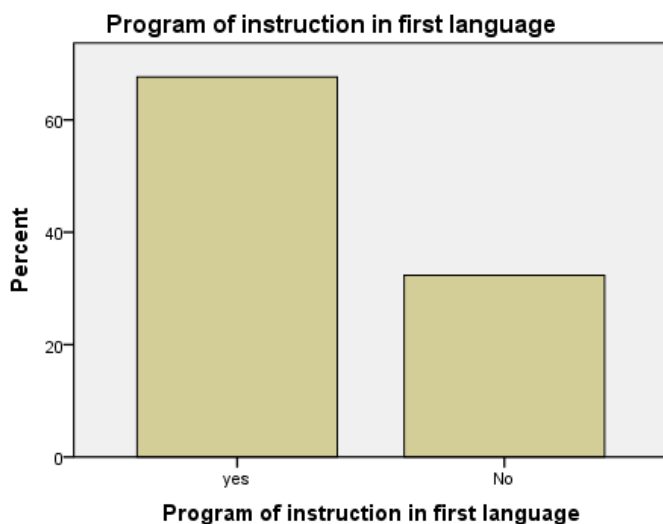
The challenges that were addressed within the program had potential to influence the learning experience of the student body. Student informants included in this dissertation are designated with “St,” beside their pseudonyms, along with their cohort number (“C1”, “C2,” or “C3”). For example, student informant Darkcloud is shown as Darkcloud, St, C3.

Qualitative data from the following informants has been included in this dissertation (all names are pseudonyms, and are listed in the order they appear): Darkcloud, St, C3; Denise, St, C2; Jake, St, C2; Stella, St, C3; Matthew, St, C1; Sam, St, C2; Crane, St, C2; Amelia, St, C1; Jim, St, C1; Mike, St, C1; Tyrone, St, C1; Nishnabe Kway, St, C1; Kate, St, C3; Marie, St, C3; Gordon, St, C1; Sheila, St, C2; Lily, St, C1; Cruz, St, C3; John, St, C2; Barbara, St, C3; Sandra, St, C3; Jake, St, C2; Tyrone, St, C1; James, St, C1; Suzie, St, C1; Dawn, St, C1; George, St, C3; Peter, St, C3; Dude St, C2; Max, St, C3; Fred St, C3; White Feather, St, C1; Aubrey, St, C3; Jamie, St, C1; and Ken, St, C1.

**English as a second language.** In this section I describe the learners themselves, and in particular, the need for recognition of the fact that English is a second language for many of them. Learners from the communities arrived with diverse academic equivalencies. Some spoke Ojibway, Cree, or Ojicree as their first languages, while others had not been taught any language other than English.

All academic and non-academic programs were delivered in English and for some, this represented a challenge. Some students, teachers, and tutors in the first cohort could be observed learning Native languages from the student body in an exchange of information between clients and employees. One teacher spoke some Ojibway. Many had personal and family relationships with students. The informants were asked if the program was delivered in their first language; responses (gathered at the end of the program) are represented in Figure 10.

End of program (all cohorts)



*Figure 10.* The program was delivered in my first language.

Sixty-seven percent of the informants indicated that the academic portion of the program was delivered in their first language. Thirty-three percent reported that the program was delivered in their second language. Apprehension about mastery of the English language was expressed by one informant:

I see myself being successful in college. If I put my mind into it, I see myself being successful in university. At the end of the program, you may have noticed that I was not as motivated. The way people think [sic]. They are worried that you might tip off if you

go straight into university or college. They are worried that I might not make it. I asked people if they think I can make it or if I should do this. It made my motivation drop. I was told that I need to develop my skills more or I might not make it. I was told this by teachers, a few people there. It made me feel scared. English is not my first language. My first language is Ojibway. Maybe if I read more articles in magazines and books my English will get better. I will only benefit if I strengthen my skills. (Darkcloud, St, C3)

Darkcloud's experience may indicate that he felt somewhat disempowered by his teachers' perceptions of the strength of his English skills, especially given that English is his second language and his goal was to attend an Aboriginal Access program in his university of choice. The Aboriginal Access program is a program meant for First Nations students to upgrade skills from applied OSSD credentials so that they are set up for a successful university experience.

In an effort to explore how involved they were in the development of the partnership, staff informants were asked about the support provided to, and input requested from, both AEO and FNSO organizations. The next section scrutinizes the level of support for teachers working inside of the organization.

### **AEO Support Challenges**

Understanding the levels of support for AEO staff is crucial to this research because the staff situated inside the FNSO opportunity structure were in the best position to be responsive to student needs in the program. AEO staff recognized the needs of the student body, as expressed by the students. The staff could only inform the administration, who were in a position to act on the requests. Individual requests and personal crisis management were communicated with other staff when deeper flexibility was merited. Staff were able to communicate these needs, and the

process used to guide the student, back to administration. This would provide protection for the student when their attendance or performance numbers alone warranted warnings or expulsion, and allowed administrative staff input into finding further supports for the student.

The level of support for teacher empowerment included administrative responses to the concerns of teachers:

When I needed books, they were made available. The first manager bought programmable calculators when I asked for them. The management style was similar to the best I have worked under; I felt appreciated under the first manager. I was always willing to go the extra mile for the students but I would have for her, too. I trusted her.

When a teacher was experiencing problems with an FNSO employee, the first manager of AEO saw it for what it was and backed her employee. (Joan, S5)

Accolades for the first AEO management style permeated the program. Staff expressed appreciation for the support offered by management to meet the needs of teachers and students:

In the beginning I was consulted by the guidance counselor. I felt supported by the first manager. She [the manager] trusted the teachers to do their job and work around any issues. (Laura, S6)

Teacher perceptions of the level of support for students, as funneled through the staff, appeared to change during the second cohort with the change of AEO management: “The second manager didn’t trust us. There was too much paperwork and not enough communication” (Laura, S6).

When the first manager retired and was replaced by the second manager near the end of Cohort 1, staff began to experience changes in the direction of program development: “I had no input into it: it was pre-designed” (David, S4).



The program under the second management style may have changed with more staff input: “Maybe, but I think really, you know, that would’ve had to happen way up front, like really far up front. Like [if I] actually designed the program” (David, S4).

The amount of support teachers experienced was influenced by the level to which they felt invested in the program:

I didn’t have a significant impact, I guess when I came here, the courses were selected based on, believe it or not, [students’] aptitude in various levels of — their learning style aptitude. Which I have a bit of an issue with, and also their career path. So their career path was chosen based on some scores that were done on multiple intelligence tests, by the FNSO people here, a very unusual way of reflecting a career path for people. I also interviewed them [students] myself and [they were] not picking up with a different career path that they were maybe more interested in, but they were told what they were going to be doing, initially. So I had little choice over career. (David, S4)

It was admitted, however, that: “All I would have to do is email and we could switch them” (David, S4).

David (S4)’s desire for upfront change in the program was reiterated by Joan (S5), who expressed concerns about FNSO planning meetings meant to provide and promote staff input. Staff contended that teacher input, while vibrant under the first AEO manager, was becoming increasingly muted after the manager’s retirement. Input into meetings that seemed to support teacher empowerment on the surface belied what was happening behind the scenes:

We were expected to attend the FNSO meetings but the second AEO manager didn’t want us to answer questions honestly or to share our professional judgment. He wanted us to let the information come from him and the guidance counselor. Teachers, he told us

on more than one occasion, were there to teach. Nothing more. I have an email that reprimanded me for answering that we needed tutors. It was carefully worded but most of his emails were nasty. They caused me so much stress I worried about getting sick... really sick you know... like his emails were so disempowering that I knew I couldn't stay there [at the organization]. The AEO meetings stopped being interactive. No one spoke but him and the guidance counselor for the meetings I attended. His management style was the worst I had ever witnessed. People don't like being micromanaged. Truth be told, I felt very badly because I had advocated to have AEO be the sole credentialing organization in FNSO, and felt responsible for what was happening. (Joan, S5)

It seemed that the second manager understood far more about the impact of the changes that were about to be implemented than he was willing to let on. Mathematics tutors, indeed, were not needed when far less students were about to be placed into college-level mathematics courses. "The second manager didn't trust us," one staff member noted, and "the management change muddled things up as well: the goals became very unclear" (Laura, S6).

When staff stood behind the best interests of the students, AEO management still seemed to find ways to shut down their input:

Well the [second] manager was telling me not to have anyone work on any course but the GLS course that we were being funded for. He was sticking to the funding rules. This meant that a few students who were working at college and university level were supposed to be working on elementary school math. I felt that was insulting and patronizing for those students, so I made copies of the workbooks and told them they could work away on the support questions but not hand anything in. They were not working on the course, not doing or handing in lessons, but only learning the material. It

was about education, not assessment. So it was win-win. They wrote the weekly GLS tests that were like child-play for them to satisfy the funders, but then got to build their skills in higher-level work for the rest of the time. I was able to concentrate all of my efforts on the most needy of students. The manager didn't like that and maybe he thought I was allowing them to do the lessons, but he took those books away from the students. The students were so upset. The teachers were too. (Joan, S5)

Other staff members besides Joan (S5) encouraged partnering with AEO after the experiences of Cohort 1 under the first AEO manager. As the AEO program began to change with practices that diametrically opposed what some staff informants saw as the merits in Cohort 1, it is not surprising they began to feel responsible for the negative changes in the program. Staff informants were asked if they thought the GED program was a better fit for the population. Their input into removing the GED program was supported:

No, it wasn't up to the task. It is not for this population because the credentialing doesn't work. But the GED program was far more about education than the second or third cohort was. The students learned a lot. Much more than under the AEO model. If I had it to do over again I would have encouraged FNSO to try the adult education services from the college instead of AEO. The college is more about education and less about credentialing, but their credentialing isn't as recognized. They don't rely on the PLAR system like AEO does. (Joan, S5)

When FNSO requested input from teachers for the direction of the program, there was the potential for empowerment within the organization.

**Teacher empowerment.** The informants were asked to reflect on whether teachers within the partnership organization were empowered in their place of work. Further, they were asked to comment on the overall effect of this empowerment (or lack of empowerment) on the learners. The FNSO partnership environment seemed to negatively impact teacher empowerment:

I don't think they [teachers] are very empowered. They don't have much say. They are overworked, stressed out, they have a lot of work and are not given enough time to complete it. They are crunched by deadlines that are really kind of silly sometimes... like the marking has to be done by January 8. Then they move the date to January 18. A lot of teachers came to me frustrated with AEO. Always AEO, never FNSO. They didn't want to bring up issues but they were concerned about the students. One student had more life experience than anyone but wasn't being given [SEA] credit for it. Maybe the student needed to write more but I had to ask the [second] manager to get them to act on it. It seemed a little bogus anyway. Someone should be checking up on those. But it wasn't empowering for the teachers and because it wasn't empowering for the teachers, the opportunity was missed for the students to be able to do better things... teachers had to concentrate on other things instead of on the students. (Rockman, S9)

Lack of teacher empowerment resulted in expressions of concern for students:

The teachers are not empowered. I think the teachers are very very limited in what they can do. They are very closely monitored. I think that takes away because those teachers are just overworked and that takes away from their ability to communicate or to be present with the students. So I don't think the teachers are empowered at all. If they are stressed about the amount of marking they have to do or what they can actually assign the

student, or if they see the student needs something then they are thinking more strategically rather than being present with the student because there is an overpowering body. They are strained. It is a problem for FNSO because it counters student success.

(Collins Rice, S3)

One staff member offered a comparison of the impact of the two management styles on teacher empowerment:

I think the difference is that the teachers asked for what they needed, as opposed to the subsequent cohorts where teachers were told what they needed. Teachers followed the PLAR process in Cohort 1 and were accountable for the various Ministry requirements, but in all other respects they dictated what they needed to the learning centre. They were not responsible for marking the lessons, tests, or exams. Teacher empowerment was high from the AEO side under the first manager. (Joan, S5)

Teacher empowerment was an incentive for the work, one informant explained:

The pay is not very good, the hours aren't very good, and the working conditions aren't very good, so the job had to have something else going for it to keep the teachers there.

They needed to have a little bit of righteousness (laughs). The teachers need to be empowered. (Rockman, S9)

Matilda (S10) reflected: "Some of the teachers put in as much work as high school teachers but are getting paid far less for it. The teachers have to buy into the program, feel as though they are helping because that is why they are doing it." She noted that teacher empowerment related to the experience students had in the program, but did not seem to be of concern to the second manager:

I don't think [the AEO second manager] is an evil man. I think he is just looking at money and he is inexperienced. He has been cutting teachers here and there. He obviously didn't care much about the students because those decisions had huge impacts on the students. It was all about money. The previous manager always just made it happen. [The second manager] eventually does get it done, but not until he has to. (Matilda, S10)

The link between teacher and student empowerment continued:

The students don't have the same decision-making ability. They only have say over their own career paths, they were not made aware that classrooms were switching or teachers were leaving, like there was no empowerment for them that way. When the students feel supported they work as a team, and they really appreciate it too. Sometimes I think students stayed in the program because they thought they would be letting people down if they left. You have happy teachers, you have happy students. Everyone can perform better if you have a good administrator. Teachers don't come and go. Consistency is what people need. [The guidance counselors from both organizations at different times] wanted to steer people to make it easier on them. It is easier to run just a math class. The students were asked about what they wanted to do but the guidance counselor wasn't on site. If the teachers had more say, it would have been better. The AEO guidance counselor doesn't know them from a hole in the wall. (Rockman, S9)

Teacher empowerment was rated high by Laura (S6) and Joan (S5) for Cohort 1 under the first manager, but low by staff informants beyond Cohort 1. The respondents expressed no levels of empowerment for teachers under the second management style. Rockman (S9) saw teachers as overworked and underpaid, and all staff informants saw teachers as not having “a

say” in the AEO program inside of FNSO. Being able to contribute to the operation of an organization assumes the perspective that the student-teacher bond is essential, and that the views of teachers are important to management. One informant (who I have not named here because of the potential for identification) admitted that the second manager of AEO said, off the record, that “teachers are a dime a dozen.” The danger when a leader works from such a premise is that the comment represents a genuine view toward those the leader leads (Crowther et al., 2001).

Teacher empowerment is linked to teacher training in the next sub-section.

**Training.** The actions of administrators has potential to deeply affect the lives of students. Levels of teacher empowerment are dependent on the training they receive that qualifies them to meet the needs of students:

The students are very high needs. The teachers care about them and they know it, so the students want to talk to them. I would like to see all front line workers receive [suicide prevention] training. It will only add to the strength of the program. (Collins Rice, S3)

Joan (S5) approached the second manager of AEO to request one unpaid day off to attend a two-day workshop in another city, where she had already paid for flight and accommodation. The manager said “no,” citing a policy not to approve non-board-related professional development. This was confusing to Joan (S5) because an agreement to support her university graduate work [also non-board related] had been granted when she was hired. Continuing to work in an environment where she did not feel qualified was not an option:

I was not asking for professional development. I was asking for a day off. I knew that I could not continue working in that environment. I felt like the game “Russian Roulette” was being played by AEO with the lives of the students, particularly with most of the

students in the cohort being from a community experiencing some of the highest, if not the highest, suicide rates in the world. That boy [that committed suicide while in the program] was only in the program to upgrade his MEL 3E credentials to that of college level. Until one of your students commits suicide and you are left, uncredentialed, to pick up the pieces alone in a classroom with all of his highly traumatized friends, you will never understand the seriousness of this issue fully. Every day us teachers live with his death, face his father who is the FNSO program manager, knowing what grief the family has been through, and watch his sisters who were also in the program self-destruct in their attempts to come to grips with losing their brother. These are people, not numbers, people. I called in sick because rumour had it that is what teaching staff at AEO were doing when they were turned down for unpaid time off. At that point it was research. I wanted to research what the second AEO manager would do. He laid me off on the Friday and brought me in front of the Board the next Wednesday to determine what disciplinary action should be taken, given my full admission to what I had done and why. I produced the dated certificate for the suicide prevention workshop. Interestingly, no disciplinary action was taken. (Joan, S5)

Stakeholders who were asked to participate in the writing of the Ontario Ministry of Education (2005a) document point out that there is no consistent approach to the professional development of adult educators, or a system with which to share best practices. Joan (S5)'s experience and willingness to take a stand on the issue may speak loudly to the lack of empowerment she was experiencing in the program by questioning her own credentials. The words and actions of the teachers showed that their concerns were student-centered: they saw



themselves as advocates for students. Teacher qualifications when highly marginalized students rely on teachers to talk to will be further discussed in Chapter Six.

Joan (S5) continued by explaining that she was laid off before the students were finished their upgrading, and that AEO did not bring anyone in to replace her for the remainder of the upgrading, despite assuring her that they would. She was laid off at 4:30 on a Friday afternoon after having made a deal with the students about what they would accomplish over the weekend, and encouraging them to be prepared to work hard for the next couple of school days to finish the program. Monday morning came. One informant left the program because of her stand. Joan (S5) noted:

... and I was gone, no good-bye, nothing, just not there for them anymore. They must have felt so let down, like they didn't matter. I guess one of the newer English teachers had told the second manager that she needed more time for English so he dumped the math. Maybe it was me he was trying to get rid of. That is probable because I wasn't exactly going along with the status quo when student needs trumped administration wants. Truthfully, I was relieved to be laid off. I never felt comfortable there after that boy's suicide in that most of us were not qualified to be working with students that were that high risk. My health was taking a hit because of the management style in AEO and from watching students not being given a chance at a full education. I just wanted to finish the upgrading and was sad that it didn't happen (Joan, S5)

Bonding between teachers and students appeared insignificant to management decisions in this case, and not worthy of the respect of even giving the teacher opportunity to say good-bye. When one teacher was laid off at the end of Cohort, she was told specifically not to tell the students she was leaving because of the possibility of "student unrest." Her leaving may have

impacted one student who was about to graduate with academic (university-level) courses, so severely that he refused to work from the day she left. He later dropped out of the program.

Under the second AEO environment, concern about “student unrest” trumped both student and teacher empowerment, while student input was deemed non-essential.

**Student input and goal setting.** Both AEO and FNSO had opportunities to consider the views of learners throughout the study period. AEO did not appear to consider student input under the second management style (David, S4; Joan, S5; Rockman, S9). This was evidenced with a sudden change of classrooms in Cohort 3:

“AEO didn’t take much input from students. It is like that one day in September when all of a sudden the classes changed. There was no warning. It was hard on people. No one had warning” (Rockman, S9). The frustration with the classrooms being switched with no notice came on the heels of a streamlining decision made by AEO administration that took even FNSO administration by surprise. Due to the significance of this day on the empowerment of students inside of their opportunity structure, more discussion will take place in Chapter Seven. Staff remembered the day the classes were switched by AEO administrators:

We lost at least one student over that. She told me she was too traumatized by it. The environment represented a home away from home for her. She depended on a certain degree of respect about its parameters. She wasn’t the only learner who was in tears that day. (Joan, S5)

The senior equivalency application process (SEA) appeared to discount the necessity for student understanding of the process:

Under the SEA guidelines, students were supposed to be informed as to why they were filling out the SEA applications. Teachers were instead told *not* to tell the students why they were filling them out: only that it was important that they take their time. This created problems later when one student did not write down all of her life experiences so found herself with five courses instead of three. The student almost quit the program because of that. The [FNSO] education counselor had a difficult time trying to advocate on behalf of the student to have the [AEO] guidance counselor revisit the student's application. (Joan, S5)

The situation with garnishing student input was made more difficult when many students came into the program undecided on their long-term goals, and/or lacking understanding of the options available to them:

I found that a lot of students didn't know what they wanted to do. I think it would have been better to do a bit more career cruising up front. The program is designed to get them graduated and into a career and if they don't know what they want to do, that is one of the difficulties of the model for sure. (David, S4)

Many students were not thinking beyond the OSSD, David (S4) noted: "Honestly, I don't think a lot of them thought about a career before they came here."

David (S4)'s contention that the students hadn't really thought beyond the OSSD before coming into the program is backed by survey data shown in Chapter 6. Students that had a clear sense of their goals seemed to thrive in the program:

The needs of those students who had a clear idea of what post-secondary program they wanted to enter into when they came into the program were met by the program eventually, because FNSO tried to make sure the students were placed in the courses they

needed for college or university entrance after they graduated from AEO. Many of the students were not sure though. I feel that the program could have been much better for those who were unsure about their goals, and could waste less time on those whose goals were clear but who began at a low level, particularly in math. (Joan, S5)

### **FNSO Support Challenges**

This section describes the challenges experienced in relation to FNSO supports, including the need for quiet areas and support for highly stressed students, some of whom were detoxing, and FNSO staff interference with teachers.

There was a need for breakout rooms for the marginalized student population. One participant discussed this need:

Well I have been teaching adults for a few decades. With that kind of time comes an understanding of how to get the most out of students. I know how and I know what I need to make it happen. That was a problem because there was need for breakout rooms that was never taken seriously. Breakout rooms were there sometimes, but only because there were no people to fill the office space yet... Administration should double up in their offices in order to maximize space for highly marginalized students if they have to, because the degree of marginalization should be proportional to space allotment.

(Marjorie, S2)

Joan (S5) noted:

The students' needs were so much more than in most organizations I have worked for and the offices sizes for admin were large enough for two people. After most of the students were placed into workplace math, breakout rooms were not as necessary because the students were not as challenged. (Joan, S5)

Detoxing issues also needed to be addressed. One informant noted: “I didn’t feel like I had much support from FNSO. Detoxing outbursts [stress due to drug withdrawals] were not addressed properly” (Laura, S6).

FNSO decisions that affected students led to a potential lack of empowerment for students. Rockman (S9) noted:

A lot of students really geared up for heavy equipment operating programs and I was told from everybody ahead of time that the [programs were] going to happen. Students were lined up for them. Then the start day got pushed back. Then, the summer deal got pushed back, and then it’s not happening, and this messes with people’s lives. That makes it really hard to empower somebody if they don’t have any control. Bottom line is, they need to be able to have the control to be able to say yes or no, and they can’t make an educated decision if they don’t do that. (Rockman, S9)

FNSO decisions toward students had the potential to impact the relationship between students and front line staff. Similarly, issues that affected front line staff had the potential to affect students, when staff attention was drawn away from helping students get what they needed to be successful in the program.

FNSO staff moved in and out of the classrooms to speak to students about ongoing issues in their lives. The teachers understood and supported the practice until it became apparent that one FNSO staff member was doing far more than administering to the needs of the students while she was in the classroom. Micromanaging by an FNSO staff member near the beginning of the program became problematic:

Her micromanaging was bizarre and did damage in the program, but she ended up leaving. When she left, she admitted that the project coordinator had asked her to spy on

us. The issue for me was that while the teachers should have been concentrating their efforts on meeting the needs of the students, they were instead fending off FNSO administration meddling. We lost the program manager's son right in the middle of all of that. I was alarmed that the project manager appeared to be continuing the practice of spying with another FNSO staff member after his death. (Joan, S5)

### **Academic Equivalencies of the Population**

Staff were asked what ranges of grade-level equivalencies learners arrived with into the program. Joan (S5) noted that the majority of the student body came into the program with equivalencies between Grade 4 and Grade 6, while Ann (S8) noted the lowest equivalency of Grade 5, saying: "It's a wide range. I'd say the lowest levels would be assessed at around Grade 5 and then some of the other students who were, you know, Grade 11, Grade 12. It's a broad range." Ann (S8) added: "One student that I know of had never been inside of a math class before." This data corresponds with that of Shields (2012), who found that the majority of informants in her study of a northern community had equivalencies of Grades 4-5 as tested by a private education tutoring organization.

The implications of these equivalencies are that students are given approximately ten months inside of the FNSO to complete secondary school credentialing consisting of seven or eight years of material. Dennis (S1) said:

The average [equivalency] was about Grade 6 math. English from the fly-in communities were at about a Grade 8 or 9 level. The road communities were a bit higher because, for the fly-in communities, English was often their second language. The students would often write like they speak, like with subject/verb agreement. (Dennis, S1)

The solution to meeting the needs of low equivalences required upfront planning:

It'd be with the front end, like okay let's look at, this is the population we're going to work with, we know these things about these people, let's prescreen and figure out exactly what we need to be doing so we can be successful. It's just upfront planning. I think sometimes people think, "oh we'll just throw you into a high school program for students and we'll bring them in from communities, we'll you know, take them from a small village, bring them into the city, we'll do all these wonderful things, and we'll give them support, and everything will be great," but that's not necessarily how it works. So, I mean, the program also has to meet their needs and I don't know that we always did. Often it did, sometimes it didn't. We tried to adapt so that it would, but it wasn't the best design, obviously. (David, S4)

David (S4)'s comments speak directly to the viability of AEO to address the academic upgrading needs of students in the program. The first AEO manager seemed to make it work according to Laura (S6)'s and Joan (S5)'s previous comments about the quality of the program under the first manager in Cohort 1. It seemed straightforward for both Laura (S6) and Joan (S5) that the need to streamline under the second management style was not congruent with the visions of FNSO that, according to Collins Rice (S3), were made clear at the monthly meetings.

This section has explored AEO and FNSO support challenges. Support challenges with the AEO included a complete lack of input into how the students were selected (David, S4) or the academic programming they pursued (Joan, S5; Laura, S6). More "career cruising" was needed in the program (David, S4). Input from students was not solicited, and sudden classroom changes took place without the knowledge of FNSO or AEO staff. FNSO support challenges included a lack of breakout rooms, detoxing issues, and micromanaging from FSNO staff.

The next section addresses the changing policies within the study period. These included changing attendance policies that affected the delivery of mathematics programs. These changes became important to the academic experiences of the informants as they progressed through the program.

### **Policy Changes**

Policies were a predominant aspect of both organizations. Within FNSO and during the pilot project, changes to policies meant changes to practices and the way the organizations interacted. The attendance policy directed practices that influenced the overall development of the program.

**Attendance policy.** The attendance policies were a recurring issue between students, staff, and policy makers. Students under FNSO's 2013 policy document (under the pilot project) were allotted one day per month for medical leave and/or personal appointments (see Appendix D). Without a valid reason for missing classes, one missed day resulted in a verbal warning, two missed days resulted in a written warning, and three missed days resulted in a training allowance deduction. Missing more than three days meant the student would be reviewed for expulsion.

AEO practices provided support to FNSO's policy document (under the pilot project) in regard to student attendance and lateness issues. Teachers would remind students about the importance of regular attendance and not being tardy. If a student disrespected the rules, AEO teaching staff would solicit the help of the CSO who would remind the student of the FNSO policies. The AEO staff, knowing they were working in the learning environment of another culture, largely respected the attendance policies willingly. They would report to FNSO staff when attendance issues arose or when they needed clarity or assistance. AEO staff adhering to FNSO's attendance policy and practices meant that students could be in the program longer than



AEO would have approved under their own attendance policy and practices. This could have detrimental effects under a model driven by economics, as was the case under the second AEO manager, because students may not be handing in lessons or meeting the attendance requirement for funding at the same pace as under AEO's attendance policy.

*Changes in attendance policies.* The attendance policies inside of FNSO were dynamic during the study period, as the program evolved. FNSO's approach to their student policies is "based on education aimed at helping students to understand their behaviour and its impact on others" (see Appendix D). The policies of AEO differed from that of FNSO. The teachers employed by AEO played a role in assuming responsibility for encouraging the FNSO policies on behavior, that promoted learning and developing individuals' potential.

The pilot project ended and became a "project" in the last six months of the study, creating a need for more stable policies that could be depended on by the MTCU funders and the AEO partnership. Attendance policies were thus stabilized:

Now that it [the organization] is a project, it is much easier. Now we are very clear as to what our attendance policies are, like if they are away for more than two days, they have to provide a note and it is the student's responsibility to sign in and sign out. We have developed documents to support those policies, such as student sign-in sheets. (Collins Rice, S3)

Differences between in the way that attendance was handled from pilot project to project status indicated that FNSO was moving further away from a deficit-led model when addressing attendance:

The FNSO student policies outlined what was expected of the student, including how the student is to be responsible for absences. Students need to take it upon themselves to seek

care for their issues. They needed to bring a note that might not necessarily be from an MD: they might be seeing a healer of some sort. This requires them to be proactive about their own issues toward being in school. The fixed policies under the project status created clear policies that students and staff could depend on. (Collins Rice, 3)

Transition to a strengths-based attendance model continued:

At the beginning, the client support officers (CSOs) were going and checking the timesheet and deducting from their wages if they were not there. Now they have to go look at their timesheet and say “ok, I wasn’t here this day; I am going to state that I wasn’t here.” They will do that because we are no longer taking away from them. It gives more voice to the students. If a student wants to take a leave of absence to work on some other aspect of their life that is their decision, and we will honour that. When they want to get back into the program they will have to write a letter to get back in. (Collins Rice, S3)

FNSO’s changing attendance policy was supported by the staff within both organizations,

including the teachers:

I had the students make up the rules of the classroom. They all had input. They decided what contributed to their success in school and how the behaviour of each would impact the class. We made a list and one student would write it on Bristol board to be mounted where all the students [and teacher] could reference it. Lateness and attendance was added to the list by the students. The students took ownership and their needs were respected, too, rather than just that of the policies. (Marjorie, S2)

Not all staff informants agreed that the system worked, however. David (S4)’s understanding was that the design was supposed to be similar to a work environment, where the students were accountable for showing up and consequences would result if their attendance was

not as agreed. He claimed that those consequences did not take place and that attendance was not good, which made it difficult for the teacher to teach. Failure to act on attendance from the beginning set the tone that became a salient feature of the program:

If the students aren't going to come, you don't have a program. The ones that did well here did well. A lot of energy and time [FNSO practice] was being spent on students that were not attending. In the adult education centre, if they don't show up three times in a row, they get a warning. They get direct instruction so if they miss three days, they will quit because they will miss too much. If they aren't that keen on it, maybe they just want to come to the city. Some students do not do a whole lot every day. Some students work their buns off. (David, S4)

The changing FNSO attendance policies, which took place over the course of the study period, moved from dynamic "living" policies to more fixed policies when the pilot project was granted project status. FNSO policies were influenced by AEO practices as the two organizations attempted to work together in the same organizational structure.

In the next section, changes to the mathematics program within the organization will be presented chronologically.

### **Math Programming Changes**

As an example of the difficulties associated with the variance in goals and practices and their impact upon students, I will focus on a specific problem that grew throughout the implementation of the program and eventually erupted into a union grievance. I tell this story as an example as to how difficult it is to align the needs of students with the policies and practices of organizations with competing agendas.

**MEL 3E: Workplace mathematics.** Workplace mathematics is “everyday living” mathematics meant to provide students with the mathematics they need to live in society. The course designations for these mathematics courses are MEL and MAT. Workplace-level mathematics is not a skills-building mathematics in that it does not build mathematics skills that can lead into an applied or academic program. Skills such as algebra, trigonometry, and geometry are not covered. Students learn instead about the difference between gross and net pay, and weekly, bi-weekly, and monthly pay. They learn about commissions, how to calculate total earnings, and pay deductions they are likely to encounter. They also learn how to work with discounts and sales tax, and simple and compound interest. They convert between Canadian and US dollars, learn to read credit card statements and airplane tickets, learn how to calculate what it will cost to fill their vehicles with gasoline, and learn to calculate total driving time given distance and kilometers per hour information. They also learn about ratios.

Workplace-level mathematics will not allow students to enter into college or university if mathematics pre-requisites are listed in the college or university course descriptions. MEL 3E is the Grade 11 minimum requirement mathematics for graduation with an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) in Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005b).

In the second cohort, this workplace-level mathematics course joined GPP and GLS, arguably, to boost funding. If a student takes MEL 3E, they are not considered prepared to take either applied (college) or academic (university), or Grades 9, 10, 11, or 12 mathematics (see Figure 8) (personal communication from guidance counselor, November 14, 2014). Unlike the OLC English course, however, workplace-level mathematics is not a mandatory course that students must take. It does offer incentives for funding, though, because it can replace the need

for elementary upgrading and serves as a Grade 11 mathematics credit. Changes to the mathematics program began to reflect this funding incentive.

**Changes to the mathematics program.** As Cohort 2 commenced in the program, it became apparent to teachers that the second managerial style was beginning to implement changes in the delivery of mathematics courses:

The first classroom teacher was laid off, the full-time employees came in and it was like... okay, the real teachers are here now and everything that the first classroom teacher and myself had built was thrown out the window. We were faulted by the new administration for taking so long to upgrade the students in Cohort 1. I talked to the math teacher a lot to try to keep the upgrading intact. He understood about the workplace math. He also tried to talk to the second manager about it. The other teacher tried to fight to protect the students from taking the workplace math too, but then one day he said he wasn't going to fight it anymore. Who could blame him? He was putting his career on the line. I think he thought I should just go along with it too, but I couldn't. (Marjorie, S2)

It became apparent that economic accountability was becoming an oppressive force within the FNSO organization.

**Maximizing economic accountability.** Streamlining of what was, for Cohort 1, an individualized program, was one way that economics was moved to the forefront in Cohort 2. Other ways included direct teaching that replaced an individualized workbook model, workplace-level course delivery that took the place of more flexible mathematics course opportunities, and one-hour lunches were reduced to 30-minute time allotments to control attendance. Further, elementary upgrading was reduced to the time available under the funded

GLS course. Sometimes classes were shifted with no notice to students or staff to meet the streamlining needs, and SEA assessment practices were changed.

When asked about the operation of AEO practices that involved course and classroom changes inside the FNSO framework, one staff informant noted: “The practices for AEO seemed to always be changing inside of FNSO. AEO seemed to be having a difficult time getting it right” (Joan, S5).

Teachers were consulted less and less, and for Cohort 3 the individual plan model was discarded completely. Most of the Cohort 3 students in this study did not receive any mathematics upgrading. Their first evaluation was the evaluation used to place them into their core mathematics courses. FNSO did not appear to have much of a say in how the PLAR was administered, as it was made clear by AEO that this was AEO’s function within the partnership. AEO’s guidance counselor described the students in the program as “our students, not FNSO’s.”

For Cohort 3 students, staff continued to look for creative solutions: “I begged them to find another solution. My focus on that was taking away from my focus on the students in my off time” (Joan, S5). This informant went on to clarify that the second AEO manager agreed to let her set up a course where AEO could be paid for lessons. She explained that she did this on her own time. Then, she described how she made 40 copies of the workbook course on the FNSO photocopying budget, and on her time and the secretary’s time. As she had to go away to school for a month (which was agreed upon when she was hired), she wanted to make sure that when she got back, the course was ready to go. When she returned, however, the mathematics programming had changed once again:

When I got back, AEO had changed the program completely. Most of the students were in workplace-level math and my course was left in the cupboard to gather dust. As far as I

know, the 40 copies are still there... such a waste. That cohort didn't get any upgrading at all. (Joan, S5)

She speculated on why all of the time and resources had been wasted, and contemplated the implications of this social injustice:

He [the second manager] once told me that adult education students do not go to university when I mentioned university for the students. For this population, that just doesn't make any sense. For many adult education students, these programs represent their second chance. For many of these students, this was their *first* chance. Doesn't everyone deserve at least one chance? Didn't I get a chance? Didn't the second manager get a chance? Why are any of these students different? (Joan, S5)

Cohort 3 students were given entrance assessments that instructors were expected to assess. The marking of entrance assessments met the economic agenda and represented a change in mathematics programming from Cohort 1:

The second AEO manager had me mark all of the students' entrance assessments for one of the cohorts after the streamlining. I was given no guidelines as to how he wanted them marked, so I phoned the guidance counselor to find out what she needed. The guidance counselor said she wanted them marked "workplace," "college level," "university level (applied or academic level)," or "redo." Those students with assessments marked "workplace" would go straight into MEL 3E. Those marked "redo" would get an opportunity to rewrite the assessment after their upgrading from elementary level mathematics to that of Grade 9. The manager told me that all those marked "workplace" would go into MEL 3E, regardless of how well they did with the upgrading from elementary level mathematics. The assessments were stopping students at the door before

they were ever given a chance! Well lucky for the students, no one told me what mark was to represent “workplace,” and what mark was to represent “redo” (this was the first time I had marked assessments for AEO and I assumed that if they did not direct me with a specific mark, I was to use my professional judgment). I wanted ALL of the students to be given a second chance after they finished the month of upgrading! I set the marking scheme so that under 60% was a “redo.” As a result, any that were not college or university were “redos” under my marking scheme. (Joan, S5)

Joan (S5) explained that she made a list of each concept that the students needed to work on, and included that with the assessments. The missing concepts were what was needed to put together the students’ individual learning plans. In the end, she said, her marking was disallowed by the manager who micromanaged her marking. Workplace mathematics, with its implication for economic savings, was the end goal:

He told me it wouldn’t matter how I marked them; they were all going into MEL 3E. I suspect the guidance counselor worked with my marking scheme anyway because all of the students I had noted as “redo” were allowed to redo the test after the month of half-days of upgrading. The manager, however, made good on his word. All of the students that were not at college or university level on entrance were placed into workplace-level mathematics. (Joan, S5)

It was suggested that economics was the reason why most of the students were being placed into workplace-level mathematics (Joan, 5; Laura, 6):

AEO gets a steady stream of funding for MEL 3E because the students are able to do the lessons quickly. AEO gets paid for every lesson the students hand in for the course. It is more expensive to provide the supports needed to put students through an applied Grade



11 mathematics course, like MBF 3C, or a Grade 12 mathematics course, like MAP 4C, because they need to be upgraded using two months of upgrading as an absolute minimum, in my opinion. Despite the students needing well over a month of full days to upgrade in mathematics, there was no funding available from the Ministry of Education to AEO to pay the cost of the teacher directly. For some, two months will not be enough. Then, some students will need tutors to support them if they are to be successful in the applied-level math courses, and tutors cost money. Tutors will not be needed for MEL 3E because it is so easy. In applied and academic college and university level courses, the students will not go through the lessons as quickly, so AEO will not be paid as much as if the students are put into an easy course like MEL 3E. It is cheaper just to put them through MEL 3E then straight into the math they need, if they need one. It hurts me to talk about this because when the students pass MAP 4C they will be college-ready on paper, but in reality they will be weak, having only visited the material one time. You need to visit the concepts much more than one time. (Joan, S5)

Staff expressed concern that cultural dissonance due to maximizing of economic accountability was creating a social injustice within the program:

They want everyone to get college-level English but they really seem to push the workplace math. I think it was for efficiency, so that everyone was at the same level. It is very easy. The workplace math is equivalent to an elementary level math. It was faster. The students got through the math very quickly. (Laura, S6)

Ontario Ministry of Education (2005a) argues that because of the enticements built into the adult education funding model, there may be a problem with quality of adult education programming: “The quality of adult education programs is also an area of concern. Quality is a

factor in determining the outcomes of adult education” (p. 53). The document does not define what is meant by “quality of adult education programs,” but does reference “incentives for innovation and local partnerships,” “accountability and clear roles and relationships among funding ministries and delivery agencies,” “accountability mechanisms to enable flexibility and innovation to meet local needs,” “accountability measures for achievement of economic, social, and personal development goals,” and “accountability mechanisms for monitoring and continuous improvement” (p. 47).

It appears that the implications for these accountability mechanisms and measurements do little to counter the urgency of financial necessity over academic opportunity. This scenario was embedded across the student body through academic expectations of AEO.

**Workplace-level math *à la carte*.** Workplace-level math course content was previously described as covering essential math-related life skills; it is the math required to survive in society. The MEL 3E course is of particular interest to this study because with AEO’s increasing practice of MEL 3E delivery, students would meet their only required Grade 11 mathematics course needed to graduate with their OSSD. One staff member reflected on the practice of delivering workplace-mathematics inside of FNSO:

Students would tell me at the beginning that they didn’t like their high school because the teachers just pushed them through even though they weren’t learning everything. I think it is the same at AEO in FNSO. Everyone gets workplace math because everyone can do it and if they want to get their Grade 12 math then they can go to Adult Ed. later to get the prerequisites they need if they don’t have time to finish. I think it was all about outcome. (Laura, S6)

AEO's practice of putting students in workplace-level mathematics classes was also raised as a concern by other staff members (Joan, S5; Laura, S6):

Almost all of the students were put into workplace-level after the one month. There was nothing in the MEL 3E workplace-level math to build on algebra, trig, geometry, integers, fractions, nothing. So after they get MEL 3E and after they have the courses needed to graduate, they are offered a higher-level math and if they choose, they are dropped into Grade 12 MAP 4C college-applied math. FNSO want them to be post-secondary ready, but they also need them to have their OSSD so they are qualified to go into FNSO trade programs provided through other FNSO partnerships that are ongoing. FNSO need enough students to fill the seats for these trade programs, otherwise they will lose their MTCU funding. So they need the graduates. The upgrading is quick, the students are given one month of half-days to upgrade from elementary school to the end of Grade 11. It was supposed to be six weeks but there is testing and workshops in there so it wasn't. It should be two to three months for most of the students. (Joan, S5)

Charges were made that FNSO administrators were vulnerable to AEO's evolving practice of withholding information about the long-term implications of workplace mathematics:

They [AEO] seemed to be trying to fit a business model to a schedule to modify what they normally would have done. I don't think FNSO understood what the course code MEL 3E stood for, or its implications to the long-term goals of students. (Laura, S6)

Laura (S6) expressed the possibility that the implications of students taking workplace-level mathematics was not clear to FNSO administrators (whose own academic credentialing is unknown to this research). Agbo (2001) argues that many First Nations community members in charge of education have not graduated from high school. Laura (S6) stated: "I kind of give

FNSO the benefit of the doubt that they did not understand the implications of what workplace-level math can lead to. In a way it was a good idea to get the students to achieve something [their high school diploma] but I don't think [anyone] was being honest about what they were doing.” Laura (S6)'s “benefit of the doubt” may well be justified alongside Agbo's (2001) contention that the average grade level of education coordinators in many communities is Grade 8 and as a result, “everybody and nobody seem to be in charge of schooling for children in some band-operated schools” (p. 297).

FNSO may or may not have understood that their students were receiving workplace-level mathematics through their understanding of what the course code stood for. AEO provided FNSO with lists of course codes that their students were enrolled in. If secondary school credentialing is essential for the FNSO trade programs, and FNSO will lose their funding if insufficient students are available to fill the spots in the trade programs as described by Joan (S5) above, then FNSO may have had financial incentive to graduate students from the AEO program in a timely fashion. “One month of upgrading was [considered] the best scenario [and] the third group did not receive any upgrading at all” (Joan, S5).

Cohort 2 received mathematics upgrading, and Cohort 3, according to Joan (S5)'s description, received none. Concerns arose that using GLS for upgrading was not a good match: “If you meet all of the Ministry guidelines for the course, the students' upgrading needs won't be met. If you meet the students' upgrading needs, the guidelines for the course can't be met” (Laura, S6). That upgrading time allotment was reduced so that it could be funded inside of the GLS course may or may not have been understood by FNSO administration.

It is unknown if all FNSO administrators had the educational background to understand the implications. One informant noted: “I told them [students] when I talked with them. I told them what choosing workplace-level would mean for their lives” (Rockman, S9). He added:

I think “done” [for the second AEO manager] means get your high school diploma. College was kind of icing on the cake. There was no thought of university level. Of course for most of these guys, university level right off the bat would have meant that the students would be unsuccessful... I think the students have to have successes further down the road. The high school diploma was huge for them, huge. But I am not so sure that for a lot them, it would really give them a whole lot. (Rockman, S9)

The economic streamlining generated good graduation numbers for the Ministry. For some informants though, it seemed that the practices from Cohort 2 on were more about credentialing than they were about education. Policies that entrench social injustice were clearly at play as many students had never had the opportunity to acquire an education previously. The practices that brought the students to needing upgrading were being repeated through mandatory workplace mathematics courses:

I feel this was so very wrong because white society is at fault for the students being where they were at the beginning of the program. The education of the students in the organization should be about making up for the wrong decisions the white organizations had made for the students throughout history. The practices of white organizations should not be to try to make even more money off of the communities by streamlining their programs to maximize economic accountability. I believe that is exactly what is happening. I believe that AEO practices are, under the second management style, all about the almighty dollar for AEO, or at least it appeared that way to me. Who else

would initiate a practice of putting all of the students through a non-skills building workplace math program after a mere month of upgrading? Imagine! One month of half-days at best to bring a student from Grade 4-6 to the end of Grade 10. (Marjorie, S2)

Direct teaching seemed an inconspicuous way to build AEO economic accountability through regulating student attendance. This is discussed next.

**The role of direct teaching.** Practices within the AEO program were shifting to a direct, teacher-led teaching style for MEL 3E from a more individualized program that relied on workbook materials. The reasoning being given for the switch was that students had difficulty reading the workbook materials, and that direct instruction is more efficient because students have to attend to stay in the program. If their reading level is at a low elementary level, they may have difficulty with reading the materials, although in FNSO, there were always two teachers to help students on an individual basis.

Implications began to surface that the administrative shift under the second management style to direct, teacher-led learning was purely about economics and was promoting extrinsic, rather than intrinsic, learning:

Equalize their learning by dumbing down learning in some areas for some students while filling in gaps for others. Make sure the course is easy so that lots of lessons are handed in. If students miss too much direct instruction they will drop out because they will fall behind and will not have workbooks to learn from on their own. So direct instruction gets rid of students who are not making money for the program. (Marjorie, S2)

She further discussed the implications of this teaching model:

I love direct teaching. There is nothing I enjoy more than standing up in front of a class and leading them through the material. However, direct teaching destroys individualized

models that allow students to work from where they are, which I would argue is the need for FNSO students. I disagree that direct teaching is more efficient in this environment. It is only more efficient if students are being taught what they already know. If a teacher is able to handle individualized programs inside the classroom to ensure that students get what they need rather than what the administration wants, what is the problem? If reading is an issue, as a teacher you deal with it. It really isn't that big of a deal but the payoff can be huge for individualized learning. (Marjorie, S2)

Using a direct teaching method in a course that is above the equivalency level of students in a class (for example, in a college-level mathematics course) could be seen as inefficient because students would need to be taught what they are missing before they would be able to understand the lessons. If taught as a class, some students may battle issues of boredom while others would continue to struggle with varying levels of missed concepts. It is important to remember here that concepts in mathematics build on each other, unlike in many other subjects. Missing out on one concept in elementary school can have devastating results when attempting to build skills.

Direct teaching was seen as advantageous because it forced students that missed too much time to drop out of the program. "Get direct instruction so if they miss three days, they will quit because they will miss too much" (David S4). In an urban setting, students who quit when they miss "too much" can still revisit the course at their convenience. In the FNSO population, however, dropping out means failing the program and being sent back to their communities. These students do not have any local alternatives for continuing their education when their lives are back on track. They may see themselves in a negative light, or their families and communities may see them in a negative light, having been sent home.

Perspective was offered for students for whom direct teaching may not work:

Sometimes they [students] need to go home for a while to get their lives on track and then come back. It is tough to tell when you pull the plug on someone. People end up being statistics. This is an at-risk population. (Rockman, S9)

The practice of using direct teaching for MEL 3E for the majority of students in Cohorts 2 and 3 meant students needed to attend, on time, and on a regular basis, in order to get the credit. As a deficit model to control attendance and lateness, direct teaching of MEL 3E could be considered efficient. It could be considered inefficient, however, when considering that the students are over the age of 22 and have been functioning for several years as adults: teaching them how to use mathematics to function in their lives is not necessarily an efficient practice. The efficiency aspect of the practice may be seen as all economic when AEO is being paid for every lesson that the students hands in while in the course.

The concerns that have surfaced out of the interview data in this section might be linked to an inquiry of whether, under direct instruction, students were being subjected to the same system that failed them in their early academic experiences. With David (S4)'s argument that direct teaching promotes students who are not ready to drop out, Rockman (S9)'s implied concern about suicides when students are sent home from the program, and Marjorie (S2)'s concern that direct teaching speaks to the overall vision of AEO, concerns about quality of programming meet concerns about lives at risk under what appears to be a deficit-led mode of instructional practice.

In the next section, the building tensions erupt into what might be seen as a cultural clash between a fragile and emerging-from-oppression organization (FNSO) and a stronger, well-entrenched colonial organization (AEO).



### **Use of the AEO Union to Control FNSO Staff**

It was not until FNSO attempted to deal with the issues arising out of the changing AEO practices that the Euro-western AEO organization drew on their union to help settle matters in their favour. When the AEO guidance counselor took the second manager and FNSO's education counselor to the union when the FNSO counselor questioned the increasing use of MEL 3E under the second AEO management style, friction was at its height. FNSO, having no union to respond within, was forced to deal with AEO's disgruntled employee at their own administration level. Joan (S5) believed that this friction was too much for FNSO administrators who also had their own staff to oversee:

While AEO was telling us teachers to keep information from FNSO, AEO were accusing FNSO of not allowing them to do their job. I wonder sometimes if AEO just wore FNSO down with that logic, not knowing that we were being told to keep information from them. I think they [FNSO] wanted to show consistency with the funders in that they could work with their partners. I really felt uncomfortable with it because FNSO were so open with AEO. They invited them to their meetings, they invited them in when they hired some of their employees to help make the decision for who to hire... It really made me feel uncomfortable. I tried to tell the project manager some of what they were doing and indeed she did act on some of the points I brought to her attention, but I think in the end I was the "messenger" so you know how that works. Put that all down as something that didn't work for me. (Joan, S5)

FNSO and AEO staff informed FNSO administrators of issues with programming that they felt were likely to negatively impact the quality of education that the students were receiving. This, as noted by the AEO's guidance counselor's use of the union, was difficult for

the front line staff who interacted directly with the students. Nobody wanted friction, but some front line staff were willing to contend with it to maintain the quality of programming they had witnessed under the first AEO manager. The organization was undergoing massive changes in practices under the second AEO manager, while still adhering to the set AEO policies. The policies had not changed, yet their interpretations had altered considerably from that of the first cohort under the first AEO manager. Front line staff were also concerned that FNSO administration did not understand the potential impact of the changes in AEO practices on the overall vision of the FNSO program. One informant explained how whenever the information did reach FNSO administration, the second AEO manager would act on it but that he would wait until that point before acting. Filing a union grievance was not the only means for AEO to exhibit control over the more vulnerable FNSO organization:

When [the project coordinator] told [the second AEO manager] to jump, he said “how high?” but the problem had to get there first. He didn’t listen all the way along. AEO would come in at the last second when they had to. FNSO is a very big thing [economic generator] for AEO. (Matilda, S10)

After the union grievance, changes that began with Cohort 2 were solidified by the time Cohort 3 began:

In Cohort 3 there was no upgrading whatsoever because AEO is not funded for upgrading elementary credentialing directly. They are only funded for secondary upgrading. Cohort 3 students went straight into MEL 3E workplace math. As a compromise [beyond Cohort 3] between the higher-quality programming that teachers wanted and what the AEO administration claimed it was being funded for, the GLS course was used for upgrading. The Ministry of Education pays for the GLS course. So as teachers, we had to try to

squeeze often five or more years of English and mathematics upgrading into the six weeks allotted to the funding of a GLS course. There is testing in there too, which takes away about two weeks. We ended up with about one month of half-days for each subject. It is nowhere near enough time. Then most of the students go straight into MEL 3E workplace math anyway, regardless of whether they want to or not. That will be their Grade 11 mathematics credit for their OSSD. From my professional opinion after 29 years of teaching mathematics, MEL 3E is about a Grade 6 to 7 equivalency. (Joan, S5)

The following scenario is meant to illustrate the difference between what might have been, under the first management style, to what was, under the second.

Roger (who was introduced in Chapter One and who had not attended a mathematics class prior to the FNSO program) completed GLS (upgrading), MEL 3E (workplace-level Grade 11 mathematics) and ENG 3C (applied college-level Grade 11 English) in the FNSO program and graduated after two six-week courses and the associated testing. The first six weeks were made up of English and mathematics upgrading and testing, and the second six weeks included the delivery of MEL 3E workplace-level mathematics and ENG 3C college-level Grade 11 English. FNSO's mandate to encourage college readiness did apply in Roger's case, but Roger claimed that was all the time he had to devote to the program. Roger complained that he already knew the MEL 3E material because he had been working with it all of his life.

AEO policies allowed Roger to graduate with minimum requirements but the practice differed under the management of the first and second management styles, and changed the education he was likely to receive given the amount of time he was able to devote to the program. Under the first manager, and using mathematics as an example, Roger would have been provided with two months of mathematics upgrading to address missing elementary concepts. He

would have worked through the PLAR mathematics workbook and would have written a second mathematics evaluation when the PLAR workbook was completed. At that point, a consultation between Roger, the teachers, and the AEO guidance counselor would have taken place to determine which core mathematics course would have been his next step. This practice would have meant that Roger would have been required to stay in the program for at least one more month before he was permitted to graduate, because he would need his core mathematics for this to occur. It is likely he would have remained in the program since his reason for attending in the first place was to obtain his OSSD. When he was able to obtain his OSSD quickly under the second management style, this resulted in reduced incentive to add additional courses that would make him college ready. Roger's time inside of the FNSO environment was significantly affected by the practices of the second AEO manager for these reasons. It should be noted that Roger represents an extreme case for the program because the majority of the informants in the study graduated with a minimum of Grade 11 English.

Concerns that quality of programming was reduced with the practice of mandatory delivery and direct teaching of workplace mathematics to the majority of the students was expressed by Joan (S5), Laura (S6), Matilda (S10), and Marjorie (S2). When students under the direct teaching model missed too much work and dropped out, this had potential implications for community suicides (Rockman, S9), as students had no local alternatives for continuing their education and were forced to face their families and communities after being sent home. This argument expresses cultural incongruences when the practices of an entrenched system are considered "good enough" for that of another culture. Roger's scenario delineates what might have been under the same AEO policies, but different practices.

## Analysis

The data in this chapter has addressed empowerment in different areas. Both student empowerment and FNSO staff empowerment appear to have been impacted by AEO practices. Two emerging themes include mandatory workplace mathematics under a direct instruction model, and potential for disempowerment in the program.

**Mandatory workplace mathematics.** Implementation of mandatory workplace delivery under a direct instruction model was examined in this chapter. Concern that workplace mathematics was not challenging the students, and was potentially limiting their options, was discussed. Links between direct instruction delivery and community suicides were made explicit through staff interviews. That students in this population experience legitimate attendance issues is understood by the FNSO organization and evidenced by the supports they put into place to circumvent predicted reasons why students may not be able to attend. For example, FNSO supported learners by flying them back to their communities for funerals. Arguably, leaving the program to attend funerals would leave students in a vulnerable position under direct instruction when they would miss large amounts of classroom material. The extra stress to “catch up,” added to the life of a person grieving the loss of a loved one, could be an area addressed in future research.

Delivery of workplace mathematics *en masse* to students who have been working with “everyday mathematics” in their lives for many years might be linked back to the unnamed respondent in Chapter One who dropped out of the Bachelor of Education program because of limited options due to his low mathematics credentials. His story linked low equivalencies to dropping out of a Bachelor of Education program; this chapter’s interview data indicates that

negative outcomes for low equivalencies still exist (and low equivalencies can be linked to community suicides, as discussed by the Native Studies coordinator introduced in Chapter One).

When the guidance counselor of AEO filed a complaint with the union because an FNSO staff member was expressing concerns about workplace-level mathematics, all FNSO staff members were disempowered due to an inability to respond. FNSO employees were not unionized, thus disadvantaging them further in expressing concerns about quality of programming. When Rockman (S9) raised concerns about students being placed in workplace-level mathematics, the AEO guidance counselor's reaction gave the second AEO manager cause to ask FNSO administrators to stop the FNSO employee from interfering. This uneven power structure rendered the less-established FNSO susceptible to practices that exercised control over the organization meant to empower highly marginalized student populations. Potential for disempowerment became a reality, and will be discussed in terms of AEO and FNSO, in the following section.

**Potential for disempowerment.** The main themes that support the contention that AEO is disempowering students are discussed in this section. Themes also surfaced that indicate possible disempowerment by FNSO decisions. Themes included use of the deficit model, credentialing, lack of input by staff into AEO programming, and lack of upfront goal setting.

*AEO.* Four central themes support the argument that AEO was disempowering for students inside of the program. First, staff overwhelmingly reported that they did not have input into AEO program development under the second AEO management style. Teachers, it seemed, were only willing to fight to a point when their jobs were at risk. When the second manager told Joan (S5) to set up the upgrading course, she described developing the course on her own time

with FNSO resources. When the course was not used, disempowerment for Joan (S5) and FNSO likely occurred and filtered down to the students, who did not receive any upgrading.

Second, given Joan (S5)'s claim that the students in the cohort she was teaching were from a community with one of the highest suicide rates in the world (McPherson & Rabb, 2011) — the same community as the FNSO program manager's son who had committed suicide while in the program — it does seem reasonable that Joan (S5) would exhibit a high level of concern. The second manager's stand, that "teachers are there to teach," does not seem reasonable under such circumstances. Joan (S5) claimed she was told that teachers were there to teach by another administrator within the school board, and another informant claimed the second manager at AEO told her/him that teachers are "a dime a dozen." This messaging suggests systemic racism through a lack of attention to the extra needs of students who are high risk. Buchanan and Harris (2014) found in their qualitative study that teachers affected by a student suicide attempt "experienced shock, uncertainty, anxiety, and fear in terms of how to handle such situations. Informants [in the study] also discussed various issues around access to student information and some noted limited knowledge of appropriate courses of action" (p. 1). They recommended proactive and inclusive policy/program development, as well as teacher preparation, in the area of preventing student suicide attempts. It is apparent through the findings in this study that FNSO (and the first manager) understood these needs and that AEO (under the second management style) did not.

The third and fourth themes of no staff input into AEO, and the use of the deficit model of education, emerged in this section as well. These themes were also linked to disempowerment for students. Potential for disempowerment within FNSO is discussed in the next section.

*FNSO*. Potential for disempowerment in this chapter surfaced with one main theme within the FNSO environment: credentialing undermining education. Additionally, long-term goals were discussed for their link to this theme. David (S4)'s argument that students had not identified their long-term goals when they began the program was backed by quantitative data that showed that 60% percent of students were aspiring only to their OSSD when they entered the program. This lack of upfront goal-setting has implications for disempowerment when students were not ready to pick the courses they needed upon entry to the program. The timing is important because it created a need for students to be given an interval to consider their future goals. This, in turn, gave AEO the acquiescence to graduate Cohorts 2 and 3 with minimum workplace-level programming before the students needed to select their long-term goals and subsequent course work. Consequently, arguments for putting students through mandatory workplace-level courses were strengthened when students arrived into the program without long-term goals. One informant noted that the program seemed to work better for students who had clear goals because FNSO committed programming dollars to help those students meet their objectives (Joan, S5).

Chapter Five examined the goals and visions of both AEO and FNSO organizations amidst shifting mandates under the second AEO management style. FNSO policies were identified as evolving for the pilot project, but fixed with the transition into project status and the development of FNSO's 2013 policy manual. Policies and practices that addressed attendance and intake were explored in light of their impact on AEO and on the development of the program. David (S4)'s concerns that the equivalencies of the students should be considered at intake were examined in relation to AEO's ability to meet the needs of FNSO's mandate for post-secondary readiness.



As the challenges within the partnership were explored, AEO practices gave rise to concerns over visions that were not communicated effectively. Crowther et al. (2001) claim that a vision that is not clearly stated will fail to promote teacher innovation. Concerns were discussed in this chapter that when Ministry guidelines of students being informed as to why they were filling out SEA applications were not adhered to, student empowerment was affected negatively. Worries that economics were trumping quality of education in the practices of AEO, and that with the subsequent changes in AEO practices, visions of the two organizations were diverging, were made explicit. These shifts were evidenced by the increased reliance on, and AEO's practice of, using direct teaching to replace individualized learning and using workplace-level mathematics for the purposes of funding and upgrading inside of funded courses that, as Laura (S6) and Joan (S5) noted, are far too short to provide the upgrading needed within the environment.

Chapter Six explores the intersections of the two partner organizations for their potential to empower/disempower participants. The issues that arise in the intersections are examined in light of staff interview data.

## Chapter Six: Cross-Cultural Organizational Impacts

To answer the primary research question: *What are the effects of organizational policies, practices, and funding models upon the empowerment of adult First Nations learners?*, the areas of the program where both organizations provided support are examined simultaneously. I use the term “cross-cultural influences” to discuss the cross-sectional areas (see Figure 11). This discussion addresses ranges of equivalencies of the student body upon entrance, AEO input and support, FNSO input and support, and additional student supports. The needs and aspirations of learners are explored, along with the potential for teacher empowerment/disempowerment within the organization.

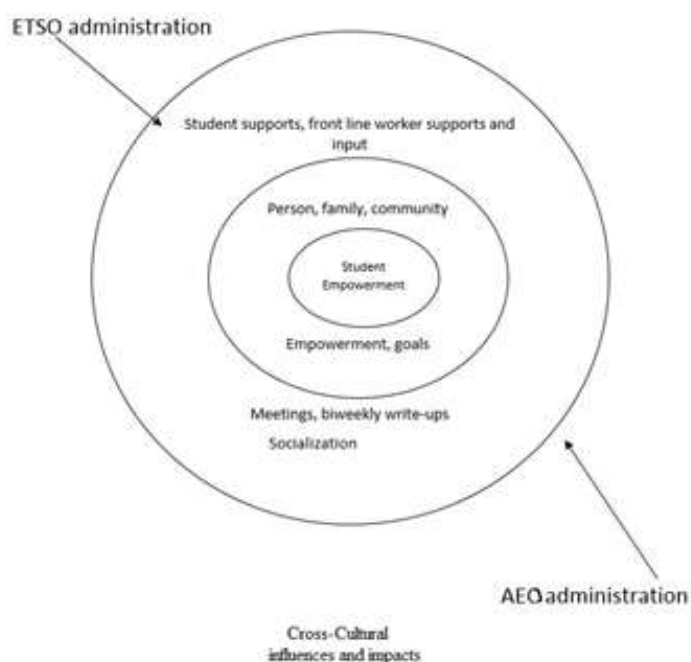


Figure 11. Cross-cultural influences and impacts.

The interview data included in this chapter was chosen based on its ability to add clarity and perspective to the primary research question. I provide an overview of information with which the reader is better able to understand the broader implications of the findings.

## **Educational Aspirations**

To gauge the informants' perceptions of where they saw themselves at the end of the program, students were asked in their interviews what they wanted from the program at the beginning, as compared to the end. When asked what their long-term goals were when they entered the program, several respondents spoke of not looking beyond getting their OSSD (Darkcloud, St, C3; John, St, C2; Denise, St, C2; Jake, C2; Stella, St, C3). Stella (St, C3) expressed disbelief that she got into the program, while John (St, C2) and Jake (St, C2) expressed interest in securing employment. Denise (St, C2) said, "I wanted to get my OSSD because I overthink things and I didn't want to focus on too much. I did think about college but I didn't give myself permission to think about it too much."

Five informants looked to post-secondary education from the onset (Matthew, St, C1; Sam, St, C2; Crane, St, C2; James, St, C1; Amelia, St, C1). "I want to have a house and a car. I want to go to college. Forestry, then I want to go to university. Then I want to work for a while then go back for my masters" (Amelia, St, C1).

Educational aspirations at the beginning of the program were compared with aspirations post-program. The survey data shown in Figure 12 agrees with David (S4)'s view that the majority of informants were focusing on obtaining their credentialing, rather than post-secondary studies, at the beginning of the program:

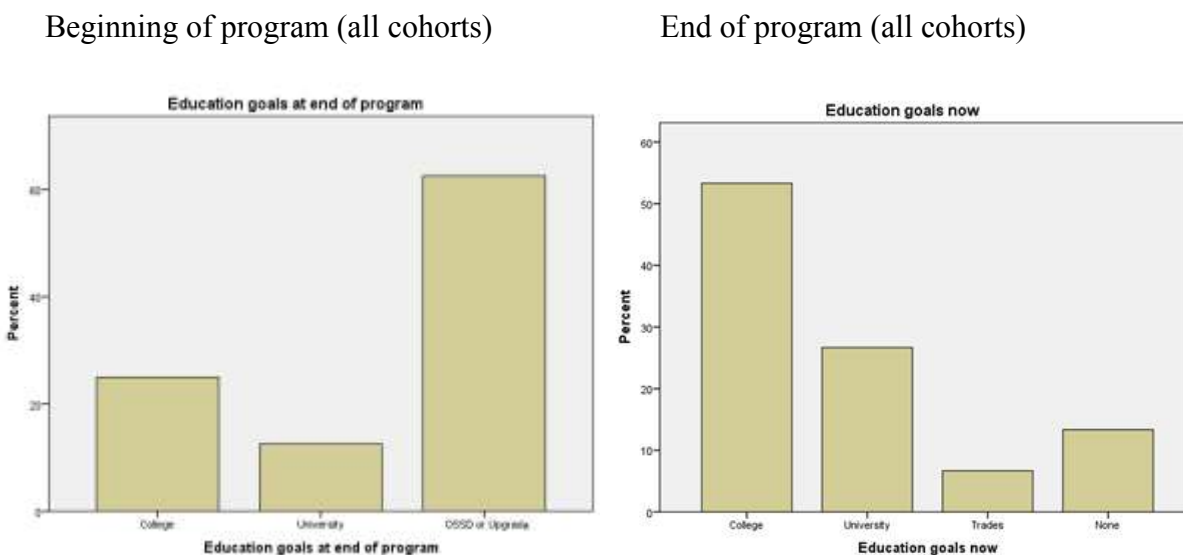


Figure 12. Educational aspirations at beginning and end of program.

David (S4)'s observation that students did not see beyond the OSSD at the beginning of the program appears to be substantiated by the data. However, after graduation, student aspirations changed, as evidenced in the second graph in Figure 12 (above). Informants who wanted to attend college increased by 30%, and those who wanted to attend university rose by 10%. The students began to think about post-secondary programs as viable options for their futures, according to their reported post-program educational aspirations. Informants made the following comments when asked about changing goals:

“My goal was to become a pilot at the beginning of the program. But I changed my mind of what I wanted to do with my life. My goal [now] is to get into university rather than going to college. To work with Aboriginal organizations” (Darkcloud, St, C3).

Another informant noted:

When I started the program my goal was just to get my Grade 12 diploma. Then when I actually got to the end of the program, taking a college course was now an option for me.

I then got really interested in becoming a Native police officer and I plan to go back to school to do it. (Jim St, C1)

**Long-term goals.** The informants were asked about their long-term goals. Many saw themselves as a match to a specific employment sector or education program, while others said their long-term goals did not change in the program. One student talked about setting up his own business: “I want to take care of my son. Get a red seal then set up my own business. Was offered to be trained in small engine repair while in the program, but wanted to stay loyal to the program so did not take it” (Jamie, St, C1). Other informants spoke of their worlds broadening with their newfound potential for engaging with education sectors beyond the FNSO program:

I don't know what I want but I know it is out there. I am deciding what I can and can't do, now that I am leaving. I thought I knew but they changed it so I am still looking. I want to do university and college but I am not sure which to do first. I want to find out more about the way my culture views the body and mind. I want to find out about myself. I would like to meet people. I have only been here a year. If you add up all the times I have been here maybe 15 or 16 months. (Sam, St, C2)

Some informants had dreams to further their education (Mike, St, C1; Matthew, St, C1), while others set goals high in corporations (Crane, St, C3). One informant expressed surprise at being accepted into the program, and now has aspirations of being an education assistant or to “go into social work” (Stella, St, C3). Another spoke of wanting to see his daughter escape the upbringing that he experienced:

I want to apply to a college art program. I want to go to the Aboriginal access program. I want to be a father. To be secure. I don't want my daughter to grow up surrounded by abuse and alcoholism like I did. I am the first one to graduate. (Tyrone, St, C1)

Struggles beyond graduation in post-secondary programs were expressed by one informant who opted to attend a college that was a long distance away from her community:

I was thinking about college when I went to FNSO. I tried college but I was too far away from home and I was homesick. I lost my sister-in-law. I had to go back. She told me I was too far away. She wanted me back. I intend to go back to college for the culinary program. My dream is to open my own restaurant back home. (Nishnabe Kway, St, C1)

Despite perceptions by staff that AEO was not set up to service the student population at FNSO beyond getting their OSSDs, informants were indicating that they were beginning to see a future for themselves beyond their OSSDs. The potential for post-program aspirations to be realized was highly dependent on students' understanding of available options and the advice and guidance from FNSO and AEO staff. Some staff were involved and supported student course selections, such as Joan (S5): "In Cohort 1 I was very involved. Same for the other teacher. She and I sat down and decided together with the student and with the guidance counselor. It worked really well. The students got both what they needed and what they wanted."

The next sub-section investigates FNSO input and support for program development.

### **FNSO Input and Support**

While the everyday teaching and tutoring was going on under the auspices of AEO, the FNSO interests were being administered through a FNSO education coordinator. This person was on-site at all times. The level of involvement in the decisions that impacted learning were investigated for staff members of both organizations. Invitations were sent via email to all AEO administrative staff for monthly FNSO meetings, where input was requested from teachers and CSOs about student performance and situatedness both in, and outside of, the opportunity structure. Monthly meetings also took place in the AEO school for AEO staff only. Staff were

asked how involved they felt they were in the decisions that impacted the FNSO learning environment of the students overall.

One informant noted that there was support for tutors from FNSO: “FNSO did a lot to support the tutors because they understood that the tutors work with the most frightened, most emotionally destabilized, the students in need of the most supports” (Marjorie, S2). Another referenced communication within the FNSO organization: “Suggestions I have made have been acted on, and if not acted on, then at least heard. I have always not only felt that I have a voice, but also that my voice is heard” (Collins Rice, S3).

One informant worked back and forth for both organizations, depending on who was funding the tutors for the particular cohort and the needs of the organizations (Joan, S5). Joan (S5) described how the FNSO project coordinator had a circle with the students she was tutoring that amounted to conferencing with them in an attempt to hear their concerns when her contract was up with FNSO. This, she noted, would never have happened inside of the mainstream education system:

They asked us to write about each student biweekly, which was fabulous. They needed it for the funders. I wanted to write more. I tried to crawl inside my tutor box and concentrate on the individual student academic needs, but how do you unsee what you see, or unknow what you know? (Joan, S5)

Most of the staff member informants agreed that FNSO was attempting to learn from arising issues, to move the program forward in their vision of learner empowerment.

A lot was expected of FNSO. Bennett et al.’s (2004) study of organizational maturity was observed by Collins Rice (S3) and Marjorie (S2) in this section. At times in the interviews, the

staff informants would begin to discuss student supports when asked how well they themselves were supported. Student supports seemed to be synonymous to support for staff participants.

### **Additional Student Supports**

Respondents spoke of the comprehensive level of support afforded to students by FNSO (Collins Rice, S3; Joan, S5). They felt that FNSO gave students the time they needed to adjust, to come to the other side of their drug addictions or their ongoing emotional issues. Several talked about the program as being dynamic and spoke of supported students creating inherent support for teachers and tutors (Collins Rice, S3; Joan, S5; Rockman, S9). In the next sub-section, student challenges are discussed to provide an overview of the reasons why many of the supports were offered within the FNSO environment. It should be noted that the students were not asked to provide these reasons. They chose to do so on their own, some citing the importance of people needing to understand the issues better. I include these discussions out of respect for the voices of the participants.

Students were asked in their interviews how many people in their family had graduated from high school. This question was asked to explore the breadth of potential empowering aspects of the program in the lives of informants and their families, but instead it brought learner challenges to the forefront.

**Challenges.** In discussing additional supports, it is important to understand the specific challenges experienced by informants while in the program. When I asked the question, “how many people in your family have graduated from high school?” during the interviews, I had no way of understanding what kind of data I would be obtaining. If ever there was evidence that the social justice theoretical framework needed to be embedded in some sort of protective theoretical framework, this question provided it. Despite my protective measures, I did not know I was



opening the conversation for the informants to reveal deaths within their families. I include this data because respondents told me about it knowing I was writing a dissertation, and because it speaks to at least one fundamental reason why FNSO supports are necessary in this program and why this student body is more likely to run into trouble than members of the mainstream adult learner population.

I asked the question in tandem with another question, “Have you made contacts with people from other communities that you will keep into the future?” because both questions seemed to deal with the breadth of empowerment across the lives of informants. It should be noted that as with all of the interview data, some informants did not answer the questions they were asked. When they finished answering, I asked them if it was important that their answer was included in the dissertation, and included it as applicable.

To determine a sense of the broad impacts of empowerment for the informants, I asked about siblings who had graduated from high school. Some informants spoke of several siblings, none or few of whom had graduated (Kate, St, C3; Marie, St, C3). One informant spoke of her sister:

She went to college for two years, to become an accountant. She was on the Dean’s list but when the plane crashed [that killed her father], she quit and hasn’t gone back. Bad weather. MNR thinks it was pilot error. This happened in 2003, she is slowly coming back up. (Marie, St, C3)

Pride was expressed in siblings who had graduated:

Four of us have graduated. Three have not graduated. One has gone to college. My family is proud of me. When I first came in I didn’t think I was going to make it. Towards the

end, I forced myself and I passed. I am kind of happy with myself now. I could have done better though. (Matthew, St, C1)

One informant spoke of tragedies in life that impacted her on a daily basis:

I lost two brothers to suicide in one day. Three years later I lost my sister to suicide. Maybe I know 75 people who have committed suicide. It needs to be out there about suicide. It is hard emotionally. I can't concentrate. I can't function. People maybe think I would be used to it. But it doesn't work that way. It is like the first one every time. People committing suicide are getting younger and younger. The youngest is 11 in our community. There is nothing for them to do. There needs to be stuff out there for the youth, youth programs. It's an epidemic. There is unfairness, everywhere, even [the tribal council] there is family members first. You would think people would learn by now with all of the suicides but they don't. I am from the Chief's side but I see the whole community as my family. I want the whole community to be like as one, like the old days but nowadays you don't see that. FNSO took my mind off of the suicides. It made me want to work toward my goals and to be an example for the little ones. I want to become an example. I want people to know they can do it at any age. My baby will be graduating before me. Mainly I am doing this for my family. (Sheila, St, C2)

Sheila's story speaks to the heart of this research and the reasons why the supports are fundamental inside of organizations like FNSO. Her passion to help improve the lives of the members of her community is testament to the importance of understanding the connection between student voice and student empowerment.

Losing siblings affected the respondents deeply (Crane, St, C2; Gordon, St, C1). That many of the informants were the first in their family to graduate from high school was not

unexpected. That so many of their siblings had not survived to finish that journey is testimony to the emotional pain that many of the informants have endured to make it into, and then graduate from, the FNSO program.

The informants were questioned in the survey about what personal challenges (if any) they experienced while in the program. This question was designed by the FNSO project coordinator to obtain a sense of the extent to which the program's supports met the needs of the students through an understanding of their challenges. This data is shown in Figure 13.

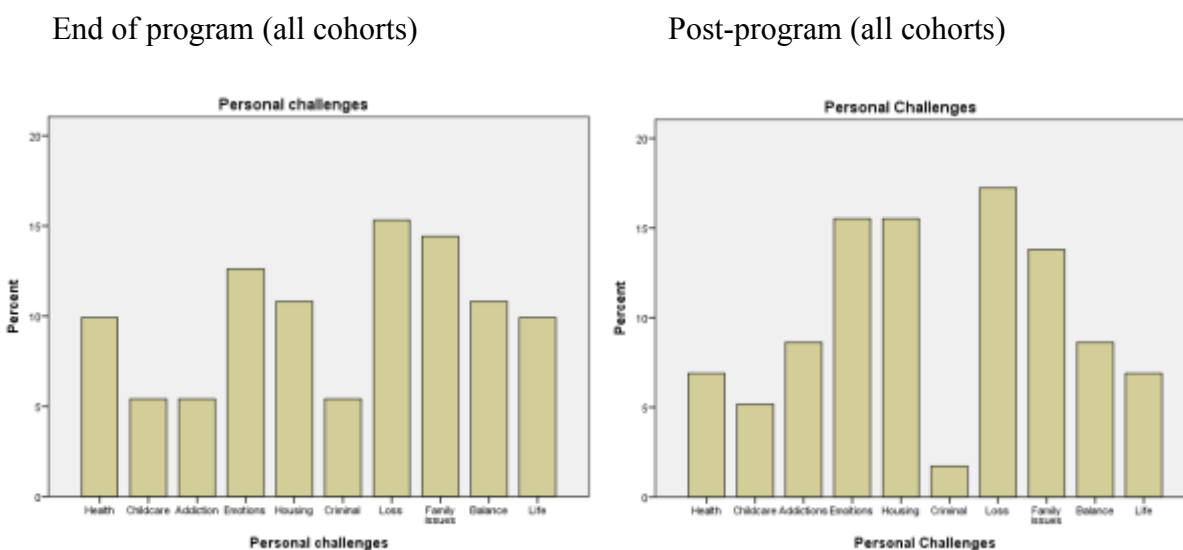


Figure 13. Personal challenges at end of program and post-program.

Loss, emotional issues, and family constitute 42% of the participants' challenges within the program. Housing, health, and balance make up an additional 30%. It is interesting to note that criminality dropped from 5% to 2% from the end of program to the post-program point, suggesting that previous battles with criminal issues were reduced when the Cohort 1 informants began to engage with their developmental outcomes. The greatest checked category of the respondents in both surveys was loss. Emotional issues, housing, and family issues were next. Housing saw the greatest increase from the end of the program to post-program.

As grief was an ongoing struggle for many participants, it was important to understand who the informants chose to turn to when they felt they needed help. The following multiple answer question was asked: “When I am in trouble, or I need to talk, I approach: \_\_\_\_\_.” The results in Figure 14 indicate how many times each category was checked.

End of program (all cohorts)

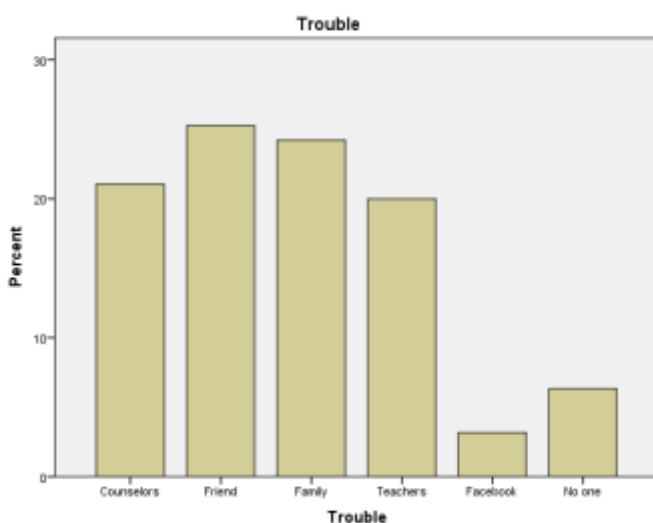


Figure 14. Who the informants talk to when in trouble.

The data indicates that next to family and friends, counselors and teachers constitute a significant network within the FNSO environment that the informants rely on when experiencing trouble in their lives. This data is interesting alongside Joan (S5)’s contention that the second manager had informed her on more than one occasion that “teachers are there to teach,” and alongside her concern that most of the teachers inside of the FNSO environment are not credentialed to be doing anything else but teaching. Joan (S5) later said that the claim that teachers are only there to teach was reiterated by an administrative local board employee.

Inasmuch as students talked to teachers to initiate bonding, they also created contacts with other students in the environment.

**Contacts.** In order to gain a more complete understanding of the importance of social contacts in the lives of participants, informants were asked if they had made contacts throughout their time in the program. Many informants expressed gratitude for the connections they had made in the program (Lily, St, C1; Cruz, St, C3; John, St, C2; Barbara, St, C3; Denise, St, C2). Denise (St, C2) noted:

I met friends that I keep in touch with. Meeting people that went through the same situation is cool. FNSO gave me a different life perspective. It is up to the people if they want to change. My brother was on the verge of finishing high school when he died.

(Denise, St, C2)

Others explained: “I have made contacts with my classmates. We got very close. We help each other” (Cruz, St, C3), and “I made lots of friends, some who I found out were my cousins. I graduated with my brother” (John, St, C2).

One informant was grateful for the connections she made with people from places she had seen but never visited:

I made a lot of friends. I never knew that my reserve was so close to \_\_\_\_\_. I used to land there on the plane but never knew what it was. I thought it was campsite. Lots of students are really nice and I relate to them. They are just people like me, some are single moms. I hope to keep the friendships going. (Denise, St, C2)

The student informants reported varying degrees of socialization inside the FNSO program, with most indicating they had made many contacts with whom they would keep in contact with in the future. Socialization was encouraged in the program, with areas provided to congregate and a kitchenette within which to socialize during break times. Teachers encouraged students to bring in their instruments. One teacher brought in her guitar for the students to use

during breaks, and supplied the students with cookies. Joan (S5) baked birthday cakes early on in the program and brought in bannock, buns, and fresh vegetables. One counselor brought lunches for students who she knew needed them.

Supports took many forms within the FNSO environment. These included a range of provisions meant to create an optimum learning experience while the students were engaging in their opportunity structure and reaching out within the community:

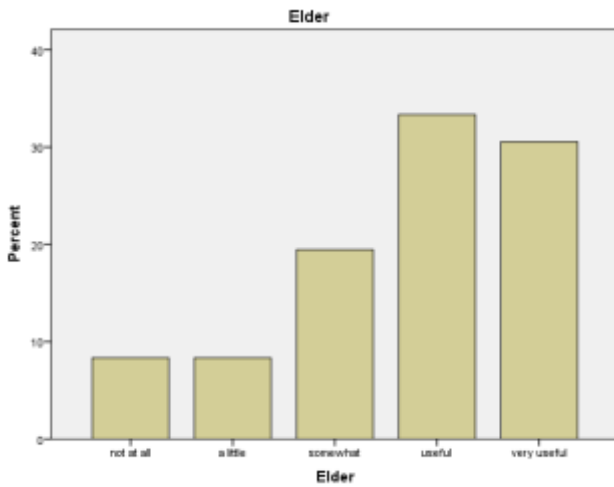
Childcare so they can attend school, general advocacy for their rights so if students are undergoing any legal, or like, if students are having legal issues or child custody [issues], we might not have the supports they need but we can connect them to organizations within the community. We also provide career assessment and emotional support and we connect them to supports within the community... so that when they are finished the program they will have other contacts and they will feel as though they are part of the community that they can connect with as they continue on their path. As far as housing is concerned, they feel a sense of belonging. It is empowering to have your own place to live and to have ownership over that. It is much better than living in a motel because someone else cleans that space and owns that space and other people are living there. They have to find the houses, get in touch with the landlords, fill out the paperwork, it is empowering for them to learn the process. A lot of them have never had their own space. They may have been sleeping on someone's couch with family members or something.

(Collins Rice, S3)

Figures 15 and 16 provide an overview of additional supports, including access to an elder and a guidance counselor (education counselor) offered by the FNSO program, and their corresponding usefulness to students while they were in the program. An elder was brought in

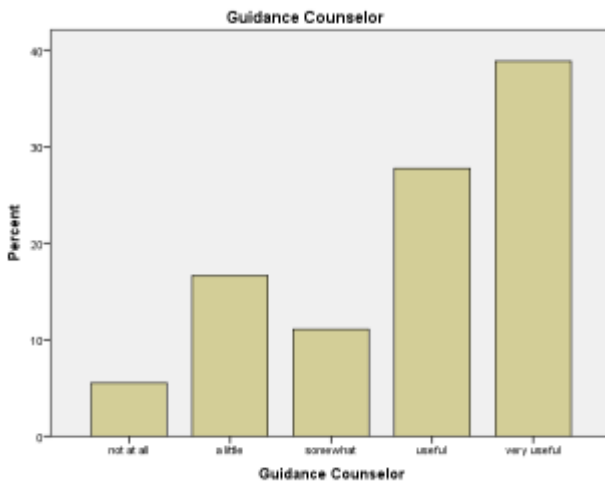
every Friday morning for students to speak to about personal matters. The burning of sage was permitted in the elder's room at all times if needed.

End of program (all cohorts)



*Figure 15.* Usefulness: Elder.

End of program (all cohorts)



*Figure 16.* Guidance counselors.

The quantitative data reflects that having an elder available was well-rated by students.

Sandra (St, C3) had this to say, “He [the elder] was always giving me great advice.” One student

commented about the accessibility of guidance counselors: “On-site guidance would have been more useful” (Jake, St, C2). The guidance counselor from AEO visited twice for Cohort 1 and much more frequently for subsequent cohorts. She worked with students to plan out the courses they needed to facilitate their interests post-FNSO program. Additionally, an FNSO guidance (education) counselor was provided to assist with software programs meant to broaden student awareness about post-program education and employment. This counselor also arranged delivery of workshops and outings, and acted as liason between employment and education sectors and individual student needs. At times, this position doubled to provide tutoring services to the students. The usefulness of the client support officers was well-rated among the informants generally, with 24 out of the 36 informants expressing this, as shown in Figure 17.

End of program (all cohorts)

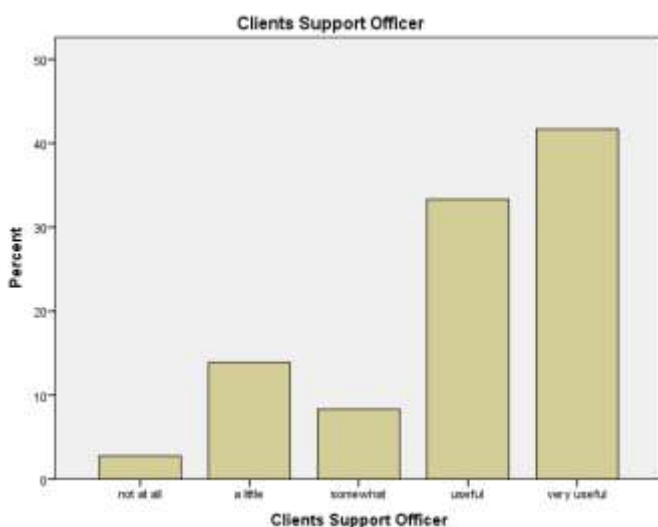


Figure 17. Usefulness of client support officers.

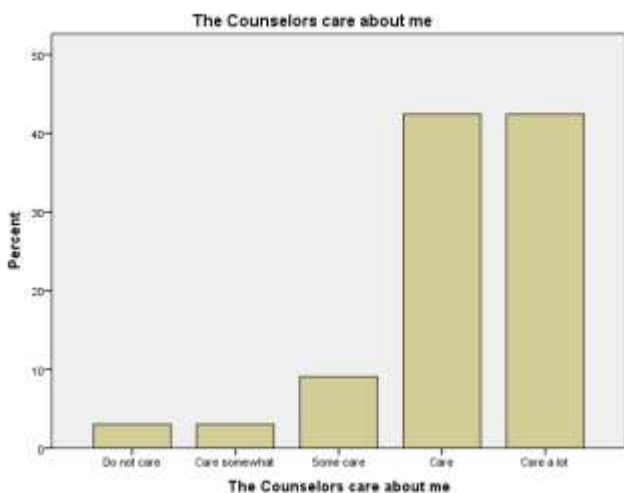
Observational data indicated that the students relied heavily on the client support officers (CSOs) for advice and to act as a liason for living arrangements, and for personal issues that arose in their lives. The supports they provided was considered useful (Dude, St, C2; Nishnabe



Kway, St, C1): “The client support [additional supports] was very useful, and they [CSOs] were there for me when I needed someone to talk to, a friendly face, someone to trust, and also someone who pushed me to succeed” (Dude, St, C2). “The CSOs were very helpful and understanding. It was an honour and privilege to know them” (Nishnabe Kway, St, C1).

Having elders, guidance counselors, and client support officers were all highly useful to informants while in the program, as indicated by the data. As counselors served many roles in the lives of students, including helping with housing and counseling supports, respondents were asked if they felt the counselors cared about them. Figure 18 reveals their responses.

End of program (all cohorts)



*Figure 18.* The counselors care about me.

The care that counselors exhibited to the informants was highly rated, with 80% indicating that counselors “cared” or “cared a lot.” The counselors tracked attendance and lateness, helped with methadone clinic scheduling, set up rental payments to landlords, acted as a liaison between landlords and tenants when issues arose, and made themselves available through their open-door policy to students who needed to talk about personal issues impacting their

performance in the program. Additionally, they set students up with food programs, local support networking programs, and medical clinics, and provided input to the program as it proceeded through its growing stages. Counselors, teachers, and tutors provided ongoing communication with each other to enhance awareness about ongoing issues that needed to be addressed or required special consideration throughout the day.

Counselors, teachers, and tutors could also be seen making food available to the student population on an ongoing basis. Participant perception of a high degree of care among the counselors is indicated in Figure 18, with only 7 of the 36 informants rating other than “care” or “care a lot.” Several informants expressed appreciation for the counselors (Tyrone, St, C1; James, St, C1; Suzie, St, C1; Mike, St, C1). “[They are] always willing and able to help students” (Tyrone, St, C1). “Teachers are great motivators, mentors, role models. They helped a lot emotionally” (James, St, C1). “Client support officers always informed me of my resources and helped me budget and find solutions to problems. Very supportive throughout the program” (Suzie, St, C1). “CSOs are the backbone [of the program]” (Mike, St, C1).

Inasmuch as Mike contends that CSOs are the “backbone” of the program, informants also relied on supports that would address their financial responsibilities, allowing them to focus on their studies. Figures 19 and 20 outline the usefulness of childcare and living allowances, as seen through the eyes of the informants.

End of program (all cohorts)

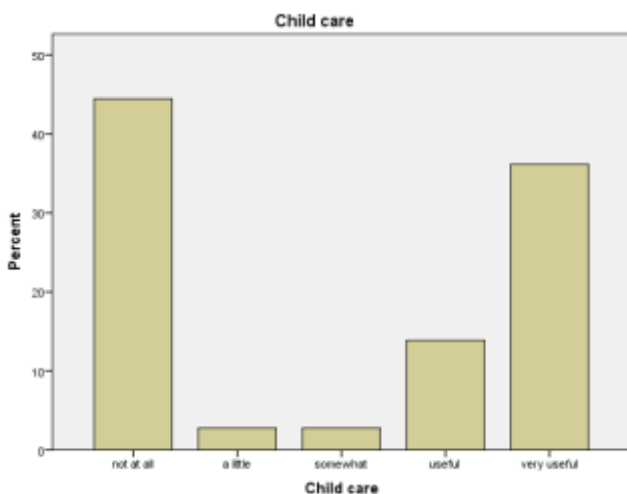


Figure 19. Usefulness of childcare.

Childcare was offered to students with children throughout the program while they were attending classes. This was provided in the form of monetary reimbursement to the students, who were expected to make their own childcare arrangements. It is likely that those informants without children rated the usefulness of childcare as “not at all” as shown in Figure 19.

Living allowances, as shown in Figure 20 (below), were necessary for most students who did not have the funds necessary to survive and attend school in the city. The usefulness of living allowances was a fundamentally important component to the existence of the program, given that students were travelling long distances to be housed in the city. One student spoke of the perception of abuse of living allowances:

I felt they [FNSO administration] were too used to students abusing this service because when I had legitimate concerns I felt an accusation tone that I was just like other students and trying to scam money from them. I did not feel properly addressed by the financial support officers due to unfair bias. (Mike, St, C1)

Despite Mike’s report, student data overall indicated appreciation for the living allowances. The quantitative data, as shown in Figure 20, indicates that the living allowance was “useful” to “very useful” for 33 of the 36 informants. Living allowance was the highest rated among all of the student supports.

End of program (all cohorts)

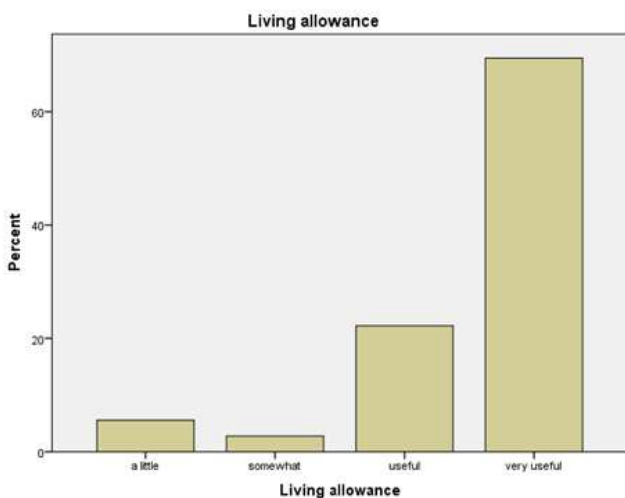


Figure 20. Living allowance.

Additional supports provided financial relief for the informants, allowing them to concentrate on their studies without worrying about food or childcare costs. Inside of the organizational structure, informants were surrounded by staff who were there to support them emotionally and with the daily challenges involved in adjusting to urban life. Workshops helped connect students back to their homes, and also helped to acclimatize them with how to maneuver in and around the city safely, and how to function effectively inside of the organizational structure.

**Workshops.** This section reports the findings of cultural and academic workshops and additional supports offered to student participants. Cultural workshops included workshops delivered by an elder and by local Aboriginal community programs. They also included workshops facilitated by Aboriginal representatives of the local police, to advise students of their rights and of what to do if harrassed by police or others. Service Canada workshops, designed to inform students of services and how to replace missing identification, were provided, as well as visits from a landlord and tenant board to distribute materials and discuss rights and responsibilities of renters in the city. Workshops by a public transportation employee were also offered to discuss the local public transport system, and visits by local members of parliament were made available as well as workshops delivered by the umbrella tribal council. Some informants were given a workshop in cooking, which most of them needed because fresh vegetables are not readily available in many of their communities. The informants were asked about the usefulness of the cultural and academic workshops. Figure 21 reports the findings on the question of the usefulness of cultural workshops:

End of program (all cohorts)

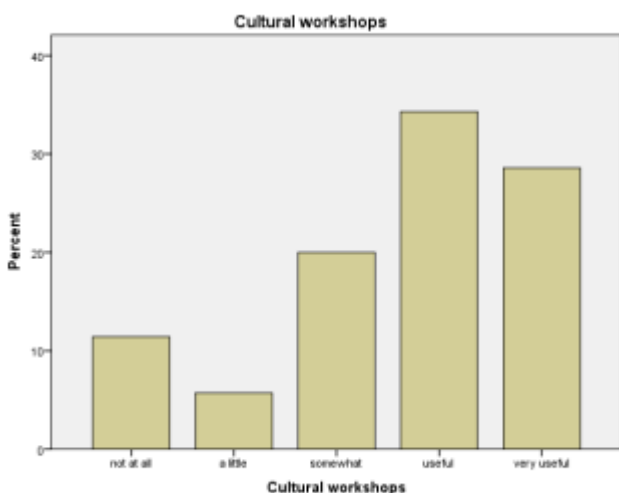


Figure 21. Usefulness of cultural workshops.

Cultural workshops were useful to informants for various reasons. For some, they represented a connection to their communities, while others learned about cultural understandings they had been missing in their lives. This was appreciated by the informants: “the cultural workshops were very useful, it made it feel more comfortable to practice my cultural ways and also made me stronger spiritually” (Nishnabe Kway, St, C1). “I have always been so distant from my culture so learning new things about it was very interesting and made me think to educate myself even more. I regret not taking my culture seriously and I know now to teach my son differently” (Dawn, St, C1).

Academic workshops included workshops given by the local college and university to increase awareness of the programs and supports provided in those institutions. Mining workshops were facilitated by interested corporations, including mining partners with the FNSO program that provided academic programs in the trades and liaisons between the corporations and the education and employment sector. One component offered in Cohort 2 was a First Aid course, delivered by AEO through a qualified teacher. All of the informants received certificates. The informants were asked how useful they found the academic workshops (see Figure 22).

End of program (all cohorts)

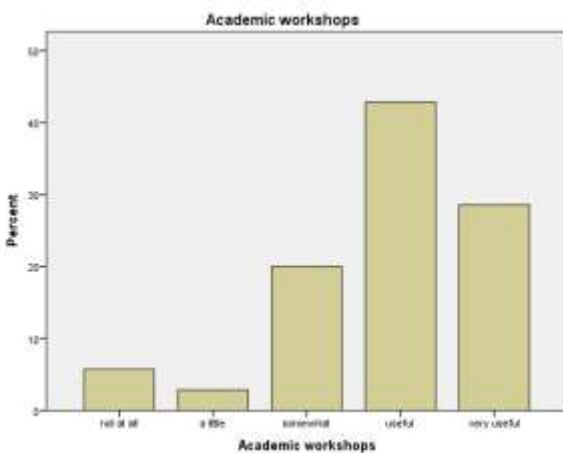


Figure 22. Usefulness of academic workshops.

Workshops and additional supports for students were generally rated at a high degree of usefulness in the FNSO program. The informants reported appreciation for supports including the living allowance and supports for childcare and materials. For many informants, these supports, along with class scheduling and choices over long-term goals, represented needs that were addressed in the program. One staff member noted:

Workshops help students develop life skills so they are well-rounded after the program. So they didn't just get their OSSD but other life skill programs. Like how to be a good communicator, skills that help them to be successful after the program, what resources are available in the city, and what your rights are as a tenant. (Sarah Abby, S7)

While the workshops helped students navigate outside of the program, needs were also addressed inside of the program.

### **Needs Addressed**

Needs addressed, as discussed in this section, include breaks for students that were allotted throughout the day. The time provided for lunch was reduced later in the program, decreasing reflection time for the learners in the middle of their day. Students' needs included being streamed into appropriate programs that would set them up to obtain their long-term goals. Workshops that informed students as to the post-secondary choices that were available were provided. These included outings where students were taken to a local college and/or university environment for the delivery of the workshop. This section also explores the time allotted for students to complete the program, as this too could be considered a need.

Students were asked to speak to the CSOs, teachers, and tutors about non-academic issues during their designated break times so as not to take away from class time. Fifteen-minute breaks were allotted both in the morning and afternoon, and one hour was provided for lunch for

Cohorts 1, 2, and part way into Cohort 3. As many of the students smoked cigarettes, these breaks provided them with an opportunity to leave the building and visit a designated smoking area. Reductions in allotted break time indicated the implementation a deficit model of education, which is discussed next.

**Deficit model of education.** During the lunch hour, students would go home to eat or could be found eating in the local McDonald's restaurant. Near the end of Cohort 3 and beyond Cohort 3, all lunch breaks were reduced to 30 minutes by AEO to further streamline and increase efficiency. Staff were told that students would not have enough time to go home, so they were more likely to return to class on time after lunch. This AEO practice, again, worked from the deficit model discussed in Chapter Five, and significantly limited the reflection aspect of the education that students received each day. Some students signed a petition to stop the change, and although this petition was considered, the lunch hour was ultimately reduced to 30 minutes. Students, AEO employees were told, needed to be job ready, and for many jobs, only 30 minutes would be allotted for lunch. Job readiness was a consideration for student preparation for a work environment, but reflection time while students are learning may be as important, if not more important, especially to First Nations learners. Alberta Education (2005) discusses the need for First Nations students to reflect on what they learn: "Reflection becomes a key part of every learning activity. Teachers can expect these reflections to become more detailed and complex as the school year progresses" (p. 37). Thirty-minute lunch breaks is the practice for AEO's own school outside of the FNSO environment, while one-hour lunch breaks are allotted for students in the upgrading program of the local college.

In addition to a reduction in lunch periods, students were prevented from knowing exactly what timeframes they were working within to complete the program. Students were



supported by the program beyond the timeframe that it would take to obtain an OSSD with minimal credentialing, to a cutoff date that corresponded with approximately 10 months.

Students were not made aware of the extended cutoff date, however, to curb procrastination and (perceived) misuse of the supports and living allowances within the program. As an alternative, several extensions were forthcoming as the students progressed through the program.

**Building on success.** FNSO focused on alleviation of stress for students through tutors and provisions for extra time, so that students would have the time to complete their program:

They've tried to build in things that will help people lead to success, like workshops and budgeting and workshops on this and that and getting certification, like things that can build success, and try and get little successes along the way to help build those up. So I think those supports are there specifically for that, so like yeah, they're a population that's at-risk, that's low income, that has not done well in terms of how we kind of judge it, you know, traditionally. Getting jobs, getting work, getting schooling — that kind of stuff. (Rockman, S9)

Rockman (S9) went on to discuss how the program taught the students many skills:

I think it opens a lot of eyes. I think there are a lot of skills that are learned there, I don't think they have enough time to really get into it a lot, but there's the beginning of a lot of skills that are learned that kind of helped get [students] going. Students learned how to be students, which is good, something that they haven't learned before or they just didn't try before, because of various reasons. I think one thing is to teach them to be their own advocates. I didn't see that as much earlier on in the program, it was more of a "this is what you should do and this is how you do it," but, it's tough because a lot of people in

that situation want to be told what to do, and that's not necessarily the best thing to do although it does help too, but you have to strike a balance there. (Rockman, S9)

Addressing students' needs included providing information to help with selection of pathways that would ensure that the career and education choices reflected learner interests and long-term goals. This direction was provided by all front line workers whom the students approached, although FNSO guidance (education) counselors were designated into this role. Rockman (S9) expressed difficulty in finding a balance between students wanting to be told what to do, and students thinking for themselves.

Respondents interviewed for the Ontario Ministry of Education (2005a) document also worried that students were not being streamed into the correct program to meet their education goals. The document suggested that clear conduits through the resources available to adult educators can aid learners when attempting to circumnavigate the variety of program options to reach their educational goals. When the learners do not understand all the pathways and options, the document warns, they may end up in the wrong program. Matilda (S10) discussed this:

When the students says, "I want to do this," I ask, "well, do you really? Like, think about it, reflect on it, you know, if you decide on what you want to do, we'll make that happen, but that has to come from you rather than coming from what is available. And don't just take something because it's there." See, that is one of the big problems with the program. A lot of the students will just graduate and go into what is there, not necessarily what they want to do. They don't really know what they want to do yet, they have to be more brought in to say "okay, this is what is possible." (Matilda, S10)

Post-program planning was built into the supports that were offered to students in the program:

The first education counselor brought in a professor from the university to talk about forestry, and representatives from the college were brought in as well. The second education counselor improved the model for the second and third cohort by bussing the students to the university and having several members of the university community speak to the students and explain the supports to them. The same was arranged with the college. The students were taken to the trade fair at the college, where they were given an opportunity to give out their resumes. (Marjorie, S2)

Further data is provided in Chapter Seven that explores the relationships between introductions to college and university environments and how students saw themselves in these academic forums. Students were encouraged by FNSO to obtain at least college-level credentialing needed to meet their goals for post-secondary education. These courses for Cohort 1 included college-level English, mathematics, and sciences. For Cohorts 2 and 3, these courses were restricted to English and mathematics (and as previously discussed, many students were streamed into the MEL 3E mathematics program).

In the next section, staff consider the colonization of students while in the program.

### **Colonization**

Staff worried about colonizing: “So many of our students do not want to go back [to their communities]. That is worrisome. Are they being colonized while they are here? I would like to see them graduate and go back to their communities” (Rockman, S9).

Several suggestions to the second AEO manager for more culturally appropriate texts for the students for their English courses were presented, claimed one informant: “I even purchased a book and gave it to the second manager hoping he would read it. He didn’t get back to me about it” (Joan, S5).

Visions for students included them taking what they learned back to their communities.

Ann (S8) explained:

I think the graduates from the program will be the leaders of their communities. It isn't a bad thing that they are in the city. There are a lot of struggles and issues going on in these communities and really if you get drawn into that, your true self is lost. I think once they find that place, they will be ready to go back and be the future of their communities.

(Ann, S8)

Most of the students from the FNSO organization do not see potential on their own (Joan, S5). They have to be encouraged from day one, and every day, to see their future as holding unlimited possibilities. Joan (S5) described that this does not happen in one or two sessions with a guidance counselor for a population that is attempting to fit into the norms of another culture: "There is much more that needs to happen for the population to see themselves as belonging to a university culture, such as building on skills like reaching out for help when needed."

Joan (S5) said that many university courses are a good fit for FNSO students. Beneath the layers of reasons why is the notion that the students are, in turn, a good fit for the university setting. With the wealth of experiences that they bring to the learning environment (many of which are substantial enough to be in need of supports such as those offered inside of FNSO), comes potential narratives from which wider society can learn. What Joan (S5) seemed to be saying through the data is that the FNSO environment is treating these cultural needs as weaknesses or deficits, as described in Harry and Klingner's (2007) deficit model, but at some point she would like to see that position turned around. She sees university as the place to do that: a place to decolonize. University, she argued, can approach the students using a strengths-based model where students are appreciated for what they have to offer (Epstein et al., 2003).

Paramount to her position are concerns that education institutions such as AEO are reinforcing the deficit colonizing model through their treatment of both students and teaching staff, as demonstrated under the authority position of the second management style.

In the next section, staff were asked about ideal conditions for the program in order to determine a comparison between what the staff informants were working with in the program and what they would like to work with as a preference.

### **In an Ideal World**

Working within the confines of FNSO funding and organizational constraints prompted staff to reflect on what they would like to see under more stable funding conditions. In this section, staff were asked to comment on what they would have liked to see for FNSO under ideal conditions. The point of intersection of the partnership is reflected by the successes and tensions that staff experience, so staff were asked to speak about their visions for the program.

The necessity of students obtaining an OSSD were discussed by Marjorie (S2) and Dennis (S1). “In an ideal world, students wouldn’t need credentialing. It would all be about education. But that isn’t how the system works and it likely never will be. I just think there has to be a better compromise than trading education for credentialing” (Marjorie, S2). Dennis (S1) explained:

I think their goal [the program’s goal] is to accommodate learners, to graduate. I guess a high school diploma is important. I agree it is important but there are other avenues to go on to post-secondary education, but the high school diploma is really pushed. I just don’t think it is as important as what they make it seem. It is affordable to the general population, though. They offer the [opportunity] at AEO to get an elective credit but that

wasn't offered at FNSO. They also have GLS and [another course] GPP, but they are more about funding. They [AEO] are mostly about credentialing. (Dennis, S1)

Students over the age of 22 can go into post-secondary as mature students if they are ready to write the mature student test provided by colleges and universities. Joan (S5) explained:

The only drawback with this idea is the notion that an OSSD is necessary for employment. However, if an organization like FNSO focused in on education and brought in the college to credential what they can, that would take care of the employment problem, because the employment sector recognizes the college. An OSSD would only be needed if the student wanted to become a teacher. If a student wanted to go into engineering at the university level, and the college program is not enough for the math, FNSO could make provisions for that particular student to work with AEO for that course. (Joan, S5)

Self-advocacy is a critical skill to move forward with learning:

We had one student who AEO tried to “dumb down” by giving MEL 3E to... at our prompting, [she] stood her ground and demanded a better math. She wants to get her PhD. She wants to be a professor one day. What she has going for her that will deem her successful is her “in your face harassing,” determination. This is the skill that First Nations organizations need to focus in on with their students in my opinion. Teach them to harass. (Joan, S5)

Rockman (S9) added, “I think one thing is to teach them to be their own advocates.” That First Nations students need to advocate for themselves is also argued by Alberta Education (2005). Learners, they contend, “will need strong self-advocacy skills in order to succeed” (p. 37).

Ideas for furthering the quality of the program were presented by Joan (S5), Rockman (S9), David (S4), and Marjorie (S2) in this section. In the next sub-section, the compatibility of the visions of both organizations is explored.

**Compatibility of visions.** In the final piece of the cross-cultural component of this research, staff were asked in a two-part question to comment on the compatibility of their vision versus that of the FNSO partnership organization. They were first asked about the vision of the FNSO program:

Visions included training for staff that addressed the cultural needs of the student body.

I was always very nervous there because I didn't have any suicide prevention training and really didn't see myself as qualified to be listening to what I was listening to. Sending students down the hall isn't an option when they open up to you. They are talking to you, trying to bond with you so they can learn better. One teacher in there is qualified though, and that is good. (Joan, S5)

Joan (S5) suggested that the use of social media sites could be helpful: "I think that front line workers should use social media sites to watch over their students." She continued:

When [the FNSO program manager's son] committed suicide after three weeks into his Cohort 2 program, everyone was affected, deeply affected. I know for myself I want to know that I have done everything I could to prevent this from ever happening again. So I broke all the rules and friended the students on Facebook. I was not marking the work of the students I friended. I was very upfront about friending them and no one attempted to prevent me. I had to leave for that month and I saw a post from one of our students while I was in southern Ontario that worried me. I texted the teacher and told her to catch the student before she left and check in with her. She did. Sometimes students do not have

enough money for food and many will post this on Facebook. Ideally, I think that students in this kind of environment should be able to connect with tutors or teachers who are not marking their work in my opinion. (Joan, S5)

A broader vision was expressed, encapsulating an overall vision for the program:

When I look at academic progress, human development, learning, graduation, it is like a gift you give yourself. It is a gift that can open up many doors. It is like a giant key. This is what they have given themselves. They have to decide how to use that. I am hoping that I have taught them that this is a powerful gift that will help them throughout their entire lives. I know that they have changed as people and that makes me proud. (David, S4)

### **Analysis**

This chapter explored various aspects of the FNSO environment and included staff interviews and student data to provide insight into the various supports. How much input each staff member felt they were contributing to the program as it developed was investigated through the data. Data on education aspirations, including long-term goals, was presented and discussed. Learner respondent backgrounds were explored to gain understanding of the challenges informants faced in the program. These challenges were delineated to provide an in-depth understanding of the importance of the supports offered to students in the FNSO environment.

Empowering aspects of the program were discussed in this section, with FNSO supports emerging as a central theme in the data. A high level of satisfaction was shown through student survey data for the elder, guidance counselors, CSOs, workshops, childcare, and living allowances. Without supports, it would not have been possible for most students to meet their responsibilities in their home communities while paying for housing in the city, detoxing,



transitioning to urban life, caring for children, and dealing with emotional upheavals from the passing of people in their communities, all while attempting to succeed in an academic environment. FNSO provisions met the needs that arose from these issues, essentially empowering students by removing barriers that might otherwise impede their learning. This meets the requirement of Aslop and Heinsolm (2005), who describe organizations as engaging in empowering processes by developing the capacity for their clients to make choices that can be transformed into desired outcomes.

FNSO was seen as realizing some of Bennett et al.'s (2004) organizational maturity themes as they handled points of conflict and were able to develop the program at the same time as they were applying for funding. Despite issues with differing goals between the organizations, FNSO appeared to continue moving ahead with a high degree of flexibility in their delivery of supports. All of the staff, at some point during their interviews, expressed pride in the program and in what they felt FNSO was attempting to achieve with specific tribal council community populations. This pride was likely the result of the empowering aspects of the supports experienced by learners, and observed by front line staff in the program.

Colonization of the students while in the program was considered, and teaching self-advocacy was deliberated. Considering the "ideal world," staff deliberated at length about the importance of education over credentialing, the importance of teaching for self-advocacy, the necessity of suicide prevention training, and the use of social media to look out for student welfare.

In this chapter, the overarching research question, *What are the effects of organizational policies, practices, and funding models upon the empowerment of adult First Nations learners?* was addressed through the interviews and quantitative data on supports offered by FNSO. FNSO

supports made up the empowering theme that emerged from this chapter. These supports were shown to meet students' needs through their level of perceived usefulness.

Due to the many apprehensions that arose in this study concerning academic streamlining in the program beginning in Cohort 2, and as discussed in Chapter Five, Chapter Seven focuses on a comparative analysis of data from Cohort 1 and Cohort 3. It begins with a presentation of statistical data to compare the results of Cohort 1 to that of Cohort 3.

## Chapter Seven: Empowerment

The data analyzed in Chapter Seven will respond to the secondary research questions. Specifically, it will answer the second half of the following questions: *What are the organizations' views of students, and how do they affect learner empowerment, and What are the levels and processes of communication between the First Nations support organization and the adult education centre, and how do these impact learners' empowerment?* It will also answer the research question: *How do learners' perceptions of their empowerment when they leave the First Nations support organization differ from the realities they experience post-First Nations support organization?*

As these secondary questions reflect aspects of the primary research question: *What are the effects of organizational policies, practices, and funding models upon the empowerment of adult First Nations learners*, the data in Chapter Seven will also respond to the primary question.

The chapter begins by reporting student survey data in a comparative analysis between Cohort 1 students and Cohort 3 students. The former (Cohort 1) represent a more student-driven model, and the latter (Cohort 3) is a more economically driven model under a differing AEO management style. In this chapter, end-of-program data is compared to post-program data in an effort to investigate the experiences of informants in FNSO and beyond. Post-program data represents the experiences of students after they have left the program and had a chance to engage with their developmental outcomes.

The survey questions explored the usefulness of workshops, teachers, and tutors; informant perceptions on the difficulty of academic material; and issues surrounding socialization and attendance. These survey questions are included in Appendix A. Staff and student interview questions can be found in Appendix C. Staff and student interviews provide

context and depth to the quantitative survey data, in an effort to provide a comprehensive depiction of the impact of the policies, practices, and funding models on learner empowerment.

Student quantitative and qualitative data is presented with a focus on student empowerment that links back to the data compiled for teacher empowerment in Chapter Five. FNSO supports such as workshops, teachers, and tutor data is presented in relation to student informant empowerment. FNSO supports such as living allowances, bus passes, cultural and academic workshops, elders, CSOs, graduation ceremonies, travel, childcare and materials are also discussed. Further, AEO supports such as mathematics and English courses are discussed in terms of empowerment.

### **Student Empowerment**

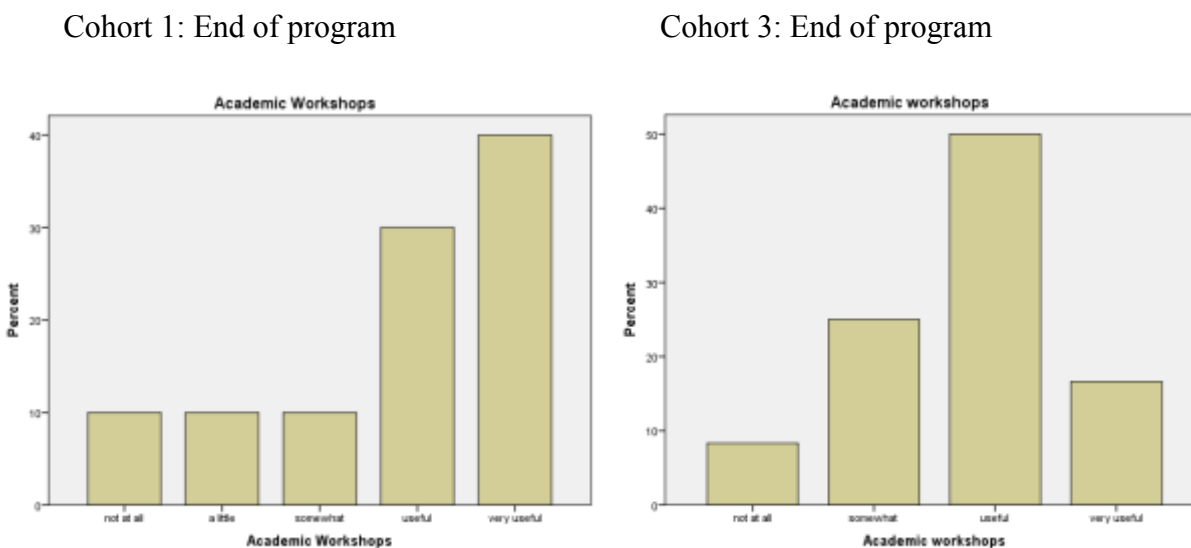
**FNSO supports.** I initially ran the survey data in SPSS without separating it into cohorts. However, given that the percentage of students that took applied college-level mathematics courses was different for each cohort, I realized the data would be invalid because trends were not separated by distinctly different cohort experiences. It was at this junction that I re-entered the student data by cohort, so that each cohort could be investigated for its potential for empowerment.

Due to space constraints, I decided to compare and present the quantitative survey data for Cohorts 1 and 3 exclusively (see figures throughout this chapter and the following chapter). These figures compare students who started with the program (Cohort 1) to students who entered into the program during the later stages of the study (Cohort 3). Data that indicates marked differences between the cohorts are shown in the figures.

It should be noted that two respondents that moved from the GED program into the AEO program were removed from the cohort data because of the influence of the upgrading they

received in the GED program. I included the GED transferred students in any data that is not designated by cohort. It should also be noted that although Cohort 1 and Cohort 3 quantitative data is explored side by side in this chapter, Cohort 2 qualitative data is also included because the voices of all informants are important to the study overall. As a reminder, student informants are designated as “St,” beside the informants’ pseudonyms and before their cohort number (“C1,” “C2,” or “C3”).

The informants for Figure 23 were asked how useful the academic workshops were to them, as perceived at the end of the program versus post-program. Academic workshops, as discussed in the previous chapter, included workshops to help them create a newsletter in a publishing software program, to help guide them in their choices for careers, and visits from representatives from a local college and university. Figure 23 compares the findings of the two cohorts at two separate points:



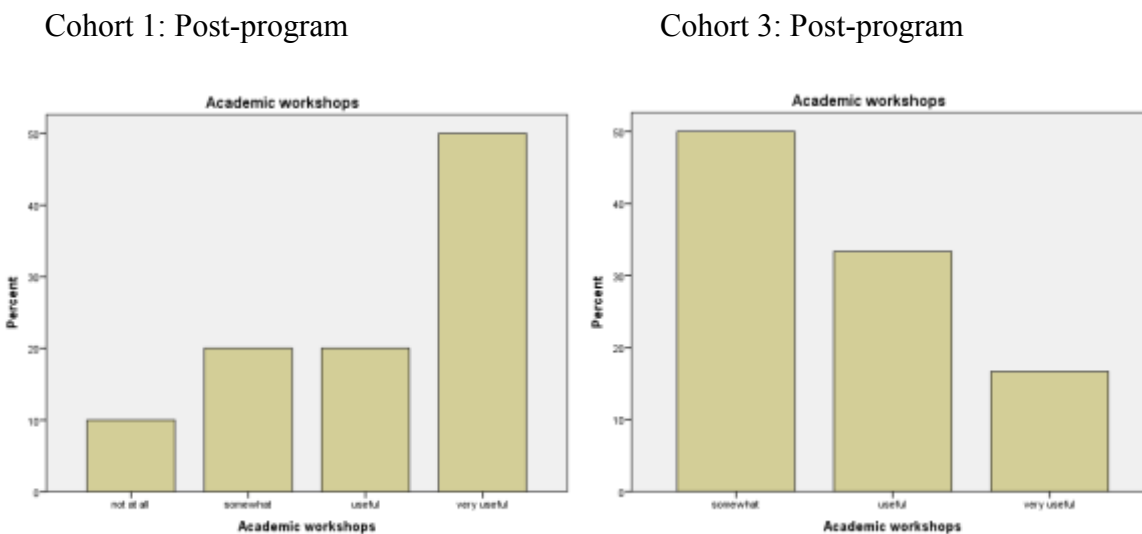


Figure 23. Academic workshops.

A high percentage of students from both Cohort 1 and Cohort 3 found the academic workshops “useful” or “very useful” at the end of the program. However, the Cohort 3 data indicated a reduction of the perceived usefulness of the workshops of about 15% post-program, while Cohort 1 remained stable from the end of the program to post-program in their results. This seems to indicate that the usefulness of what Cohort 3 thought they received was less than that which they actually experienced after they left the program and engaged with their developmental outcomes. This does not seem to be the case for Cohort 1.

In Figure 24, respondents were asked to comment on how much they relied on teachers to help them in the program. Both cohorts reported that teachers were “very useful,” as their highest reported category.

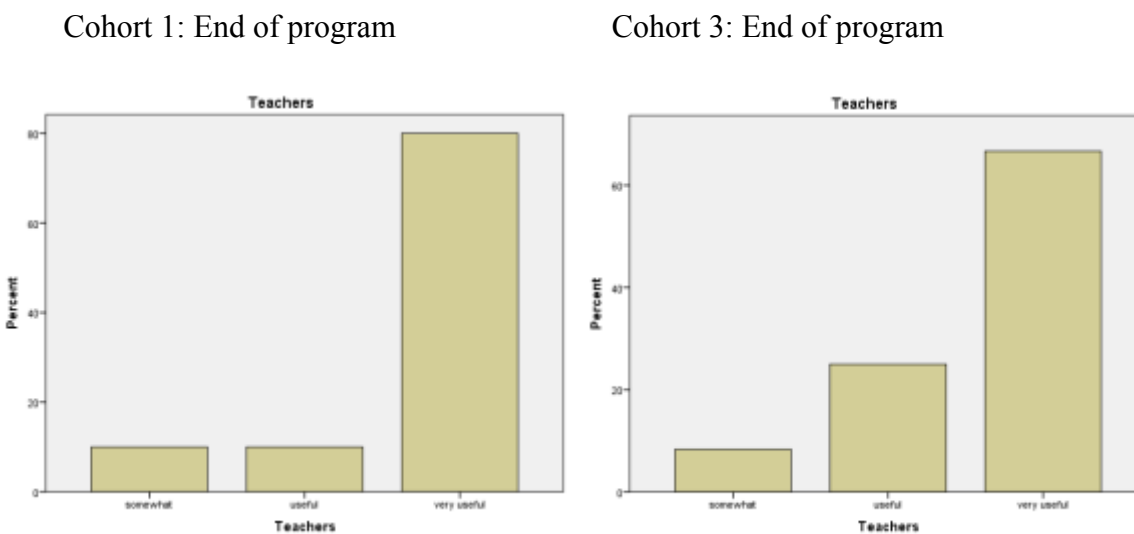


Figure 24. Usefulness of teachers.

This data indicates that students largely perceived teachers to be “very useful” to them in the program. The qualitative data from the surveys supports this, indicating that respondents thought highly of the teachers in the program. Three respondents commented on the need for more teachers in the program, however (Dawn, St, C1; Tyrone, St, C1, George, St, C3). “[The program] need[s] more teachers’ aides” (Dawn, St, C1). “Maybe more teachers [are needed]” (Tyrone, St, C1). “More teachers are needed with the same qualifications” (George, St, C3).

In Figure 25, mutual respect between students and teachers was explored to investigate the working relationships critical to empowering outcomes for learners. The following figure outlines students’ perceptions of their relationships with teachers.

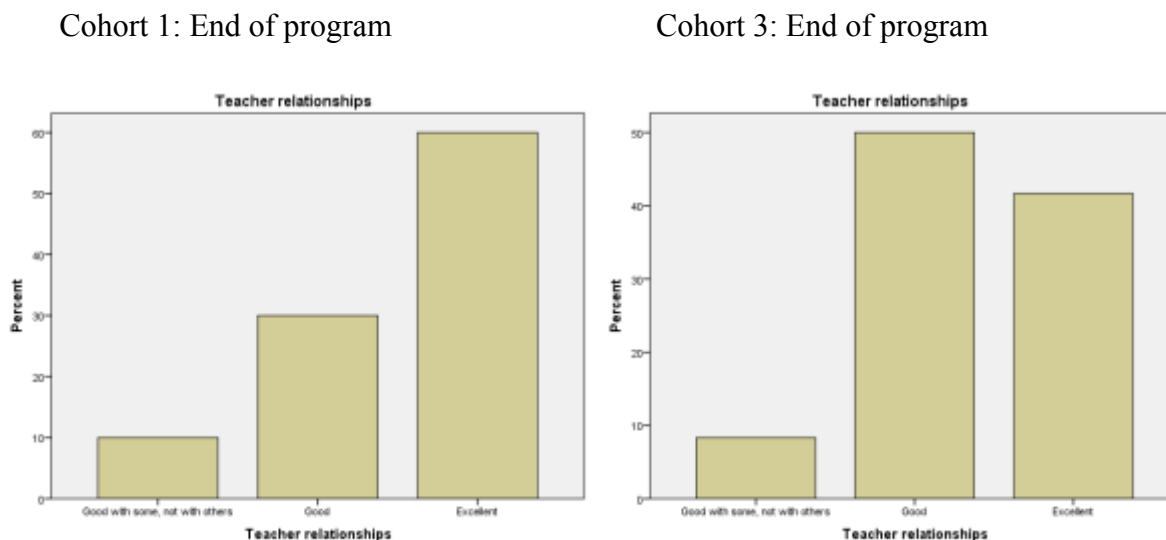


Figure 25. Teacher relationships.

The highest reported category in both cohorts was that there were “excellent” relationships between students and teachers, with 60% of Cohort 1 respondents and 40% of Cohort 3 respondents selecting this option. Several informants commented on the specific usefulness of teachers (Nishnabe Kway, St, C1; Tyrone, St, C1; Cruz, St, C3; James, St, C1). “[I] met my goals with help from teachers” (Nishnabe Kway, St, C1). “I love those guys! Teachers are passionate. Teachers walked me through what needed to be done. They believed in me” (Tyrone, St, C1).

Indeed, despite a few observed clashes with teachers, students and teachers overall shared a mutual respect from the perspective of the informants: “All teachers were very nice and understood where I come from. I got to know my teachers pretty well” (Cruz, St, C3). “[Teachers were the] perfect mentors, great facilitators” (James, St, C1). Similar relationships with tutors were noted when one informant wrote: “They never let me give up. Always supportive no matter what the issue may be. Encouraged me even when I was ready to throw in the towel. Best supports besides the amazing teachers that I have ever had” (Suzie, St, C1). Of teachers Suzie



added: “Pushed me to my full potential. Always took time to provide extra help when I needed it. Teachers [were] honest and straightforward, yet understanding and helpful” (Suzie, St, C1).

Another informant wrote, “Best teachers I’ve ever had. They get in my face sometimes but for the right reasons” (Tyrone, St, C1).

One staff informant indicated that because she sees scaffolding as essential for the students, she continues to support them in both university and college, either from her home or at arranged meeting places, even though she has not worked for the organization for several months. She added:

Other, more senior staff members in there go the extra mile too. One teacher does her marking inside the classroom after class so students can work in with her if they want to.

I only stayed back when students were willing because I didn’t mark lessons. (Joan, S5)

In an effort to investigate findings from Chapter Six that indicate that informants talked to teachers almost as much as they talk to CSOs, Figure 26 explores the percentage of informants that reported they would go to teachers when in trouble.

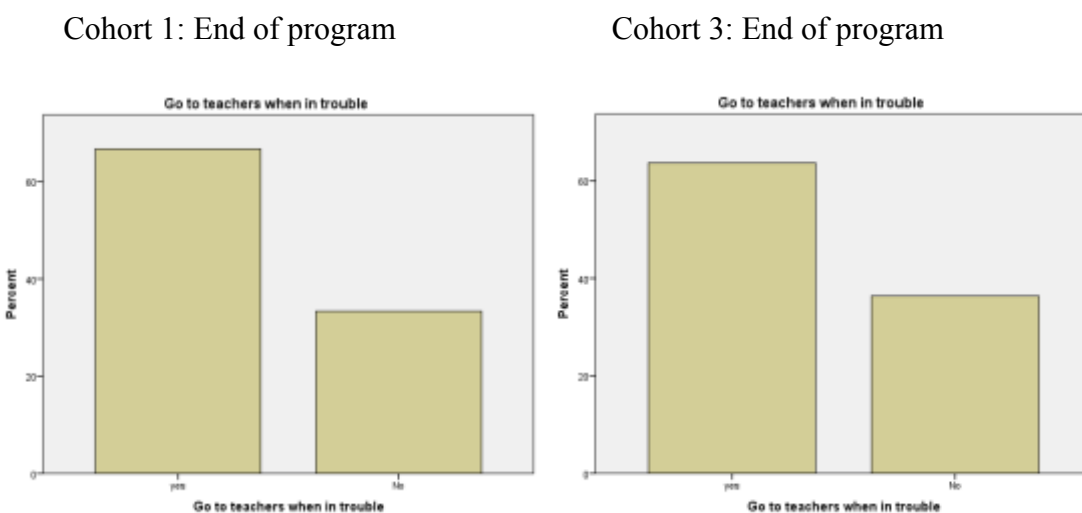


Figure 26. Informants talk to teachers when in trouble.

Slightly more than 70% percent of Cohort 1 respondents and 65% of Cohort 3 respondents in Figure 26 indicated that they go to teachers when in trouble. Consistent with the findings discussed in Chapter 6, informants relied on teachers to talk to about both academic and life issues. Denise (St, C2) wrote about a tutor: “I could also talk to her about personal matters.”

More than one student informant understood about the importance of relationships with teachers for the population:

Teachers were not fit to do the job [where I went to school on reserve] because they should understand the community before going in there, but they didn't. The students will bond with the teachers easier but I didn't bond with anyone after I came here for high school. We were raised to bond. If no bond, no trust. We can do anything that any human can do. Our hearts and minds work the same way. (Max, St, C3)

Credentiailling of teachers should be called into question given the high rate of suicide in the communities of the informants, and the data shown in Figures 14 (“Who the informants talk to when in trouble”) and Figure 26 (above). Credentiailling was also considered in Chapter Five and Six. Looking at the student informant data, it does seem clear that the respondents from both cohorts relied on teachers as people to turn to when they had problems in their lives.

In Figure 27, students were asked at the end of the program to comment on how much they relied on the tutors in the program.

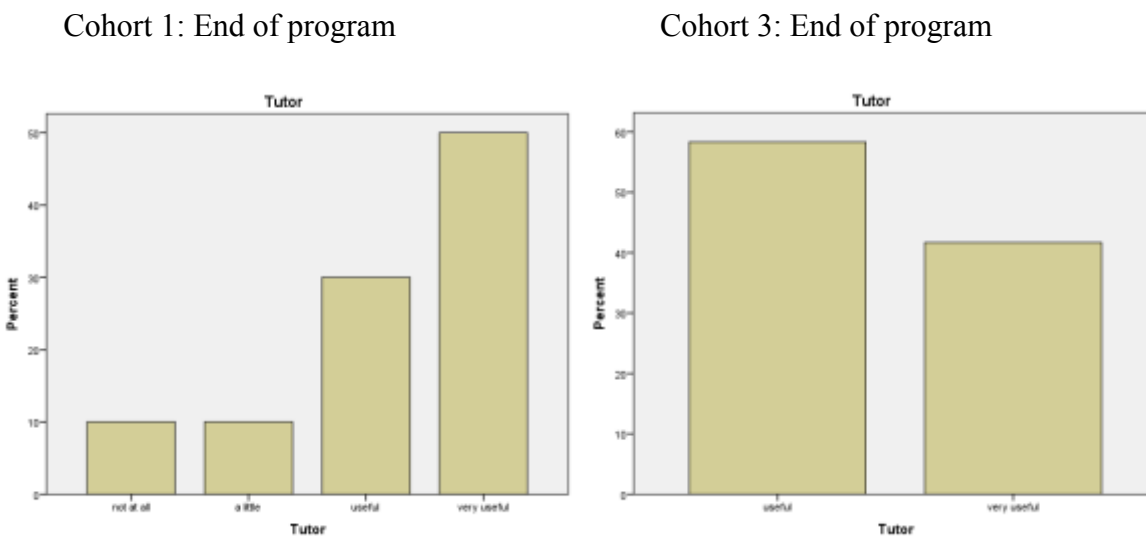


Figure 27. Usefulness of tutors.

Fifty percent of Cohort 1 respondents indicated that tutors were “very useful” to them while 42% of Cohort 3 respondents reported the same. The data here seems to indicate that tutors, who provide academic assistance to students, often on a one-on-one basis in breakout rooms, were appreciated across the two cohorts. Appreciation for the role of tutors in the program was expressed in the qualitative data as well (Nishnabe Kway, St, C1; Jim, St, C1; Crane, St, C3; Dude, St, C2; Denise, St, C2).

They [tutors] were excellent in helping me hone my skills. I mean the teachers were very helpful too [but] I guess maybe having more tutors to help with the students [would be helpful], because the one thing that sucked was having to wait for a teacher to be done with another student and sometimes that teacher would pay attention to only one student all the time. It got frustrating at times. (Crane, St, C3)

Dude (St, C2) noted that tutors “helped me learn things I thought that I would never learn or even attempt to do, they gave me a lot of confidence.” Denise (St, C2) added, “The tutor made me feel very comfortable. She gave me help and encouraged me to keep moving forward. I could also talk to her about personal matters.”

In the next section, the academic supports provided by the AEO organization in English and mathematics are explored to track shifting student perceptions from the end-of-program point to the post-program point.

**AEO academic supports.** Informants were questioned about their perceptions of academic supports, specifically in English and mathematics. The section is structured by the survey questions which addressed informant perceptions of the English they achieved in the program, followed by the mathematics they achieved in the program. The data is presented as a comparison between Cohorts 1 and 3, to consider empowerment across the two groups. As applicable, I include the academic level completed in the program at the time of the interview to provide context for empowering or disempowering perceptions shared by informants.

In an effort to gauge whether students were appropriately placed in their programs, I asked the cohorts, as shown in Figure 28, how difficult they found English. For an appropriately challenging placement I was expecting categories of “difficult” to “somewhat difficult.” I was not expecting students to answer “easy” if they were in programs that challenged them.

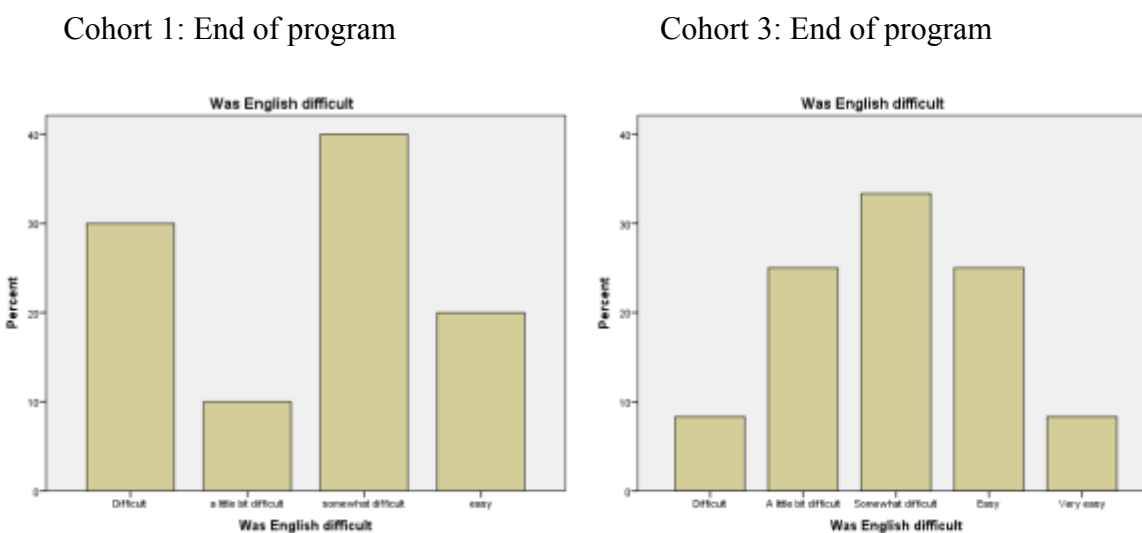


Figure 28. Was English difficult?

The data shown in Figure 28 indicates that 80% of Cohort 1 respondents were appropriately placed overall (in the categories of “difficult” to “somewhat difficult”), with 20% being in placed in programs that were not challenging them (as reflected by answers in the category of “easy”). No one in Cohort 1, however, indicated that the material was “very easy” (and hence this category is not represented on the Cohort 1 chart). In Cohort 3, however, 35% of respondents indicated that English was between “easy” and “very easy,” potentially indicating that a much higher percentage of students were not being challenged in this cohort. All of the students in both cohorts graduated with at least Grade 11 college-level English; some did not complete college-level Grade 12 English due to time constraints in the program.

When the same question was asked about mathematics (see Figure 29), the results showed far more deviation between Cohort 1 and Cohort 3 than the data set pertaining to English. It should be noted that out of 36 respondents, 15% of Cohort 1 informants took workplace-level Grade 11 MEL 3E as their graduating mathematics, compared with 69% of Cohort 3 informants.

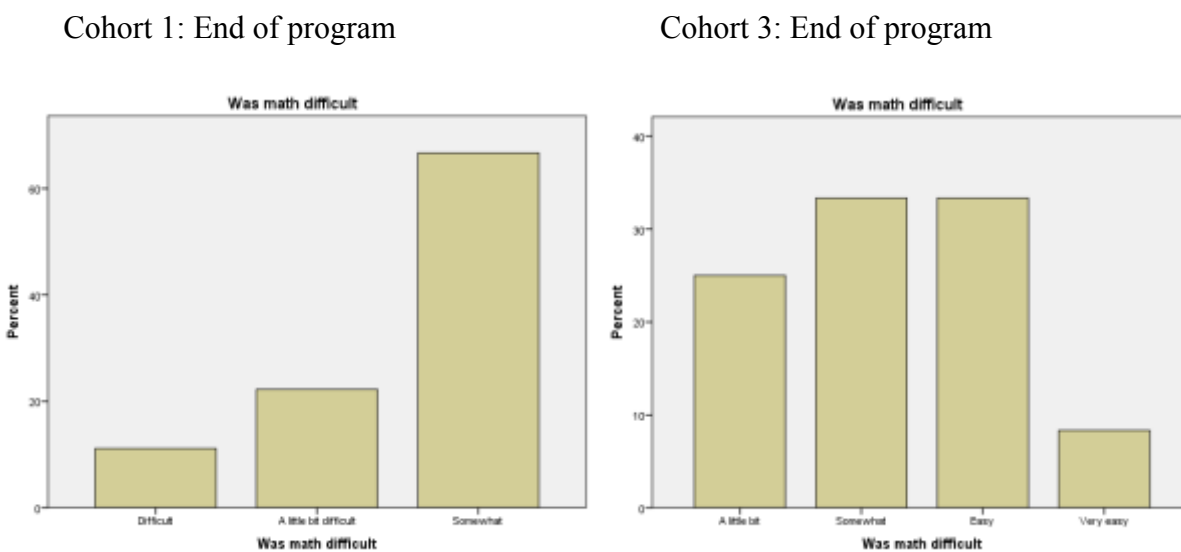


Figure 29. Was math difficult?

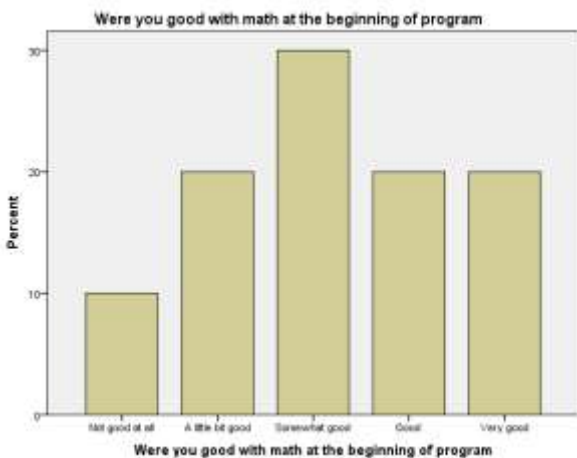
One hundred percent (100%) of respondents in Cohort 1 indicated that they were appropriately placed in a challenging math course, with responses ranging from “difficult” to “somewhat difficult.” In Cohort 3, however, only 60% indicated they had a suitably challenging mathematics experience within the program, with 40% indicating that they did not find their mathematics challenging. With 69% of respondents in Cohort 3 reporting that their highest level of math was workplace-level MEL 3E, this meant that 45% of the MEL 3E informants found the course to be “somewhat” to “a little bit” challenging, with 55% believing that their MEL 3E course was not challenging. Cohort 3 students did not receive any mathematics upgrading before being placed in the MEL 3E course, unlike later cohorts who were given one month of half-days of upgrading before being placed into MEL 3E. Cohort 1 students were provided with two months of mathematics upgrading.

Informants entered the program with varying degrees of mathematics skills; one had previously taken algebra and considered herself to be good in mathematics. She noted:

I was already pretty good in math, but everything I learned in FNSO helped me to progress. I knew algebra but I didn't know trig. I learned trig and factoring in FNSO. My math skills maybe went from basic to intermediate. (Amelia, St, C1: MAP 4C)

In Figures 30-32, students were asked how good they perceived themselves to be in math at the beginning of the program (Figure 30), at the end of the program (Figure 31), and post-program (Figure 32), to investigate changes experienced across time.

Cohort 1: Beginning of program

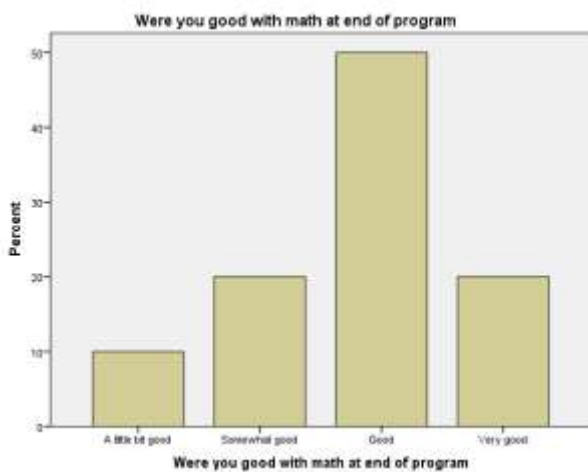


Cohort 3: Beginning of program



Figure 30. Good with math at beginning of program.

Cohort 1: End of program



Cohort 3: End of program

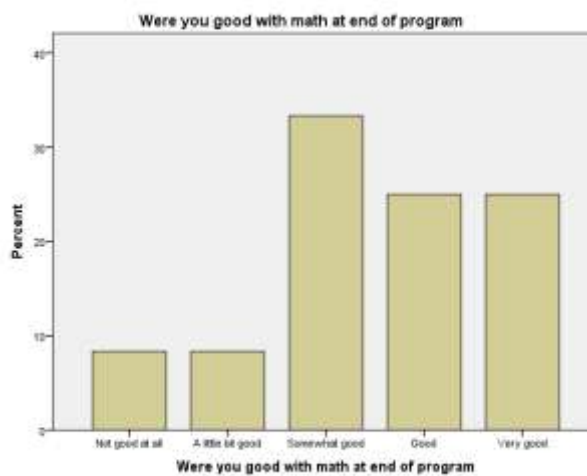
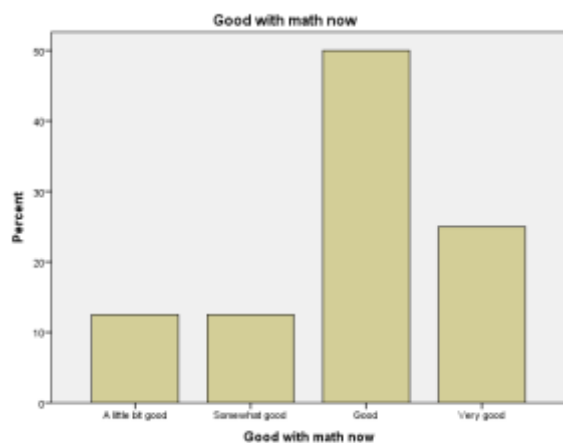


Figure 31. Good with math at end of program.

Cohort 1: Post-program



Cohort 3: Post-program

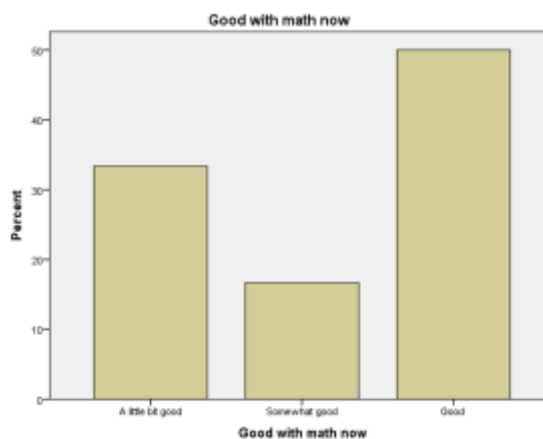


Figure 32. Good with math now.

Cohort 1 data is relatively unremarkable, particularly between how the informants perceived they were in math when they left the program to how they perceived they were in math post-program. The “very good” category (at almost 20%) for Cohort 3 at the beginning of the program rose to 25% by the end of the program, but was largely absorbed into the “good” category post-program. Cohort 3 students’ perceptions of how good they were at the beginning of the program was much lower, with 30% percent answering “not good at all.” No one answered “not good at all” post-program. This seems to suggest that the respondents felt better about their ability to achieve in mathematics post-program, as compared to how they felt when they entered into the program. For Cohort 3, however, the data indicates that the informants thought they were much better overall while they were in the program, as compared to how they later perceived their abilities in mathematics. This is evidenced by a 25% percent drop in informants who perceived themselves to be “very good” in mathematics from the end of the program to post-program, and may be indicative of post-program experiences that reduced how good they perceived they were in mathematics. These informants perhaps realized at the post-program



point the limitations of the mathematics they received in the AEO program. Student comments that represent how they felt about the mathematics they received in the program follow, along with data presented later in this chapter that speaks to student perceptions of the English they received in the program. This is to provide a balanced view of how the informants perceived their advancements in the central academic subject areas.

Student comments below, included those taken from surveys and student interview data, add substance to Figures 29 to 32. It should be reiterated that, while MEL 3E is an essential workplace-level Grade 11 mathematics credit, MBF 3C is a Grade 11 college-level mathematics credit and MAP 4C is a college-level Grade 12 mathematics course. It must also be remembered that MBF 3C and MAP 4C build mathematics skills in algebra, trigonometry, and geometry, so that informants who feel empowered by completion of these courses are likely empowered by them. This may or may not be the case for workplace-level MEL 3E, when students who were capable of higher levels of mathematics were placed into this course. ENG 3C is a Grade 11 English credit and ENG 4C is a Grade 12 English credit. The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OLC) may be used to meet the Grade 12 English compulsory credit (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003a).

One informant, who may have been appropriately placed in MEL 3E because of her fear of learning mathematics, discussed the difference that the mathematics training meant in her life: “My math skills increased. I like math now, where I was afraid of it before. Now I can look back in my notes and I will ask for help” (Lily, St, C1: MEL 3E). Another discussed their progression of mathematics skills in the program: “I dropped out in Grade 10. I was going to school here in town. On a scale of 1 to 10, I progressed about 4 to 5 in math [in the program]” (Darkcloud, St, C3). For Darkcloud (St, C3), who completed MEL 3E and MAP 4C, one wonders why, if he was

capable of completing MAP 4C, did he find his start in MEL 3E, where concepts that would have helped with reinforcing MAP 4C skills were not covered? In fact, none of the informants in this study that graduated with MAP 4C took a Grade 11 prerequisite first (see Figure 8: “The Ontario Mathematics curriculum, Grades 9-12,” for a list of prerequisites). This is akin to a student being placed directly into Grade 12 mathematics without first learning and practicing the skills and concepts necessary for full comprehension of the subject material.

Reflecting on perceived advancement in mathematics in the program, three students expressed appreciation for how much they learned. All three completed MEL 3E and MAP 4C (Marie, St, C3; Fred, St, C3; Barbara, St, C2). “[I made] a lot of progression, especially in algebra. I am helping my kids at home now” (Marie, St, C3). One informant reflected on how much she considered she learned in mathematics, to bring her to where she is now:

I didn’t know anything about algebra but I now I understand how to work with it. I went to Grade 8 on the rez [reserve]. Most of the time I was in the bush. I always missed from end of September to December because my parents were trappers. (Barbara, St, C2)

Indeed, Barbara’s experiences were echoed by an informant who did not attend secondary school: “My math is way better now. It was the first time I actually concentrated on it. I did not go to high school” (Fred, St, C3). The informants above expressed empowering statements, and it does appear that their mathematics skills were strengthened. Are they, however, all they are capable of being, given the time they spent in the program? With a 25% drop in the category of “very good” in mathematics post-program (see Figure 32, “Good with math now”), it could be argued that some informants are beginning to realize post-program that some of their potential was wasted when they were made to complete particular courses in the program. One informant expressed dissatisfaction with what she learned in the program, when

she commented post-program: “I didn’t learn too much. I went through MEL 3E” (Kate, St, C3). It should be noted that Kate seemed aware that she understood the limitations of the mathematics she received in the program, which was not the case for all informants. Kate may be representative of the drop in percentage from how good the informants thought they were while in the program to how good they perceived they were, post-program. One informant noted, “I was scared. I always struggled with math. I took MEL 3E. I think I am good in math now. I did MEL 3E, and ENG 3C [in the program]” (Peter, St, C3).

Perceptions of students who think they are good in mathematics when their highest level mathematics is workplace-level represent an oxymoron of sorts. If students are good in mathematics, why were they not streamed directly into college-level mathematics? Is it reasonable to think that an adult is not good in mathematics when he/she has never been given the opportunity to thrive in algebra, trigonometry, or geometry?

Informants who worked through college-level mathematics courses generally commented that they were satisfied with the mathematics they received in the program (Gordon, St, C1; Nishnabe Kway, St, C1; James, St, C1). “Before I came in it was mostly adding and subtracting. Now I know some trig and algebra” (Gordon, St, C1). Continuing with an expression of appreciation for the mathematics received in the program, one informant noted:

I went to a meeting yesterday and the economist guy from the university was talking about graphs and stuff and I understood what he was saying. It was neat. I am looking forward to learning more. I look at my math [MAP 4C] every day just to stay current.  
(James, St, C1)

Cohort 1 and Cohort 3 qualitative data link closely with the quantitative data when considered side-by-side. Cohort 1 informants appeared empowered by their mathematics

program from pre-program to end-of-program, with a rise from 62% “good” to “very good” in mathematics from end-of-program to 75% post-program. Cohort 3 informants, although stable in the combination of “good” to “very good,” realized a drop of 25% in the category of “very good.” This may be evidenced by Kate (St, C3)’s experiences of understanding post-program, at which time she wished she had completed more mathematics while in the program. Cohort 2 data was not included in Figures 30 to 32, although their voices have been included in the next section.

**Cohort 2 qualitative data: Mathematics.** For reasons previously discussed, the Cohort 2 quantitative data was not included in the above discussions, but I include the informants’ qualitative comments here because they provide insight into how these students felt about the mathematics they took in the program, expressing varying degrees of empowerment.

One informant, who took workplace-level MEL 3E, remembered: “Math was always my favourite [subject]” (Dude St, C2), and another, who took a college-level mathematics credit, recollected: “On a scale of 1 to 10, I progressed about 5. I did [Grade 11 college level] MBF 3C. The teachers helped me a lot” (John, St, C2). Still another expressed a desire to continue, “I took upgrading plus [workplace-level] MEL 3E. I would have liked to take more math and science. I would like to continue” (Denise, St, C2). Denise, expressing a degree of empowerment, clearly perceived herself as capable of a higher level of mathematics. Why then was she streamed into workplace-level? Her desire to continue on in mathematics, while being streamed into a workplace-level course when she was capable of more, likely indicated a degree of disempowerment as well.

Informants discussed their schooling prior to the FNSO program. Some had to leave school and others attended only sporadically, for various reasons. Claims of not being taught properly in their communities were made:

I did not recognize about 90% of the math [in the FNSO program]. I graduated from the [reserve] high school. Everyone will say the same thing if you ask them. We were not taught algebra. [My reserve] Day school was run the way the government wanted it. I was there every day and I didn't learn. (Sam, St, C2)

Sam, who was taught algebra in the MAP 4C college-level program, likely finished this course empowered by his understanding and ability to complete a Grade 12 mathematics program. Another informant experienced disempowerment, however, through the guidance counselor's attitude toward her ability to be successful in a college-level mathematics course in the program:

My math skills progressed a whole lot. I went through MAP 4C. My teacher believed in me [but] the guidance counselor told me I had to go through the workplace math [and] that I wasn't ready enough for MAP 4C. I felt really bummed out about it until one of the teachers stood up for me. The guidance counselor said I should be a counselor because I filled out a form which said I should be one. My job portrayal was [as] a counselor. I said I didn't want to be a counselor. She said I had to take whatever math was given to me. I said I wanted a challenge. I told her I wanted to be more than a counselor. She said she would look into a higher-level math. Then she said if it was too challenging, I could drop it if I wanted to and take an easier math. She said that I wasn't strong enough for MAP 4C. My final MAP 4C mark was 79 percent. I completed Grade 8 in my community. (Crane, St, C3)

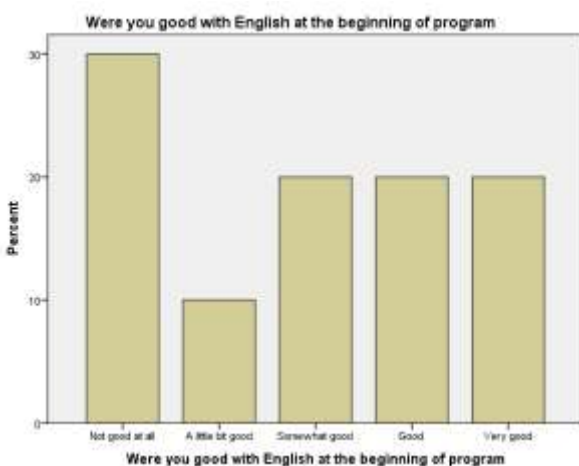
Crane likely experienced disempowerment at having to ask the guidance counselor for a higher-level mathematics course. It is likely, however, that she experienced some empowerment when she advocated for herself and achieved her goal of completing the college-level mathematics program.

Dissatisfaction with mathematics programming was expressed: “[The mathematics program could improve with] a harder math” (Stella, St, C3). Similar to other informants (Denise St, C2; Kate, St, C3), if Stella was capable of a higher level of mathematics, why was she placed into a workplace-level mathematics course below her ability? Stella likely experienced some disempowerment through her feeling of completing a workplace-level mathematics course instead of a college-level mathematics course.

### Cohort 1 and Cohort 3: English

In Figures 33-35, students were asked how good they perceived themselves to be in English at the beginning of the program (Figure 33), at the end of the program (Figure 34), and post-program (Figure 35), to investigate changes experienced across time.

Cohort 1: Beginning of program



Cohort 3: Beginning of program

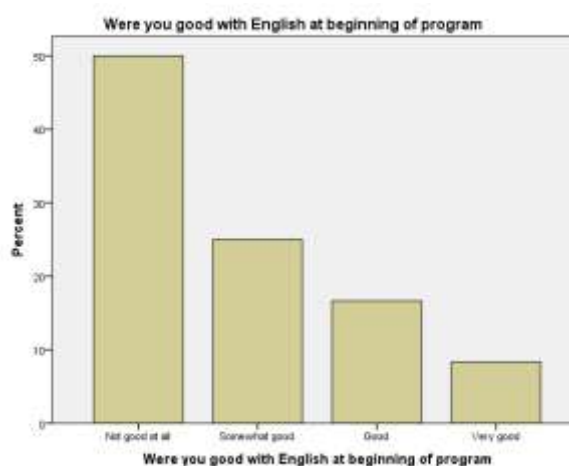
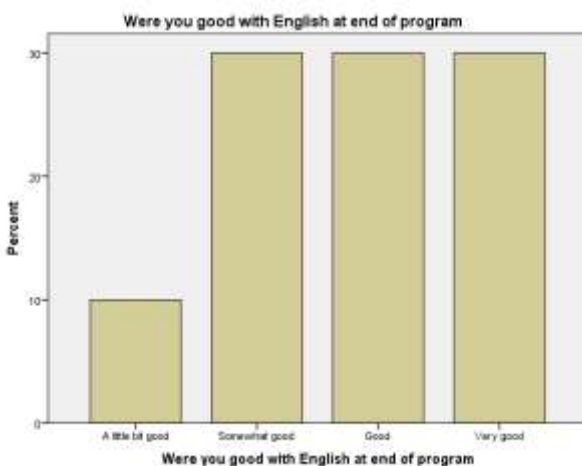


Figure 33. Good with English at beginning of program.

Cohort 1: End of program



Cohort 3: End of program

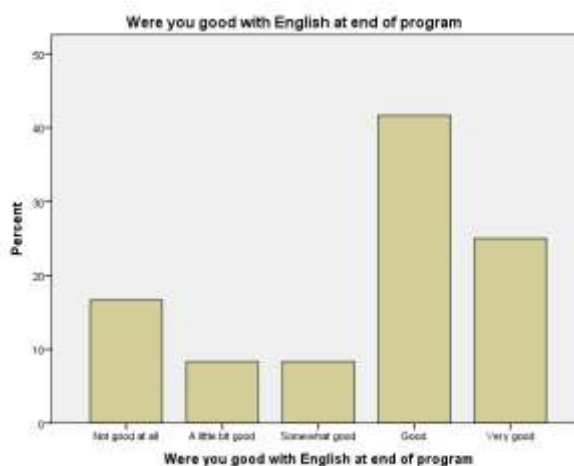
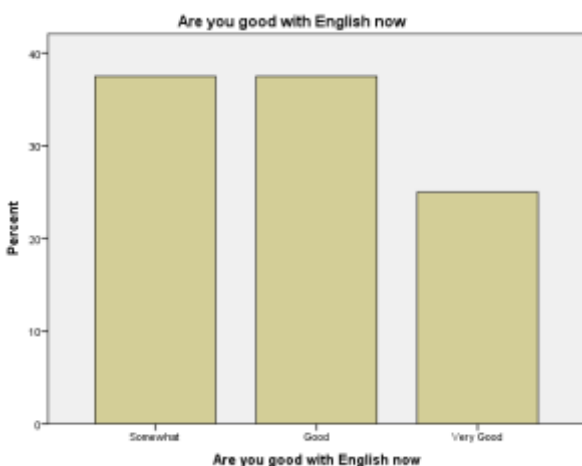


Figure 34. Good with English at end of program.

Cohort 1: Post-program



Cohort 3: Post-program

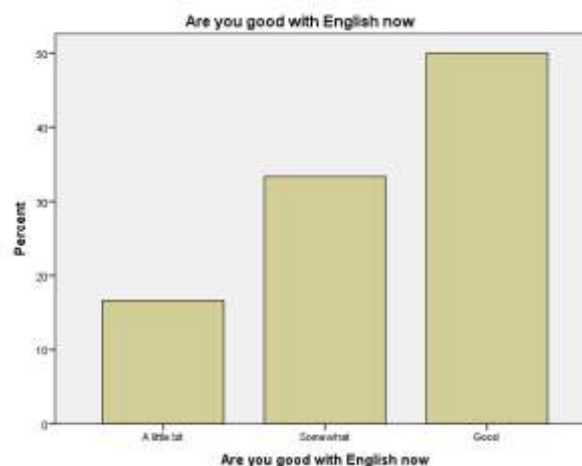


Figure 35. Good with English post-program.

Thirty percent of Cohort 1 informants felt they were “not good at all” with English at the beginning of the program, as shown in Figure 33. None of the informants felt the same way post-program. The same phenomenon was noted in Cohort 3, where 50% of respondents considered themselves “not good at all” with English at the beginning of the program and no informants

considered themselves in that category post-program. This is likely indicative of an increased ability to communicate in written form within mainstream society. What is unique for the second data set, however, is that the 25% of Cohort 3 respondents that indicated they were “very good” in English at the end of the program disappeared in the post-program results, to be absorbed into lower ratings. This indicates that what they thought they had when they graduated did not measure up to what they considered they had after being given an opportunity to engage in their developmental outcomes.

One respondent noted, “I appreciate it [English] more now. I didn’t realize how powerful it was. I enjoy writing in my free time now” (Tyrone, St, C1). Another made a suggestion for an alteration to ENG 3C: “The program could improve if we worked together in a group on some English lessons instead of individually” (Sandra, St, C3). Two informants who completed ENG 4C felt that their ability to write changed their relationship with their writing (Darkcloud, St, C3; Max, St, C3): “[I] did not know how to write, my writing is a bit better. I like English now” (Darkcloud, St, C3). “I didn’t write before the program. I’m starting to write a lot” (Max, St, C3).

Dunaway (2011), in a piece entitled “How Letter-Writing Can Empower Students,” notes that: “writing letters gave my students a feeling of empowerment. The process taught them that they could express their thoughts in a relevant, real-world way” (p. 1). Alba (2001) agrees with claims that learning to write and speak well empowers people due to the statement it makes to others. With both Cohort 1 and Cohort 3 expressing in the quantitative and qualitative data that they felt significantly better about their ability to write from the beginning of program to post-program, empowerment during that timeframe likely resulted for both groups.

As all of the English courses are considered skills building courses, the actual courses taken to frame the responses are less pertinent to the responses themselves than is the case for the



mathematics courses. This is because not all mathematics courses are skills building (e.g., MEL 3E does not teach concepts such as algebra, trigonometry, and geometry, which are needed for college and university-level mathematics). When students graduate with MEL 3E, they may feel empowered by their achievement but later find out that there was no basis for the empowerment (this may have been the case for Denise (St, C2), Kate (St, C3), and Stella (St, C3)). This is less problematic for English courses. OLC English was mandatory for most students in the program, and they were later offered ENG 3C and ENG 4C: preparatory college programs.

In interviews, and in light of the arguments of Alba (2001) and Dunaway (2011) for the connections between the procurement of English skills and empowerment, informants were asked, “how much do you feel that your English skills have progressed since you began the program? Please discuss.”

Several informants were impressed by how much they learned (Superman, St, C3; Barbara, St, C2; Max, St, C3; Lily, St, C1; James, St, C1; Amelia, St, C1; Gordon, St, C1; Cruz, St, C3): One informant noted, “It is not my thing but I have gotten stronger” (Superman, St, C3). Another said, “I had never done an essay but now am doing essays. I did Grade 12 English here” (Barbara, St, C2). Alba (2001) would make the argument that both Superman and Barbara have been empowered through what they learned in English in the program, given their comments.

Another respondent said:

I did not know how to make a proper sentence but now can write a sentence. I have proved a lot. Ojicree is my first language. Didn't have the proper learning that the city folks have. You are not motivated on the rez [reserve] to do anything like reading and writing. (Max, St, C3)

One informant who completed ENG 3C agreed that the program strengthened her writing skills and ability to find the help she needs: “I got better. I learned how to write an essay and to use the internet to check for things and where to go for help. I never had a problem with writing though” (Lily, St, C1). Another, who completed ENG 4C, did not realize that he was about to learn as much as he did in the program: “I thought my English was good but apparently it wasn’t. I learned how to write properly” (James, St, C1).

Similarly, Amelia was grateful for her newfound empowering English skills: “I think the most I progressed was in English. I knew how to spell and grammar but at FNSO I learned essay writing and memos. It was all new to me” (Amelia, St, C1).

Cruz (St, C3), Gordon (St, C1), Nishnabe Kway (St, C1), Tyrone (St, C1), and Mike (St, C1), who all completed the FNSO program with ENG 4C, were pleased with what they had learned. “When I started my writing there was a big change in my vocabulary. I use more words now. My grammar improved a lot” (Cruz, St, C3). “I couldn’t even write a paragraph when I first started. Now I can use more complex sentences. So now I can get my community’s attention quickly” (Gordon, St, C3). “I think my writing got better when I finished. I write memos for the band council. I am a secretary. I thought I could do anything I wanted so I applied. I wasn’t working before” (Nishanbe Kway, St, C1). “[The program] helped me a lot in English. I can write an essay now. I read a lot now. [I am reading] *Bury Me at Wounded Knee* and *Einstein*” (Tyrone, St, C1).

Enjoyment for English was expressed:

I used to say I wanted to be a paleontologist. I always liked big words. I was always good at English. I did well at FNSO in English but for me, talking about my family is a trust

that is earned. I thought it was invasive but it was accommodated within reason within the course. (Mike, St, C1)

Indeed, many of the informants expressed that their English was strengthened in the program, likely an indication of empowerment when considering the views of Alba (2001) and Dunaway (2011). One informant who completed ENG 3C discussed skills she obtained to enhance the way she works: “I used to get writer’s block but now I read before I do the assignments and it is much better” (Marie, St, C3).

Students were given the opportunity to write stories and poetry for a newsletter to take home to their communities, an empowering opportunity according to Alba (2001), who connects the power of acquiring English skills with that of perceptions among family and friends. Additionally, this project left students with the skills needed to use a desktop publishing software program. Students began reporting the use of their literacy skills in areas other than academic arenas.

Hamilton (2008), who contends that reading is at once pleasurable and empowering, would see significant acquisition of power for Tyrone (St, C1) and Fred (St, C3) due to their newfound pastimes of reading. Fred (St, C3) explained the ways he benefited from English courses and gained a new hobby:

I understand when people are trying to make me look bad. Now I see it right away. I listen a lot better. I have learned a lot. My writing is average but has improved. I am going to write short stories as a hobby. My foster child and my dad is what they will be about, to keep my dad’s memory alive. Adventures, like Tom Sawyer. I read a lot of fiction.

Empowering voices from Cohorts 1 and 3 are echoed in the next section by Cohort 2 informants. Cohort 2 informants, however, also raised concerns about attempts at colonization, mixed in with the empowerment they experienced.

**Cohort 2 qualitative data: English.** The following excerpts cannot be compared side-by-side with the quantitative data because they represent quotations from Cohort 2 informants. They do, however, speak to the general question of empowerment for FNSO students.

One informant, who completed ENG 3C but claimed to have a “low work ethic,” understood that he may have thrown away a large portion of a potentially empowering opportunity: “I understand what people are talking about now. I don’t have to look so much up. [But] my work ethic is low. I could have done a lot more in the program. But there were things that were more important to me” (Dude, St, C2).

Sam (St, C2), who completed ENG 4C, expressed disappointment in the cultural aspect of his English program and in differences between what he wanted and what he received from the program. This disappointment speaks to Rockman (S9)’s concerns in Chapter 6 when he asked, “Are they being colonized?” Sam (St, C2) expressed the following:

I understood English. FNSO English class was like every other English class I ever took. The teachers have to be more demanding. It wasn’t like that. I would have liked to see what I could have done with my English but I didn’t. I was given all these tasks that were not meaningful, just to finish. It was about finishing, not finding out what I am capable of. I wanted to write about my people. I wanted to write about what I wanted to write about. I don’t care about Christopher Columbus.

Others commented on areas in their lives where they are using their skills in literacy. For one informant, who completed ENG 3C, empowerment was reflected in her comparison of where she came from pre-program to where she is post-program:

I learned way more than I expected. I never knew I had it in me. I used to hate it but now I tolerate it. Now I read newspapers and my own books. I would have been back in my community doing nothing without this program. (Denise, St, C2)

Another respondent said: “I progressed in English. I learned how to be independent with my work and how to write sentences and the words I used” (Crane, St, C3). Crane, who also completed ENG 4C, now has a vibrant Facebook presence, again verifying Alba’s (2001) view that external perceptions matter. Crane claims her writing improved:

A lot. A whole lot... I can write now without making run-on sentences. My sentences are more meaningful and fulfilling now. I practice on Facebook. It helps me with my writing. I wish I could be at school now. (Crane, St, C2)

In this section, both qualitative and quantitative data indicate that empowerment took place for students in English courses. The informants looked forward to employment opportunities after they earned English credits. For Cohort 3, the 25% drop of “very good” from end-of-program to post-program may indicate that the amount of empowerment estimated at the end of the program was less than actual accumulated empowerment, however. Further, it is probable that colonization is beginning to emerge in the data as evidenced through Sam (St, C2)’s comment that “I wanted to write about my people ... I don’t care about Christopher Columbus.”

**Moving forward.** In this section, the empowering/disempowering potentials of the program are further explored in relation to informants being asked about how well their

academic needs were met in the program, along with their intentions to continue with, and stay in school. Data was compared between Cohort 1 and Cohort 3, both at the end-of-program point and post-program point. In an effort to explore empowerment differences across cohorts, and after the informants were given an opportunity to engage in their developmental outcomes, questions were asked about changes they might like to see in their lives. These questions addressed socialization, motivation to stay in school, and attendance to their schooling/jobs. These survey questions originated with Aslop and Heinsohn's (2005) World Bank model of empowerment that represents the foundation of the empowering aspect of this research.

Survey questions were designed to discover how much control the informants perceived they had in various aspects of their lives. It should be noted that 55% of informants in all cohorts designated that achieving their OSSD was their focus for attending the program. This data also indicated that 35% of informants wanted to attend college before they attended the program, and 10% were initially driven by a desire to attend university.

The next data set investigates whether the informants felt their overall needs were met in the program. Data was compiled at the end of the program and after the informants had a chance to engage with their developmental outcomes (post-program).

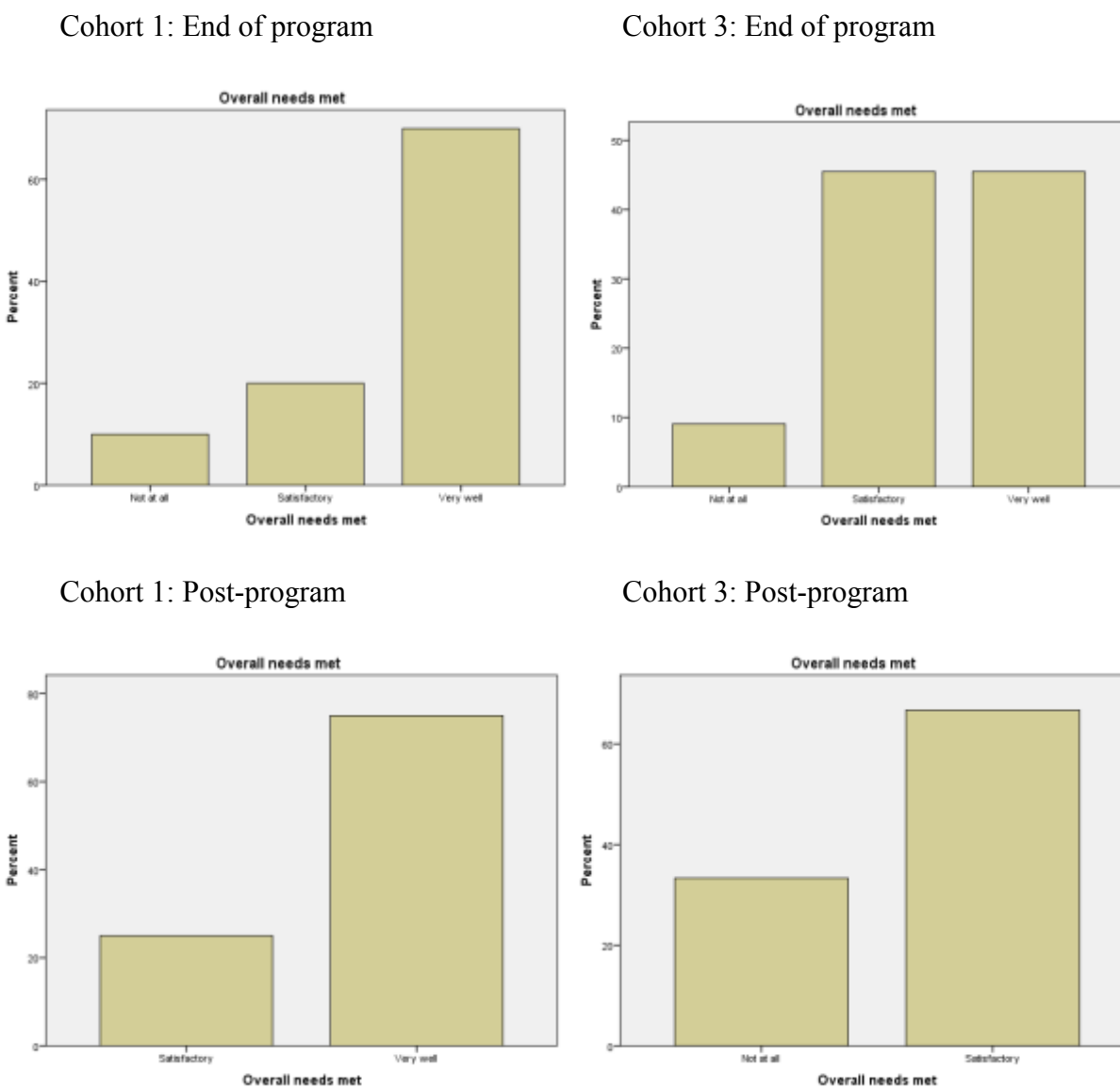


Figure 36. Overall needs met.

How the perceived needs of Cohort 1 students were met at the end of the program remained relatively consistent with post-program results. However, post-program results were notably different for Cohort 3, as 45% of respondents who indicated that their overall needs were met “very well” at end of program were reduced to 0% post-program, and the 45% that answered “satisfactory” at the end of the program increased to 70% post-program. This would indicate that what Cohort 1 students thought they received was consistent with what they did receive, while

what Cohort 3 students thought they received was higher than what they actually felt they received post-program.

As previously discussed, some respondents expressed disappointment in the mathematics they learned. “I didn’t learn too much. I went through MEL 3E” (Kate, St, C3) and, “[the mathematics program could improve with] a harder math” (Stella, St, C3). These comments may help to explain the drop in how well Cohort 3 students perceived that their needs were met in the program, versus how well they perceived their needs were met post-program.

In an effort to investigate the intentions of the informants to continue with their education, respondents were asked in Figure 36 about future plans to remain in school:

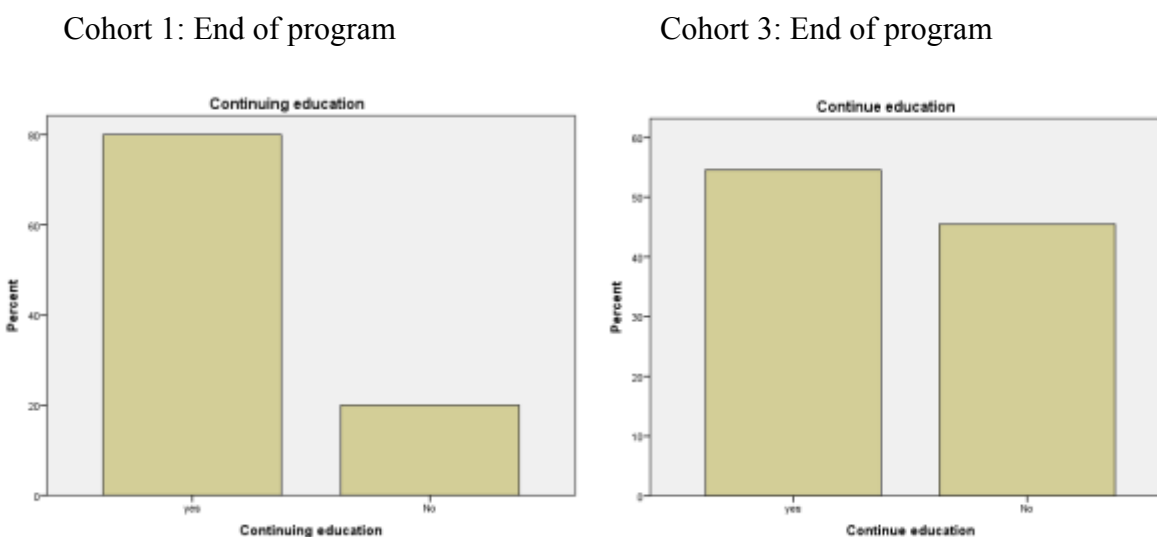
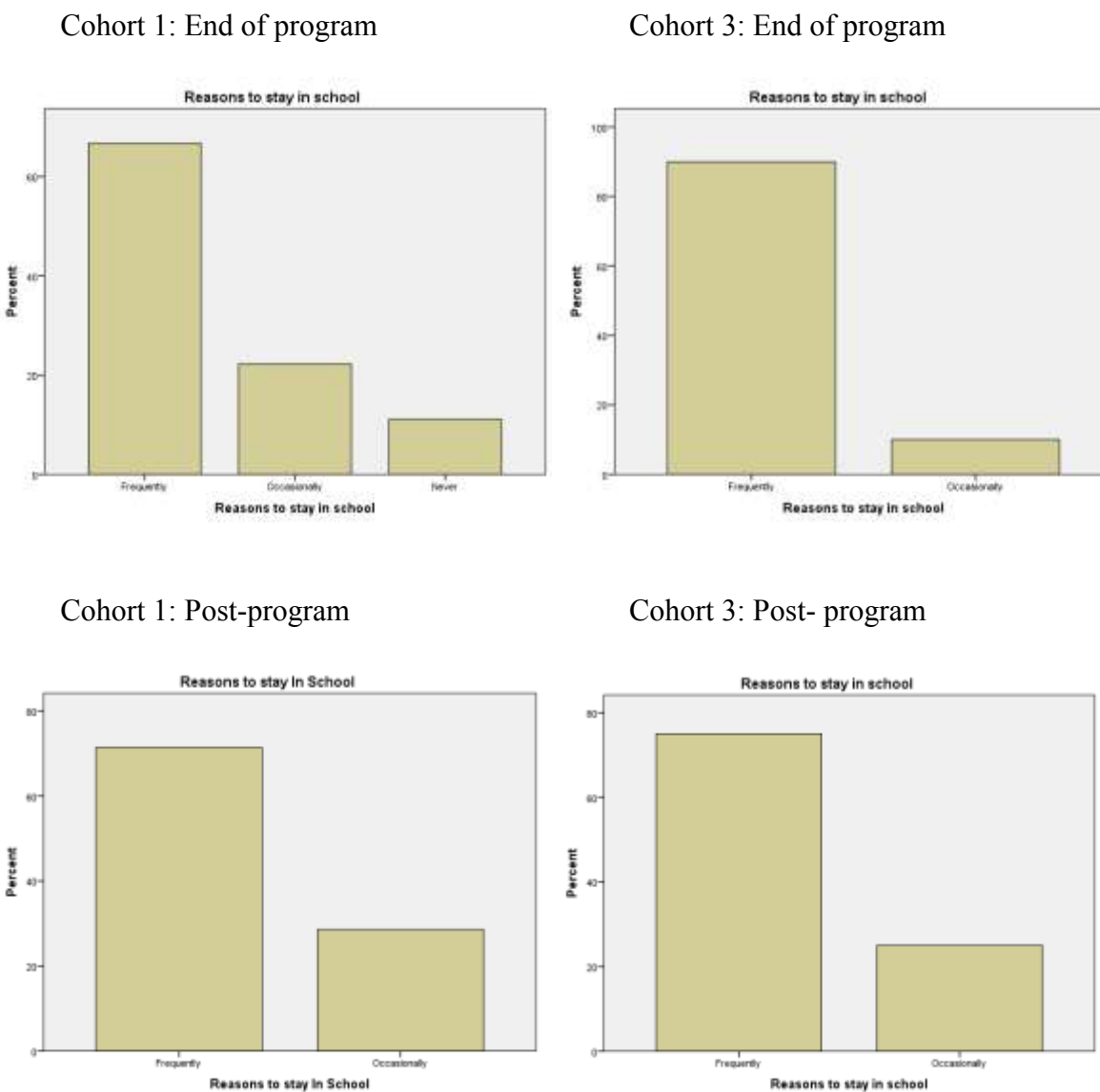


Figure 37. Are you planning on continuing your education?

Eighty percent of Cohort 1 informants, as shown in Figure 37, indicated at the end of the program that they planned to continue with post-secondary education. This was compared to 55% of Cohort 3 informants who reported the same. The respondents were then asked to comment on their reasons to stay in school, in an effort to uncover motivational factors for their educational endeavours. They were surveyed at the end of the program and again while engaging



in their developmental outcomes post-program, with the specific question of if they felt they had reasons to stay in school (see Figure 38).



*Figure 38.* Reasons to stay in school.

The results for Cohort 1, as shown in Figure 38, were interesting in that respondents who said they “frequently” had reasons to stay in school rose by 15% from the end of the program to post-program. This same category dropped by 15% for Cohort 3. These findings indicate that

Cohort 1 was more motivated to stay in school post-program than at the end of the program, while Cohort 3 was less motivated to stay in school post-program than at the end of the program.

The next category investigated informants' next steps, comparing what they planned to do when they left the program with what they planned to do post-program. In the qualitative section that follows, evidence emerges that indicates that funding is an impediment for some informants' next steps.

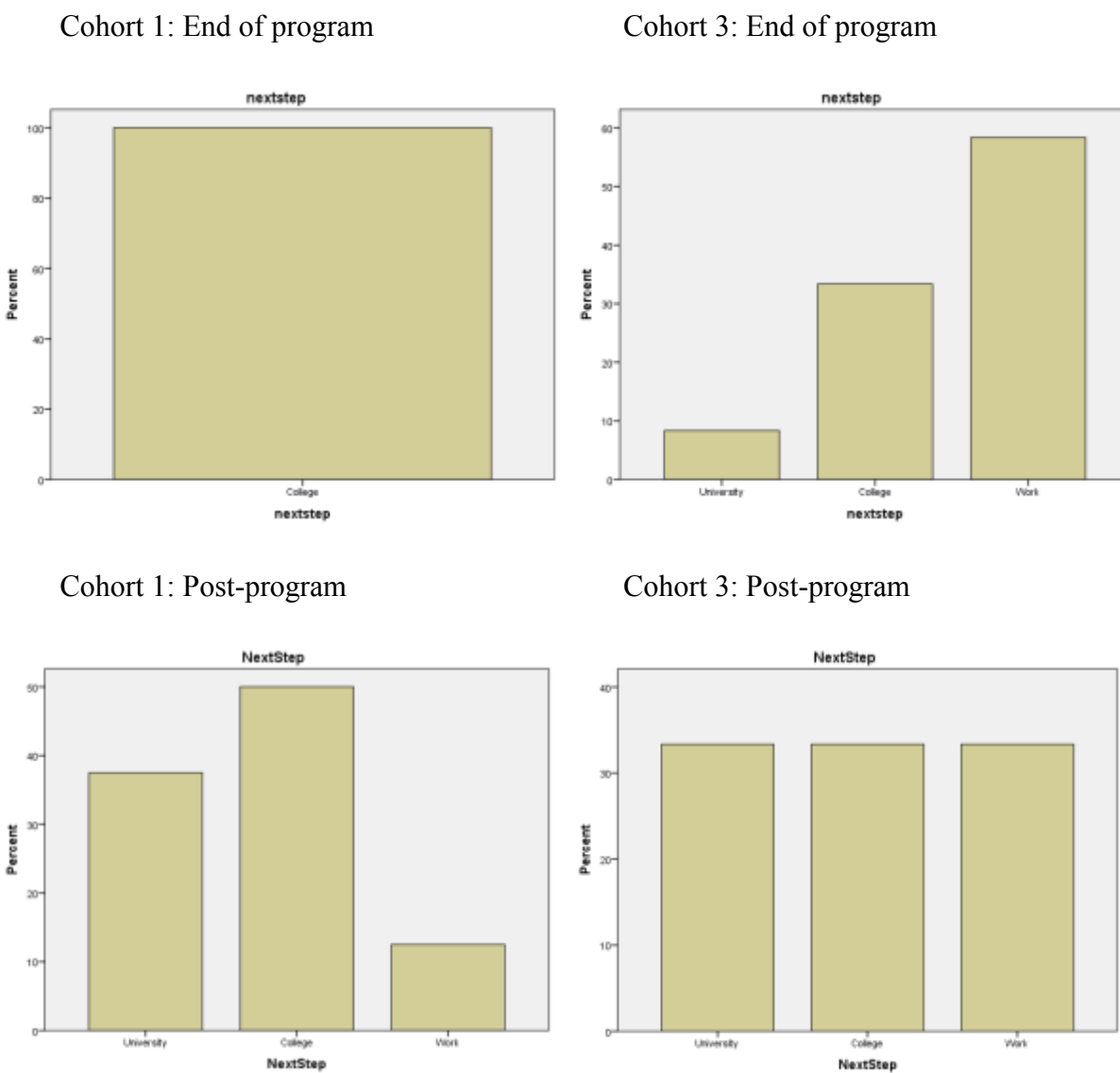


Figure 39. What are your next steps?

There are several notable aspects to the findings of this data set. First, not one respondent from Cohort 1 indicated that they intended to go to university at the end of the program, yet 100% expressed an interest in college. Further, at this point, no Cohort 1 respondents indicated that they wanted to work after graduating from the program. It must be noted that for Cohort 1, a professor from the local university visited the program to talk about the university environment, whereas in Cohort 3, students were taken to the university with various professors and education advisors giving presentations. That 8% of Cohort 3 students saw themselves in university at the end of the program might be attributed to this difference.

The second remarkable aspect to the data was that in Cohort 3 there was a 27% post-program rise in those who said their next step was university, and a 37% post-program increase in this same category for Cohort 1 respondents. Ninety percent of Cohort 1 were planning on remaining in school (either college or university), while 10% planned to work as their next step. For Cohort 3, 33% percent of the respondents planned on working, this down from 57% at the end of the program. Interestingly, when combined with the findings of the last data set, in which 90% of respondents from Cohort 3 said they have frequent reasons to stay in school, it is notable from this data set that only 67% actually plan to stay in school. This phenomenon was reversed for Cohort 1, with 70% saying they frequently having reasons to stay in school and 90% choosing school as their next step. This may indicate that despite less motivation for continuing with school in Cohort 1, the informants plan to attend regardless. As one respondent noted about college: "I love it! I want to go to university in the future" (Amelia, St, C1). Another informant noted:

I feel that college is the right learning [place for me] because it is where I could find what I want to do in the future and it is less work. University would be more work. I feel

university is where you know what you want to do and go from there. (White Feather, St, C1)

Funding was an issue for two informants (James, St, C1; Dawn, St, C1) whose next step was college: “I was offered entrance into [local] college electronic engineering but I could not secure funding” (James, St, C1). Dawn (St, C1) remarked: “[I want to pursue] practical nursing. I got accepted last year but I didn’t get funding last year. I will be trying again this year.”

In light of this post-secondary funding issue that began to emerge post-Cohort 1, FNSO approached the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MTCU) who agreed to help address the problem. Students in later cohorts who had difficulty securing funding and had been accepted into college and university programs were provided with assistance through FNSO funding.

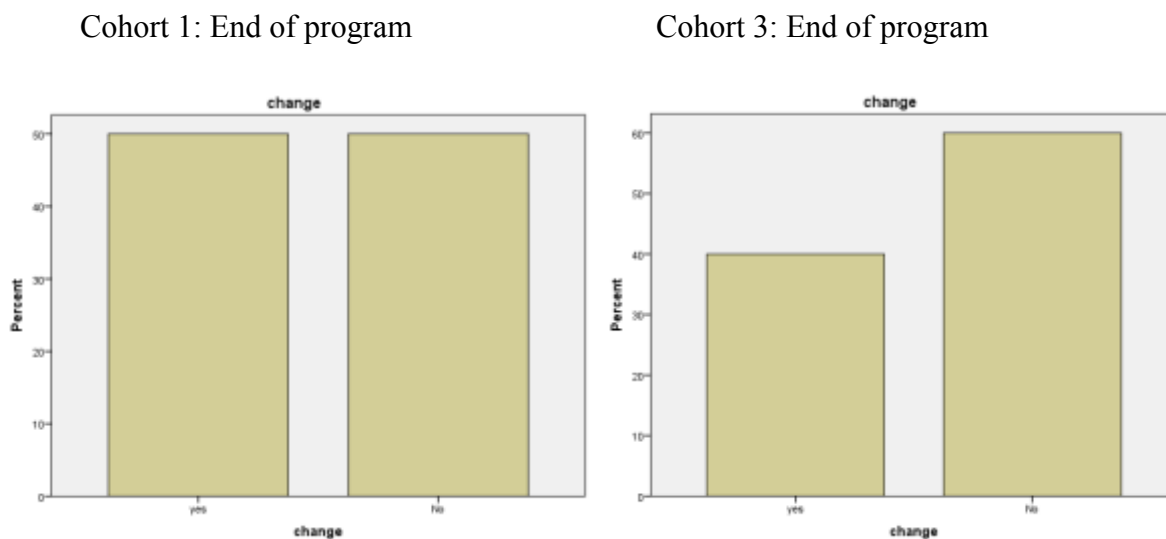
Some informants, like White Feather (St, C1), perceived college as being “less work” than university. One informant noted: “Not university at the moment because I think it is harder and it will be a big change from this program to that. I’m afraid I will fall behind” (Stella, St, C3). University, however, was considered ideal by some: “University here is great. People come from all over to attend university here!” (Sam, St, C2).

In order to compare the quantitative data regarding plans for attending college or university as next steps, and indicators that post-secondary applications had been submitted, I asked informants if they had applied into a college or university program. Some informants expressed a need to take time away from educational pursuits. Confusion about what programs to apply to was, at times, expressed: “I am still kind of confused. I have not applied yet” (Darkcloud, St, C3). Darkcloud added:

I lost my cousin a few months ago and my motivation was low. I look after my kids while their mother is in school. It's very hard for me to adjust to the city life with my family. I am having a hard time with housing with my rent costs going higher.

Other students said they were in various stages of considering, or applying to, specific college and university programs (Aubrey, St, C3; Cruz, St, C3; Lily, St, C1). "It would also have been good to go to the university and make contacts [while in the program]" (Aubrey, St, C3). "I was thinking that I would like to take welding at the college. I applied at the college for the welding program if [the mining partnership] doesn't happen" (Cruz, St, C3). "I want to go to college to be a PSW. I got accepted to a PSW and Education Assistant programs" (Lily, St, C1).

Figure 40 outlines informant responses of whether they wanted to see change in their lives. They were not asked what changes they wanted, only if they wanted changes to occur. This question was asked to explore how informants viewed their current realities and to gauge these results alongside who they thought were responsible to make changes (as depicted in Figure 41).



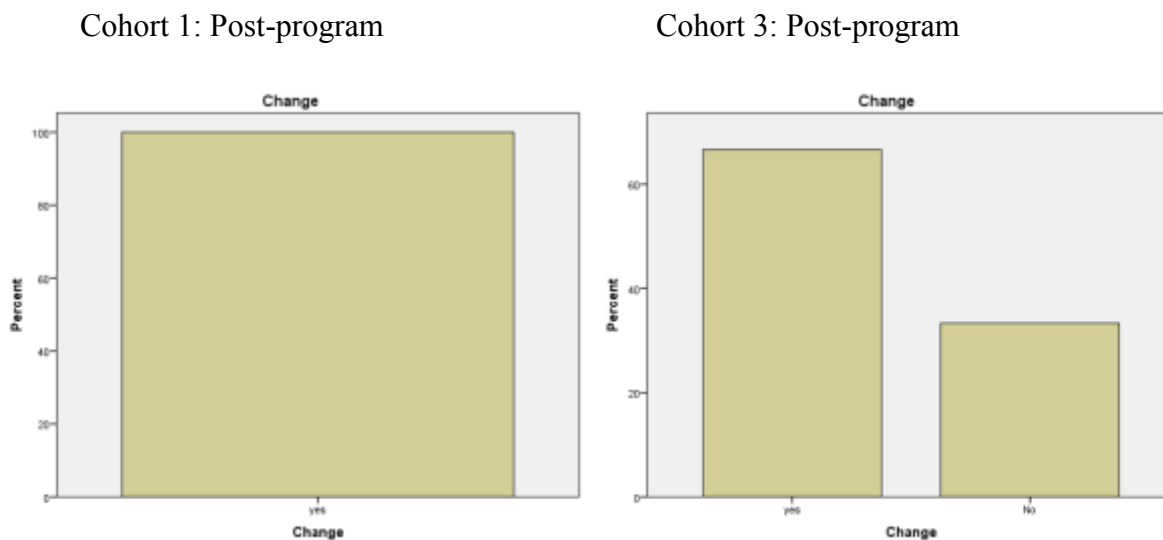
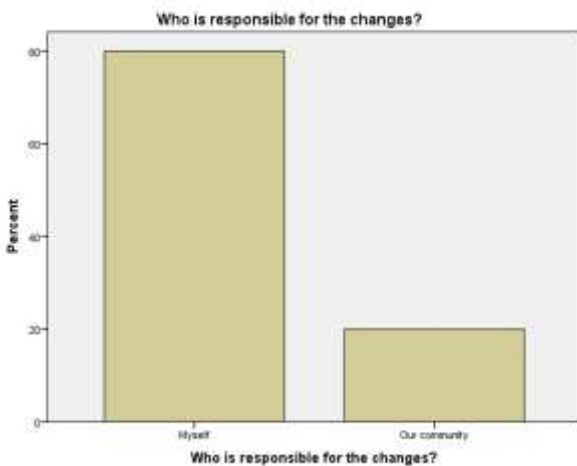


Figure 40. Do you want to see change in your life?

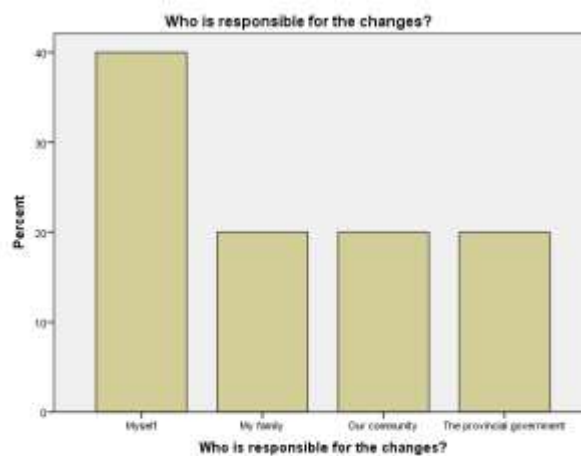
An equal percentage in both groups wanted to see change in their lives at the end of the program. This rose to 100% for Cohort 1 post-program and 65% for Cohort 3 post-program. Thirty-five percent of Cohort 3 students did not desire change in their lives. For Cohort 1, this rise may be indicative of their worlds opening up to more choices and opportunities, as reflected in their newfound interest in university as their next step. Given Pettit's (2012) assertion that empowerment requires an ability to participate, the respondents were asked questions that deal with changes and the participation involved to facilitate change.

In an effort to discover who the informants felt were responsible to make the changes they wanted to see, those who answered "yes" to the last data set were asked who should be responsible to make the changes needed in their lives. The results are shown in Figure 41.

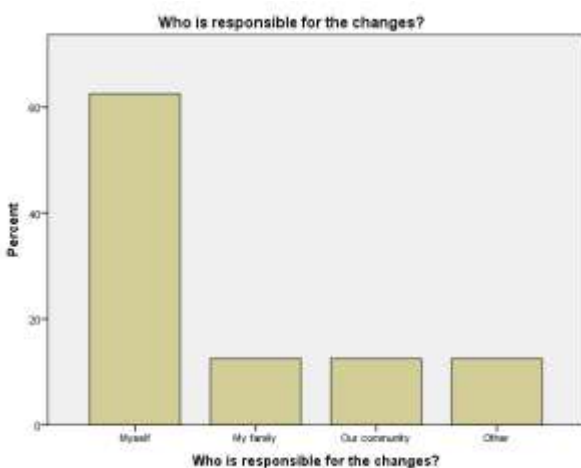
Cohort 1: End of program



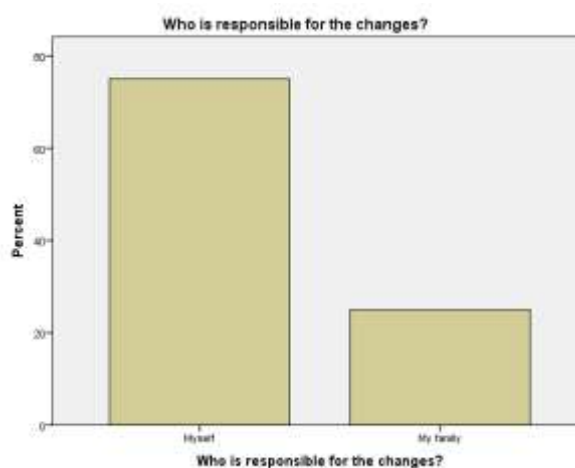
Cohort 3: End of program



Cohort 1: Post-program



Cohort 3: Post-program



*Figure 41.* Who is responsible for the changes?

At the end of the program, 80% of Cohort 1 students indicated that they needed to be the ones to make the change, indicating a feeling of individual responsibility while in the program. Post-program, however, the data for Cohort 1 is more spread out, indicating that the respondents saw other sectors of their lives as playing a role in needed changes. Notably, for Cohort 3, what began as a widespread responsibility for change, including “myself,” “my family,” “my community,” and “the provincial government,” was reduced to the two categories of “myself”

and “my family” in the post-program data. In this data set, the category “my family” shouldered the responsibility previously allotted to “our community” and “the provincial government.” One informant spoke to the responsibility of family when asked who is responsible for the changes, and he replied “my wife” (Fred, St, C3). Broadly, these results may speak to a decolonization trend for Cohort 1 and a colonization trend for Cohort 3, reflecting a broadening/reducing in the lives of informants respectively.

The data in Figure 41 indicates a degree of colonization on the part of Cohort 3, a worry expressed by Rockman (S9) when he stated in Chapter Six that: “so many of our students do not want to go back [to their communities]. That is worrisome. Are they being colonized while they are here?” Rockman (S9)’s concerns were reiterated by Sam (St, C2), when he expressed: “[English] was about finishing, not finding out what I am capable of. I wanted to write about my people. I wanted to write about what I wanted to write about. I don’t care about Christopher Columbus.”

Another cohort informant, who is not named here to further protect their anonymity, raised the issue of nepotism in communities, speaking to the issue of change needed:

There is a lot of nepotism on the reserves. I would like to change that. I know that things need to be changed on the reserve. The last six months have been really tough, knowing that some families are getting a lot of help and others aren’t. (Cohort 1 informant).

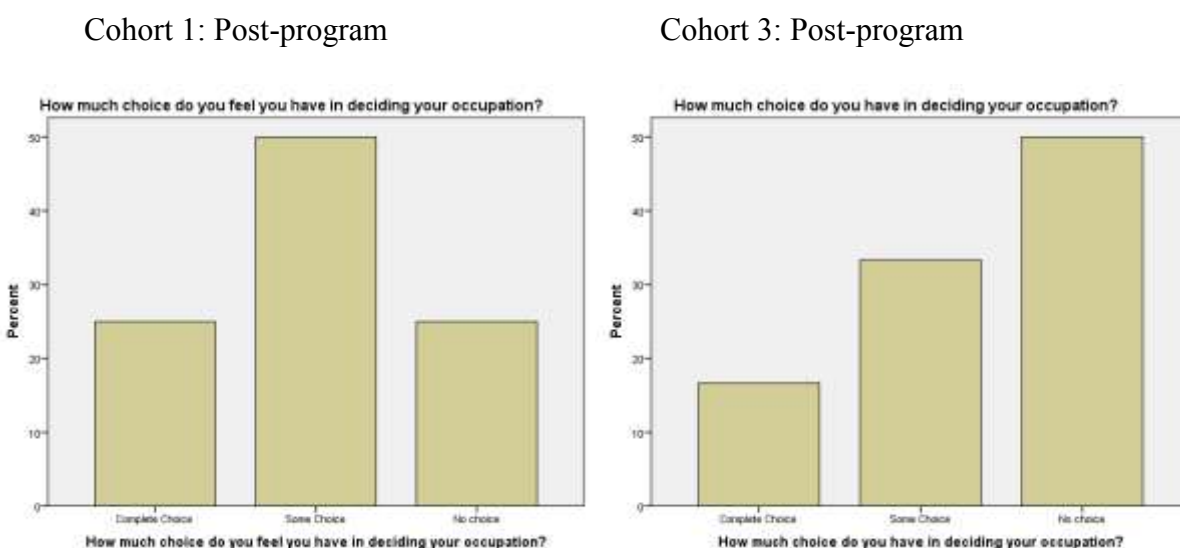
This comment indicates that this Cohort 1 informant understood that others besides herself/himself were responsible for the changes that he/she wanted to see take place.

The data in this section indicates that Cohort 1 informants viewed changes they would like to make in their lives intertwined with changes needed in their communities, while Cohort 3 informants were concentrating on themselves and their immediate families. This may be



indicative of increased colonization for Cohort 3 and decolonization for Cohort 1, especially when considering that Cohort 1 students appeared to arrive in the program with more colonized views of self, while Cohort 3 students appeared to arrive showing less effects of colonization.

Investigating how much choice respondents felt they had when deciding their occupation was an important question to ask, particularly after they had a chance to engage in their developmental outcomes. Informants' responses are reflected in Figure 42:



*Figure 42.* How much choice do you have in deciding your occupation?

Twenty-five percent of Cohort 1 respondents indicated that they felt they had “no choice” over their occupation, whereas 50% of Cohort 3 respondents indicated the same — a 25% difference in the two groups. This may be indicative of a lack of empowerment for a quarter of Cohort 1 respondents and half of Cohort 3 respondents. Twenty-five percent of Cohort 1 respondents indicated that they felt they had “complete choice” post-program, compared to 15% of Cohort 3 for the same category.

When asked why it would be difficult or easy to change his occupation, one informant wrote, “Lack of skills” (Darkcloud, St, C3), while another shared an interesting response, saying:

“This is my land. I can do whatever I want” (George, St, C3). Both informants centralized themselves as the reason for their opposing viewpoints. On the surface, George’s (St, C3) comment might seem to express a decolonizing attitude toward who owns the land, but when interrogated more deeply, it is apparent that colonization is involved. This is evidenced by his use of the more possessive language of “my land,” “I can do whatever I want,” rather than using the language of, for example, “our land, we can do whatever we want.” Darkcloud (St, C3), on the other hand, takes all of the responsibility for his situation. Other comments from students included one who noted that he would have to leave his family to change his occupation: “You have to leave your family to get education or training” (Cruz, St, C3).

Respondents in Figure 43 were asked if they have had any job offers since they graduated from the program. The question was asked post-program, after respondents had been engaging in their developmental outcomes. The idea was to investigate how active the informants had been in looking for work post-program, to gauge whether initial goals of obtaining their OSSD was as empowering for their lives as they may have initially believed.

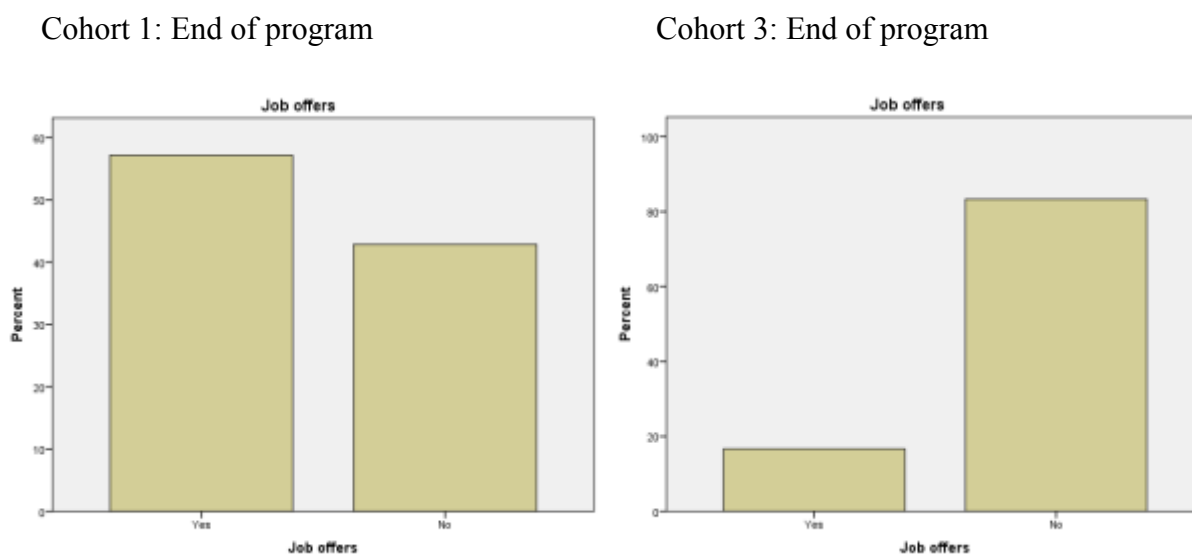


Figure 43. Have you had job offers since leaving the program?

Job offers were forthcoming for 57% of Cohort 1 informants as shown in Figure 43, but only 18% of Cohort 3 informants. This may be an indication of a lack of motivation to apply for employment post-program.

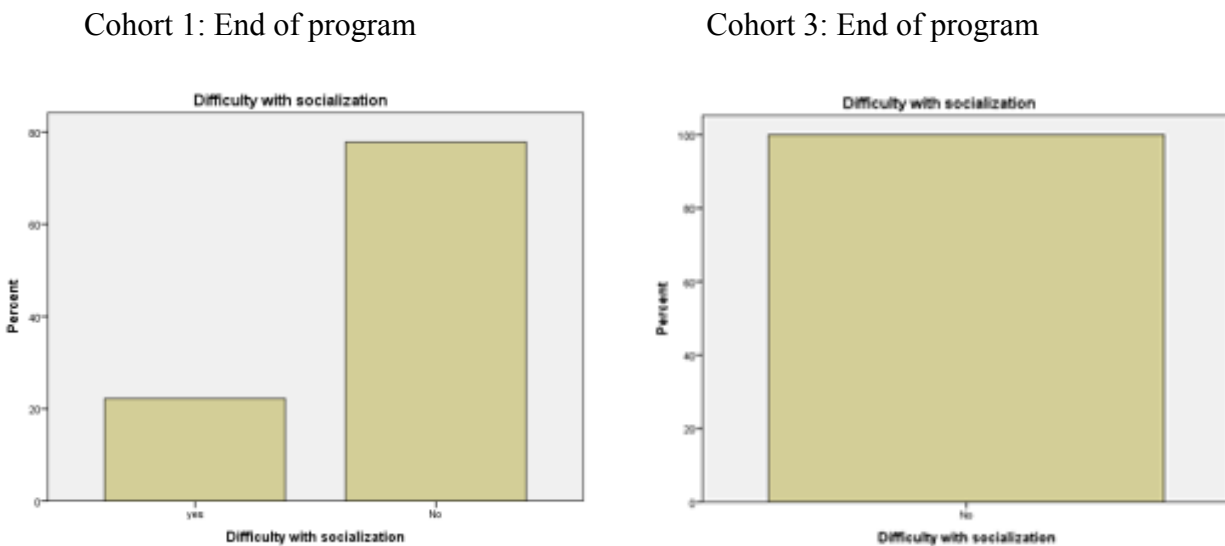
Racism was raised by two informants (James, St, C1; Ken, St, C1). James (St, C1) noted that “the racism factor in any situation is almost always present in [this city]” while Ken (St, C1) said “you need at least college or university education to participate in the labour force and race can play some factor as well.”

Both James and Ken mentioned race as impediments, but this does not explain the difference in responses between Cohort 1 and Cohort 3 informants in regards to job offers. Given that people who look for work are more likely to get job offers, it seems apparent that Cohort 1 students were likely actively looking for work. When considered alongside Figure 39 (“What are your next steps?”), in which 33% of Cohort 3 informants said they saw work as their next step post-program, it is noteworthy that 85% of these respondents had had no job offers. Interestingly, and despite the fact that the possibility of racism exists equally for Cohort 1 and Cohort 3 respondents, only 12% of Cohort 1 informants said they saw work as their next step in Figure 39, yet they appeared to be much more actively looking for work as 57% had been offered jobs, as shown in Figure 43. Are Cohort 1 informants experiencing more choice in their lives, as a result of increased levels of empowerment?

It is worth mentioning that race was mentioned five times in post-qualitative student data and not once in the end-of-program data. Racism was not studied in this research project and no questions were asked as prompts.

Outside of the FNSO environment, students were expected to fill their evenings and weekends many hundreds of kilometres away from their families. Their understanding of

“community” thus took on a new meaning when they ventured out to participate in activities offered around the city. Socialization as a measure of empowerment is somewhat tangential to program delivery, yet it is interconnected to the way the informants felt about themselves while in the program and post-program. To probe how comfortable they felt in their urban setting, the cohorts were asked if they had experienced difficulty with socialization outside of their opportunity structures. Both cohorts were tested at the end of the FNSO program and post-program. Difficulty with socialization as a measure of empowerment/disempowerment is considered in Figure 44.



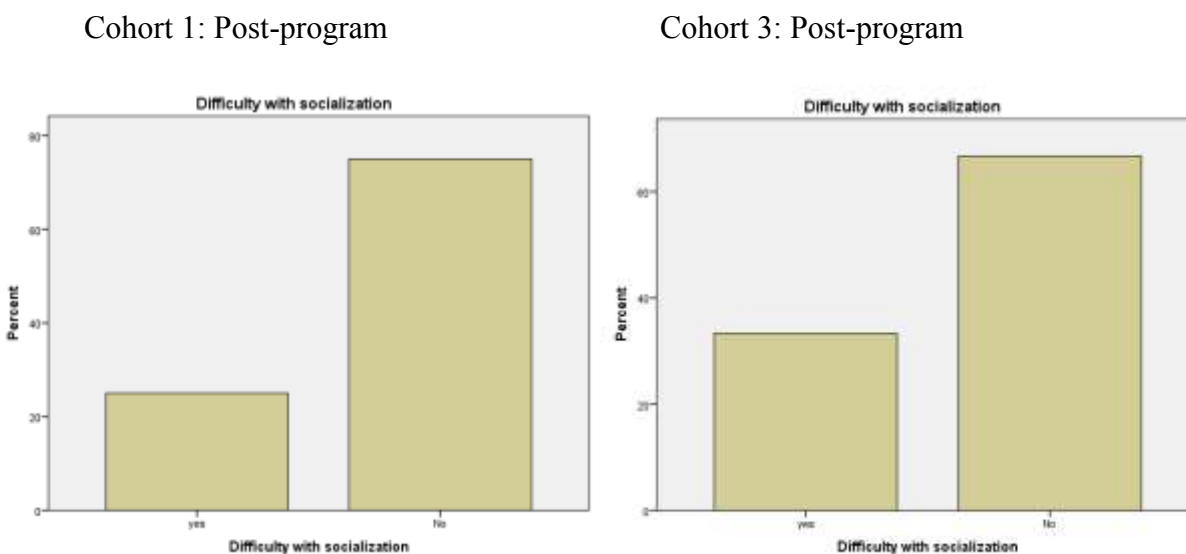


Figure 44. Do you have difficulty with socialization?

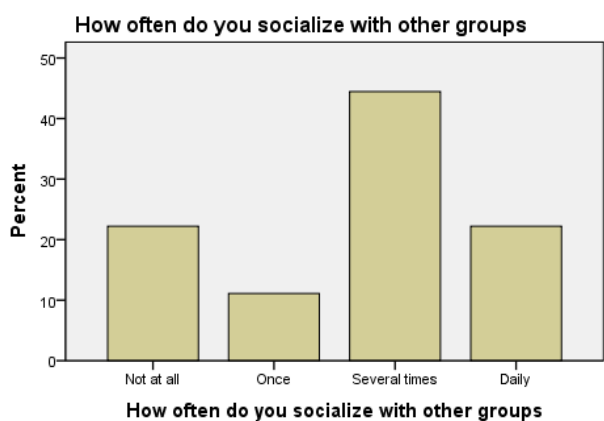
Cohort 1 data remained relatively consistent in the informants' reports of socialization at the end of the program and post-program. This data for Cohort 3, however, was very notable in that 100% of Cohort 3 informants reported having no difficulty with socialization at the end of the program. While prominent on its own, this category became even more noteworthy as 35% of Cohort 3 respondents reported having difficulty with socialization post-program. Two informants commented on barriers to socialization (Marie St, C3; Aubrey, St, C3): "I cannot participate if I have childcare" (Marie), and, "they [people not well-known] are strangers and I don't talk to strangers" (Aubrey).

The data seems to indicate that Cohort 3 conceptions of how they fit into the wider world altered significantly as they engaged in their developmental outcomes. Feelings of disempowerment were manifesting. This data may be compared to the analysis for Cohort 3 in Figure 41 ("Who is responsible for the changes?"), Figure 42 ("How much choice do you have in deciding your occupation?") and Figure 43 ("Have you had job offers since leaving the program?"). For example, the data in Figure 43 ("Have you had job offers since leaving the

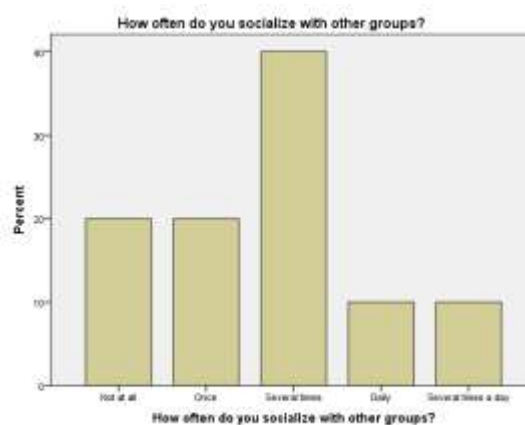
program?”), suggests that Cohort 3 informants are not actively engaging in activities related to looking for work, which may correlate to the data in Figure 44 (“Do you have difficulty with socialization?”). If this is the case, disempowerment for Cohort 3 may be seen in the quantitative data and is generally supported in qualitative comments as well.

In order to explore socialization in a more profound way, I asked informants to list how often they socialized, both at the end of the program post-program.

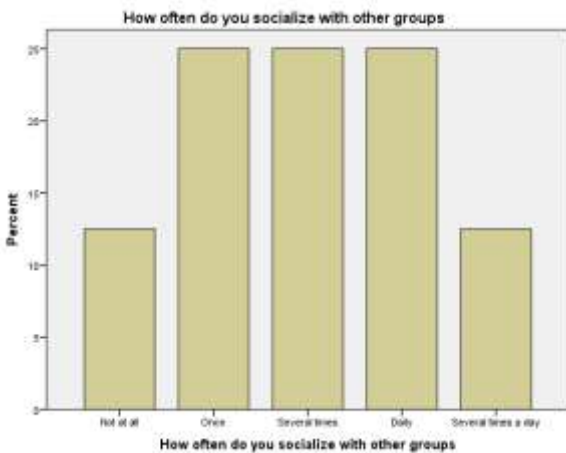
Cohort 1: End of program



Cohort 3: End of program



Cohort 1: Post-program



Cohort 3: Post-program

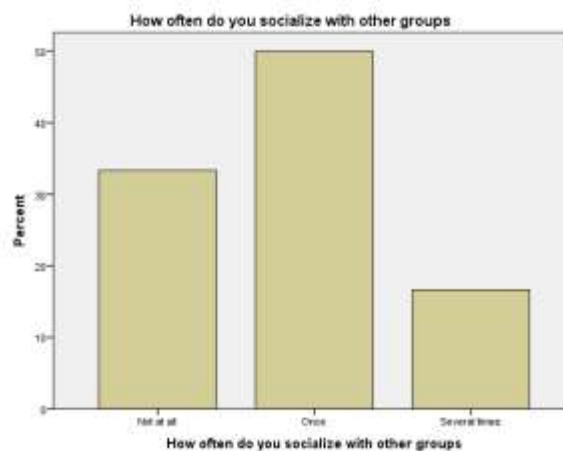
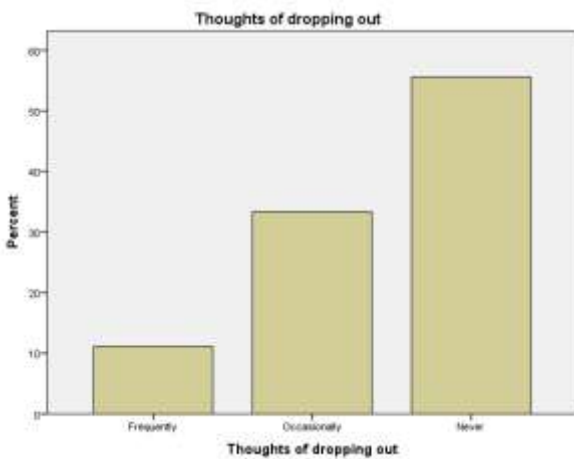


Figure 45. How often do you socialize with other groups?

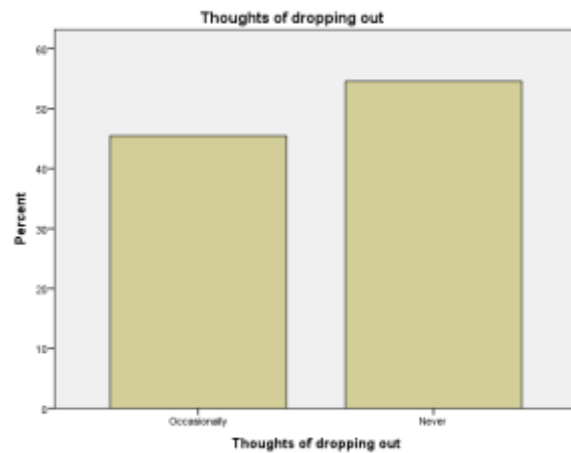
In analyzing the data in Figure 45, socializing between “several times” and “several times a day” was considered a healthy range for informants who reach out to make empowering connections in their worlds. When examining the Cohort 1 data, it was noted that the respondents in this range dropped from 70% at the end of the program to 60% post-program. Ten percent is not significant enough to claim that disempowerment has taken place in this study, however, the results are not indicating empowerment. The Cohort 3 data, however, reveals another story. When the same range of categories (“several times” to “several times a day”) were considered, Cohort 3 informants dropped from 60% at the end of the program to 18% post-program. This 42% decrease in what might be considered a healthy range of socialization appears as disempowering for this group. This data is consistent with previous data for Cohort 3, as shown in Figures 41-44. As socialization is intertwined with the informants continuing to want to be where they are, the next question explored feelings associated with dropping out of educational goals that were being pursued.

In Figure 46 I asked the informants whether they had thoughts of dropping out and if so, how often. Dropping out, for students who were not in school post-program, meant putting aside any thoughts of pursuing their education in the short term.

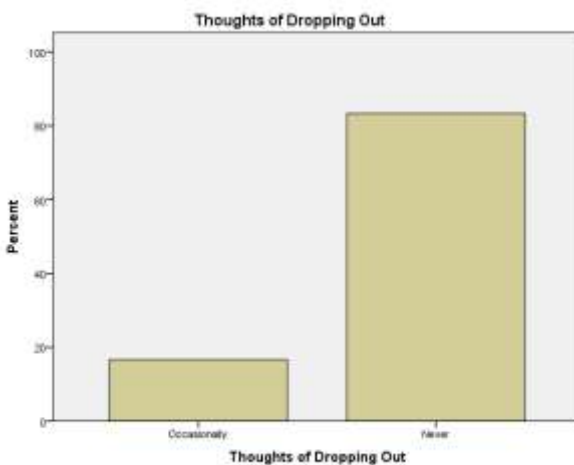
Cohort 1: End of program



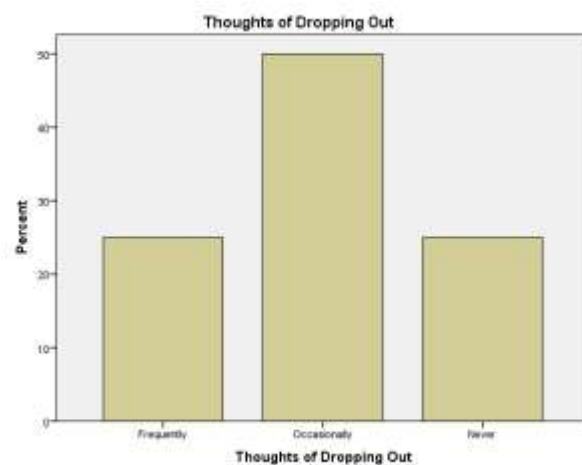
Cohort 3: End of program



Cohort 1: Post-program



Cohort 3: Post-program



*Figure 46.* Do you have thoughts of dropping out?

Both groups reported having thoughts of dropping out. Cohort 1 respondents indicated they had these thoughts “frequently” 10% percent of the time at the end of the program. Post-program, however, this data altered, with the “frequently” category disappearing and the “never” category increasing by 17%. Empowerment for this group is thus indicated by the data.



Cohort 3 showed a different picture. “Frequently” having thoughts of dropping out rose by 25% post-program for the Cohort 3 respondents, the “occasionally” category rose by 5%, and the “never” category decreased by 30%. In other words, at the end of the program no respondents (0%) indicated that they “frequently” thought about dropping out, but post-program that number had risen to 25%. This reveals that a level of motivation respondents had at the end of the program dropped post-program. This drop may be indicative of AEO’s managerial shift in which students were controlled by the academic program by not being allowed to choose their courses initially, not having say over their teachers leaving, and having their lunch time significantly decreased. Conversely, for Cohort 1, the informants were encouraged to exercise choice over the courses they took, and were given the time to reflect over a longer lunch. This 25% drop for Cohort 3 may be indicative of the effects of oppressive aspects of the academic portion of their FNSO program: disempowering trends that seem to be continuing from the data in Figures 41-45.

Attendance in the program was perhaps the principal challenge for teachers and client support officers (CSOs), according to observational data. FNSO policy mandated that students schedule doctor appointments outside of class time. This, however, was not always possible, and coupled with childcare issues, methadone clinic appointments, and myriad other issues that predominantly affect the adult population, meant progress was slow for some informants.

The next section addresses attendance and motivation in an effort to gauge the ability of informants to overcome the challenges that interfere with attending and performing at school. It is considered that empowerment is occurring when the informants are able to make attendance top priority for the goals they have chosen for themselves. As we are reminded by Pettit (2012),

participation is the cornerstone of empowerment. The informants were asked if they have trouble attending school. If not in school post-program, trouble attending would apply to work.

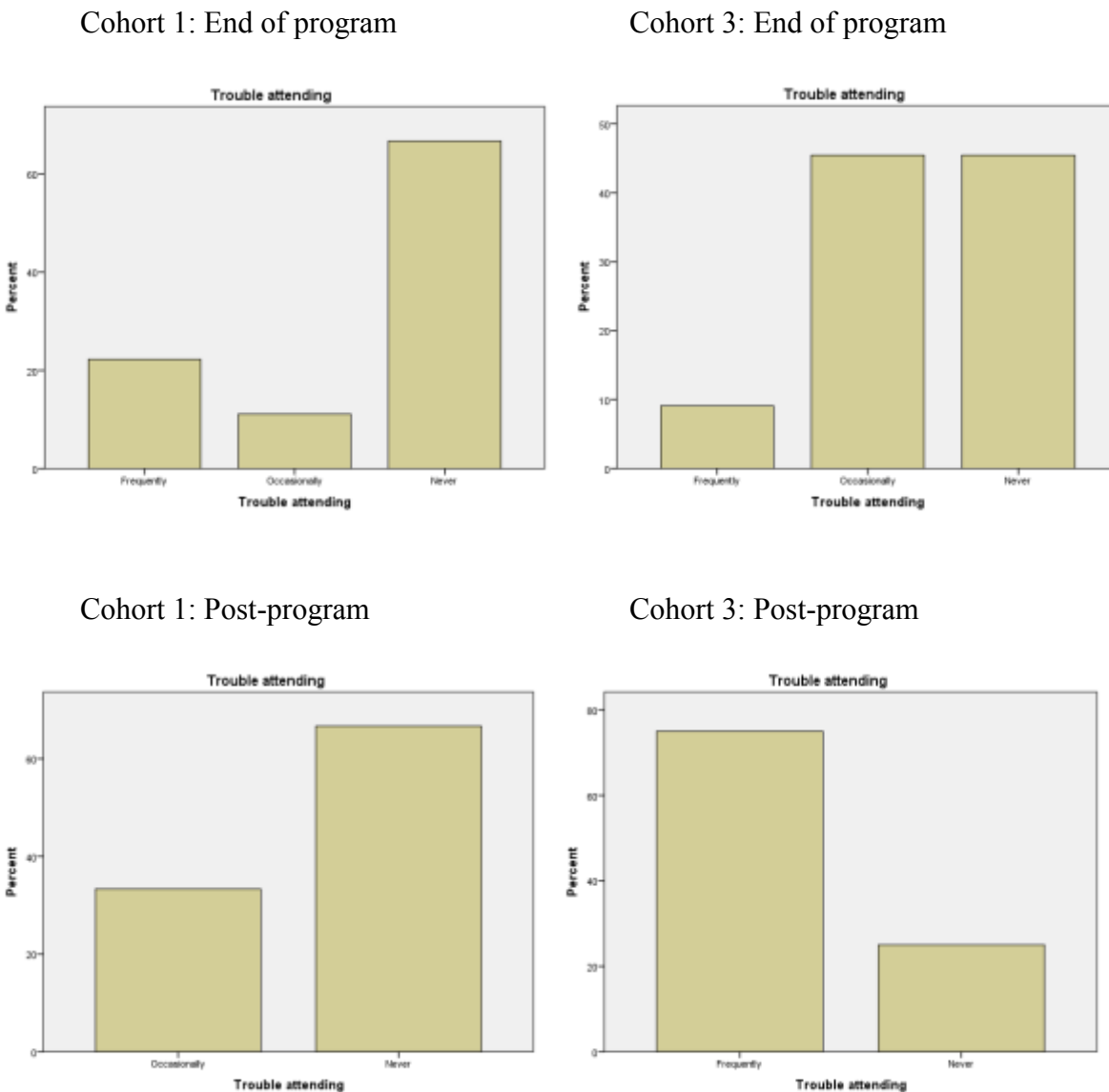


Figure 47. Do you have trouble attending?

Twenty-two percent of respondents in Cohort 1 indicated that they “frequently” had trouble attending school while in the program. As shown in Figure 47, the “frequently” category dropped to 0% post-program. For Cohort 3, trouble coming to school for the more structured, streamlined program was reported as “frequently” only 9% of the time while in the program.

However, this rose to 70% post-program, replacing the “occasionally” category altogether. The category of “never” having trouble attending dropped to 20%. This data may indicate disempowerment for the Cohort 3 group, when the indications are interpreted as informants having difficulty showing up for what they chose for their developmental outcomes. Disempowerment may also be read into the data when considering that for Cohort 3, some of their choices may have been removed and time spent taking courses over which they had no control and/or no use for, in the AEO program.

College taught unexpected skills to one informant:

College has taught me to say no. Family members and friends want me to skip classes to help them with problems that they got themselves into. If I do that, I will not be setting an example. So I say no. (Amelia, St, C1)

This empowering account is representative of many students who said they experienced difficulties when family members and friends asked for help that interfered with their schoolwork. One respondent reported that she chose to attend school in another city, because “I knew that I would need to focus on my course and that would not happen if I stayed” (Nishnabe Kway, St, C1). That Amelia (St, C1) was able to realize it was within her ability to say no to requests for help is a powerful indication of empowerment.

The data in this section showed empowering aspects from end of program to post-program for Cohort 1 across several lines of questioning, although disempowerment was evidenced in the area of socialization (Figure 45: “How often do you socialize with other groups?”). Empowerment was evident in Cohort 1 data in the following areas: “needs met,” “reasons to stay in school,” “desire for change,” “job offers,” “thoughts of dropping out,” and “trouble attending.”

For Cohort 3, empowering aspects dropped off in the categories of “needs met,” “continuing education,” and “desire for change.” The data also indicated disempowerment for Cohort 3 in the categories of “reasons to stay in school,” “socialization,” “job offers,” “choice over occupation,” “thoughts of dropping out,” and “trouble attending.” Additionally, 90% of Cohort 3 informants indicated that they believe they should stay in school, but only 67% reported planning to do so. This can be compared to 70% of Cohort 1 respondents who indicated they believe they should stay in school but 90% who planned to do so. This may indicate a lack of motivation on the part of Cohort 3 informants, especially since more post-secondary funding was available for this group through MCTU. Cohort 1 informants, however, appeared to be choosing post-secondary studies not because they feel they should, but perhaps out of interest or a desire to learn more.

The final observation from this section is that of possible indicators of colonization and decolonization of Cohorts 1 and 3 respectively, when asked who is responsible for the changes they would like to see in their lives. Cohort 3 respondents moved from a place where responsibility is shared to a place in which it is shouldered exclusively by themselves and their families. Cohort 1 informant data was reversed from Cohort 3, in which respondents indicated that they no longer felt that they and their families alone were responsible for the changes they wanted to see. Qualitative comments sprinkled throughout the data explained this further, such as comments from Sam (St, C2), who wrote “I don’t care about Christopher Columbus,” and George (St, 3), who wrote that “This is my land. I will do what I want.” If colonization is taking place, Memmi’s comments echo throughout discourses of empowerment: “Even the poorest colonizer thought himself to be — and actually was — superior to the colonized” (Memmi, 1965, p. xii).

## Analysis

This chapter has focused on a comparison between Cohort 1, representing students who started in the program under the first AEO management style, and Cohort 3, representing students who were deeply entrenched in the cost-effective management style of the second AEO manager.

FNSO program supports led to empowerment across all cohorts. These supports included client support officers, teachers, tutors, cultural workshops, elders, living allowances, graduation ceremonies, workshops, bus passes, childcare, support for community deaths and drug addictions, and housing — all indicated empowerment for informants. All students benefited from the supports provided. Students used the supports throughout the program, at times choosing with whom they wanted to share their needs. Data from Figure 14 (“Who the informants talk to when in trouble”) and Figure 26 (“Informants talk to teachers when in trouble”), along with student and staff qualitative data, indicate that students go to teachers when in trouble.

Workshops usefulness, views on teachers, teacher relationships, and tutors were compared between Cohort 1 and Cohort 3. Empowerment was noted in Cohort 1 and Cohort 3 for these supports. Student comparative data was explored for its ability to reveal how often students go to teachers when in trouble, in an effort to gauge credentialing concerns.

Learner perception of difficulty levels of mathematics and English were investigated to determine how challenged the informants were in the two cohorts. Cohort 1 respondents were clearly challenged to a higher percentage in mathematics than Cohort 3 informants. Empowerment was noted for both cohorts in English, with some disempowerment noted from the end of the program to post-program for Cohort 3.

Socialization of the informants of the two groups was explored at the end of the program and compared to post-program. Cohort 3 reported a drop in the category of “no difficulty” with socialization, from 100% of informants at the end of the program to 35% post-program, indicating a dependency on the program for the socialization of many informants under the streamlined efficient academic program. This data was indicative of disempowerment for Cohort 3 after they engaged in their developmental outcomes.

Respondents reported feeling better about their ability to achieve in mathematics post-program in Cohort 1, yet Cohort 3 reported a reduction in how good they were in math from the end of the program to post-program, with the “very good” category dropping from 50% to 0%. This is backed by qualitative student data. Additionally, what Cohort 3 students thought they received did not match with what they considered they received post-program, when asked if their needs were met in the program. Less empowerment appears to have been experienced by Cohort 3 students in this category after engaging in their developmental outcomes. This trend continued when students were asked about their motivation to stay in school.

Decolonization/colonization aspects were considered, with the data suggesting that the former took place for Cohort 1 respondents while the latter occurred for Cohort 3 informants. This was evidenced by the data that arose out of asking the informants who was responsible for the changes they wanted to see in their lives and by qualitative data from informants.

Difficulty with attendance changed among Cohort 3 students, as 9% reported “frequently” having difficulty attending while in the program, but 70% answered “frequently” to the same question post-program. This may indicate a lack of self-determination when attendance was controlled in the program, through direct teaching as reported by David (S4) and shortened lunch hours as reported by Joan (S5). Similarly, 45% of Cohort 3 informants reported “never”

having difficulty attending school at the end of the program, and this dropped to 20% post-program. Cohort 1 students, however, moved from having difficulty attending in the program to having less difficulty attending post-program. Twenty percent reported “frequently” having difficulty attending at the end of the program, while 0% answered “frequently” to the same question post-program.

Informants under the economically driven AEO program that delivered MEL 3E *en masse* appeared to be less empowered post-program in their socialization, their perceived ability to do well in mathematics, and their motivation to attend to their developmental outcomes. At the same time, all of the supports offered to the students, including teachers and tutors, were rated highly. Informants such as Stella (St, C3) made recommendations for the program that involved higher-level mathematics. Some respondents asked for more teaching staff under Cohort 1, suggesting they were being challenged. Indeed, Cohort 1 data indicated that 80% and 100% of informants were being challenged in English and math, respectively. This was compared to 68% and 60% of Cohort 3 informants responding to the same question, regarding being challenged in English and mathematics respectively. The informants under the streamlined model (Cohort 3) appeared to be far less challenged in their programs.

Cohort 3 informants were clearly struggling with empowerment post-program. With 57% of Cohort 1 respondents reported being offered jobs post-program, as compared to only 18% for Cohort 3 informants post-program, and considering that Cohort 3 students expressed work as their next step by 22% more than the Cohort 1 group, this data may indicate that Cohort 3 informants are less active in pursuing their next steps.

When informants were asked if they had thoughts of dropping out, Cohort 1 data indicated empowering results from end of program to post-program while the more streamlined Cohort 3 displayed disempowerment. Cohort 1 informant data on control over their occupation was reported as 25% saying they had “no choice.” This was not the case for Cohort 3, where 50% of respondents indicated “no choice” in deciding their occupation post-program, and qualitative student data reinforced this. Disempowerment for Cohort 3 was indicated in this category as well.

For the category of needs met, Cohort 3 respondents who answered that their needs had been met “very well” took a notable drop of 45% between the end of the program and post-program, down to 0%. “Not at all” having their needs met rose as a category from 10% at the end of the program to 35% post-program. Cohort 1 informant data, however, showed a greater appreciation for what they received in the program after the program ended, with the 15% “not at all” category disappearing altogether. With agency being defined in Chapter Two as a measure of student understanding of what education and career options are available to them, this schism between what Cohort 3 students thought they received, and what they did receive, would indicate that informant agency dropped off for the respondents in Cohort 3 between the end of the program and post-program.

Cohort 1 informants who reported that they “never” found reasons to stay in school dropped from 10% to 0% from the end of the program to post-program, whereas Cohort 3 informants who “frequently” found reasons to stay in school dropped from 90% at the end of the program to 75% post-program.

The data that queried the informants about change revealed an interesting phenomenon. Cohort 3 informants came into the program believing that the responsibility for the changes they



wanted to see were shared among themselves, family, community, and government. This took a dramatic shift as respondents indicated that only themselves and their families were responsible for the changes, post-program. Rockman (S9)'s concerns that the students were being colonized while they were in the program may show standing with this category as a more hegemonic worldview emerges for these students. Regarding George's (St, C3) notion that "the land is mine," rather than "the land belongs to my people," Baskin (2006) writes, "To divide any of these realities into separate categories is a dishonour to Aboriginal ways of thinking" (p. 1). Additionally, if Cohort 3 informants are indicating that they and their families alone are responsible for making changes needed in their lives, they are carrying a large burden. As noted with the end-of-program data, Cohort 3 informants arrived in FNSO with a belief that responsibilities are shared, according to the data in Figure 41 ("Who is responsible for the changes?"). This shifting scenario thus brings a weight of responsibility that would be unfamiliar to these informants. This is a critical finding, because it may explain some of the downturns throughout the quantitative data that indicated disempowerment for the group.

Contrary to what is observed in the Cohort 3 data, Cohort 1 data showed a degree of decolonizing appearing post-program. This may indicate a critique of the system, when Cohort 1 informants indicated a wider spread of responsibility to make the changes they wanted to see in their lives post-program. How Cohort 3 informants viewed the world, however, appeared to collapse from the end of the program to post-program. Indications that both disempowerment and recolonization have been realized by Cohort 3 informants appear across a number of areas in the data.

Amelia's (St, C1) experience with college teaching her to say "no" is interesting because she sees herself playing an empowering role in the lives of her family and friends. She has

moved her thinking to a focus on empowering her community, indicating not only a significant rise in empowerment but additionally a distinct decolonizing characteristic.

Overall, Cohort 1 informants appeared empowered by the FNSO program on a number of levels. Categories including the usefulness of academic workshops, perceptions of the difficulty levels of mathematics and English while in the program, decolonization, trouble attending, trouble with lateness, needs met in the program, and next steps all indicated empowerment to greater and lesser degrees after having engaged in the developmental outcomes. Cohort 3 informants, however, presented various indications of disempowerment in all of the above categories. Additionally, indications of recolonization were reported by the Cohort 3 group, which has implications for empowerment. Cohort 3 informants had more difficulty with attendance and tardiness after the program ended and their socialization decreased significantly from the end of the program to post-program. More Cohort 3 students reported their next step as work than did Cohort 1 students, although significantly less had been offered jobs post-program.

The data in this chapter is critical in that it represents the culmination of effects of the policies, practices, and funding models on student empowerment. Data was presented and interrogated for a comprehensive analysis. This data provides culminating student voices that speak directly and indirectly to empowerment and disempowerment between Cohorts 1 and 3. As each section was analyzed, data began to develop into a depiction of recolonization and disempowerment for Cohort 3 informants, who had been subjected to an economically efficient AEO model of education as discussed in previous chapters. Disempowerment for Cohort 3 was linked to teacher disempowerment under the economically driven model, despite evidence that teachers attempted to prevent their disempowerment from impacting the students in the program.

In Chapter 8, a summary of the study's analysis is provided along with conclusions, a discussion of implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for similar programs and further study. This chapter will outline how the primary question, as well as the three secondary questions, have been answered through the data.

## **Chapter Eight: Conclusions and Implications**

My stated purpose in undertaking this research was to examine the tensions that occur when First Nations learners are caught between competing organizational policies, practices, and funding models. Having worked through the processes of data collection and analysis, I have come to an understanding of the challenges that exist in the education of First Nations learners. In this chapter, I conclude my dissertation by discussing these challenges in terms of empowerment and its corollary, disempowerment. From this discussion, I move on to an explicit answering of my research questions, along with a discussion of the implications and recommendations that flow from those answers. The chapter concludes with an epilogue of my research experiences, an epilogue that, in many ways, captures the themes of empowerment and disempowerment.

### **Empowerment and Disempowerment**

In my study I have followed the experiences of three cohorts of First Nations learners and their teachers. Over the course of time, there have been significant changes in the policies, practices, and funding models, each of which has had a dramatic impact on the empowerment and disempowerment of both learners and educators. Working from my analyses of the data, I would argue that learners and teachers were empowered when FNSO was able to maintain power, resources, and autonomy over their organization. I would further contend that this Cohort 1 pilot project was an ideal model and an example for First Nations communities interested in maximizing sustainable levels of learner empowerment. When FNSO lost effective control of their power to the better-funded and more dominant AEO, disempowerment of the learners and teachers began to manifest. A pivotal moment in this loss of power was the AEO filing of a union grievance. Filed in the latter half of the Cohort 2 program, this action reflected Battiste's

(2005a) claim that First Nations organizations have difficulty advancing education development because of struggles that take place over funding, policies, and practices when they are forced into partnerships. Given that many of the informants in the study were being offered an established education program for the first time in their lives, power struggles within and between organizations are troubling.

The disempowerment of First Nations learners and their teachers was a gradual process. While empowerment was experienced among Cohort 1 informants, there was increasing disempowerment of learners and teachers due to a number of forces. These forces were constituent parts of the dominant educational and organizational discourse exemplified by AEO's policies, practices, and funding models. This discourse culminated in the disempowerment of both the First Nations learners and their teachers in Cohort 3. The roles and impacts of the policies, practices, and funding that have been researched for this dissertation can now be explicated.

**Policies.** The growing policy dissonance between FNSO and AEO was a prime source of disempowerment for the First Nations learners and their teachers. The policies, a reflection of the dominance of AEO, effectively subverted the values originally espoused by FNSO, adapting them "to the 'needs' of the 'new' global economy" (Welton, 1997, p. 33).

Bennet et al. (2004) argue that, for an ideal partnership, the autonomy of both organizations in any partnership needs to be set aside when the goals and visions are shared. The goals and visions of FNSO and AEO differed significantly, as observed by all of the staff participants to varying degrees. AEO's policies constrained FNSO's vision on four levels: (a) AEO's policies not allowing teachers to take the suicide prevention workshops offered by FNSO (Collins Rice, S3; Joan, S5), (b) a lack of AEO policy to provide elementary upgrading to

teachers (David, S4; Laura, S6; Joan, S5), (c) AEO policies allowing a deficit model of education to dominate the program (Rockman, S9; Joan, S5; David, S4), and (d) a policy designating 50% to be a pass from AEO courses (Joan, S5), which was low for students in pursuit of post-secondary studies. These differences ultimately appeared to adversely affect the empowerment of respondents.

With informants admitting to talking to teachers when in trouble only slightly less than talking to counselors, it seems that regardless of the views of either organization in the partnership, teachers need more credentialing than a teaching degree. Joan (S5)'s expressed nervousness in working with a population with high suicide rates and having no training to help identify students at risk is poignant, considering that the student data indicated that they turned to teachers only 2% less than counselors when they were in trouble. Through staff interviews throughout the study, it was apparent that teachers saw the learners differently than the AEO administrators, who appeared to subscribe to a deficit-based, colonial model of learning.

As AEO increasingly viewed the FNSO learners through a deficit model of learning, FNSO began moving their policies in an opposite, more empowering direction, turning away from the deficit model for attendance issues. FNSO appears to have recognized the latter model as contributing to colonization for the learners after observing its implementation by AEO. Despite this final attempt by FNSO to increase long-term empowerment, the analysis indicates that both teachers and learners in Cohort 3 were ultimately disempowered. Memmi (1965) makes the argument that disempowerment is colonization:

Theoretically at least, a worker can leave his class and change his status, but within the framework of colonization, nothing can ever save the colonized. He can never move into

the privileged clan; even if he should earn more money than they, if he should win all the titles, if he should enormously increase his power. (pp. 73-74)

**Practices.** The FNSO vision clearly prioritized education for the whole learner, evidenced by the holistic supports that were offered during the program and after it ended. While initially supportive of this vision of education, the analysis indicates that the practices of AEO, under the second management style, became progressively more aligned with an economically driven, deficit model of teaching and learning. A deficit model in education works from the premise that low achievement is caused by problems with the student, rather than the instructional practices and organizational structures of the school (Harry & Klingner, 2007). The deficit model sees diversity in culture, lifestyle, language, and learning styles as problematic, rather than something to be celebrated (Harry & Klingner, 2007). This shift in practice was disempowering for the teachers and learners.

The analysis suggests that the AEO deficit model came to view learners from a colonial perspective: capable of unrest and needing to be “forced” to be on time. This was evidenced in practices such as removing teachers but giving students no warning in order to forestall student unrest, the implementation of a shortened lunch break, and the move to direct teaching to control attendance. In terms of colonization, AEO’s unexpected switching of teachers and classrooms could be seen as a colonial, disempowering history repeating itself for the learners. Shields (2012) found that a northern Ontario First Nations community hired teachers from all over but they did not last in the community. Pettit (2012) has argued that unilaterally switching classrooms and teachers as an efficiency measure excludes the participation necessary for an empowering outcome. It is difficult to imagine students feeling empowered when teachers faced sudden departures, as Joan (S5) described: “I was gone, no good-bye, nothing, just not there for

them anymore. They must have felt so let down, like they didn't matter.” As Aslop and Heinsohn (2005) argue, learners' understanding of their opportunity structure is necessary if there is to be a sustained sense of empowerment.

The practices adopted by AEO impinged on the reflection time that First Nations students need when they are learning (Alberta Education, 2005). David (S4) contended that direct teaching pushed students who do not attend out of the system, and Marjorie (S2) was uneasy about AEO's sudden implementation of direct teaching. Attendance policies can be seen as European educational strategies that can have devastating effects when applied in cross-cultural situations. David's claim that students drop out willingly under a direct instruction model, because they fall behind quickly when they do not attend, is concerning when considering the high suicide rate of the population. Rockman (S9) alluded to this risk when he pointed out that “people end up being statistics.” The data here suggests that a deficit model is being relied upon when using direct instruction; Flear and Vakulenko (2010) refer to this deficit model as disempowering.

When direct teaching methods were used in conjunction with the mainstreaming of the workplace-level mathematics courses, the need for elementary upgrading diminished. The combining of these practices was economically favourable for AEO: it abolished the need to find scarce funding for elementary upgrading, and it provided significant funding when students were able to hand in lessons quickly because they were not challenged by the material (Kate, St, C3). While economically efficient, this practice was disempowering to students.

All staff informants expressed concerns about the disempowering effects of delivering workplace-level mathematics to Cohort 3. When FNSO controlled the program, there was a sense of the teachers having more control over the academic program, and being empowered to



meet the learning needs of students (Joan, S5; Marjorie, S2). Teachers having little control over the delivery of the AEO program had negative implications for teacher, and subsequently student, empowerment. The fact that Cohort 3 students were supported by AEO and FNSO to take college-level courses only *after* they achieved their OSSD likely resulted in a mixed form of empowerment/disempowerment at best. Exercised power and control by AEO in this area likely reduced the quality of programming from that experienced by Cohort 1.

Diminished teacher control became particularly concerning when factoring in the necessity of bonding for First Nations learners. Research shows that First Nations learners need to bond with their teachers in order to learn (Alberta Education, 2005). The turnover in teachers throughout the study period is problematic, as is the perception that AEO did not value its teachers. The negative impact of teacher turnover was exacerbated when AEO's practice was, as previously discussed, to keep these changes secret. As described by Joan (S5): "We were told by AEO not to tell the students that we were leaving." The implication is that AEO practice may have undermined any trust that existed between the teacher and students. These students may have felt let down, once again, by teachers as a result (see Pettit, 2012).

The undervaluing of teachers by AEO is a common issue in the adult education literature. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2005a) describes lower pay, lower benefits, and lower job security for adult educators in what is regarded as a "second-class" teaching environment. Rockman (S9) echoed these concerns. The AEO manager's (off-the-record) comment that "teachers are a dime a dozen" speaks to a disempowering view of both learners and their teachers. This view is contrary to the view of Rockman (S9), who observed: "Everyone can perform better if you have a good administrator." As discussed in Chapter Six, Pettit (2012) would argue that empowerment cannot thrive in conditions where teachers are told not to speak

about issues of concern, are given no say over how lessons are taught, or are not informed when classrooms are switching.

In comparing teacher empowerment across the cohorts, there was a marked decline between Cohorts 1 and 3. This is an important finding, as high-quality teaching performance is an outcome of teachers who are empowered (Marks & Louis, 1999). While the analysis suggests that students rated the teachers and tutors highly, there were significant changes in the level of empowerment as experienced by the teachers. The high level of teacher empowerment noted by both Laura (S6) and Joan (S5) for Cohort 1 no longer existed in Cohort 3, despite the fact that Cohort 3 students continued to find the teachers helpful and continued to go to them when in trouble. This likely indicates that the teachers in the program cared about the lives of the informants, which was evident to the students. The Alberta Government (2012) delineates that teachers that care about student success are needed to teach First Nations learners:

... school authorities hire teachers who are committed to improving outcomes for Aboriginal students, have high expectations of all of their students, are flexible, and have demonstrated a warmth and genuine care for their students. (p. 21)

The role of teachers in caring for students, and thus meeting the educational vision of FNSO, was seen with Cohort 1, but undermined by AEO's increasing micromanagement. The negative impact of this was seen in the data for Cohort 3.

Over the course of the study the teachers' determination to meet students' needs was made increasingly difficult by administrative decisions. Joan (S5) reported that an FNSO employee was told by the project manager to spy on the teachers, and the second AEO manager's management style became increasingly oppressive. The learners' empowerment was compromised as the teachers were no longer able to reflect on student needs outside of teaching

— their time was increasingly diverted to fending off oppressive management behaviour. This was evidenced through interviews with Rockman (S9), Collins Rice (S3), Laura (S6), and Joan (S5), who all contend that teacher focus was sidetracked away from student needs when it became necessary to deal with pedantic issues arising from management and working to stay ahead of encumbering workloads. The data indicated that teachers who believed in empowerment for the student body did not change their approach to the students, even when they were experiencing disempowerment themselves. These teachers, along with FNSO, were unfortunately losing in their efforts to push back economic mandates that interfered with the thoughtful and reflective focus necessary to meet the needs of students.

Inasmuch as the staff expressed concerns about the direction of the program (Joan, S5; Rockman, S9; Sarah Abbey, S7), AEO continued advancing their economic mandate while shutting down the voices of teachers through commands delivered by email (Joan, S5). When the AEO guidance counselor filed a union complaint, the uneven exercise of control reflected Vickers's (2002) claims of a superior/inferior relationship that reinforces an integrally oppressive education system. Rockman (S9)'s experience substantiates Vicker's assertions that the superior stance of educators prevents them from broadening their own worldviews to include the practices of Aboriginal culture, which negatively affects learner empowerment. In the FNSO environment, Rockman (S9) observed that the union issue resulted in uneven organizational collaboration that, in turn, influenced the decision-making of FNSO and ultimately resulted in student disempowerment. The data in this study revealed that funding was the impetus for this disempowerment (Collins Rice, S3; Marjorie, S2; Rockman, S9).

**Funding.** FNSO funding was not firmly established from the onset of the partnership. In contrast, AEO's funding was firmly established by the Ministry of Education's funding model

(People for Education, 2015). This study has exposed the vulnerability of FNSO to the more established, better funded, and therefore more powerful AEO. FNSO, although attempting to set up a quality program that served the whole student, had little choice but to adjust to the rules of the more powerful AEO program, especially after it was no longer within their capacity to hire their own teaching staff. Essentially, at the point where FNSO chose AEO as a partner when moving into project status, FNSO relinquished their ability to maintain power over their own organization.

The data suggests that the FNSO administration was disempowered when the project status prevented their ability to partner with another non-government funded credentialing organization (Joan, S5; Rockman, S9; Collins Rice, S3). As noted in Chapter Five, the combination of not being in a position to change partners easily, and having partnered with a more established organization, rendered FNSO vulnerable to the practices of the dominant partner, who were then in a position to control the highly marginalized student population. Control, for this study, is assumed to be oppressive and therefore disempowering for those oppressed by it (Fainstein, 2000; Memmi, 1965).

In summary, the disempowerment of FNSO in terms of policies, practices, and funding contributed to the disempowerment of both learners and teachers. As FNSO was disempowered, AEO was able to assert the hegemony of a western view of education, and in effect, recolonize the FNSO program. The data and analysis support the observation of Foucault (1981), who argued that “any system of education is a political way of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourses, along with the knowledges and powers that they carry” (p. 64). To challenge those discourses requires power, the “ability to cause or prevent change” (Bybee, 1993, p. 157). The disempowerment of FNSO left the students vulnerable to the policies,

practices, and funding models of AEO. Without power, the promise of a decolonized education as seen in Cohort 1 was lost, surrendered to the more powerful AEO.

### **Research Questions**

In examining the tensions that occur when First Nations learners are caught between competing organizational policies, practices, and funding models, it has become clear that power is at the heart of those tensions. FNSO was looking to establish a culturally appropriate education for their students, and was apparently successful with Cohort 1. In looking at the analyses for Cohort 3, however, that apparent success has been diminished as FNSO and AEO engaged in power struggles over policies, practices, and funding. The data indicates that AEO, the more powerful organization, effectively disempowered key aspects of the FNSO program. As a consequence, students were disempowered.

FNSO set out to support students in a holistic way, and used their initial control of the program and resources to build a range of supports for their students. These supports helped to acclimatize learners to urban life and academic environments, and included housing, travel, and workshops. In line with their policies to support the whole student, other supports included access to healthcare providers, cultural outings, client support officers, elders, childcare funding and the flexibility to meet individual student needs as they arose. The supports that FNSO provided and the organization's focus on post-secondary credits, as established early in the program, provided the foundation for an empowering experience for all learners. That the quality of academic programming could be improved to meet the needs of students on an individual basis does not diminish the vision and mandate of FNSO toward moving the learners, their families, and their communities toward an empowering future.

It was shown through the quantitative data that Cohort 1 was empowered by the program in the areas of being challenged by their courses, post-program socialization, post-program satisfaction, and attending to school/work. Importantly, the data shows evidence of the decolonization of this group.

Cohort 3, in turn, was disempowered by the program as evidenced through the survey data in the following areas: not being challenged by their terminating mathematics course, post-program difficulty with socialization, a drop in post-program satisfaction with the program meeting overall needs, and difficulty with attending to school/work post-program. Quantitative data, as backed up by qualitative data, also indicated recolonization for Cohort 3.

The promising data that emerged from the FNSO program was that the supports showed empowerment across all supports over all cohorts. Due to the consistency of FNSO program supports being offered, as well as respondents' appreciation for supports across the program, this aspect of the partnership program was held constant throughout the study period. The major changes in the program were made by changes in AEO's delivery of academic programs from Cohort 1 to Cohort 3. In this way, I was able to determine that the economic streamlining changes to AEO were largely responsible for the disempowerment observed in Cohort 3.

In addressing my primary research question, the main focus has been on the increasing disempowerment of students. This is not, however, the whole story. Even as there were accumulating levels of student disempowerment from Cohort 1 to Cohort 3, there are still glimpses of student empowerment, often due to encouragement given to students by the teachers. It has been established that students were often placed in certain academic programs regardless of their needs or abilities. Regardless of this, teachers thought students were capable of more than what they were told was mandatory, and acted accordingly. These acts of empowerment

were acknowledged by students such as Crane (St, C2). Staff interviews made clear that they believed that economics drove AEO decisions under the second management style (Laura, S6; Collins Rice, S3; Marjorie, S2; Joan, S5; Rockman, S9). Having painted this overall picture of how First Nations learners are caught between competing organizational policies, practices, and funding models, I now wish to explicitly answer the three secondary questions that have contributed to this study.

*(a) What are the organizations' views of students, and how do they affect learner empowerment?*

While the data and analysis indicates that FNSO was initially a strong advocate for students' well-being and empowerment, this was increasingly under pressure as AEO exerted growing control. Similarly, AEO was initially supportive of the values of FNSO, but changes in management imposed a greater economic focus on the relationship. A key moment in this imposition was the pre-emptive classroom change described in Chapter Six, a move that completely changed the opportunity structure of the program (Aslop & Heinsohn, 2005). This decision was reflective of AEO's view of the students being in need of control. If the students had been told about this change, it was likely, given their negative reaction to finding out they had been moved (Rockman, S9), they would have attempted to stop the change.

This dynamic environment, however, cannot be clearly delineated in terms of its effects on student empowerment. For example, AEO showed a willingness to support and respect FNSO's workshops, which were held to be empowering, and was also prepared to share their classroom (Sarah Abbey, S7). Conversely, AEO shortened the lunch hour to demonstrate its power and control over student attendance (Matilda, S10). That AEO saw the students in need of external control is also evidenced by the application of a direct teaching model (David, S4).

Similarly, some of FNSO's practices reflected a gradual acceptance of the deficit model of teaching and learning, leading in one case to the locking of the washroom doors. FNSO, however, clearly wanted the students to succeed through their changing practices, a focus on flexibility, and dedication to supports (Rockman, S9; Collins Rice, S3; Marjorie, S2; Joan, S5). The high appreciation for the usefulness of the supports provided by FNSO indicates empowerment for the informants. In terms of staffing, FNSO also viewed graduated students as an extension of the program, inviting them back for tutoring and counseling. The effects of the organizations' views on learner empowerment were fully considered in Chapter Seven.

For all of AEO's efforts to control attendance in Cohort 3, informants in Cohort 1 had less trouble attending than informants in Cohort 3. This indicated the organizations' views empowered the informants in Cohort 1, but by Cohort 3, the changed views had resulted in disempowerment. Likewise, the question "was math difficult?" produced data that indicated that the informants of Cohort 1 were challenged overall, while the informants in Cohort 3 were not. The quantitative data was backed up by the interview with Kate (St, C3), who stated that she did not learn much in mathematics because she went through MEL 3E as her terminating Grade 11 mathematics course. Additionally, Darkcloud (St, C3) indicated that at least one staff member did not believe he was capable of attending university without additional courses. This is viewed as disempowering when his experience resulted in a negative change in his motivation.

*(b) What are the levels and processes of communication between the First Nations support organization and the adult education centre, and how do these impact learners' empowerment?*

In answering this question there is a clear dichotomy between the actions of the two organizations. The staff from both organizations were invited to FNSO meetings to bring student



concerns to the attention of administration. The communication that took place in FNSO meetings resulted in graduated students being invited back to make use of the supports while attending to their post-secondary goals. In a demonstration of its power, AEO did not invite any FNSO staff to AEO meetings. This lack of communication on the part of AEO was evidenced on many occasions. The sense that communication was to be controlled by AEO, for the benefit of AEO and not the students, emerged when one staff member (Joan, S5) was reprimanded by the second AEO manager for answering a question asked by the FNSO manager at a meeting on whether more tutors were needed. It was known that AEO would be supplying the tutors at this point in the program. Although Joan (S5) answered yes, more tutors were needed, this turned out to not be the case when AEO mandated workplace mathematics courses for the majority of Cohort 3 students and consequently, less tutors were needed. The control of information is clearly disempowering.

The data indicates that the learners' empowerment was significantly decreased from the open communication practices in Cohort 1 and the closed communications reported in Cohort 3. This closed communication, discussed in Chapter Five, was shown to have taken place at the same time as the switch to workplace mathematics was being implemented. The data indicated that the workplace mathematics course was below the ability level of the majority of informants in the study. This was backed up by the qualitative data.

*(c) How do learners' perceptions of their empowerment when they leave the First Nations support organization differ from the realities they experience post-First Nations support organization?*

This question was answered by the following sets of data, as discussed in Chapter Seven: "overall needs met," "who is responsible for the changes you want to see," "having thoughts of

dropping out,” and “trouble attending.” These data indicated empowerment for Cohort 1 and disempowerment for Cohort 3 from the end of the program to post-program.

The primary research question and three secondary questions were answered explicitly by the data analysis provided in Chapters Four to Seven. Although some empowerment was experienced by both Cohort 1 and 3, Cohort 1 showed significantly higher levels of empowerment than Cohort 3 across several different categories throughout the study. Disempowerment for Cohort 3 emerged from the quantitative data and was backed up by the study’s qualitative components. The implications explored in the next section emerged from both empowering and disempowering aspects of the research.

### **Implications**

This section begins by addressing the federal and provincial implications that emerged from the analysis. Although the study did not rely on federal funding, implications emerged in the research that link federal funding to a requirement for extensive provincial funding. The implications for practice at the local level reveal specific needs for the First Nations organization.

**Federal and provincial.** Federal funding was indirectly involved in this study because the elementary education of most of the participants was federally funded. That the students were not taught an upper elementary introduction to concepts speaks largely to federal funding policies for this population. Consequently, a major implication for policy at the federal level includes the fact that many of the students need upgrading from elementary grade-level equivalencies.

The data indicated that FNSO may have felt compelled to continue working with a partner that significantly changed their academic program. Provincial funding incentives,

however, encouraged both FNSO and AEO to graduate students quickly. These incentives may have enticed FNSO to accept mandatory workplace courses into their program and may be connected to a trades program running concurrently, and under the same umbrella, as FNSO. Regardless, implications for provincial policies surfaced in the data that included First Nations organizations not being protected from takeover by entrenched colonial organizations. As a result, lower-quality programming is being rewarded over more comprehensive and culturally appropriate programming geared to the needs of First Nations learners. Additionally, policy at the provincial level includes implications that MTCU is tying its criteria of success to the number of graduates, rather than the quality of programming.

The data in this study, through the lens of a social justice theoretical framework, indicated that a high percentage of informants were not challenged by the workplace-level MEL 3E mathematics course, yet they had no choice but to take this course if they decided to stay in the program. The implication of this finding is that “workplace-level math *à la carte*” is degrading and patronizing to students who are willing to take an applied level of skills-building mathematics upon entrance to the program. Mathematics skills, much like writing skills, play a crucial role in the wider lives of students. Skills learnt in mathematics impact identity by helping to develop critical thinking skills that beget healthy risk taking, and are essential to understanding the roles that wider society plays in the lives of marginalized people (Cockcroft, 1982; Gustein, 2003; Resnick, 1987). Students who study concepts such as algebra, trigonometry and geometry are afforded opportunities to appreciate the utility of mathematics, engage in abstract thinking and to discover where they fit within those paradigms. Goodson (1993) describes three levels of curriculum that emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and continue to influence contemporary education. These include the pedagogic, lower-status and high-status curriculum.

These levels of curriculum have survived into contemporary education, with the pursuit of mathematics and the sciences carrying a perception of high-status, abstract forms of knowledge that can be used to reinforce social class and power. Melville, Jones & Campbell (2015) describe the relationship between high-status content and social divisions:

Broadly speaking, the academic tradition concerns itself with high-status content, which is presented in the theoretical and abstract and is readily evaluated through written examination. The academic tradition was seen as the preserve of the ablest students who were destined for the learned professions and high-level administrative or commercial positions (p. 3).

Despite the fact that significantly reducing the number of students taking a college-level mathematics course is cost-effective and reduces the need for breakout rooms, education should challenge learners. Although initial evaluations indicated that learners had not been taught algebra, trigonometry, or geometry, this does not mean they were not capable of learning these strands. The implications for provincial funding policies that emerged from the data also included the need for breakout rooms, to be used by students who were challenged and/or needed to conference/learn with a teacher/tutor away from the larger body of students.

Data emerged from the research indicating that teachers attempted, in numerous ways, to communicate the above concerns to AEO and FNSO. Evidence that teachers were instructed to withhold information from the First Nations organization in the latter part of the study, and under the authoritative management style, has implications for existing provincial policies that would allow this to occur. Further, the need for further teacher training was so pronounced that one informant took a self-sacrificing stand to bring the issue to the attention of upper management. The implication that neoliberal thinking dominated the partnership organization emerged when

the funding of FNSO was found to be tied to funding of the sister trades organization. Graduates from AEO were needed for the trades organization to maintain its funding. As this trades organization ultimately fed into a large mining project projected in the future, the neoliberal education agenda was clear from the onset, ultimately directing the data that has been presented in this research.

**Local implications.** Implications of this study at the local level overlap with implications for policy at the provincial level. These implications relate to the empowerment of teachers, and subsequently the empowerment of students. It is clear from this research that additional training for teachers is needed so they are prepared to deal with the crisis issues arising from the population with whom they are working. This training should include, but not be limited to, suicide prevention workshop training. As well, breakout rooms are needed for this population, due to their high level of marginalization.

It is clear from the data that the credentialing organization AEO is not set up to properly deliver elementary upgrading. That AEO is not in a position to offer the upgrading required was discussed by all front line staff informants to varying degrees. While students were not ready to attend the AEO program, for FNSO, the program was all about getting the students ready.

The implications for the local level include FNSO having chosen a partner that is limiting the quality of education for the students. This was evidenced by staff informants' concerns about the low requirement of 50% to pass a course (according to AEO assessments) and concerns that the student informants should be upgraded inside of their communities before they begin the AEO program. Recommendations that develop out of the implications in this section are outlined next.

## **Recommendations**

Recommendations in this section include: an examination of federal funding policies that contribute to teacher attrition, an examination of provincial funding incentives, the need for FNSO flexibility to change partners, ongoing funding for extra tutors and teachers, practices that allow significant changes to program delivery, and equal say for teachers. Additionally, recommendations include the factoring in of breakout rooms for highly marginalized populations, additional qualifications/training for teachers, and recommendations for a change in criteria for success.

**Recommendation for the federal government.** Although federal funding was not provided during the course of this study, the need for informant upgrading came out of federal funding policies imposed on First Nations communities. Data in this study indicated that previous teachers of the students did not remain in the students' communities for long periods of time. This is consistent with data analysis from Shields (2012). Teachers in First Nations communities are hired through contracts. They are generally not provided with employment stability, benefits, or pensions that are enjoyed by their mainstream counterparts (Manyfingers, 2010). It is therefore recommended that the federal government provide funding to promote strong incentives for teachers to remain in First Nations communities. Doing so may significantly reduce the need for student upgrading in the coming years.

**Recommendations for the provincial government and FNSO.** Recommendations for the Ministry of Education in the adult learning sector are urgently stressed. The recommendations outlined in this section are intended for, but not limited to, funding ministries, First Nations education sectors, and mainstream organizations that consider partnerships with First Nations organizations, such as FNSO.

Provincial funders should permit First Nations organizations to change partners if the colonial, more established organization dominates in an untenable manner. Further, the First Nations organization should not be penalized in any way if the partnership grows out of compatibility. The data in this study has made clear that, at the present time, the practices of mainstream adult education can change significantly on the whim of an administrator.

Financial incentives that reward managers of adult education centres for running inconsequential courses and/or delivering them inappropriately for economic reasons need to be stopped. As an added protective measure for First Nations organizations, funding for extra teaching staff and tutors should be made available. Further, for continued and consistent quality of programming, it is recommended that First Nations organizations work within a partnership model in which teachers work *with* management, rather than *under* management. Practices that significantly change programs under different management styles should not be permitted, and could be avoided if power imbalances were removed between management and teachers. It is recommended that teachers have an equal say into who is hired and how programs develop at every stage. This would, for example, help to solve the issue of breakout rooms.

In another Ontario learning environment, unlimited breakout rooms are provided, and teachers use the rooms to speak with students privately, as needed, about their work (Government of Ontario, 2015). Breakout rooms are also considered essential in an online simulated environment, like Contact North. As such, they should be considered critical for the physical working spaces of highly marginalized students. The provision of breakout rooms is thus a recommendation for provincial funders and First Nations organizations considering upgrading for their student populations.

It is recommended that teachers be trained to interact and bond with students. Teachers should also be given training to develop suicide tendency sensitivity. The policies of the credentialing organization need to permit this training. Additionally, there should be a mechanism in place for teachers to follow if/when potential suicides are suspected. Provincial funding should be made available for this crucial area and First Nations organizations should be encouraged to develop agreements with their academic partners that permit teacher involvement.

Continued upgrading opportunities should be promoted for First Nations people across the province, including funding for the supports described within this dissertation. Provincial funders should continue to fund First Nations education organizations and support them while the organizations choose their partners. It is recommended, however, that the criteria for success be re-examined and changed from that of graduation from the program, to that of quality of courses and attainment of marks. In other words, the success of the program through the eyes of provincial funders should be measured by the potential of the learner to be successful in post-secondary institutions, regardless of the reasons why learners have enrolled in the program. Given that funding incentives remain to graduate students quickly, it is recommended that sister organizations (e.g., trades organizations) be severed completely from the education program.

Due to the large amount of data that indicated a disempowering partnership with AEO in Cohort 3, and as compared to the empowering data from Cohort 1's student centred focus, I recommend that FNSO look to other adult learning centres, or to their local college, for elementary credentialing needs. I further suggest that FNSO utilize AEO's economic streamlining program only for supplemental upgrading, such as mathematics courses needed for university engineering, pursuits of mathematics, and education degrees.



Due to the consistent data indicating the empowerment of Cohort 1 through the student centered model, I recommend that descriptions of the FNSO/AEO program during its early stages be scrutinized by First Nations communities considering education programs for their populations. Although AEO appears to have changed its focus, similar programs offering the high empowerment experienced by Cohort 1 informants may be found within local upgrading college programs and/or through partnerships with established tribal council education programs.

### **Future Study**

A significant need for further studies emerged from this research, branching off in various directions.

Studies to explore links between workplace-level programming and community suicides would be beneficial. Given my experience of the Native Studies coordinator in 1995 informing me that students with low equivalencies end up committing suicide (as discussed in the introduction to this dissertation), combined with the workplace-level programming being delivered through AEO, research into the links between workplace-level programming (implemented as mandatory in Cohort 3) and the incidents of suicides in First Nations communities is needed.

Another area for future study is the use of social media, such as Facebook, in highly marginalized environments. Despite data that indicates that the informants did not post on Facebook when in trouble, my data suggested otherwise. This observational data revealed that students give clues to how they are feeling on their social media site. Understanding the social media environment is essential for researchers to engage in further studies that explore using social media and its evolving relationship to highly marginalized student populations.

In relation to this research design specifically, a longitudinal study would allow informants to engage in a longer period of life-long learning/employment, to add depth to the data. For example, this research would benefit from four sets of similar surveys, six months apart, along with an interview with each student informant after one and a half to two years of engaging with their developmental outcomes. This would allow researchers to track the overall trends of the economic streamlining decisions with the long-term post-secondary graduation. This would be especially beneficial to track the results of students that visited mathematics and English concepts less than what was possible within the organization because of the time used by the mandatory delivery of workplace courses.

Additionally, a broader comparison study with a different partner to FNSO, such as the local college upgrading program that features individualized programming, would be illuminating. As Cohort 1 also focused on individualized learning, it would be valuable to compare the data from Cohort 1 to that of graduates from a similar but fully developed individualized program.

After the closure of this study, an opportunity emerged to interview an employer who worked closely with some of the FNSO graduates from Cohorts 2, 3, and 4 who were interested in moving into the trade sector. I did not interview the employer, but in personal conversation he expressed concern that the math skills of FNSO graduates were too low to be considered for the trades. The FNSO graduates he worked with had completed Grade 12 college-level mathematics courses, yet only one of the graduates was successful in his program. He indicated that he would not work with FNSO students again because of his frustrations with equivalencies. Was the tone of this personal conversation indicative of Joan (S5)'s concern that although mathematics concepts need to be re-visited many times, this was not happening for the later cohorts? It

seemed that the economically driven adult education agenda ultimately interfered with the success of the neoliberalism ideology between MTCU and the trades program when the mathematics proficiency of the students graduating from the First Nations organization was found to be fragile. In other words, neoliberalism undermined its own agenda at the expense of learner disempowerment. Further studies in this area are recommended.

### **Epilogue: Tiptoeing to the End**

During the process of developing the first seven chapters of this dissertation with my supervisor, I received an email from the second manager of AEO. This email, dated February 6, 2015, was addressed to both my supervisor and myself. It stated, "I am writing to inform you that the board has withdrawn support for this project. Thank you for your attention." When contacted, the second manager explained that FNSO was withdrawing its support and he was, too. As my study was close to completion, this became an interesting puzzle for the Research Ethics Board (REB) when my supervisor responded by alerting them to the events of the day.

In the ensuing communications, the FNSO project manager stated that a student had come asking about their involvement in the second survey. According to the project manager, she had directed me to talk to the program manager about the second survey and this did not happen, hence, they were removing their support for my study. A letter, my supervisor was told by the FNSO project manager, was in the mail.

When the letter dated February 10, 2015 from FNSO arrived, it stated that support had previously been removed and that I was still pursuing my studies on their program. If, I wondered, support had previously been removed, then why was my supervisor told that a student

had asked about the second survey as the impetus for the withdrawal? I also wondered why the AEO's second manager said that he withdrew support because FNSO withdrew their support, when his email arrived four days before the dated FNSO letter.

The FNSO letter went on to state that permission had been given for a one-time instance of a mini-survey of a few students. At the beginning of the study, the program manager, the project manager, and FNSO board members were all interested in the research that was to take place, with long-term implications to be investigated through the second survey administered. Since that time, staff interviews had taken place within the organization and through their own internal study. I have no reason to believe that the staff interviews contained within this dissertation were much different than the data from the interviews held with the internal study. Early in my own study, the project manager wrote comments and suggestions over my 20-page survey, including suggestions to enhance it. Thankfully, I had kept this evidence, which refuted the claim that only a "mini survey" had been authorized.

In gaining AEO ethical approval for the study, I had described the study in writing, mentioning the plan for a second survey a total of three times. Additionally, the program manager was made aware, verbally and in written form, of the entire study design before the study began and before he signed the consent form. Lastly, a poster had been disseminated explaining in detail about the second survey and its approval by the REB. The FNSO project manager's claim of "a one-time instance" was thus contested.

Further, on the consent form that the FNSO program manager had originally signed (see Appendix E), it states that he understood and supported the surveying and interviewing of all FNSO students. This would have amounted to a minimum of 100 students at any given time. This refuted the claim of a "few students." Thus, the entire claim of "one-time instance of a

mini-survey of a few students” had been refuted through evidence I was able to provide and that is contained in Appendix B. So why then, would FNSO state that they had previously withdrawn their support? Was it because the FNSO removal of support letter went on to say that all data that had previously been collected was considered the intellectual property of FNSO? What was really going on here? The FNSO program manager and I parted on good terms. We remain Facebook friends.

The day the program manager signed the consent form several months prior, I had explained that I wanted to share the research findings on an ongoing basis. The program manager asked me to share with the FNSO project manager instead, on an ongoing basis. I did so, on average, once a week until I left the FNSO organization. As outlined in this dissertation, the quantitative and qualitative data appeared to have empowering implications near the beginning of the study, but the data began to shift when the second AEO manager took over. I continued to share the findings despite the fact that the FNSO project manager was appearing to display discomfort when I visited her office.

A few days after I left the organization, the project manager told me that she did not want to be informed of my ongoing research findings. Further, she wanted me to ask the program manager about administering the second survey. As I had already discussed the second survey with the program manager and he had directed me to speak to the project manager about my research, I discontinued my ongoing sharing of my research. I did, however, send the project manager an invitation to read my literature review. I did not receive a reply.

I was approximately one week away from setting an appointment with the program manager to share the major final findings of the research when I received the AEO second manager’s email that approval was being withdrawn. Meanwhile, the REB informed my

supervisor that approval by an organization had never been removed before – only informants had ever withdrawn. Precedence was about to be set. Not one of my informants had withdrawn from my study. A week passed before we (my supervisor and I) were both asked to appear at an REB meeting. Another week passed before we did.

Interestingly, on the same day that the REB met with us, they also met with a colleague who had just experienced approval removal of her study by a First Nations organization. It is alleged that the Deputy Grand Chief called the President of the university and requested that the President contact the REB to have the REB “reign in” the colleague. The colleague was waiting outside of our REB meeting before her case was heard.

Prior to the REB meeting, I read Chapter Nine of the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS), entitled “Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada” (Government of Canada, 2015). I noted that Article 9.7 of the policy referred to Article 3.6, which delineated the reasons why critical inquiry does not need organization approval. My research, indeed, had become a critical inquiry. Moving back to Article 9.7, it became clear, after realizing that the term “notwithstanding” means “regardless of,” that critical inquiry does not require permission of First Nations organizations, only the participants. When asked by the REB about timelines, what happened, and what I considered the next steps should be, I was able to share my evidence and the Article 9.7 and 3.6 definitions as they applied to my critical inquiry research.

After many questions and discussion, I was asked if I was willing to draft a letter to the informants explaining the organizations’ withdrawal from the research in order to give them the opportunity to withdraw themselves from the study. I suggested that my study could be closed,

as enough data had been gathered for my dissertation. The REB agreed that the study should be closed to any more participants. This is precisely what took place.

Between 1991 and 1996, the Report of The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Dussault & Erasmus, 1996) determined that research was harmful to First Nations communities and that First Nations research was not being shared with the communities through dissemination. One outcome of RCAP's report was Chapter Nine of the TCPS, laying out parameters for respectful research in First Nations communities (Government of Canada, 2015). As a researcher with a First Nations background, I decided from the onset that I would share my research with the First Nations organization with ongoing collaboration, so that my research would directly benefit the communities under study. When the data began to show less than promising measures of empowerment for the informants in the latter part of the study, my research may have begun to lose its appeal to the First Nations organization, who saw themselves as dependent on Ministry funding with pilot, then project, temporary status. With a more permanent dollar commitment, research that was not producing the desired results might have instead been applauded as the possibility of meaningful change loomed. In the case of FNSO, however, the feasibility of dollar commitment was seen as directly proportional to the success of the program. Any negative results made public may have been seen as a threat to the program itself, a program that is meant to be empowering for First Nations students, despite the data showing that improvements could be made to benefit the quality of the program.

As much as I was surprised to hear that the organization had removed its support for my research, I remain astonished that similar withdrawals are not happening wherever Chapter Nine of the TCPS has standing. Are researchers collaborating with the First Nations organizations under study? Are both positive and negative findings being reported? Was my research too

invasive? Out of respect for the FNSO project and the program manager's withdrawal, I recommended to the REB that my study could end without disruption to my dissertation, despite Article 9.7 which would allow me to continue. The uncomfortable feeling that prompted me to recommend completion of my research is my conundrum. This test of Chapter Nine of the TCPS, and its apparent failure to protect First Nations organizations through the Article 9.7 notwithstanding clause, offended the social justice framework upon which my research rested. The fact that First Nations organizations appear to be under the illusion that Chapter Nine offers protection from research that is not culturally respectful is one issue of concern. That protection from unstable Ministry funding is necessary at all is another concern, and ultimately is seen by this researcher as a limitation of this study. If FNSO was instead reliant on stable funding (as is the AEO organization), I believe the withdrawal likely would not have taken place.

As a researcher, I could have pulled back my collaboration when the data began to appear problematic to the mandates of the FNSO program. I did not make that decision because I believed that doing so would have been deceitful. Instead, I followed through with the collaboration that is encouraged in Chapter Nine of the TCPS, and is a requirement of social justice research, a move that became research on the Chapter itself. Alongside my social justice framework being thrown into question by the dissection of Section 9.7 of the TCPS, should there be concerns about how social justice is being used within the academic community? Why was I the first researcher (within this university) to have permission withdrawn from a First Nations organization in Northern Ontario? All education funding for First Nations organizations is "soft" because educational service to First Nations is a matter of "policy without reference to a treaty-based right to education" (Arnot, 2007, p. 57), and the right to education is not written into the Indian Act (Indian Act, 1985). First Nations organizations have reason to be concerned about any



potentially negative analyses that could lead to the revocation of their unstable funding. It stands to reason that if empowerment researchers share the mandates of social justice frameworks, then they should be providing analyses that honestly critique all programs. The danger is that negative critiques may adversely impact on “soft” funding, and therefore may be suppressed through withdrawals of support. As this study is the first in this university to have had support withdrawn, could it be that empowerment is being emphasized, and cases of disempowerment are being downplayed? With First Nations education 28 years behind that of mainstream education and students, unanimous reports of empowerment within First Nations education programs does not seem realistic. Certainly there is an inconsistency here. Either social justice researchers in First Nations education are not sharing disempowering analyses with First Nations organizations, or are suppressing the dissemination of analyses that indicate disempowerment. This dissertation, therefore, further recommends that social justice research itself needs to reflect on who it is that is benefiting from social justice research. Additionally, this Epilogue discloses a possible limitation of this study, in that unstable Ministry funding may be promoting a lack of collaboration, and sharing, between First Nations organizations and researchers when negative analyses begin to emerge. Implications for further research likely also exist within this conundrum.

As a researcher, I have endured a great deal of personal sacrifice to present this data in the spirit that I have. Never in my life have I been seen to oppose the views of an organization I worked for. My track record is exemplary. I have no trouble offering any of my previous supervisors as references. If I was not satisfied for any reason within an organization I have ever worked in, I quietly left. This was not the case, however, when working in the FNSO environment. Sharing my research on an ongoing basis meant “telling” on my immediate

superior for this study. It also meant attaching my name to the data, and when the data began to appear as disempowering, my name was attached to that as well. Placing the research first and foremost meant dealing with the fallout of all of the sharing, including the understanding that I would never again be employed by either organization as a result. Having spent my entire life in adult education, closing this fundamental door for the sake of this research was a major personal sacrifice. It is my hope that the data presented in this dissertation is found to be beneficial to First Nations communities and tribal councils, if not immediately, then in the foreseeable future.

For too long have the seeds of disrespect been sown into the lives of First Nations youth. Dei (2013) writes:

But where is the recognition of the necessity to deal concretely with power, privilege and our relative complicities...? When counter-narratives, knowledges and oppositional voices are raised, they are often ridiculed or responded to with threats, violence, erasure, or plain dismissiveness... Education for the 'global good' and responsible global citizenry in the context of an oppressive status quo must involve anti-oppression. (p. 6)

Memmi (1965) adds the claim that colonialists could "not favor an undertaking which would have contributed to the disappearance of colonial relationships" (p. 117). In the musings of Burke, former Chairman of the Indigenous Australian Higher Education Association and an Australian Aborigine, the question is then asked, "How can you expect your culture and identity to survive if you give all the responsibility for education to another group of people?" (cited in Maslen, 1995, p. 47).

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## **Appendix A:** Survey questions

## (End-of-program) Survey Questions

I am asking you to fill out this survey because I am interested in finding out how the (FNSO) program has affected your capacity for meeting both your immediate and your long term goals. Your identity will remain anonymous.

Please state your gender, age and which community you belong to.

Gender	
Age	
First Nations Community	

Section 1: These questions will be about the supports offered in the program

1. a) How useful did you find each of the following counseling supports while you were working on your education goals in (FNSO)? (Please check **one** box for each support).

Elders

Comments (optional)

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

--

Guidance counselor (Lakehead Board)

Comments (optional)

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

--

Tutor/Student Advisor (FNSO)

Comments (optional)

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

## Client support officers (FNSO))

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

## Comments (optional)

--

- b) How useful did you find each of the following workshop supports while you were working on your education goals in (FNSO)? (Please check **one** box for each support).

## Cultural workshop

## Comments (Optional)

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

--

## Academic Workshops

## Comments (Optional)

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

--

## Life skills workshops

## Comments (Optional)

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

--

- c) How useful did you find each of the following staff supports while you were working on your education goals in (FNSO)? (Please check **one** box for each support).

Teachers

Comments (Optional)

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

Community Supports (daycare etc.)

Comments (Optional)

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

- d) How useful did you find each of the remaining supports while you were working on your education goals in (FNSO)? (Please check **one** box for each support).

Living allowance/rent

Comments (Optional)

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

Childcare

Comments (Optional)

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

Materials such as paper, binders etc.

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

Comments (Optional)

--

Organized outings

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

Comments (Optional)

--

2. a) My relationship with my teachers overall is: \*

Teacher relationships

Not good	
Somewhat good	
Good with some, not with others	
Good	
Excellent	

Comments (Optional)

--

b) The respect between my teachers and I overall is: \*

Mutual respect with teachers

No mutual respect	
Some mutual respect	
Respect with some, not with others (Please explain)	

Comments (Optional)

--



Good mutual respect	
Excellent mutual respect	

c) The Counselors care about me: \*

Comments (Optional)

Counselors

Do not care	
Care somewhat	
Some care, others do not (Please explain)	
Care	
Care a lot	

d) The administration cares about me: \*

Comments (Optional)

Administration

Do not care	
Care somewhat	
Some care, others do not (Please explain)	
Care	
Care a lot	

e) When I am in trouble, or I need to talk, I approach (check **as many** as apply) \*

Counselors        
 Friend  
 Family  
 Teachers       Facebook       No one

f) I have the time to discuss things that are important to me. \*

Comments (Optional)

Administration

No time	
Some time	
Sometimes there is time, sometimes not (Please explain)	
Adequate time	
Lots of time	

How has (FNSO) addressed your needs overall while you were in the program? (Please check the **one** that fits best)

Comments (Optional)

Very Well	
Satisfactory	
Not at all	

3. If you were talking to a friend, what would you tell them about the (FNSO) programs?

---



---



---



---

Section 2: Opportunities

4. Did you receive any job offers while at (FNSO)? (Please check **one**)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you answered No, why were you not offered any jobs?

---

If you answered Yes, did you accept the job offer (Please check **one**)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you accepted a job offer please explain why you made that decision.

---

If you did not accept a job that was offered to you, please explain why you made that decision.

---

5. Did you receive any opportunities to continue your education in your chosen field while at (FNSO)? (Please check **one**)

If you answered yes to question 5, do you plan on taking advantage of the/those opportunities.

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain the opportunities you have been offered or why you were not offered opportunities.

---

6. What were your education goals at the beginning of the program?

---



---

a) Did you meet your education goals while in the program? (Please check **one**)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exceeded goals	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain why you did or did not complete your goals.

---

7. Have you previously completed any other Band sponsored training programs? (Please check **one**)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you answered yes, please list the training programs.

---



---

Section 3: These questions are about the subjects you took in the program and your learning

8. Program delivery at (FNSO) was delivered in my first language. (Please check **one**)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. Did you consider yourself good with math when you first began the program?  
(Please check **one** box)

Comments (Optional)

Not good at all	<input type="checkbox"/>
A little bit good	<input type="checkbox"/>
Somewhat good	<input type="checkbox"/>
Good	<input type="checkbox"/>
Very good	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. Did you consider yourself to be good with writing in English when you first began the program?

(Please check **one** box)

Not good at all	
A little bit good	
Somewhat good	
Good	
Very good	

Comments (Optional)

--

11. Do you consider yourself to be good with mathematics now that you have completed the program? (Please check **one** box)

Not good at all	
A little bit good	
Somewhat good	
Good	
Very good	

Comments (Optional)

--

Do you consider yourself to be good with writing in English now that you have completed the program? (Please check **one** box)

Not good at all	
A little bit good	
Somewhat good	
Good	
Very good	

Comments (Optional)

--

12. Did you like math when you entered the program? (Please check **one** box)

Not at all	
A little bit	
Somewhat	
I liked it	
I loved it	

Comments (Optional)

--

13. Did you like writing in English when you entered the program? (Please check **one**)

Not at all	
A little bit	
Somewhat	
I liked it	
I loved it	

Comments (Optional)

--

14. Do you like math now that you have finished the program? (Please check **one** box)

Not at all	
A little bit	
Somewhat	
I like it	
I love it	

Comments (Optional)

--

15. Do you like writing now that you have finished the program? (Please check **one** box)

Comments (Optional)

Not at all	
A little bit	
Somewhat	
I like it	
I love it	

16. Was the math that you learned at (FNSO) difficult? (Please check **one** box)

Comments (Optional)

Not at all	
A little bit	
Somewhat	
Easy	
Very easy	

What math course(s) did you take while at (FNSO)?

---

17. Were the writing course(s) that you took at (FNSO) difficult (Please check **one** box)?

Comments (Optional)

Not at all	
A little bit	
Somewhat	
Easy	
Very easy	

What English course(s) did you take while at (FNSO)?

---

19. How might (FNSO) improve either the math or English component of the program?

---



---

20. Did you take any other courses while you were in the (FNSO) program? Please explain.

---

Section 3: These questions are about the community around where you currently reside and attend school.

21. I felt as though I could participate in any activities while in Thunder Bay, such as those organized by the local government, religious organizations, the school, the local development association etc.? (Please check **one box and comment**)

Comments (Optional)

I felt that I could participate in all activities	
I felt that I could participate in "some" activities	

If you answered "some" activities to question 21, please proceed to question 24.

22. In which activities do you perceive you could not participate?

---



23. Why do you think you cannot participate? (Please check **as many** as apply)

Comments (Optional)

Poverty	
Occupation	
Lack of education	
Gender	
Ethnicity or language spoken/race	
Age	
Religion	
Other (Please specify below)	

24. How often have you met with and talked to people from other social groups outside of your home and school in the last week? (Please check **one** box)

Comments (Optional)

Not at all	
Once	
Several times	
Daily	
Several times a day	

25. Are there any people from different social groups that you feel you cannot, or would have difficulty in socializing with? (Please check **one** box)

Yes	
No	

*If you answered 'No' to question 25, please proceed to question 26.*

- a) Why do you feel you cannot socialize with these people? (Please check **as many** as apply)

Poverty	<input type="checkbox"/>
Occupation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of education	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ethnicity or language spoken/race	<input type="checkbox"/>
Age	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (Please specify below)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments (Optional)

25. Do you feel that college is the right learning environment for you, either now or in the future?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

Why do you feel that it is, or is not?

---



---

26. Do you feel that the university environment is for you, either now or in the future?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

Why do you feel that it is, or is not?

---



---

27. Is there anything in your life that you would like to change? (Please check **one** box)

Yes	
No	

a) If so, what examples can you give me of things you would like to change?

---



---

*If you answered No, to question 27, what further clues can you give me?*

---



---

*If you answered No, to question 27, please proceed to Question 28.*

b) Do you think these will ever change? NA = Not applicable (Please check **one** box)

Yes	
No	
NA	

Comments (Optional)

When do you think they will change? (Please check **one** box)

Comments (Optional)

Very soon	
Fairly soon	
A long time in the future	

--

c) Who do you think will contribute most to any change? (Please check **one** box)

Comments (Optional)

Myself	
My family	
Our community	
The Provincial government	
The Federal government	
Other (Please explain below)	

--

d) What are the main difficulties that you feel might prevent these changes from occurring?

---



---

28. Do you feel that people like yourself can generally change things in your community if they want to? (Please check the one that most applies)

Comments (Optional)

Yes	
Somewhat	
No	
Yes, very easily	
Yes, fairly easily	
Yes, but with a great deal of difficulty	
No, not at all	

30. What is the one thing you would most like to do in your life?

---



---

31. How difficult do you think it will be for you to achieve this? (Please circle **one** box)

Comments (Optional)

Very difficult	
Difficult	
Fairly difficult	
Fairly easy	
Easy	
Very easy	

32. How much choice do you feel you have in deciding your occupation? (Please check **one** box)

Comments (Optional)

Complete choice	
Some choice	
No choice	

33. How easy would it be to change your choice of occupation if you wanted to? (Please check **one** box)

Comments (Optional)

Very easy	
Fairly easy	
Not very easy	
Impossible to change	

34. Why would it be easy/not easy to change your occupation? (Please check **as many** as apply)

Comments (Optional)

Lack skills	
No local alternatives	
Occupation is determined by race/community/gender	
Other (Please specify below)	

35. I am in control over the decisions regarding my health. To what degree do you feel you have control over decisions regarding your own personal welfare, health and body? (Please check **one** box)

Comments (Optional)

To a very high degree	
To a fairly high degree	
To a small degree	
Not at all	

I am in control over the decisions regarding my welfare. (Please check **one** box)

Comments (Optional)

To a very high degree	
To a fairly high degree	
To a small degree	
Not at all	

36. I am in control over the decisions regarding my body. (Please check **one** box)

Comments (Optional)

To a very high degree	
To a fairly high degree	
To a small degree	
Not at all	

37. Where do you go on your own? (Please check **one** box)

Everywhere I want to	
Most places I want to	
Some places I want to	

Comments (Optional)

--

38. How easy do you find it to access education or training services when you need to? (Please check **one** box)

Very easy	
Fairly easy	
Fairly difficult	
Very difficult	
Impossible	

Comments (Optional)

--

39. What is your next step upon completion of the program?

University	
College	
Work	
Other	

Comments (Optional)

--



40. What were your personal challenges (if any) that you experienced while in the (FNSO) program (Please check **as many as apply**)

Comments (Optional)

Health	
Childcare	
Addictions	
Emotional (anxiety, depression, frustration)	
Housing	

Please discuss how any challenges that you checked in Question 41, were met with the supports of the program while you were enrolled?

Criminal	
Family loss	
Family issues	
Family/School balance	
Adjusting to city life	

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Section 4: These questions are about your decision to stay in school.

41. I have thought about dropping out. \*

Frequently   Occasionally

Never

If yes, what have been some of the reasons that you might have wanted to drop out.

---

---

42. I have had trouble coming to school. \*

Frequently   Occasionally

Never

If yes, why has it been difficult to come to school?

---

---

43. I have trouble being on time. \*

Frequently   Occasionally

Never

If yes, what are some reasons that you have trouble being on time?

---

---

44. I have reasons to stay in school.\*

Frequently   Occasionally

Never

What are some of the reasons you have to stay in school?

---

---

45. I have people who support my staying in school. \*

Frequently   Occasionally

Never

If yes, what do people do to help you stay in school?

---

---

46. Are there any additional comments you would like to make?

---

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Thank you for the time you took to fill out this survey!

**(Post-Program) Survey Questions**

I am asking you to fill out this survey because I am interested in finding out how the (FNSO) program has affected your capacity for meeting both your immediate and your long term goals. Your identity will remain anonymous.

Please state your gender, age and which community you belong to.

Gender	
Age	
First Nations Community	

Section 1: Supports

3. a) How useful was the advice that you received in the following counseling supports while at (FNSO) to your education goals beyond (FNSO)? (Please check **one** box for each support).

Elders

Comments (Optional)

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

Guidance counselor (Lakehead Board)

Comments (Optional)

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

Tutor/Student Advisor (FNSO))

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

Comments (Optional)

--

Client support officers (FNSO))

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

Comments (Optional)

--

How useful did you find each of the following workshop supports that you received while in (FNSO) for your education goals beyond (FNSO)? (Please check **one** box for each support).

Cultural workshop

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

Comments (Optional)

--

Comments (Optional)

--

Academic Workshops

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

Life skills workshops

Comments (Optional)

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

e) How useful was the education you received from teachers while at (FNSO) to your education goals beyond (FNSO)? (Please check one box for each support). (Please check **one** box for each support).

Teachers

Comments (Optional)

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

4. How has (FNSO) addressed your needs overall while you were in the program? (Please check the **one** that fits best)

Comments (Optional)

Very Well	
Satisfactory	
Not at all	

18. If you were talking to a friend, what would you tell them about the (FNSO) programs?

---



---



---



---



---

Section 2: Opportunities

19. Did you receive any job offers while at (FNSO)? (Please check **one**)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you answered No, why were you not offered any jobs?

---

If you answered Yes, did you accept the job offer (Please check **one**)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you accepted a job, are you still working in that job?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

20. Did you receive any opportunities to continue your education in your chosen field while at (FNSO)? (Please check **one**)

If you answered yes to question 5, did you take advantage of the/those opportunities?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

Are you still pursuing this education goal?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

21. What were your education goals at the beginning of the (FNSO) program?

---



---

b) What are your education goals now?

---



---

22. Did you attend any other Band sponsored training programs after leaving (FNSO)? (Please check **one**)

Yes	
No	

If you answered yes, please list the training programs.

---



---

### Section 3: Subjects and Learning

23. Did you consider yourself good with math when you left the program?  
(Please check **one** box)

Not good at all	
A little bit good	
Somewhat good	
Good	
Very good	

Comments (Optional)

24. Did you consider yourself to be good with writing in English when you left the program?  
(Please check **one** box)

Not good at all	
A little bit good	
Somewhat good	
Good	
Very good	

Comments (Optional)

25. Do you consider yourself to be good with mathematics now? (Please check **one** box)

Not good at all	
A little bit good	
Somewhat good	
Good	
Very good	

Comments (Optional)



26. Do you consider yourself to be good with writing in English now? (Please check **one** box)

Comments (Optional)

Not good at all	
A little bit good	
Somewhat good	
Good	
Very good	

--

27. Did you like math when you left the program? (Please check **one** box)

Comments (Optional)

Not at all	
A little bit	
Somewhat	
I liked it	
I loved it	

--

28. Did you like writing in English when you left the program? (Please check **one**)

Comments (Optional)

Not at all	
A little bit	
Somewhat	
I liked it	
I loved it	

--

29. Do you like math now? (Please check **one** box)

Comments (Optional)

Not at all	
A little bit	
Somewhat	
I like it	
I love it	

--

30. Do you like writing now? (Please check **one** box)

Comments (Optional)

Not at all	
A little bit	
Somewhat	
I like it	
I love it	

19. How might (FNSO) improve either the math or English component of the program knowing what you know now?

---



---

Section 4: Community

21. I feel as though I can participate in any activities while in the community where I go to school, such as those organized by the local government, religious organizations, the school, the local development association etc.? (Please check **one box and comment**)

Comments (Optional)

I feel that I could participate in all activities	
I feel that I could participate in "some" activities	

If you answered "some" activities to question 21, please proceed to question 24.

22. In which activities do you perceive that you are unable to participate?

---

23. Why do you think you cannot participate? (Please check **as many** as apply)

Comments (Optional)

Poverty	
Occupation	
Lack of education	
Gender	
Ethnicity or language spoken/race	
Age	
Religion	
Other (Please specify below)	

27. How often have you met with and talked to people from other social groups outside of your home in the last week? (Please check **one** box)

Comments (Optional)

Not at all	
Once	
Several times	
Daily	
Several times a day	

25. Are there any people from different social groups that you feel you cannot, or would have difficulty in socializing with? (Please check **one** box).

Yes	
No	

*If you answered 'No' to question 25, please proceed to question 26.*

b) Why do you feel you cannot socialize with these people? (Please check **as many** as apply)

Poverty	
Occupation	
Lack of education	
Gender	
Ethnicity or language spoken/race	
Age	
Religion	
Other (Please specify below)	

Comments (Optional)

Do you feel that college is the right learning environment for you, either now or in the future?

Yes	
No	

Why do you feel that it is, or is not?

---



---

28. Do you feel that the university environment is for you, either now or in the future?

Yes	
No	

Why do you feel that it is, or is not?

---



---

27. Is there anything in your life that you would like to change? (Please check **one** box)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

e) If so, what examples can you give me of things you would like to change?

---



---

*If you answered No, to question 27, what further clues can you give me?*

---



---

*If you answered No, to question 27, please proceed to Question 28.*

f) Do you think these will ever change? NA = Not applicable (Please check **one** box)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
NA	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments (Optional)

g) When do you think they will change? (Please check **one** box)

Comments (Optional)

Very soon	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fairly soon	<input type="checkbox"/>
A long time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>

h) Who do you think will contribute most to any change? (Please check **one** box)

Comments (Optional)

Myself	<input type="checkbox"/>
My family	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our community	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Provincial government	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Federal government	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (Please explain below)	<input type="checkbox"/>

i) What are the main difficulties that you feel might prevent these changes from occurring?

---



---

28. Do you feel that you can generally change things in your community if you want to?  
(Please check the one that most applies)

Comments (Optional)

Yes	
Somewhat	
No	
Yes, very easily	
Yes, fairly easily	
Yes, but with a great deal of difficulty	
No, not at all	

--

30. What is the one thing you would most like to do in your life?

---



---

31. How difficult do you think it will be for you to achieve this? (Please circle **one** box)

Comments (Optional)

Very difficult	
Difficult	
Fairly difficult	
Fairly easy	
Easy	
Very easy	

--

32. How much choice do you feel you have in deciding your occupation? (Please check **one** box).

Comments (Optional)

Complete choice	
Some choice	
No choice	

33. How easy would it be to change your choice of occupation if you wanted to? (Please check **one** box).

Comments (Optional)

Very easy	
Fairly easy	
Not very easy	
Impossible to change	

47. Why would it be easy/not easy to change your occupation? (Please check **as many** as apply).

Comments (Optional)

Lack skills	
No local alternatives	
Occupation is determined by race/community/gender	
Other (Please specify below)	



48. I am in control over the decisions regarding my health. (Please check **one** box)

Comments (Optional)

To a very high degree	
To a fairly high degree	
To a small degree	
Not at all	

--

49. I am in control over the decisions regarding my welfare. (Please check **one** box)

Comments (Optional)

To a very high degree	
To a fairly high degree	
To a small degree	
Not at all	

--

50. I am in control over the decisions regarding my body. (Please check **one** box)

Comments (Optional)

To a very high degree	
To a fairly high degree	
To a small degree	
Not at all	

--

38. Where do you go on your own? (Please check **one** box)

Everywhere I want to	
Most places I want to	
Some places I want to	

Comments (Optional)

--

39. How easy do you find it to access education or training services when you need to? (Please check **one** box)

Very easy	
Fairly easy	
Fairly difficult	
Very difficult	
Impossible	

Comments (Optional)

--

What is your next step?

University	
College	
Work	
Other	

Comments

--

40. What were your personal challenges (if any) that you experienced after you left the (FNSO) program (Please check **as many as apply**)

Health	
Childcare	
Addictions	
Emotional (anxiety, depression, frustration)	
Housing	

Comments (Optional)

Please discuss how any challenges that you checked in Question 41, were met with supports that you were able to find since **leaving** (FNSO).

---



---



---

Section 4: These questions are about your decision to stay in school. If not going to school, please proceed to question 36.

34. I have thought about dropping out.

Frequently   Occasionally

Never

If yes, what have been some of the reasons that you might have wanted to drop out.

---



---

35. I have had trouble coming to school.

Frequently   Occasionally

Never

If yes, why has it been difficult to come to school?

---

---

36. I have trouble being on time.

Frequently   Occasionally

Never

If yes, what are some reasons that you have trouble being on time?

---

---

37. I have reasons to stay in school.

Frequently   Occasionally

Never

What are some of the reasons you have to stay in school?

---

---

38. I have people who support my staying in school.

Frequently   Occasionally

Never

If yes, what do people do to help you stay in school?

---

---

39. Are there any additional comments you would like to make?

---

---

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Thank you for the time you took to fill out this survey!

## **Appendix B:** Consent forms

**AEO letter for permission for research (Blank space have been whited out to protect anonymity)**

First Nations tribal councils across North Western Ontario are currently looking to service their communities with upgrading programs that will prepare their learners for jobs, as well as college and university programs. [redacted] is a government funded pilot project organization meant to prepare cohorts of students from nine remote First Nations communities for employment opportunities in Ontario's [redacted] development project. [redacted] work with the communities to bring learners to [redacted], provide supports such as housing, living allowance, childcare, counseling services, elders, workshops, access to methadone clinics as well as providing liaison with colleges, universities, and prospective employers. The Ministry of Colleges and Training and Universities have just won the Amethyst award for their work with the (FNSO) pilot project over the past year. [redacted] are currently contracting the academic portion of the upgrading program out to the [redacted] for their credentialing services. For an adult learning environment to maximize its potential, the relationship between the tribal board members, teachers, counselors, Elders, the [redacted] administrators, colleges, universities and employment sectors must be seen to comply in their policies, practices and their funding models. My study will examine the effects of organizational policies, practices as well as funding models servicing 100 adult FN students from nine remote communities.

I will be surveying students in a two-step process in order to gauge the effects of the program on learner empowerment after they have received the supports meant to address the cultural values of the students' norms. The first step will involve a quantitative-qualitative approach where the interviews will clarify and provide depth to the survey answers. Students will be asked to complete the first survey prior to leaving. [redacted]. The second step will involve students being asked to complete a similar survey to the first, 3 months after leaving the [redacted] program. All of the [redacted] students are over the age of 22. I will be analyzing the open-ended survey data using descriptive statistics and the close-ended survey data using inferential statistics. Each survey and interview question will be lined up with the research question "What are the effects of the organizational policies, programs and funding models upon the empowerment of adult First Nations learners?" I will be using SPSS quantitative software to run tests for association and frequency and will incorporate Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software for the interview data as it is particularly useful in tracking the relationship between themes and the consistency of statements.

Student surveys will be distributed and interviews will take place when the students have finished the program and the second set of surveys distributed by email, three months after their upgrading program ends. Interviews will be audio taped and will last approximately 30 minutes each. Tribal Board member and teacher interviews will be ongoing, at mutually beneficial and pre-arranged times.

**Administrative Board Letter (Blank spaces have been whited out to protect anonymity)**

December 3, 2013

Dear Potential Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research project involving the teaching of mathematics titled *Cross-cultural organizations and the empowerment of First Nations learners* as part of my graduate work. You are being asked for this interview because of your capacity as an administrator/board member in the program.

You will be asked for a short interview. You do not have to answer any questions that you are asked. You may refuse to participate in any part of the study, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You will not benefit in any way by not withdrawing.

During the interview you will be asked questions relating to your experiences with the policies, programs and funding models of the program. You will be provided with the questions prior to the interview. With your permission, I will collect field notes and audio tape this interview.

One potential benefit of this study is to enhance our understanding of the effects of resource organizations upon the goal attainment and empowerment of First Nations learners. You have no obligation to agree to be part of this study.

The results of this study may be published. However, you will remain anonymous in any publications and such publications will be e-mailed to you and your community for your review before publication at your request. In line with the policies of the University, your data will be securely stored in the Faculty of Education for a period of five years, and will only be accessed by the researcher and supervisor. This project has been approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions or concerns please contact Sue Wright at (807) 343-8283. I may be contacted at [tjshield@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:tjshield@lakeheadu.ca) or my supervisor Wayne Melville at [wmelwill@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:wmelwill@lakeheadu.ca)

Sincerely,

Tracy Shields



**Student Letter (Blank spaces have been whited out to protect anonymity)**

December 3, 2013

Dear Potential Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research project involving the teaching of mathematics titled Cross-cultural organizations and the empowerment of First Nations learners as part of my graduate work. You are being asked for this interview because of your request for upgrading in from the program.

You will be asked for a short interview. You do not have to answer any questions that you are asked. You may refuse to participate in any part of the study, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Your participation/or lack of participation will have no effect on your work with me as your tutor.

During the interview you will be asked questions relating to your experiences while in the program. You will be provided with the questions prior to the interview. With your permission, I will collect field notes and audio tape this interview.

One potential benefit of this study is to enhance our understanding of the effects of resource organizations upon the goal attainment and empowerment of First Nations learners.. A personal benefit from this study will be to give you extra time to reflect on your own growth and future goals. I may be requesting samples of your work.

The results of this study may be published. However, you will remain anonymous in any publications. I will e-mail such publications to you at your request. I will e-mail such publications to board members. In line with the policies of the University, your data will be securely stored in the Faculty of Education for a period of five years, and will only be accessed by the researcher and supervisor. This project has been approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions or concerns please contact Sue Wright at (807) 343-8283. I may be contacted at [tjshield@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:tjshield@lakeheadu.ca) or my supervisor Wayne Melville at [wmelvill@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:wmelvill@lakeheadu.ca)

Sincerely,

Tracy Shields

**Teacher Letter (Blank spaces have been whited out to protect anonymity)**

December 3, 2013

Dear Potential Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research project involving the teaching of mathematics titled *Cross-cultural organizations and the empowerment of First Nations learners* as part of my graduate work. You are being asked for this interview because of your capacity as a teacher teaching First Nations students in the \_\_\_\_\_ program.

You will be asked for a short interview. **You do not have to answer any questions that you are asked. You may refuse to participate in any part of the study, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You will not benefit in any way by not withdrawing.**

During the interview you will be asked questions relating to your experiences with your students and with your work in the \_\_\_\_\_ program. You will be provided with the questions prior to the interview. With your permission, I will collect field notes and audio tape this interview.

One potential benefit of this study is to enhance our understanding of the effects of resource organizations upon the goal attainment and empowerment of First Nations learners. You have no obligation to agree to be part of this study.

The results of this study may be published. However, you will remain anonymous in any publications and such publications will be e-mailed to you and your community for your review before publication at your request. In line with the policies of the University, your data will be securely stored in the Faculty of Education for a period of five years, and will only be accessed by the researcher and supervisor. This project has been approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board ( ). If you have any questions or concerns please contact Sue Wright at (807) 343-8283. I may be contacted at [tjshield@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:tjshield@lakeheadu.ca) or my supervisor Wayne Melville at [wmelwill@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:wmelwill@lakeheadu.ca)

Sincerely,

Tracy Shields

## Student Consent Form

I have read and understand the covering letter for the study. The nature and direction of this study has been explained to me and I agree to participate. I understand the potential benefits of this study. I am a volunteer and can withdraw from the study at any time and may choose not to answer any question. I understand that this study is collaborative and that my involvement is invited and encouraged in order to enhance community engagement and participation. The data I provide will be securely stored at Lakehead University for a period of five years. The outcome of the study will be made available to me through an e-mail attachment when it becomes available. Names of family members or other identifying information in our discussions will be withheld from the written outcomes of the study unless explicitly agreed to by me.

I authorize the audio taping of all meetings    Check one    Yes   

No   

Signed this \_\_\_\_\_ day of

\_\_\_\_\_, 2\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Participant (Please print)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Program Manager Consent Form (Blank spaces have been whited out to protect anonymity)**

As Program Manager and community advisory group expert, I have read and understand the covering letter for the study *Cross-cultural organizations and the empowerment of First Nations learners*. The nature and direction of this study has been explained to me and I grant permission for Tracy Shields to request involvement with all students who have been registered in the program. I understand the potential benefits of this study. I understand that this study is collaborative and that my involvement is invited and encouraged in order to enhance community engagement and participation. I understand that the data will be securely stored at Lakehead University for a period of five years. I appreciate that each adult student will receive a covering letter and a consent form to sign. I understand that the nature and direction of this study will be explained to all students involved. I understand that the report, once completed, will be made available to all informants in the study as well as to administration.

I authorize the audio taping of interviews of  
all registered students of the  
program.

Check one  
Yes

No

Signed this \_\_\_\_\_ day of  
\_\_\_\_\_, 2\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Program Manager

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Program Manager

\_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix C: Interview questions**

**Student Interview Questions**

1. How much do you feel that your math skills have progressed since you began the program? Please discuss.
2. How much do you feel that your English skills have progressed since you began the program? Please discuss.
3. Did you decide to apply to the program for your benefit, the benefit of your community or both? Please discuss.
4. Have you applied into a college or university program? Please discuss.
5. What were your long term goals when you entered the program?
6. What are your long term goals now?
7. Have you made contacts with people from other communities that you will keep into the future?

**Staff Interview Questions (Blank spaces have been whited out to protect anonymity)**

1. How long have you been teaching in the program?
2. What are the ranges of grade levels that your students entered the program with for the subject(s) you taught them?
3. How involved were you in the decisions that impacted the learning environment of your students overall? Please explain.
4. How involved were you in the decisions that impacted the course selections for the students you taught. Please explain.
5. As a 'front line' employee, please describe the support you were offered by the administrative staff. Please explain.
6. As a 'front line' employee, please describe the support you were offered by the administrative staff. Please explain.

7. Please describe the successes and challenges that you have experienced since you have been teaching in the program.
  8. In an ideal world, what would be your vision for the students that you taught overall?
  9. How close of a match to your vision is the reality of the impact of the program on the students you taught overall? Please explain.
  10. What contributed to the degree to which your vision matches the reality of the impact of the program on the students you taught in your opinion? Please explain.
1. Please describe some of the support services that provide for students. How might these services effect overall student empowerment?
  2. What are some of the policies and practices that you work within the organization? Please discuss how you feel these policies and practices effect overall student empowerment.
  3. How, if at all, do you see that the policies and practices of have changed in order to accommodate the requirements of the funders and overall program goals and visions and visa versa? Please discuss how you feel these accommodations of policies and practices effect overall student empowerment.
  4. Please describe your knowledge of how the students are chosen from the communities i.e.: random, based on long term goals of the student, based on subjects of student interest, personality etc. Has this selection process changed from the pilot project to the project? Please discuss how these choices affect the empowerment of the students chosen and not chosen from those who applied to the program.
  5. Please discuss how much communication you experience within the program including that between the partnerships. Please discuss how you feel this communication effects overall student empowerment.
  6. What are the overall goals and vision of the program? In your opinion. Do you think that all employees of both organizations understand these goals and visions? Do you think that all employees within the partnership organization have the same goals and vision? How do you think these congruencies or incongruences effect student empowerment?
  7. In your opinion, are teachers within the partnership organization themselves empowered in their place of work? Please comment on the overall effect of this empowerment/lack of empowerment on the empowerment of the students.

8. Please describe the funding procedures for, how they work, and what constraints and freedoms they provide for the program's partnership operation. Please describe how the funding freedoms and constraints effect student empowerment.
9. How does the funding for the pilot project differ from that of the project? How might these differences effect student empowerment?



## **Appendix D: FNSO** student policies

approach to student code of conduct and discipline is based on education aimed at helping students to understand their behaviour and its impact on others. \_\_\_\_\_ is dedicated to the development of each student's potential for learning in a positive environment. Students, instructors, \_\_\_\_\_ staff will assume a responsible role in promoting behavior that encourages learning and the development of individuals' potential.

## SECTION 1. SCOPE OF CONDUCT

### Introduction

\_\_\_\_\_ assumes that all students attending \_\_\_\_\_ learners who have accepted the principle \_\_\_\_\_ shares, and the responsibility for creating and maintaining a respectful and productive learning environment.

#### \_\_\_\_\_ promotes positive learning environments where students:

- Assume responsibility for their own actions
- Respect and believe in themselves and others
- Demonstrate the ability to get along with others
- Understand and respect individual differences
- Obey the student code of conduct and discipline
- Understand the consequences of their choices; and
- Demonstrate the importance of being respectful, kind, generous and helpful.

Students are required to conduct themselves within the commonly accepted standards of behaviour including those related to the consumption of alcohol or illegal substances.

#### A positive learning environment:

- Is positive, not negative
- Provides full educational, employment and career opportunities
- Makes behavior improvement the primary goal in discipline
- Protects students from behaviour which threatens their health/safety or interferes with learning
- Is free of drugs, alcohol, or other harmful substances.

#### Student conduct will be demonstrated in five distinct areas of activity:

- 1.1 classroom conduct
- 1.2 academic performance conduct
- 1.3 relationships with students on/outside of the classroom
- 1.4 relationships with \_\_\_\_\_ staff, instructors, peers, guest presenters/speakers
- 1.5 Financial Supports : training allowance/ temporary accommodations / private accommodations / rental units/ bus pass/ childcare / travel

- Group activities
- Quizzes, tests and exams
- Individualized assistance
- Field trips

views attendance very seriously and expects that students understand and accept that there may be consequences resulting from their decision not to attend, be late and not notify the Instructor and Client Supports Officer. While in the program students are allowed one (1) day (or accumulated 5 hours) per month for medical leave/personal appointments. It is encouraged students request their appointments occur outside of school hours. The consequences for not attending classes regularly without valid reason are shown below:

1 missed day	Verbal warning
2 missed days	Written warning
3 missed days	Training allowance deduction
3+ missed days	Expulsion

Students missing days and with valid reasons will still be expected to make up classroom time to get caught up on missed work to ensure no delays in completing the program. Attendance affects academic progress so it is expected for students to find out what was missed during class time and get caught up on own personal time. Tutor supports are available for extra academic assistance.

Examples of valid reasons include: personal illness (a doctor's note will be required if absent for more than two (2) days); illness in family (A doctor's note will be required if absent for more than two (2) days); death in family; medical/dental appointments; employment interviews.

Students leaving program by choice from due to health/medical/personal reasons will be given two (2) weeks' notice to ensure it is the right decision and training allowance will be provided during those two (2) weeks.

For students being dismissed from the program permanently for lack of commitment, poor attendance and/or progression, immediate dismissal notice will be given and funding will be terminated immediately.

### **(B) Classroom Activities/ Academic Progress**

Students should complete assignments, projects, and any other classroom activities set by the instructors for evaluation on time. If a student is unable to complete the work in the designated time, he/she should discuss this matter with the instructor Client Supports Officer in advance. Student academic progress will be monitored frequently. If you require additional academic supports, inquire with the classroom instructor, Client Supports Officer and/or Tutor/Student Advisor.

### **(C) Tardiness**

is preparing you for the workforce through employment and academic discipline. Students are required to sign in and sign out when arriving and leaving class. Students should arrive to class on time and be required to stay for the full day along with adhering to break times provided (ie. 15 minutes in duration per break). Failure to abide to this policy can result in a meeting with the Client Supports

**(C) Conflicts and Interventions**

Students should strive actively to resolve conflict between themselves and fellow students and should make an effort to prevent conflict between other students. Strategies to be used may include verbal attempts at reconciliation; if these are not successful, the student should immediately notify the Instructor / Client Supports Officer. Specifically, students should refrain from any physical intervention.

**SECTION 1.4: RELATIONSHIPS WITH \_\_\_\_\_ / INSTRUCTORS / ELDERS / PEERS / GUEST PRESENTERS / SPEAKERS**

Interactions with instructors, Elders and \_\_\_\_\_ staff outside the classroom can occur in several contexts:

- interactions directly relating to their learning situation and counselling services (for example, instructors assisting students' work in areas such as classrooms, resource centre, study area and offices. )
- interactions during out of field trips and work placements

Students should:

- feel free to discuss in a courteous and respectful manner any issue concerning their academic standing or learning experience with the Instructor who is teaching them and / or Client Supports Officer/Tutor-Student Advisor;
- schedule any discussion / meeting to take place with the Instructor directly or through reception to meet with the Client Supports Officer / Tutor-Student Advisor or sign up for a time on the appointment schedule posted outside the staff door;
- schedule a counselling session with an Elder. An Elder is onsite every Friday morning. If you require access to an Elder outside of this time frame, feel free to contact the Client Supports Officer to make arrangements.
- maintain a non-confrontational attitude in interactions with Instructors, \_\_\_\_\_ staff, and Elders;
- should approach even difficult matters with a view to resolving the problem at hand;
- Students should observe and respect the boundaries of the professional relationship between Instructors / \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ staff / Elders;
- Students will treat support staff, peers, Elders, instructors, and presenters with courtesy and respect.

**SECTION 1.5: FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE: TRAINING ALLOWANCE / TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATIONS / PRIVATE ACCOMMODATIONS / RENTAL UNITS / BUS PASS / CHILDCARE / TRAVEL****(A) Training Allowance**

Training allowance is paid on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of each month, should that date fall on a weekend or holiday the training allowance will be released the previous banking day. ▼

- Participant must provide a rental agreement between the student and landlord prior to any rent being paid. The agreement is to include a move-in/effective date, cost per month, what is included (e.g. inclusive or plus utilities etc.), if first and last month's rent is required, and the approximate duration of program.
- The agreement will state clearly that \_\_\_\_\_ will pay monthly rent directly to landlord only for as long as the individual is a student with \_\_\_\_\_ (Direct deposit is the preferred payment method).
- For new rentals the client, preferably with the CSO, will have viewed the apartment and determined that it is ready to be occupied. First/last month's rent will not be provided until the keys are received and a final walk through of the apartment has been done.
- The rent will range from \_\_\_\_\_ to a maximum of \_\_\_\_\_ per month (the maximum may be exceeded with approval of Project Coordinator/Finance Manager where circumstances dictate).
- Monthly invoice/receipts from the landlord must be submitted to \_\_\_\_\_ Finance Department for processing of payment.
- Participants must provide the landlord's mailing and contact info to \_\_\_\_\_
- Participant must be respectful of the furnishings and accommodations e.g. no damages, vandalism. If there is damages/vandalism, the student will be held liable for costs.
- Participant must provide 60 days' notice to the landlord when it is known when you are departing. You will be responsible for costs after \_\_\_\_\_ is completed if you decide to live in \_\_\_\_\_

#### (D) Bus Passes

To ensure that students have a method of travelling to school, each student will be provided with monthly bus pass at the start of every month while in the \_\_\_\_\_ program. In the case of lost or stolen bus passes, another bus pass will be provided but the full cost of the pass will be deducted from the next training allowance. For students who drive their personal vehicle to school they can be reimbursed the cost of a monthly parking pass in lieu of a bus pass. A receipt must be submitted for reimbursement of the cost of a parking pass.

#### (E) Childcare

Childcare will be assessed on a case by case basis. The Client Supports Officer will be available for assistance to connect the student with child care options. If it is determined that a student requires child care for their dependants, financial assistance will be paid directly to the childcare provider. KKETS will provide up to \_\_\_\_\_ for one child or \_\_\_\_\_ or two or more children.

It is the student's responsibility to make arrangements for childcare whether it is private or a daycare centre. For students that do not have a reliable childcare provider it is encouraged for them to apply to a licensed childcare provider. Applications can be made online through \_\_\_\_\_ t Social Services Board,

Students may also apply for childcare fee subsidy. To apply to for childcare subsidy students will need the previous year tax return. Any person who has not filed their income tax return can contact the \_\_\_\_\_ Social Planning Council, \_\_\_\_\_ as they have a volunteer income tax preparation program.

**Appendix E: Withdraw of support & evidence (Blank spaces have been whited out to protect anonymity)**

**Hi Wayne & Tracy,**

**I am writing to inform you that the board has withdrawn support for this project.**

Thank you for your attention.

**Manager**

**Adult & Continuing Education**

**Public Schools**

February 10, 2015

Dr. Wayne Melville  
Associate Professor in Science Education  
Assistant Dean  
Chair, Senate Undergraduate Studies Committee  
Faculty of Education  
Lakehead University  
955 Oliver Road  
Thunder Bay ON  
P7B 5E1

Dear Dr. Wayne Melville:

**Re: Tracy Shields - Research on Aboriginal Skills Advancement Program**

It has come to our attention that Tracy Shields is still pursuing her PhD research on our program, the [REDACTED] Program after we have withdrew our support from this study. Originally back in December 12, 2013, [REDACTED] signed a consent to conduct a mini-survey as a one-time instance with a few students after which we decided to withdraw our participation in this research.

This letter should suffice as our means to withdraw from her research study and any prior information gathered will not be used in any regard and is considered as intellectual property of [REDACTED]

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,





**From:** Tracy Shields [<mailto:tracyshields@shaw.ca>]

**Sent:** Sunday, October 5, 2014 2:47 PM

**To:**

**Subject:** research

Hi ,

I hope this email finds you well, both personally and professionally.

Due to the offer that I made to several months ago to share my research as it unfolds, and due to his specific request for me to share it with you, rather than him, on an ongoing basis, I am writing to you to invite you to read my literature review which will provide the academic foundation for the study. If you are interested in reading the review, please let me know either by email or by telephoning and I will send it via email. Certainly, and as always, I would welcome any input that you may have.

Best regards,

Tracy

First page of multiple pages of notes that Project Manager made on researcher's survey.

Survey Questions

1. a) How useful did you find each counseling support while you were working on your education goals in KKETS? (Please check **one** and include comments.)

Elders

client support officer

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

Guidance counselor (Lakehead board)

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

Tutor / Academic support  
Education counselor (KKETS)

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

b) How useful did you find each v education goals in KKETS? (P

Cultural workshop

Not at all useful	
A little useful	
Somewhat useful	
Useful	
Very useful	

feedback  
 Opportunity to provide  
 comments  
 questions are very close ended  
 you can effective survey  
 closed & open ended  
 questions should be incorporated

include  
in  
sketch  
sheet

What were your challenges  
 (if any) you experienced  
 while in the program  
 (select more than one  
 if ~~need~~ required).

- health
  - childcare
  - drugs
  - emotional
  - housing
  - criminal
  - family loss
- etc. list as many.