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Seeing education through two pairs of eyes:

An investigation of community involvement in the education system of a Northern Cree community

by

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A thesis

submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Education

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY

THUNDER BAY, ONTARIO

March 2005

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Canada

Abstract

This qualitative emergent research study investigated the perceptions of involvement of Aboriginal community members in the formal secondary education system of a Northern Cree community by using a grounded theory approach. In researching, a deliberate attempt was made to work from an Indigenist and postcolonial paradigm by using a participatory approach which valued the participants as co-inquirers and included them in the determination of the research process. Participants were involved in negotiation of research questions, data collection technique, analysis, and in the interpretation of data. The research study found that parents are and wish to be involved in our children's formal education, that community members feel disassociated from our community education system, that this disassociation results mainly from issues of cultural dissonance and the community's historical experience with institutionalized education, and that community members long for a sense of ownership of and connection to the system we have chosen to use in educating our children. Above all, we found that educational success for our children is highly important to this community's members.

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Acknowledgments

Thank you to all who guided, assisted, and participated in this research endeavour.

Thanks especially to my partner, Brian, and my mother, Susan, for looking after children, reading rough drafts, encouraging me along the way, and offering critical insight. This would not have been possible without you.

I am especially grateful to Brian who has always been thoroughly supportive of my pursuit of graduate studies and has "picked up the slack" in our daily life while we both juggled full-time jobs and family life with our school work. We did it!

To Dr. Constance Russell who is a wonderful mentor and teacher: I learned much from you and feel fortunate to have had you as a thesis supervisor. Your expertise, knowledge, and caring way of working supported and guided me along the way. Thank you for taking me under your wing.

Thank you also to Dr. John O'Meara, Dr. Mary Clare Courtland, Dr. Rod McLeod, and Dr. Fentey Scott for assistance, insights and great learning experiences, and to Diana Mason for all of the help she gave me throughout this process.

To the participants of this study who worked with me to develop the understandings presented within this thesis submission: you gave generously of your time and openly shared your feelings and thoughts because of your dedication to our children and the future of our community. Thank you. I learned and gained much from this experience with you.

Finally, thank you to the School Committee and the Band Council of the Cree Nation of Chisasibi for allowing this research project to take place.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Researchers...who work with or whose work impacts on indigenous communities

need to have a critical conscience about ensuring that their activities connect in

humanizing ways with indigenous communities. (Smith, 1999, p. 149)

This thesis focuses on community involvement in the formal education system of a

Northern Cree community and examines the characteristics of and possibilities for involvement

of community members in the formal secondary education system. I investigated this issue with

participants. Data were organized under three main themes: ways children are already or can be

supported by parents; community members' frustrations concerning involvement; and the ways

in which community members would like to move forward. It is my hope that this research study

will serve as a step in the construction of an agenda for heightening community involvement in

our local formal educational system.

In doing thesis research, I worked from within an Indigenous context, doing Indigenist

research as an Indigenist educator who sees the goal of self-determination and social justice

informing my practice. It is my belief that self-determination and social justice will not be

supported unless we are mindful of these goals in everything we do and work towards these goals

cooperatively and in equality. This is not exclusive of research done for the purposes of fulfilling

a graduate degree requirement.

Consequently, I used a participatory approach, valuing the participants as co-inquirers and

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including them in the process to the extent they wished. I see all participants, including myself, as contributors to a pool of knowledge which may be shared and used by all towards a common goal. My aim in doing this research study was to work within a community of inquirers intent on sharing, community-building and networking. When working in this way, process is of utmost importance.

A grounded theory design was employed during the research process. This allowed me to tailor data collection and literature review to the specific situation of the community and desires of the participants. This has resulted in a highly situation-specific report on findings and interpretations, which may still be useful to other Aboriginal communities who find themselves in similar situations.

What follows is a research report in three parts: Part I (chapters 2, 3 and 4) explores methodological stance, gives a general overview of the study, and details the research design; Part II (chapters 5, 6, and 7) presents findings and interprets them in light of the literature reviewed; and Part III (chapters 8 and 9) discusses the implications of findings and recommendations for action and further research.

A note about the title:

One of the participants of this study spoke of our education system as a cultural "clash zone" (Marker, 2000) where mainstream Canadian culture and our own Indigenous culture collide: "*We don't see education with the same pair of eyes...*". These words kept coming back to me as I worked through drafts of this thesis. The idea of seeing education with two pairs of eyes speaks to our community involvement issues in many ways including:

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- the ways in which we as a community are separated from the alien construct we have imported to educate our children

- the issues surrounding the residential school system (cultural dissonance, colonialism, imperialism, assimilationist goals, the de-valuing of traditional education for example) and the fall-out which has affected community involvement in our own system

- the fact that we know we have chosen a culturally dissonant construct

- the ways in which we wish this construct to work for us and the ways in which we wish to work with it

- the fact that, ultimately, integrating a mainstream model with our community identity will involve journeying through "cross-cultural terrain" (Graveline, 2003) and will require the ability to see *comfortably* with two pairs of eyes.

"Seeing education through two pairs of eyes" expresses the belief that comfort is possible and will be attained.

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Part I

An exploration of methodological stance, rationale and research design

The following chapters discuss grounds and reasons for this research project. Chapter Two provides a statement of my personal ground and methodological stance. Chapter Three gives an overview of the study including rationale, research questions, assumptions, limitations and significance. Chapter Four describes the research design including methods, time frame, setting, sample, and the research process.

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Chapter 2

Situating myself

To begin with myself is a conscious, political choice.

(Graveline, 2003, p. 71)

Personal Ground and Purpose of Research Endeavour

I am a member of the Cree community of Chisasibi, a reserve in Northern Quebec on the coast of James Bay. I am a person deeply affected by the formal education system in both positive and negative ways, and for this reason the Cree education system has become a focus for me both professionally and personally. I have been a student in a variety of situations including the community school, a high school in southern Ontario, university in southern Ontario, and lately in the Master's program at Lakehead University. Over the years I have attained a degree of comfort in working within the structure of institutionalized education which has led me to acknowledge and become interested in others' discomfort with institutionalized education, especially the nature of the discomfort felt by other Aboriginal people and peoples.

I have worked with students, parents and teachers within my home community, but also in other communities as both a teacher and as an education consultant, which means that my thesis work has informed my own professional practice. I am a parent and so, inevitably, have approached my thesis work out of concern for the future of my own children. I am also a person who is deeply concerned for other children, especially those children who are denied the opportunity to reach their full potential within our society. Furthermore, I believe that it is possible for our formal education system to fulfill the needs of every child and to act as an

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integral part and support of our community and its members. It is for these reasons that I perform research; behind my research lies a wish for a better education system, more responsive to the needs of *all* members of our community.

My methodological stance and its consequences for study design:

In doing research I deliberately position myself in opposition to the accumulation of knowledge for knowledge's sake in the spirit of liberal individualism. I believe that, like teaching, research is an inherently political activity. According to Smith (1999):

> ... research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has
>
> something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions. (p. 5)

The Aboriginal community has a long and infamous relationship with "research." Research conducted by academics and government workers has been one of the means by which colonial powers have placed and kept Aboriginal people/s in the position of Other, justifying paternalism. It has informed the beliefs and actions of the dominant society by attempting to prove that Aboriginal people are somehow less intelligent, or unable to think in the ways necessary to be self-determining. From the Imperialistic research of the enlightenment which *"determined"* that Indigenous people were sub-human (Smith, 1999) to research conducted during the 1980s which *"proved"* that cranial shape was an indicator of lower intelligence levels in Aboriginal people compared to Caucasians (Common & Frost, 1994), research has been used as a tool to maintain the sub-ordinate position of Aboriginal people within colonial society.

Even the very idea of a research "problem" is dubious and makes me uneasy. After the War of 1812, with our populations decimated by disease and no longer being necessary allies, we

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were in the way of waves of immigrants who wanted access to more and more land. Aboriginal peoples became conceived of as a problem for the European occupiers, with the "problem" part of the concept being situated within Aboriginal people themselves. This situating of "problem" within Aboriginal people as a result of their "nativeness" fuelled the belief that assimilation was necessary for the good of Aboriginal peoples. The "Indian laws" enacted are stomach-turning evidence: 1857, An Act to Encourage the Gradual Civilization of the Indian Tribes of the Canadas; 1859, Civilization and Enfranchisement Act; 1869, An Act for the Gradual Enfranchisement of Indians; 1876, Indian Act (Faries & Pashagumskum, 2002). It was these "Indian laws" and the BNA Act which *legitimately* placed Aboriginal peoples under Crown *protection* enabling the European positional transcendence to be enforced and reinforced through an education system.

We have always been blamed for our own oppression. Obviously, in looking into the reasons why community members feel un-empowered or dis-empowered[1] when it comes to their children's schooling, I feel that I must take care not to allow the problem to be situated within parents and their "Nativeness." Parent involvement is seen as "the remedy schools and students need most at this moment" (de Carvalho, 2001, p. 1). Happy students and fulfilled parents are a widely documented characteristic of successful schools (Epstein, 2003 and Levine and Lezotte, 1995, for example). In this way, parents are potentially burdened with making schools successful and students learn (de Carvalho, 2001).

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[1]Un-empowered implies an absence of power in the past and the present. Dis-empowered implies the presence of power in the past that was either taken away, lost, or let go. I am distinguishing between "un-empowered" and "dis-empowered" because both were expressed by participants.

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There is already much literature which takes a deficit view of parental involvement (de Carvalho, 2001). Little (1996/97) serves here as an example of such deficit thinking. According to Little, Navajo parents dump their children at school and abdicate responsibility for them, other things are more important to parents than their children's needs, parents do not instill respect for teachers in their children, they are not involved with homework; consequently, Navajo children are unmotivated.

According to de Carvalho (2001), the issue of involvement in formal education systems is framed with the middle class family of the dominant society as the norm; consequently, a perceived lack of parental involvement can be seen as a cultural deficit which needs to be corrected. Any investigation of Aboriginal parent/community involvement in a formal education system must be approached both with the recognition that the school system is an essentially European construct and the recognition that we should not expect Aboriginal parents and community entities to play roles which are dictated by western norms. Research into community involvement must be used as a step in the creation of possible solutions and not as a means to assign blame.

Research is now done by many Native communities as a tool in the work towards self-determination.

> When the dominated culture perceives the need to liberate itself, it discovers that
> it has to take the initiative and develop its own strategies as well as use those of
> the dominant culture. The dominated culture does this ...to better fight
> oppression. (Friere, 1985, p. 193)

According to Smith (1999), using the "master's tools" in an exercise of *writing back* moves us

towards decolonization and self-determination. Writing, in this way, becomes a political act. During the Enlightenment, Imperialistic research determined the ability to write as the mark of a superior civilization; the literacy of Europe was placed in opposition to and privileged above the oracy of Indigenous societies. Smith speaks of "*re*writing and *re*righting our position in history" (p. 28) – the act of academic writing making a place for Indigenous peoples who were written out of history because history traditionally belongs to the fully human, not the Other. Research and writing done by Aboriginal people can potentially work against Imperialist, positivist research which has been used to dehumanize and compartmentalize Aboriginal people so that colonialist acts could be justified and continued. Research done by Indigenous people with a political agenda becomes Indigenist Research performed within an Indigenous paradigm.

I use the term Indigenist Research to mean research for Indigenous people, on the side of Indigenous people, in favour of the goals of Indigenous people. There is current academic interest in defining Indigenous methodology. The term is used in a number of texts (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2001, for example) concerning research done with Indigenous people, and there seems to be an acceptance that there could exist an Indigenous Methodology. I believe, however that we must be careful of both ghettoising and excluding in this work of defining. We need to work against the "one-size-fits all where Aboriginal people are concerned" attitude. Attempts at defining an Indigenous Methodology, or even Methodologies, play right into this attitude. Methodology and research designs must be situation-specific and subjective if they are to be of any benefit to participants. Weber-Pillwax (2001) expresses similar sentiments:

> How to describe a methodology as Indigenous is somewhat problematic for me,
> and I think that perhaps this is not the best way to formulate the issue. Any

methodology will suit my purposes in research if it permits a fluidity that can

encompass any social or cultural context that I choose to work in without breaking

the boundaries of personal integrity. I use the practices and principles of methods

and methodologies that seem to fit with and balance my own ways of being and

looking at the world. I try to ensure that there will be no conflict between my

ways of being and doing if I should decide to do research with a particular

methodology or method. (p. 172)

I also term my research as post-colonial. Like Smith (2002), however, I do not believe that we

have achieved a post-colonial era, but I name my methodology as post-colonial for my deliberate

choice to work against a positivist paradigm in an effort to work towards the achievement of a

post-colonial state[2].

For some, what I am advocating here could be dubbed "emancipatory research" (Lather,

1991), but I wish to avoid the term. Research seen as emancipatory is problematic in that it can

be performed as something done to Indigenous people instead of something done with or by

Indigenous people, despite any good intentions the researcher may have. There is the danger that

Indigenous people(s) will be treated as the passive recipients of emancipation: "this is what I am

going to do/have done/am doing to these people." Furthermore, the labeling of research as

emancipatory privileges the researcher as emancipator and brings up questions about the

subjects' choice to be "emancipated." Although I am hesitant to use the term "emancipatory," I

do, however, still believe that research can be empowering both to the researcher and the

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[2]A post-colonial state is not for one person to define, but must be left up to previously
colonized communities.

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participants. As Lather (1991) does, "I use empowerment to mean analysing ideas about the causes of powerlessness, recognizing systematic oppressive forces, and acting both individually and collectively to change the conditions of our lives" (p. 4).

I have done my thesis research in my home community, Chisasibi, a Cree nation in Northern Quebec, and so, in situating myself, I must acknowledge my status as Insider and the complex web of responsibilities and relationships which is inextricably bound to Insider Research. I always work with the realization that I have to live/choose to live/belong with *these people* in *this community* and the consequences of my doing research here. This is an intimidating position to be in. I cannot leave after it is all over and there is no question of being objective or removed: I will not attempt to be so, and do not believe it possible.

> Once we accept our "selves" as the ever present "subjective I", ...we call into question one foundation of Western intellectual tradition: objectivity. I understand myself to be In-Relation to my research subject: myself, my students, my teaching, our journey together through cross-cultural terrain. (Graveline, 2003, p. 71)

I acknowledge the fact that my experience within this community allows me to see things which others may not, but I also refuse to see myself as able to completely know the situation I am working within. As Smith (1999) argues,

> ... the role of 'official insider voice' is ... problematic. The comment, 'she or he lives in it therefore they know' certainly validates experience but for a researcher to assume that their own experience is all that is required is arrogant. One of the difficult risks insider researchers take is to 'test' their own taken-for-granted

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> views about their community. It is a risk because it can unsettle beliefs, values,
>
> relationships and the knowledge of different histories. (p. 139)

Certainly, I take risks in doing research. In looking into community involvement issues, critiques

of the Board I work for have come to the surface, criticisms of the teachers with whom I work

have been put forth, and we have explored many ways in which our community does not function

as well as it could. I feel that I have opened myself up, exposed myself to criticism in sharing my

opinions and thoughts with participants and in making this thesis available to community

members; this venture feels extremely risky to me. There are assumptions that I made which

have been disproven by this research study, I worry that some will be offended by what they find

within these pages, and I am afraid that I, a product of a colonial education system and using that

system's tools in research, have inadvertently reproduced a paternalistic agenda. The risks have

danced around and through and played with this entire process and in this final product, I must

declare my own knowledge of risk.

While being an insider, there are many ways in which I also am seen as an outsider in this

community. I have schooling off reserve (I attended high school and university in Toronto and

am now enrolled in a graduate program whereas most of the people I worked with have finished

high school, but have not gone on to further institutionalized education experiences). The fact

that I myself am comfortable with institutionalized education no doubt coloured the lens through

which I see the responses of the participants. Also, I am half white and have always been seen as

different by some members of the community. There are probably many other ways which I have

not seen or do not see myself. The acknowledgment has necessitated being mindful of my

"outsiderness" throughout the entire process. It has surely influenced my dealings with

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participants, the ways we have reacted to each other. Furthermore, it is inevitably an integral part

of and influence on the entire process including my interpretation and writing.

Chapter 3

An overview of the study

Rationale:

Research has documented low involvement rates for Aboriginal parents in their children's education, and this low parental involvement has been linked to high drop-out rates and low academic performance (Friedel, 1999). Levine and Lezotte (1995) tell us that parental involvement is a common factor of "unusually effective schools" (p. 530). Epstein (2003) cites many benefits for both students and parents when parental involvement is a "process of partnership, of shared views and actions toward shared goals" (p. 361). For students, these include feeling comforted by the awareness that family and school are connected, feeling protected, and experiencing benefits specific to policy decisions involving parents (Epstein, 2003). Benefits are both academic and emotional, and hold for children at all grade levels (Epstein, 1992). For parents, benefits include feelings of ownership and connection to other families, and an increase in knowledge about educational policy (Epstein, 2003).

This is representative of what most literature says about the subject of involvement. There is, however, a potential for danger in an acceptance of this view of parental involvement and application of popular research findings concerning parent involvement to Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal people.

The western education system has been created to suit middle-class, mainstream society members and their children, to perpetuate the myth of meritocracy (Battiste, 2000; de Carvalho, 2001). Furthermore, from the point of view of Aboriginal populations, the system is a colonial institution (Battiste, 2000; Cajete, 1994; Graveline, 2003, for example). Even when school

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systems are placed in Aboriginal communities and run by Aboriginal people, we must acknowledge that formal education systems have their roots in a colonialist government's attempts at assimilation with large scale damage to and devastation of individuals and communities as the consequence. In fact, schools can be harmful still to students and families who do not identify with mainstream middle-class North American culture (de Carvalho, 2001).

The potential for danger lies in the touting of numerous benefits of parental involvement for both students and parents when the concept of involvement is defined using the school system as a force of normalization and the Western nuclear family concept as ideal. We risk saying to parents that the burden is upon them to make students and schools successful, making parents (as a group and as individuals) scapegoats for a system which cannot reach every child. We even risk telling parents that they should not feel good about themselves because they are not formally involved in their children's school. Ultimately we risk saying to both parents and their children that if only they were not so deficient culturally, they would be able to use the school system to realize meritocratic dreams.

The line that must be walked is fine. On one hand, we must not allow formal education systems and mainstream research to dictate how Aboriginal parents and community members should be involved in their schools. On the other hand, having Aboriginal parents and community members involved in formal education systems is the only way to ensure that an education system will one day be created to comfortably work for and with Aboriginal parents, students and community members. Above all, blame must not be assigned to parents or communities. To do so would be non-constructive and damaging.

As stated by Tippeconnic (1992), "the standard ways used by schools [to involve parents]

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do not seem to work in many Indian communities. Innovative and creative ways need to be explored, documented, and disseminated" (p. 77). Have educational institutions spent too much time defining the "standard ways" in which parents should be involved in the formal education of their children instead of asking parents how they wish to be involved in their children's formal education or how they are involved? If parents wish to be involved in schools in non-conventional ways, then these non-conventional ways need to be explored. Furthermore, if parental involvement is an issue of self-determination, then any exploration of the issue must be conducive to and consistent with the valuing of parents as self-determining individuals. This valuing necessitates the use of a participatory approach to inquiry that respects parents as co-researchers who are fully able to participate in and determine the research process. This study is an attempt to do just that.

Basic Assumptions and Research Questions

...the challenge for Indigenous people is to engage in positive, proactive initiatives rather than resorting to reactive modes of action. (Smith, 2002, p. 210)

I did the research for my thesis in my home community, employing a focus which is highly situation-specific and personal. I have been a teacher at the school in this community and now work as a consultant for the regional school board. I have been troubled by perceptions I have encountered within schools serving Aboriginal children of parents and the community at large. Typical complaints about parents include: they do not ensure that their children are punctual; they do not come to parent nights; they do not collect, take interest in, or take action on report cards; they do not communicate with teachers; and they do not make sure that their

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children are properly fed and rested to ensure that the children are in the best possible condition to learn. A chasm seems to exist between the school and the community.

My encounters with these attitudes have given rise to a personal need to attempt to construct an agenda for amelioration. Emphasis should deliberately be placed on creation rather than on deconstruction[3], because frequently, deconstruction is just that – it ends without positive re-construction. It must be balanced by an attempt at problem-solving. Weber-Pillwax (2001) speaks of the "compelling, but relatively hopeless paradigms of deconstruction and decolonization" (p. 170), telling us that;

> Deconstruction and decolonization will serve some purpose, but I don't think that
>
> these processes will necessarily bring us to a better state of existence as
>
> Indigenous people. (p. 170)

Deconstruction should have a "purpose that moves it beyond the abstraction of a concept and into the practicality of action" (p. 169).

I entered the study with assumptions based both in personal experience and a preliminary literature review highlighting hindrances to involvement. There is documentation of teachers' perceptions of indifference on the part of Aboriginal parents as a reason for low involvement rates (Friedel, 1999; Mosher-Rae, 2001). The same literature also argues that Aboriginal parents do want to be involved in their children's education (Friedel, 1999; Mosher-Rae, 2001; Tippecconic, 1992). I also held the assumption that the rift between our education system and the community exists in part because the residential school system caused dis-empowerment and

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[3] Deconstruction "means to undermine the conceptual order imposed by a concept that has captivated our imaginations and ways of seeing things" (Postmodern Therapies Listserv, 2004).

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a malaise with institutionalized education. In fact, Fournier and Crey (1997) and Friedel (1999) cite negative past experiences with formal education in residential schools as a hindrance to involvement. Friedel also refers to Aboriginal parents experiencing a lack of cultural capital specific to the dominant culture and barriers put up by the administration to block Aboriginal parental involvement. Mosher-Rae (2001) found that parents lack knowledge of "teaching methods, curriculum and policy-making procedures used within the school" (p.1) which has resulted in some parents feeling that the education of their children should be left up to the "experts." According to Smith (2000), in order to be involved in the school system, parents need to educate themselves to become critically aware of power structures and act on this awareness. Upon entering the study I also wondered whether having more Aboriginal teachers in our school would make a difference in involvement levels, inferring that parents would feel more comfortable with fellow community members.

Furthermore, I entered the study with the view that to some extent our society has self-colonized. The creation of the Cree School Board was an anti-colonial act, but an anti-colonial act which has upheld the forms of the colonial education system. We have chosen to continue to use forms which were historically imposed upon us by the colonizers. Although we have our own school board, teach our own language and culture, we have adopted educational settings very much like those of the mainstream Canadian society. For the most part, walking through one of our schools is like walking through many other schools in Canada. Internalized colonial messages within the individual may work in tandem with internalized colonial structures within our society, displacing parents in our very own school system. We have used the master's tools[4]

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[4] Echoing Audre Lorde (1979)

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to take over the master's house, but maybe the master's house is not home? Perhaps there are changes to the system which would allow parents in? With this in mind I posed the following research questions in my thesis research:

- How do parents see themselves and their roles as parents of school children?

- What measures would encourage parents to become more actively involved in their teenage children's school lives?

- How do community members wish to be involved?

- What are the issues surrounding involvement?

Limitations

The significance of this research project is highly subjective and context-bound. This speaks to both the limitations and the value of both the research findings and the process involved. I am not seeking to build theory which may be applied to other Aboriginal people or peoples in different situations or times. Furthermore, I view this study as part of a process – a preliminary study which will lead to the development of future research studies involving this community. This thesis represents an exercise in searching for appropriate, valuable, community-serving questions to ask, rather than searching for absolute answers to my own questions.

Significance

The significance of this study is highly situation-specific. Nevertheless, this project is highly significant in that the difficulties surrounding the issue of community involvement in the

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formal education system of this community require investigation and attempts at amelioration.

The project's significance also lies in giving space to parents' voices, and space to work together

in "co-constructivist meaning-making" (Hawthorn & Henderson, 1998, p. 91), performing

research as praxis (Lather, 1991). This work may be of interest to other communities who face

similar challenges, because, according to Young (2000), cultural issues surrounding involvement

have not been explored in research, and there is little research concerning the involvement of

parents in children's formal education at the secondary level, but that is for those communities to

decide.

Chapter 4

Research Design

Design

The design of the study is emergent and based in grounded theory, taking a highly participatory approach. This emergent design unfolded, depending not only on the data which was collected (McMillan & Shumacher, 2001), but also upon the wishes of myself and my co-inquirers who decided the course of the research process. The design also reflects a constructivist grounded theory approach (Schram, 2003) with its emphasis on developing theory from data, valuing the meaning-making of participants, acknowledging the influence and role played by the researcher in the research process and with participants, and the assumption of socially constructed reality (Charmaz, 2002; Schram, 2003).

Methods

The research design was emergent, and therefore, did not entail the use of an interview guide or interview question list. Instead, I needed to create a space for emergence. I and my co-inquirers co-created discussions and, therefore, all acted as instruments determining the course together. The length of meetings and the form of meetings – individual interviews and focus groups – were negotiated with participants. I myself favour the use of focus groups because such gatherings are conducive to socio-constructive meaning-making and this was explained to participants during the negotiation of data collection technique.

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Time Frame

Data collection began in June 2004 with interviews and focus groups. Data were analysed and presented to participants for discussion and approval at the end of June. Further data collection, analysis and literature review took place in July 2004 and August 2004. A final presentation of on-going analysis and literature review was done for participants at the end of August 2004 and the final analysis for the purposes of this submission was completed in October of 2004. The data analysis and interpretation of findings presented here may very well not be final, and may lead to further data collection and analysis when this report is disseminated to the community. The process is on-going. Taking a highly participatory approach to research requires a lengthy time commitment and so this thesis submission serves as an exploration of methodology and a survey of issues involved in community involvement in our education system with hopes that a stepping stone to further research endeavours has been provided.

Setting

This research study was completed in Chisasibi, a Cree community in Northern Quebec. The population of the community is approximately 4,000 people. Most community members are Cree. Most non-Cree community members are transient, working for either the school board or the health board. The school serves approximately 1000 students from preschool to secondary five.

The community school is part of the Cree School Board which was formed in 1975 under the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. The Board was created in response to the Cree experience with residential schools, off-reserve boarding programs, and the day schools on

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reserves run by Indian Affairs and the Commission Scolaire Nouveau Quebec. With the creation

of the Cree School Board, Cree people took control of formal education, providing ourselves

with the opportunity and resources to teach in and support the Cree language, to develop our own

curriculum, and to hire appropriate teachers for our children. The board is funded by both the

province of Quebec and the federal government. The Cree School Board is a provincial school

board.

Within the community school, Cree is the language of instruction from kindergarten to

the end of grade three. English or French can be chosen as the language of instruction from

grade four to the end of secondary five. After grade three Cree language and Cree culture are

taught as subjects. The school year is a modified version of the standard provincial calendar with

hunting breaks in the fall and spring and a shorter summer vacation period. The importance of

providing a uniquely Cree education can be seen in the philosophy of the Cree School Board.

The philosophy of the Cree School Board states that:

> The Cree School Board will ensure that each student has the opportunity to
>
> develop his or her full potential as an individual and as a member of society.
>
> We believe that:
>
> The Cree language and culture are the root of the Cree education system
>
> We believe that the Cree child:
>
> Is unique
>
> Is entitled to proper spiritual, emotional, mental and physical
>
> development
>
> Begins to learn before and from birth. It is our duty to foster the

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growth of this learning

Has the right to learn and be taught in his or her Mother tongue

Has the right to be taught and practice his or her culture and its

value system

Must be taught to be non-judgmental, aware, and comfortable

being a Cree person

Has the right to be provided with the opportunity for support and

resources according to his or her needs

Is to be provided the opportunity to follow any level of academic,

technical, vocational and Cree traditional education

(Cree School Board, 2005)

There are vehicles in place for community involvement within the board. Each community elects one commissioner to the Council of Commissioners which is the highest decision making body of the school board and provides direction for the entire board. Also in each community are elected parent organizations called "School Committees", which are consultation committees, consulted by the school in the selection of teachers and principals, school calendar and school year, and any changes in curriculum. School Committees are meant to ensure community involvement in our education system. While there is ample opportunity for involvement, common community discourse purports that there is a low level of community involvement in our school system. The current study is an attempt to address this issue.

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Sampling

A purposeful sample (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) was employed, consisting of parents of high school-aged children, employees of the school, and members of the local school committee. Participants were invited to work with me in exploring the research questions. The co-inquirers were all fellow community members and were involved in the determination of the data collection method and acted as co-analysts with me in the interpretation of data. A purposeful sample enabled me to find participants who shared an interest in and gave importance to the research questions I wished to ask. This minimized the amount of negotiation necessary in determining the specific research topic or the need to change the research questions, although I was open to the possibility that I would need to determine more relevant research questions with those who agreed to be my co-inquirers. This did indeed happen; participants felt that scope of the research questions should be broadened, and so, as participants wished, we focussed more on the concept of community involvement than on parent involvement.

I feel that connecting and sharing, as discussed by Smith (1999), are important because they potentially allow for the development of collective power and the exploration of internalized colonization. For this reason, the purposeful sampling was done as much as possible as network sampling, which McMillan and Schumacher (2001) describe as a "qualitative strategy in which each successive participant or group is named by a preceding group or individual" (p. 595). Network sampling further helped to ensure that all participants shared an interest in the research topic and felt that it was an important issue to explore. This type of sampling is consistent with a grounded theory approach to sampling which advocates staying as close as possible to the social situation and choosing participants who will help to elucidate the situation by "explor[ing] and examin[ing] participant's concerns" (Charmaz, 2002, p. 676).

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In terms of sample size, I attempted to limit the sample to a maximum of five participants (excluding myself) both to ensure that the transcribing was manageable and so that I was able to spend enough time gathering data from each participant to ensure that the data collected was as comprehensive as possible. The size, however, because networking was employed, was open for negotiation with my co-inquirers who wished to bring others into the sample as the research progressed. The sample grew to thirteen participants and therefore, out of respect for the wishes of my participants and the needs of the process, the expected time frame was modified to fit. I felt that it was necessary to hear as many voices as possible during the process.

Research Process

Access/Entry

As a member of the community where I have done my research, I have access to the community, but realize that I must not take this access as permission to conduct research. Access was negotiated with the School Committee which is the governing body made up of parents and community members, and the Band Council who represent the community in our local government. I provided these entities with a letter describing the project and obtained written permission from the Band Council and oral permission from the School Committee to proceed with the study.

Entry was negotiated with my co-inquirers as the purposive sample was created with an explanation of the research agenda and prospective process. Furthermore, all concerned were made aware that this research was taking place in partial fulfilment of a Master's Degree and not as part of my professional duties. Participants were made aware of their right to confidentiality

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and the storage of data policy of Lakehead University. Co-inquirers' voices are maintained for those who have expressed a desire to ensure acknowledgment for their own words; informed consent (either written or taped) was sought as to whether participants wished to remain anonymous or wished to be named. I also ensured that participants knew that they could drop out of the study at any time with no consequence to themselves; this was particularly important to me as those I worked with were fellow community members and I did not want them to feel bound to the study by obligation of any type.

Data Collection

In accordance with a grounded theory approach, the method of data collection remained flexible and emergent based on negotiation with participants. Participants were made aware that they should be able to explore the research problem using methods with which they were comfortable. All participants wished to be interviewed and many took part in the two focus group discussions which took place. Interviews and focus group meetings lasted between one and a half to three and a half hours in length. Participants were asked for their permission to tape and transcribe our interactions. Some declined, asking that I take handwritten notes instead, so data collected consists of recorded conversations, field notes taken during interviews and recorded focus group discussions. Transcriptions were made of all recordings.

In the spirit of collaboration, I shared my own experiences with participants during our inquiry. I felt that this was important and would encourage building-together with each of us understood as a member of the community of inquirers. I let my own perspective and beliefs be known. I did not feel I could ask for openness without being completely open myself. I realize

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that this may raise concerns about the skewing of responses, but are we not all constructed in-relation? As a member of the community I am a self-in-relation to those around me, just as are my co-inquirers (Graveline, 2003). My perspective has been built based on my experiences and the other participants have been a part of those experiences because of our shared histories and spaces. Perspective, or lens, must be made visible if all members of the community of inquiry are to see themselves in-relation and working in trust toward a common goal. As one of my fellow participants said, "We learn by sharing our stories."

Data Analysis and Interpretation

In a grounded theory approach, data analysis is on-going throughout the collection process. I favour a constructivist grounded theory approach to data analysis, viewing data analysis "as a construction that not only locates the data in time, place, culture and context, but also reflects the researcher's thinking. Thus the sense that [I make] of the data does not inhere entirely within those data" (Charmaz, 2002, p.677). According to Charmaz (2002), there is no "discovery" (which assumes the possibility of objectivity) of what is happening in data, only a "defining" (because of multiple realities) of what is happening. Because of the subjectivity of data analysis, it is imperative that co-inquirers are also involved in the sense-making process in order to approach representations which my co-inquirers feel most in tune with.

Lather (1991) uses a Marxist definition of praxis when speaking of "research as praxis." Praxis, in this context, is the collective construction of theory which is used for emancipatory collective action. Praxis occurs when theory and action work closely together, each informing the other in an on-going cyclical relationship (marino, 1997). I kept this conception of research in

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my mind when working with my co-inquirers. I had hoped we would look at data together, but discovered that participants felt more comfortable with me doing an analysis and then bringing it to them to approve and discuss. In this way we were able to use the process, collecting data and using discussion to come to common understandings and construct theory which we intend to use for action.

I have used Charmaz's (2002) approach to analysis; coding was reflexive and open to the possibility for changes as the process evolved. Changes were necessary and data was re-analysed several times in accordance with the wishes of participants. For example, the first analysis of data placed a large emphasis on communication from the school with parents. Participants, in reviewing the analysis with me, felt that too much emphasis was placed on communication from the school and not enough on involvement concerning the whole community, focussing on all community members. Data was re-analyzed with this in mind. In this way, the line between data analysis and data collection was blurred, even eradicated at certain points during the process.

Literature review took place as the data were analyzed. This is consistent with a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2002), although a preliminary literature review on parent involvement and Aboriginal parent involvement in general was done. Theory built in a specific situation cannot necessarily be applied to another situation. Furthermore, the emergent design of the research process implied that a literature review be led into areas enlightened by data analysis. With Lather (1991) I believe that:

> [theory] must...be premised on a deep respect for the intellectual and
>
> political capacities of the dispossessed. (p.55)

Any theory about Aboriginal people in a particular situation must be generated by the Aboriginal

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people in that particular situation. My co-inquirers know their situations and are qualified to develop theory about their own situations and goals. Involving co-inquirers in theory building by involving them in data analysis and interpretation has meant approaching a holistic view of the situation we are studying. According to Glesne (1999):

> Obtaining the reactions of respondents to your working drafts is time-consuming,
> but respondents may (1) verify that you have reflected their perspectives; (2)
> inform you of sections that, if published, could be problematic for either personal
> or political reasons; and (3) help you to develop new ideas and interpretations. (p.
> 152)

The worry that sharing findings with participants has inhibited my own analysis is not a concern to me.

I was prepared for the fact that in approaching research in this way, data analysis might lead to further data collection and analysis to fill in any holes in information acquired. It did and the decision was made in collaboration with participants. I did, however, recognize the need to bring closure to the fulfilment of degree requirements, which means that this thesis submission concludes with recommendations for further research from the participants. The research will be an on-going cyclical project and this thesis represents a beginning.

Representation of Data and Findings

Being faced with the contradiction of my viewing the mainstream education system as a colonial construct while choosing to use the tools of this system to work with Indigenous people, I have had to find some way to come to terms with issues surrounding representation of data and

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findings. This is the situation as I see it: my Aboriginal culture is traditionally an oral culture with a writing system only introduced in the 1800s for missionary purposes; a consistent devaluing of the oral in preference for the written is a characteristic of Imperialism (Chamberlin, 2000; Smith, 1999); in order to develop theory I have asked participants to share stories and give testimony. We have given space to voice and a valuing of the oral as a part of the research project that must be carried over into the thesis itself. Aikenhead and Huntley (1999) speak of western science classes as an exercise in "cultural border crossing" (p. 161) for Aboriginal students. In fact, any academic work is an exercise in cultural border crossing when it is done by and/or with Aboriginal people. The current research study has been such an experience and the experience must be valued as such. Furthermore, the physical act of hearing voice may re-create a connection which is hindered when the experience is mediated through this written report. For these reasons I have also chosen to produce an electronic version of this thesis submission which will allow the physical voices of myself and my co-inquirers to be heard.

The voices of my co-inquirers must not be disadvantaged and so, in writing my thesis while attempting to remain as just as possible, I have attempted to guard against the privileging of my own voice – the author as authority at the centre of the text. This means owning my position in the textworld of my thesis paper by using "I." It also means using "we" to mean myself and my co-inquirers, not the positivist, Imperialist, Western academic "we." As well, I feel that making my views and beliefs known will serve in some way to de-centre my own voice by showing an audience that I am not objective and cannot pretend to be so.

Findings from data analysis and literature reviewed have been intertwined. I feel that this presentation best represent the grounded theory approach taken with data analysis having led the

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literature search and review. My one concern in presenting findings in this way is that it may appear that literature is being used to validate thoughts and feelings of co-inquirers. It is not. Responses of participants stand with their own inherent value irrespective of findings from other research and related literature. Other literature is used in dialogue with the voices of myself and my co-inquirers, to highlight what is said, and to add related information where applicable.

Co-inquirers were given the opportunity to approve my presentation of their responses. Each were given a copy of the findings and interpretation section (Part II of this thesis submission) before it was finalized. I wanted to make sure that I came as close as possible to presenting the responses of participants as they were meant and in a way that was comfortable for each person. I felt that this was part of minimizing the risks for participants.

Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in accordance with the guidelines and procedures outlined by Lakehead University.

Purpose. The purpose of this research was to explore with community members the issue of community involvement in our children's formal education and to explore ways in which parents wish to be involved in the formal education system.

Informed Consent. Participants were given an explanation of the purpose of the research and process involved both in writing and orally. The letter and the verbal explanation made clear that:

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- participation was voluntary

- any participant may have withdrawn at any time without risk to him or herself

- I did not foresee any risks involved

- participants may have maintained anonymity if they so wished

- all data collected must be stored at Lakehead for seven years

- a copy of the thesis submission will be made for each participant and other copies will held at the Lakehead University library.

Confidentiality and Anonymity. All participants were informed that the data collected will remain confidential, if they so wish. The wishes of participants who wish to be named in the thesis submission has also been respected. In cases where confidentiality and anonymity has been requested, pseudonyms have been assigned to appear on the transcripts, field notes and the report and any identifying information has been omitted or changed. These changes have also been approved by the concerned participants.

Risks. I did not foresee any risks to the participants, but was open to discussing the issue with participants as they may have seen risks not apparent to me. I was concerned that the words of participants as presented in the report were approved by the participants concerned in case those participants felt at risk in any way as a consequence of participation.

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Storage of Data. Data will be stored at Lakehead in a locked filing box for seven years following the submission of the thesis work. All data has been placed on cd rom and is not available in paper form.

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PART II

Findings from data analysis and literature review

As a grounded theory approach was employed during the research process, literature was reviewed as data were continually collected and analysed. The analysis guided the path taken in literature searches, causing a close interplay between data collected and literature reviewed. In this way, the literature became part of the analysis process thus part of the data collected. For this reason, findings from the analysis of data and the presentation of literature reviewed have been interwoven throughout this section.

Themes:

Three major themes emerged as data were analysed: supporting our children; articulating frustration; and the desire to move forward. The three following chapters explore these themes.

Chapter 5

Supporting our children

Ways of supporting our children:

> *"...but there were times when she said I don't want to do it [finish high school]. I said that you will and I will support you. ...she needs me and I have to be there for her."*

> — *Mary*

> *"we didn't give up..."*

> — *Roy and Margaret*

All of the parents in the study felt that a formal education was important for their children and that it was important for them to support their children in this endeavour. When speaking of how parents should be involved in a child's formal education, most participants spoke of things which were done outside of school, in the home. All parents stressed activities such as waking children up in the morning, ensuring that homework is done, disciplining children who skip school, and maintaining a dialogue about the importance of finishing high school. In fact, parent-child communication was seen to have a large effect on the educational success of students.

Poonwassie (2001) supports this view. In an article about Aboriginal parental involvement he states that "parental verbal interactions with children" and "parental affective relationships with children" have a positive effect on school achievement among Aboriginal students (p. 162). Young (2000), in research done with Latino American parents, also shows similar findings to ours. The parents in Young's study showed a greater concern for what Young

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refers to as "informal involvement." The types of informal involvement activities mentioned by Young were: everyday care-giving activities; knowing their children's friends; instilling cultural values; ensuring that homework is done; talking to children about school and their futures; and helping children learn how to be responsible.

Parents in this study stressed the effect of their own actions in instilling in their children the desire to achieve a formal education. Parents acted by having and using books around the house, but mainly they spoke of the importance of being role models for their children.

I think it has a lot to do when I was going to school she would see me work on my assignments. I think it has a lot to do with role modeling. There were some days that I stayed up all night working on my assignments and she saw that. And I think that's what made her work towards...knowing that this is what you have to do to succeed. ... I think that was the key for her success is seeing me do the same.

- Mary

... for me one of the key things is to have an education of our own. Without that there's not much you can do to try to help your child at home. I think that's one of the best places to support your child ... especially in high school....Role models is probably one of the main things ... at the same time it's also a challenge, a good challenge, a positive challenge to want to be the same or even, I like to believe that the child who has both educated parents, if they went as far as high school, or graduated from high school, the child would want to be the same or probably even go further.

- Bertie

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Another parent spoke of his own father as an academic role model. His own father instilled a

sense of the importance of school in him which he has, in turn, passed on to his children.

For me, my dad, it was very important to him. He made sure I went to school. By

the time I was seventeen, I was done [secondary school]. I had no choice... that

rubbed off from him to me...that school was important... he went to school a

lot...he was always out at school. I don't know how many diplomas he's got. I

don't know why school was so important to him. I guess he just realized that in

the future he'd need school to get a job. He never told me why, he just made sure

I went to school.

– Roy

In the case of parental influence over formal academic success, actions are truly seen as speaking

louder than words with parents playing the part of academic role models for their children.

Poonwassie (2001) speaks of "parental education expectations,""parental beliefs and

attributions" as well as "parental encouragement, and parents' education" as factors in Aboriginal

student achievement (p. 161). Hale (2002), citing Ogbu (1987), says that role models are

essential for Aboriginal students "in order to accept the school and education as the means to

their success." Similar to the parents in this study, Young (2000) feels that it is important for

parents to "show, through their actions, that education is important"(p.42). The difference

between Young (2000) and this study is that, for Young, parents should volunteer and participate

in the organization itself to illustrate a valuing of formal education and learning, while

participants in the current study show that they value formal education by going to school

themselves.

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A few participants also spoke of being involved in their children's education by acting within the school. Members of the local school committee spoke of the need for parent volunteers to take on such roles as lunch time monitors, and after school activity organizers. School staff members[5] interviewed also saw a role for parents to play within the school but felt that parents saw the school as being in charge of their child's education with the parents being responsible for other aspects of a child's life. Poonwasie (2001) is similarly concerned that Aboriginal parents "feel that teachers are well qualified to look after the education of their children" (p.156), and Ramirez (2003), speaking of Latino American parents, found that "many parents felt it was not their place to attend or to go to the schools for they felt that the teachers were better suited to teach and educate their children" (p.99).

Other literature speaks of schools' expectations of parents. Skau (1996) speaks of the norm of Canadian schools expecting "parental involvement by assisting learning at home (homework) and ...involvement in schools [by] fundraising, fieldtrips, [and as] volunteers in classrooms" (p.35). Similar views are expressed by Hale (2002) and Reyhner (1992) who add that schools want parents to make sure that students do homework and study and come to parents' night.

According to Skau (1996), the call for parents to be involved in school governance is a recent development. Much of the literature concerning Aboriginal parental involvement views involvement in governance as an aspect of self-determination. Perley (1993) tells us that the education system in form and goals was designed to serve the needs of the colonizer; that there is

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[5]These participants are referred to only as "school staff members" so that the identity of those who wished to remain anonymous remains protected. To be more specific about their roles within the school would make them identifiable.

a lack of involvement of Aboriginal people in the planning and decision making process; and that

this requires the "real incorporation of Aboriginal parents in participating in the education of

their children" (p.125-6). According to Smith (2000), from the Maori point of view, self-

determination is about decision-making and the power to make decisions for oneself and one's

children, which increases personal investment in the education system. This view is echoed by

Adams (1974) who speaks of the Navajo Board of Education and its Rough Rock Demonstration

School in Arizona as a self-determination initiative. According to Adams, Native parents should

play an active part in determining school programming. The school should reflect community

goals, with close collaboration between the school and the community (Adams, 1974; Cajete,

2000). Friedel (1999), speaking of an urban Canadian Aboriginal population, advocates the

involvement of Aboriginal parents as "decision-makers or policy-makers, but also as an

independent force that initiates, implements, and monitors basic change in the school structure"

(p. 140). Archibald (1999) looks at self-determination from a Sto:lo perspective and a

community's initiative to implement a Sto:lo social studies curriculum. For Archibald, the Sto:lo

initiative is based in the educational self-determination manifesto of the National Indian

Brotherhood, *Indian Control of Indian Education*, commonly referred to as the "Red Paper,"

which was published in 1970. Both Smith (2000, 2002) and Archibald (1999) view Aboriginal

parental involvement as an anti-colonialist endeavour based on the fact that historically,

Aboriginal parents in New Zealand and in Canada have been excluded from their respective

Federal education systems by colonial law and by federally enforced institutionalized education

systems.

Parents who participated in this study, for the most part, felt that playing a role within the

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school was unnecessary. In fact, a few parent participants felt that their children would be embarrassed to see them within the school and for this reason have never gone to their child's classroom to participate in any way. Parents also did not want to disturb the work going on in their child's class. Most parents did not want to be consulted on matters pertaining to school governance and policy such as setting a calendar and school rules, but felt that type of responsibility should be left up to the school. There were, however, some participants in our study who did feel that the issue was one which needed to be explored further.

Young (2000), in a study of Latino parents within Texas borderland schools, found that parents decided not to become involved formally in the school because of time constraints, work and, similar to this study, the perception that children do not want their parents involved in their school. Skau (1999), in a study of Alberta schools, also found that most parents do not want to become involved in administration and decision-making within the school. In fact, some authors foresee problems arising as does Cassanova (1996) who speaks of the possibility for power struggles between teachers and parents when parents want to control too much. Taylor, Crago and McAlpine (1993) see potential problems when Aboriginal people who have no formal background in education make educational decisions. These authors put forth the problematic, possibly paternalistic view that undereducated Aboriginal leaders are "more vulnerable to misinformation and manipulation, both from within and outside the Aboriginal community" (p. 177).

De Carvalho (2001) offers an intriguing critical view of current thinking on parental involvement in formal education systems. She positions herself in opposition to a hegemonic view that parental involvement is good and desirable in every case. It is this belief in the

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goodness of parental involvement which has allowed deficit thinking to pervade; according to Levine and Lezotte (1995) for example, "high levels of parental involvement [are characteristic] of unusually effective schools," which necessarily places the burden for making schools effective on parents. Little (1996/97), speaking of Navajo parents, serves as a similar example when she speaks of parents "dumping" children at school and abdicating responsibility. Friedel (1999) is concerned when urban Aboriginal parents are blamed for their children's lack of success in school. In popular and academic thought parents have become the scapegoats for school systems which fail to meet the needs of all students, and, according to de Carvalho, we must reframe the issue in terms of capital – cultural, social, and economic – for the education system is created to preserve the status quo of the dominant society and therefore favours the types of involvement with which members of the dominant society are comfortable.

Most parent participants did, however, speak of the need to take on advocacy roles for their children within the school:

> *There were times when she wanted to give up because she had problems with*
> *some of her teachers. Before Christmas she said, "I give up" after she got the*
> *results of her work. So I went to go see the teacher and I told her [my daughter]*
> *is really working hard and she really wants to finish this year. And then she told*
> *me "Yeah, I understand. Our personalities clash." That's what she said! And*
> *then I told her, "You have a job here and your job is to make my daughter*
> *succeed and if you feel that she requires extra help, then you give it – if she needs*
> *to do extra assignments to make her more at ease with the work."*
>
> *- Mary*

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Similar findings were stated by Young (2000), in which many parents felt "that it is their responsibility to ensure that the school is doing everything possible for their children" (p.35).

Interestingly, in this study, school employees reported that mothers seemed more involved than fathers in their children's education and that extended families members also played a large role in the education of those children whose mothers and fathers were unable to be supportive. Extended family involvement is also an important factor in Maori communities where, according to Smith (2000), formal schooling is built upon "*Kaupapa Maori theory and practice*, the significant component of which is centered on the use of traditional and contemporary notions of *whanau* (extended family) values, practices, and structures" (p.57). Extended family also played an important roles in Young (2000)'s study of Latino American parents in the Texas borderland.

Parents also spoke of the way in which cultural change affected their role. One participant feels that "we have to work twice as much to be parents" as did previous generations. And many parents see themselves as living in two worlds and trying to mediate between them for themselves and their children. Part of their role is to "hold on to our culture, our language, plus...balance everything...family, work, school...". Little Bear (2000) speaks of the anxiety felt at this moment among Aboriginal people who seem to live between two cultures, saying that a clash among Aboriginal and mainstream worldviews "is at the heart of many current difficulties" and "denies Aboriginal people harmony in their daily lives" (p. 85).

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Why we support our children's formal education:

Parents talked about the reasons they feel it is important to encourage and support their children's formal education. All of the parents in the study are involved in their children's formal education out of concern for their children's future. Most parents in the study want their children to experience professional success and to be happy. According to Hampton (1999) and Battiste (2000), most Aboriginal parents wish for a formal education system which prepares their children for successful participation in both Aboriginal and mainstream societies.

Parents use their own stories to motivate their children:

... about construction... my husband... didn't complete high school, he dropped

out in secondary II ...He's the one who has the seasonal jobs and he's always

using that example with our children. I'm the one who completed and moved on

and did my bachelor's in social work. An he's the one that's on UIC for a period

of time ... he's always using that ... what you can have and what he doesn't have.

So he's really motivating my children ...

– Jane

In fact, many parents connect their own academic history to the role they play in their child's education. For some parents, their experience with their own parent's lack of support gives them reason to push their own children. When speaking of the effect that social issues have on parent involvement, one participant said:

Social issues ... we see some of these kids they still try to go to school – I was

there too. I was one of the kids. I still went to school but it affected me. It was in

my mind all the time, but I pulled through ...I promised myself not to do that to my

kids...

– Mabel

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Another parent spoke of being the only sibling in her family to graduate from high school. She talked about her parents allowing her to make her own decisions when it came to schooling at a very young age. She skipped a lot of school and eventually dropped out. She ended up going back to school when she realized that the jobs she wanted were jobs which required formal education. She finished high school and eventually went on to post secondary studies. She has a sense of success and wants the same success for her own children. Mary's case is similar:

> *For myself, I didn't graduate from high school. I finished my schooling at adult ed. When I had her I was 18 and didn't care much for school and right there I decided I won't let my daughter make the same mistake I did. That made me push her more.*

> *...I only had my high school diploma when I was 24 and I kept going back to school to quit again because no babysitters, no money for babysitters. It was really hard for me. I told her, "You have a chance. Do that before you start a family. Go for it." And I told her, "You still have lots of years ahead of you ... I want you to get that paper before."*

These parents are involved in their children's education as role models because of their own early lack of success within the formal education system.

Other parents, as well as being concerned for the future of their own children, are concerned for the future of the nation and so feel that they are serving the Cree Nation by being involved in their children's education.

> *I certainly don't want my family or my kids to participate in limiting our own people. I think that the lack of education, I think that's what it does – limits your*

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people. I think the beautiful thing about our people is that you can have both

culture and education. If you can have both, that's the best. If you can only have

culture, you can only go so far. If you can only have education you can only go

so far as well. If you can have both, you can have the best of both.

<div align="right">

– Bertie

</div>

There is much literature concerning formal education and the future of Aboriginal

nations. Hampton (1999) tells us that "the freedom and strength of the individual is the strength

of the group" (p. 21) and sees education as a means to freedom. Rozon (2001) also ties

education to self-determination and the survival of Aboriginal beliefs and values. Wotherspoon

and Schissel (2000) see formal education as the key to Aboriginal peoples' individual and

community success economically, politically and socially.

Chapter 6

Articulating feelings of frustration

Several sub-themes emerged during data analysis when participants spoke of things which make them feel frustrated about our school system and affect their willingness to become involved within the school setting. These include perceived barriers, attitudes of students and the wider community, and a lack of action.

Barriers:

There were many barriers to involvement identified by participants in this study. These barriers included: a lack of knowledge; discomfort with school staff and the school environment; cultural dissonance; communication; social issues; and the community history with formal education.

Lack of knowledge:

Participants articulated a lack of knowledge in subject areas, procedures, and how to become involved. Parents feel they lack knowledge in various subject areas – namely Cree, science, and math – and are therefore unable to help their children with homework. School employees interviewed are aware of parental discomfort in this area and feel that parents may be nervous about their own lack of formal education. Consistent with this, in a review of research concerning reasons for parental involvement, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) state that parents are less involved in high school because of the higher difficulty level of student work.

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Parents also feel that they lack knowledge of procedures to be followed. Many parents shared stories of their children having trouble within the school, mainly in the form of clashes with teachers and the administration. These parents did not know who to approach within the school, or how to approach the administration about their child's problems and so often ended up not doing anything. Members of the school committee are aware of this barrier, acknowledging that parents are unaware of the procedure for making complaints and that parents feel uncomfortable with putting complaints in writing. This discomfort with report writing is also acknowledged by the school employees interviewed.

According to Poonwassie (2001), barriers concerning administrative procedures exist because "most parents on reserves have a low level of schooling and do not identify with the process of schooling in their communities" (p. 156). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), however, in a review of research, suggest that level of parental involvement is not dependant upon parental level of education.

Parent participants also feel that they lack knowledge of how to become involved in the school. They did not know whether they were welcome to come into the school or to enter their children's classrooms. The members of the school committee interviewed also addressed this issue, saying that the school does have an open-door policy, but that despite this policy, parents are not, in reality, welcomed into classrooms:

> *...we say...the school is open to parents ... but when you try to put that into*
>
> *practice, some teachers might be very reluctant to let the parents into their*
>
> *classrooms. Sometimes it's just lip service that we're offering to the*
>
> *community...we don't practice what we preach...*
>
> *– C. N.*

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The lack of knowledge extends to the roles of school staff members. According to school employees, parents seem unaware of the different roles school staff – mainly from the guidance office – can play in mediating between parents and the school, and thus helping parents to become involved.

Discomfort with environment and school staff:

Data also pointed to a discomfort with the school environment and the school staff as a barrier to involvement. All parents who participated in this study have felt discomfort going into the school, although those parents who had or have professional contact with the school, either as employees of the school, or employees of entities connected to the school, said that this professional connection makes it easier for them to make a personal connection to the school. Many parents are nervous about going to the administration of the school with problems:

> *...for me I do get a little scared at the type of response I'll get if I do ask too many*
>
> *questions about why my child is having problems ... it's not an easy...feeling when*
>
> *you're afraid to ask.*
>
> <div align="right">*– Bertie*</div>

Some parents are also worried about causing negative repercussions for their children if they make a complaint.

Parents furthermore feel that the school has been unsupportive and devaluing of their attempts at involvement. This frustration was mainly focussed on the administration during instances when parents have attempted advocacy on behalf of their children:

> *So I came to the school and I spoke to the administration and there I didn't feel*

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like I was given support. It was more like, "This is your daughter's fault and she

has to pay the consequences." Even though I tried to explain to them, according

to my daughter, this is what happened, I wasn't listened to. I don't know what

happened with the teacher. I don't think they did anything at that time. I guess

they didn't have enough evidence, or not thinking that I would write a report on

that. I was really upset at that....I did request that we have a meeting regarding

that incident and the teacher to be present also. I never got a call back. Very

discouraging.

– Mary

I went to go see the administration a couple of times...every time we went in there

they made us feel like we did something wrong...we were concerned parents and

they try to make us feel guilty for wanting to know this...we sat there for an hour

he was just making excuses...I told them, "We've been here for an hour and I feel

like I've wasted my time."... They tend to be defensive...

– Roy and Margaret

The perceived lack of support from the school left parents feeling powerless and sad at their

inability to intervene on behalf of their children.

Literature links parental feelings of efficacy with the relationship to the school.

According to Poonwassie (2001), Aboriginal parents do not feel welcome in schools and are

often discouraged from participation because of negative relationships with administration and

teachers. In Young (2000), Latino parents expressed a fear of the school staff. Friedel (1999)

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found distrust, lack of respect and a lack of understanding among administration and parents with barriers put up by the administration to block Aboriginal parental involvement. Friedel also found that parents felt they couldn't make a difference because they had been frustrated in attempts at involvement. In a review of research concerning reasons for parental involvement, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) speak of parental feelings of efficacy as important in determining involvement levels. They cite research stating that individuals with a high sense of self-efficacy "approach difficulties as challenges to be mastered rather than threats to be avoided" (p.18), and that:

> Individuals low in self-efficacy..tend to avoid situations in the area, slacken their
>
> efforts, or stop trying all together..persons with low efficacy...who experience
>
> failure will experience drastically reduced motivation to become involved. (p. 18)

Parents are made to feel ineffective by negative experiences with their children's schools and as a result become disengaged.

Parents also feel uncomfortable with some teachers who do not facilitate participation, and whose lack of availability discourages parents from being involved in their children's education. Parents want teachers to be more available to them. One parent reported that:

> *There were times that I tried to meet with the teachers, but they're gone after the*
>
> *bell rings, some of them. They don't make themselves available.*
>
> *-- Mary*

All parents feel that report card nights do not give enough of an opportunity for parents and teachers to build relationships and to discuss student progress.

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Cultural dissonance:

The discomfort with teachers also stems from a perceived lack of respect for students and for cultural differences. Study participants reported hearing about some teachers speaking disrespectfully to students.

It's the teachers, how they present themselves in class that degrades the

motivation, how they talk, the way they talk to the children. That's the other

thing. That's the part that's not there also is the respect from both sides – the

student and the teacher sometimes.

– Mabel

Members of the school committee are frustrated because not a lot can be done about problem teachers because of restrictions with the collective agreement in place. Teachers who do not appear to respect cultural differences are frustrating to parents because of implications for student success. Most parents in the study did not feel that it is necessary to have more teachers of Aboriginal descent (approximately 40 percent of the teachers in the school are of Aboriginal descent with about 10 percent of these teaching at the secondary level).

According to Klug and Whitfield (2003), cultural dissonance between teachers and students of American Indian descent greatly affects the success rate of these students. Many authors including Battiste (2000), Hale (2002), Klug and Whitfield (2003), Poonwassie and Charter (2001), and Reyner (1992) for example, say that it is important for non-Aboriginal teachers of Aboriginal students to be supportive of the Aboriginal culture of their students. Hale (2002) tells us that it is important to see cultural differences from the mainstream as an asset instead of a deficit to be dealt with:

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Caring teachers are willing to learn about their students and adjust their teaching

to fit the pupil's cultural backgrounds. Such teachers recognize the cultural

heritage of students as a positive contribution to the class and not as another

difficulty with which they must deal. (p. 97)

Hale also speaks of the importance of caring teachers as documented in research on Aboriginal

student drop-out rates. Furthermore, Poonwassie and Charter, citing Gilliland (1992),

recommend that:

those who work with Aboriginal students provide a multicultural environment for

all students, become familiar with their students' worldviews, value their

students' background, identify and emphasize positive Aboriginal values, ...and

work with students' parents and community. (pp. 131-2)

Respect for students and their cultural background is emphasized in much of the literature on

Aboriginal education.

Communication:

Discussions about barriers with participants pointed to a lack of communication from the

school with parents and the wider community. Parents want to have more communication with

teachers. They feel that parents' night is too short and that the line-ups are too long, that they do

not receive invitations to take part in activities within the school, and that they do not know what

is happening in the school in terms of tutoring and other activities. Parents also report that they

are not informed of any problems their children are having in school until a child has been having

difficulty for a considerable length of time and drastic measures, such as suspensions, are put into

place.

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Communication with parents from teachers and the school is highly important (Epstein, 2003; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Ramirez, 2003; Young, 2003). In their review of research concerning why parents become involved, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) state that "general invitations, demands, and opportunities for involvement" (p. 3) all affect the level of parental involvement. Young (2000) and Ramirez (2003) also found that lack of opportunity to communicate was a factor. Poonwassie and Charter (2001), citing Gilliland (1992), recommend that "relaxed communication" (p. 132) be promoted between Aboriginal parents and the school.

Social Issues:

In our case, social issues including drug and alcohol abuse and physical, mental and sexual abuse are also seen as a barrier to involvement. School committee members report hearing more from parents who have a very stable home environment than those parents who are having problems at home. The participants in the study feel that many parents do not participate in the school because they feel guilty, blame themselves, and are afraid that school staff will talk about them. According to one school staff member:

A lot of families, because they're going through personal social issues, that's another factor why parents don't come around. They must think that the counselors or the Cree staff inform the non-Cree teachers what goes on in that kid's family. We don't. Only when the teacher asks – if there's been a sudden change in behaviour – we only give them what they need to know. That's what we do from our office. There's more dysfunctional families and the kids are reacting. They bring their problems to school. That's where they react to their teachers.

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School staff members feel that there are many parents who are dealing with drug and alcohol abuse in their homes and do not have the personal or emotional resources to become involved in their child's schooling.

Poonwassie (2001) and Poonwassie and Charter (2001) also link Aboriginal parental participation to social issues. Poonwassie and Charter (2001) acknowledge the stigma attached to problems with abuse, and find that the issue is extremely problematic because:

> ... there is a focus on changing the behaviours of individuals rather than on addressing the social problems; ... an individual can be labeled as 'dysfunctional' and blamed for not recovering, while the underlying social problems are ignored.
>
> (p. 125)

Smith (2000) also cites social and economic problems as barriers for Maori parents. For Smith, the extended family, *whanau*, base of the school system works to alleviate this problem.

Community history:

The community history with formal education is also seen as a barrier to involvement. One participant talked about the relationship between the community and the residential school; children were told not to go near the buildings or to play around the school as it was seen as very separate from the community. Children were truly segregated there and parents were not allowed any input or asked to be involved. Participants feel that the residential school history began a cycle of disassociation with formal schooling that encouraged parents to opt out of involvement.

> *I think it has a lot to do with the way the residential school was carried out. The responsibility of the parents was taken away. They just sat back and waited and*

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watched other people raise their kids. They were powerless. And I think it stems

from that. I think that's why a lot of parents don't get involved with their

children's school because of what happened. They think it's the school's

responsibility to raise them. That's how I feel personally. That has to stop and

give the responsibility back to the parents.

– Mary

There is much research which corroborates participants' views that community history affects involvement. Fournier and Crey (1997) and Friedel (1999) cite negative past experiences with formal education in residential schools as a hindrance to involvement. Residential school experiences have had negative effects on the development of parental roles and on family ties and have played a negative role in the development of identity (Charters-Voght, 1999; Haig-Brown, 1988; Poonwassie & Charter, 2001; Wotherspoon and Schissel, 2000). Furthermore, negative past experiences with formal schooling have caused resistance to involvement among Aboriginal parents because schools are seen as negative places (Friedel, 1999; Skau, 1996; Smith, 2000).

Attitude towards formal education and our school system:

Participants feel that if parents and the wider community have a more positive view of our school system, involvement levels would be higher. Similar findings by Epstein (1986) are cited in Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) who state that when schools make an effort to involve parents, parental attitude towards school is more positive and that this positive attitude leads to higher rates of involvement. In the present study, aspects that affect attitudes toward our

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school system include perceptions of student frustration with the school system, a lack of confidence in our system's ability to prepare students for success, and the wider community feelings about formal education.

Perceptions of student frustration:

Participants feel that a negative attitude towards our youth exists within the school. Participants see a need for feedback from students and a lack of student input into the workings of our education system. They also feel that the school harms the self-esteem of many students. One participant, a parent and a former school employee, who is involved in community youth activities speaks of the frustration articulated by one young community member:

> *the students care, they do care ... one came over to my house she was having*
>
> *problems with school, she wanted change... if I go to the parents' committee what*
>
> *will they say? She was afraid she wasn't going to get support...*
>
> *– Roy*

According to participants, our students feel a lack of support from their education system. This leads to low self-esteem and lack of a sense of belonging. One participant, speaking of the bureaucratic nature of our system, questions whether our school is student-centered or administration-centered. And most participants feel that teachers can do a lot to improve student feelings by spending more time with students in activities which are not academic, outside of class time, mainly in extra-curricular activities, but also in community activities.

Friedel (1999) agrees that working on a child's self-image in school is important. Osterman and Freese (2000) link a sense of school membership to engagement, saying that

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unengaged students "perceive schools as uncaring environments" (p.288) and that:

> students who are engaged are interested in learning, enjoy challenges and persist in the completion of tasks. They are psychologically involved with and committed to the learning process. The disengaged student, in contrast, is emotionally distant from his or her education. In some cases, disengagement is not apparent and students can complete assignments and achieve good grades while remaining completely detached from their work. In other cases, disengagement is evident in behavioural problems, either withdrawal or aggression. (p. 286)

According to Osterman and Freese, students must feel a sense of belonging and "relatedness" (p.289) to their school. Osterman and Freese (2000) and Reyhner (1992) link engagement to teacher-student relationships; research, cited in Osterman & Freese (2000), indicates that teacher-student relationships are more important than family or peer support in determining student engagement. Reyhner (1992) also links engagement to extra-curricular activities among Aboriginal students and Osterman and Freese (2000) tell us that "caring teachers showed consideration and understanding and had a relationship that extended beyond the boundaries of the classroom" (p. 294). Furthermore, Young (2000), in research done with Latino American parents, found that:

> Parents whose students are engaged, whether in scholastic, artistic, musical or athletic activities, seem to have higher levels of involvement than those parents whose children are un-engaged in school beyond attending class. Student engagement seems to facilitate both formal and informal involvement activities [among parents]. (p. 56)

The lack of confidence in our system:

> *...The teachers and the community and the parents – all these people – I think all*
>
> *of us we're not doing enough to work together to make sure – just watching our*
>
> *children learning barely...*
>
> *– Bertie*

Many participants in this study feel that the school is unable to prepare their children

adequately to pursue post-secondary studies or to enter the job market. Over and over again,

participants expressed a lack of understanding of why we do not have more children entering

post-secondary studies and entering professions which require academic preparation. A few

participants had even removed their children from our community school, taking them to schools

in the south to prepare them to enter a post-secondary institution.

Reasons given for this lack of success have mainly to do with standards. Participants feel

that the school employs low academic standards and expects little from students in terms of the

amount and type of work given and homework. One parent compared our school to a school in

Montreal where she had placed her child; her daughter was given much more responsibility in

terms of homework and research to do. Some parents feel that our school is not challenging

enough and does not give students enough work to do, and that homework is not sent home

because teachers do not trust children with textbooks. Other parents feel that not enough is being

done to help students to become better learners such as teaching time-management skills,

positive study habits and preparing students for life outside of the community in post-secondary

institutions.

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I find that sad...there's four thousand of us in the community and we don't have

an education system that properly prepares our kids to go out there...

<div align="right">

– C. N.

</div>

Both Friedel (1999), in a study done with urban Aboriginal parents, and Charters-Voght (1999) in a study done with the Upper Nicola Band, found that parents perceived their schools as having low expectations or low standards of Aboriginal students. Poonwassie and Charter (2001), citing Mackay and Myles (1995), address the issue of inadequately preparing students for post-secondary education, saying that Aboriginal students are frequently unprepared not only to leave home and live within a different culture, but that they are also often unprepared academically.

Participants also see a lack of success of our school system evidenced by our dependency on outside professionals. Participants feel that there is a problem with our community remaining dependent on people with professional expertise who are not from this community, speaking of our tendency to hire consultants or advisors who are members of mainstream Canadian society. One participant's words speak for others in the study:

It doesn't help if we start just hiring dropouts in the community... We have a

problem ... we only depend on people from the outside to come in and fill the top

jobs in our community... we don't have enough Cree nurses. We have one Cree

doctor, but she's still studying... If we can't produce the administrators from our

schools then that's going to continue, on and on and on...

We need thinkers... critically, analytically, these are skills that are taught... these

are skills that we really need...

It's so sad that we have to have people come from the outside, we're just the

helpers...

– C. N.

Wotherspoon and Schissel (2000) say that "economic disadvantage" among Aboriginal nations will remain as long as the gap in formal educational achievement exists between mainstream society and Aboriginal peoples and that "undereducation compounds itself over time" (p. 194). In order to combat this situation, Wotherspoon and Schissel (2000) feel that more and more Aboriginal people with formal qualifications will be needed to fill leadership positions within Aboriginal communities and organizations. They also feel that "recent cohorts of Aboriginal young are better educated and have access to a wider range of occupational and societal alternatives than previous generations" (p. 194).

The community view of education:

Participants in this study indicate feelings of frustration with what they perceive as a lack of value placed on formal education within the community. Participants felt that it should be more important to community entities other than the school to become involved in the life of the school. It is seen as especially important that Social Services and the Youth Department of our community become more involved with students in the schools.

The other part I don't see is at the local level – we're not doing, not just as

parents, the other people should be part of it like the organizations that have

direct links with children...the ones that are looking after the youths – those are

the ones I don't see that are not involved also.

– Mabel

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It is felt that a large improvement in student success can be made if students have more support in terms of counseling, advocacy and protection. Participants also feel that other entities can play an important part in career choice and student motivation.

Participants feel that the devaluing of education plays out in hiring practices within the community. One participant, during a focus group session, reported that:

> *There's a lot in the community that almost contradicts that school is important.*
> *I've seen so many people that don't even have high school education get the best*
> *jobs. (Others concur.) Some parents, when they see this they don't see a reason*
> *why ... I've seen some teenagers get jobs before the high school graduates. ...*
> *That's not even to say that these dropouts are earning the best salary that they*
> *could earn... You even see it in some of the organizations when they start hiring*
> *relatives for example whereas some college students come back, they can't find a*
> *job.*
>
> *– C. N.*

Parents feel that students pick up on this attitude toward education, seeing that education does not necessarily lead to professional success, and that this affects student retention and success.

Participants feel that, as a community, we don't encourage students by highlighting talents or encouraging exceptional students to succeed. In fact, a formal education is almost negative capital in that students are afraid to succeed in school because they are afraid of being judged by others and that people who have gone away to post-secondary institutions outside of the community are seen as a threat by some when they come home. Participants feel that the school itself plays a part in this when children are discouraged from talking in classrooms and are encouraged to be silent.

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Much literature concerning Aboriginal community involvement in formal education exists that tells us that a community's involvement in its formal education system is good for both the community and the students in the school. According to Tippiconnic (1999), speaking of Aboriginal education, "when community involvement is high, the school becomes a focal point and is involved in the reconstitution of community life" (p.45). Similarly, in Charters-Voght's (1999) study of the Upper Nicola Band, "ideal education" involved the participation of all community members (p. 86). Klug and Whitfield (2003) tell us that community involvement encourages schools to focus on the affective domain and not solely on the academic. Poonwassie and Charter (2001), citing Mackay and Myles (1995), link community valuing of formal education to student success:

> First Nations communities which value education and communicate this to
>
> community members and school staff appear to have higher success rates in
>
> graduating students. Their leaders, school boards and schools all work together to
>
> meet their student's needs. (p. 124)

Rehyner (1992) also feels that drop-out prevention involves various community members, namely counselors working with students who are also in close contact with parents. Baizerman and Compton (1993) give similar views on drop-out prevention from a mainstream perspective; according to them, the community needs to take on responsibility for its youth, claiming "moral responsibility for its children, adolescents, and youth, and act[ing] to support their healthy development" (p. 17). Baizerman and Compton tell us that dropout prevention comprises more than parent involvement and therefore community entities must become involved because a need exists for "deeper socio-cultural and socioeconomic intervention" (p. 19).

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A lack of action:

Most participants feel that there has already been a lot of talking about issues concerning

education and not enough action on the issues. They spoke about the lack of action concerning

community and parental involvement in our school system:

> *we always say there's lack of parental involvement, but we never sit down to say*
>
> *how should we approach it, how should we work this out...*
>
> *– Mabel*

One parent connected the lack of action to the institutional systems we utilize:

> *we're not doing enough, our generation, to get things going. The transition has*
>
> *to be forced to happen. There's been too much maintaining over the years. Three*
>
> *decades of just maintaining systems ...*
>
> *– Bertie*

Parents perceived a maintenance of the status quo and felt that it was up to them to act.

Participants in Friedel (1999)'s study involving urban Aboriginal parents were also frustrated by

the lack of action they perceived.

Chapter 7

The desire to move forward

...There's got to be a better way to educate our children. There's got to be a

better way to raise our children.

– Bertie

The words of participants illuminated a desire to move forward. Data relating to the desire has

been sorted under three headings: articulating possible solutions; making a commitment to act;

and ways in which community members want to be involved.

Articulating possible solutions:

The articulating of possible solutions mainly relates to communication and relationship-building.

It is felt that there is not enough communication from the school with the rest of the community

and that relationship-building is necessary among all stakeholders.

Solutions regarding the school and teachers:

On the whole, it is felt that there is not enough communication from the school with the

rest of the community. Some participants feel that they do not really know what is going on in

the school and that the community would be interested in knowing what students are doing in the

school. Having community meetings about education is important to participants during which

people could get together and talk about education issues. Displaying student work around town,

having regular radio shows, and bringing elders into the school are suggestions made to enhance

communication between the school and the community.

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The need to build relationships between teachers and the community is expressed by all participants. Parents feel more comfortable with teachers from the outside who make efforts to belong to this community. The school committee, itself made up of parents, realizes this and takes this into consideration when interviewing teachers. It is felt that cultural conflict is an issue and so they try to *"fit people that can see us – our culture...We try to fit these candidates in the school..." (Mabel).* In interviewing, the school committee also tries to figure out how a prospective teacher will see themselves in relation to the community, asking the teacher about how they would feel taking part in community events. Parents see relationship building as necessary out of concern for the happiness of teachers from the outside:

> *we've seen a lot of outside teachers who have never been in a Native community*
>
> *and when they interact with the community, they usually like it. ...I can name a*
>
> *few teachers...who make the effort to meet with the community members, be*
>
> *friends with them, understand the culture. ...These are people who try to*
>
> *understand culture and try to adapt to it instead of try to make the community*
>
> *adapt to their own. We do have some teachers still in the school who have their*
>
> *own way... and who try to impose that. They usually have conflicts..."*
>
> *– C. N.*

Parents are concerned about teachers having a sense of belonging and job satisfaction. They recognize that feelings of alienation and a lack of job satisfaction can play a part in teacher burn-out and wish more teachers would stay in the community for longer periods of time as the high turn-over rate negatively affects students. Charters-Voght's (1999) study with the Upper Nicola Band also recognized staff turnover as a problem affecting students. Harper (2000) approached

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the issue of teachers as outsiders in an Aboriginal community from the point of view of these teachers. She found that teachers from the outside experience trauma from culture shock and have trouble building relationships with the community, because: they do not mix; feel like outsiders; are transient and feel that the community does not invest in transients; and are unprepared by their preservice and inservice education programs for cross-cultural teaching.

Parents wished for open, honest, on-going communication with teachers. Parents want teachers to call home with good things to say about their children, not only to call parents when there are discipline or academic problems to be dealt with. They also felt that teachers perceived parents as uncaring about their children:

> *... parents do care for their kids, even though some of them don't give a crap*
>
> *about education they do care about their children...if you show them that you care*
>
> *they will respond...*
>
> *– Roy and Margaret*

According to these parents, the teacher-initiated contact can make the difference between non-involvement and involvement.

Above all, parents are concerned with teachers building relationships with their children. Parents want teachers to understand students' situations. They feel that if teachers take part in community activities they will have more opportunities to build stronger relationships with parents and students. Parents want teachers to understand that they only know a small part of each child when they know the child in a classroom setting alone.

It is felt by participants that working on relationship-building with teachers will affect student self-esteem and sense of belonging in the school. School staff members feel that those

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parents who are more involved have children in school with higher self-esteem levels. Parents say that they would be more involved in the school if they had better relationships with teachers. Parents also feel that having stronger, positive relationships with teachers would help to boost self-esteem levels and self-confidence in students. Many participants feel that a child's attitude toward school depends largely on his or her relationship with teachers, and that a child's feelings about school influences a parent's feelings about the school.

Participants feel that there are many ways that we could help children to be happier in school. Mostly parents feel that there should be more extra-curricular activities offered by the school. Parents are very happy with teachers who put in time with students outside of the classroom:

Especially the extra-curricular activities. ...those are the ones we're happy with,

the ones that are going to be more outgoing and do more. Those are the ones that

students tend to, and parents also, tend to like... blends with everybody.

– Mabel

Parents also say they want to see programs in the school which would motivate kids. One parent expresses the feelings other parents have about their children attending our school. He would like to see parents and administration of the school working together:

... make the kids feel like the school belongs to them, like the school is theirs.

They don't feel like that. ...it's a drag for them to go.

– Roy

All parents feel that extra-curricular activities are important for students and that they help to build a sense of belonging in the school.

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Participants feel that the school should be more fun, more exciting for students. A few of the participants speak of teaching methods as a solution. Participants want teachers to interact more with students within the classroom, saying that teachers spend too much time sitting at their desks and that there is not a lot of real learning happening in the classroom. One participant feels that teachers rely too much on "old methods" while other participants would like to see more teaching about values, more project-based learning, more cooperative working and sharing – what parents perceive as real-life situations. Some parents feel that teachers spend too much time writing notes on the board and that there is not enough discussion taking place in classrooms.

Teachers are an integral part of the learning process and student motivation; teachers who are warm and caring, have good relationships with Aboriginal students, and attempt to understand cultural backgrounds of their students play a large role in drop-out prevention (Hale, 2002; Reyhner, 1992, Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2000). Literature also addresses teaching methodology where Aboriginal students are concerned. Smith (2000), speaking from a Maori perspective, sees a necessity for teachers to take on a political role as transformative intellectuals:

> Where indigenous peoples are in educational crisis, indigenous educators and
> teachers must be trained as change agents to transform these undesirable
> circumstances. They must develop a radical pedagogy (a teaching approach for
> change). Such pedagogy must also be informed by their own cultural preferences
> and respond to their own critical circumstances. (p. 70)

Similarly, Benham and Cooper (2001) see teachers as "guides" of students on a learning journey and as "servants of the community who work to help bring balance to individuals who then in

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turn create empowered communities" (p. 19). Benham and Cooper address the roles of administrators and teachers as community members:

> ...on the community level...[administrators and teachers] become proactive community members. They then may develop community based activities that integrate traditional and contemporary practices to address pressing social issues; partner with Native and Non-Native individuals and groups to create mentoring experiences in academics, skill development, and Native traditions; and increase opportunities for community members to participate... (p.19)

There is also a danger seen when teaching methodology is built upon deficit attitudes towards education and non-mainstream cultures; this results in teachers having low expectations and not recognizing the cultural wealth that children bring into the classroom (Hale, 2002; Reyhner, 1992).

In terms of teaching methods, Hale (2002) and Reyhner (1992) tell us that promoting passivity and quietness leads Aboriginal students to drop out. Hale, citing Cummins (1989), recommends using experiential and interactive exploration methods with Aboriginal students instead of traditional transaction methods. Reyhner (1992) recommends active teaching methods using a whole language approach, hands-on activities, manipulatives for math, and lab work. According to Reyhner, teaching methods must mirror those used in the home because "cultural mismatch between home and school often starts a cycle of failure for Native students" (p. 4). Furthermore, curriculum must be culturally appropriate, but not a watered-down version of the mainstream curriculum which would lead to boredom and drop-out. Reyhner also addresses assessment saying that emphasizing tests leads to holding back, and consequently, drop-out.

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Similarly, Barhardt (1999) found better results in a study of community and school in Quinhagak, Alaska using "authentic and performance-based" assessment methods like portfolios (p.109).

Solutions regarding relationship-building and the wider community:

In terms of relationship-building, participants feel that role clarification would play a large part in any solutions which were found. Participants feel that the clarification of roles should be a whole community event so that all are aware of the responsibilities of others and of themselves. Skau (1996), in a study of three Alberta schools, also found that there was a need to clarify involvement roles, and in a review of research concerning involvement, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) state that:

> As group members (in this case, parents, school personnel, and students)
> communicate frequently and come to consensus on appropriate role expectations
> and behaviours, clarity and agreement on member roles is likely to increase all
> members' successful and satisfying performance of their own roles. (p. 15)

Participants in the study also want to see other community entities play a part in the school community:

> *...It's only when we have problems that other services in the community get*
> *involved when they should be involved at every stage.*
>
> *– C. N.*

Parents talked about building partnerships between the school and the community with the student as the central focus. Participants felt that parents had to take part of the burden for

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relationship-building upon themselves and that the process has to be transparent to all members of the community:

> *If we're going to improve the education in the community then everybody has to*
>
> *be involved. They have to know what's going on. The students have to know*
>
> *what's going on. The parents have to know what's going on. The teachers have*
>
> *to know what's going on. Not just at the school but also at the home.*
>
> *– C. N.*

Some suggested that the Band Council also play a part in helping teachers to become part of the community. This could be done by assigning community members to help new teachers become acquainted with the community and also by disbanding the teachers' cluster – an area of town where the teachers live. Participants felt that teachers would form bonds more easily with community members if they were living among community members instead of in their own separate area.

Solutions regarding cultural support:

Participants link an enhanced role for culture in the school system with the idea of the whole community becoming involved in the school:

> *It's the responsibility of the community also to continue whatever the children*
>
> *were taught in school. There's more to it than just making snowshoes...as*
>
> *parents, as communities, we also have that responsibility to make time, to have*
>
> *our kids taught. Not everything can be taught in school. Especially with culture.*
>
> *There's got to be a balance...*
>
> *– Bertie*

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In fact, community involvement is seen as necessary for the support of the Cree culture program within the school and as a part of the school curriculum.

Wotherspoon and Schissel (2000) speak of the importance of the way in which we understand culture. For them it is important that we have "an understanding of culture as a complex and dynamic phenomenon rather than a narrowly defined static set of traditional beliefs and practices" (p. 195). According to Steinhauer (1998), there is a misconception that culture is traditions and the difference between culture and traditions needs to be understood. Scott (2001) speaks of a danger in seeing culture as product instead of culture as process: if culture is seen mainly in terms of product, then artifacts, tangible dimensions become too much of a focus, whereas those intangible aspects, deep values, are left unrecognized. According to Scott, "[h]ow teachers and program developers view culture will affect what happens in classrooms, how children are taught and what they learn (p. 67)." Weber-Pillwax (2001) expresses a similar view of culture:

> You can live and talk about the bush and never have set foot on a trail. My father was a trapper, and I lived in that lifestyle. However, until I personally went to the trapline and stayed there for three weeks, I didn't really know the context or the connections between the trapper and the land, or the trapper and the animals, being there for enough time was necessary for the learning to be integrated into my being. Perhaps it is like writing *bread* on a piece of paper and then eating the paper instead of eating the bread. (p. 173)

Charters-Voght (1999) and Tsuji (2000) have also explored the issue of authentically integrating culture and school curriculum. For Charters-Voght it was important for the Upper Nicola Band to ensure that it was putting "education into culture as opposed to culture into education" (p. 79).

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This meant a "shared responsibility" (p. 80) between band members and the school. In Tsuji's study with the Moose Cree First Nation, the issue was brought up within the context of modified school years because community members asserted that it is important "when something will be taught and learned" (p. 158). Because cultural pursuits are tied to the seasons, Moose Cree First Nation experimented with year-round schooling and also with placing breaks at different times during the school year.

One issue to be overcome is the competition between provincial standards and the need for Aboriginal curriculum. According to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) when provincial standards must be met, provincial programs are frequently enriched rather than truly written from an Aboriginal perspective, but "holistic, culturally and community-based curriculum development is achievable and is an investment that must be made for present and future generations" (p. 463).

Cree culture is seen by participants as integral to student resilience; participants talk of children needing a balance and of being afraid that our school system is not giving children that sense of balance. One participant describes the cultural clash between our school system and the community:

> *We don't see education with the same pair of eyes... we're in a very unique*
> *situation where we have two cultures and they look at education differently.*
> *Whereas on one hand you have the Cree culture. The elders teach the younger*
> *generation and they call this education. On the other hand you see what a student*
> *is and you call this education. One doesn't involve a school and one does. That's*
> *the dilemma. You have to make a balance. If we cannot integrate two cultures*
> *into the school then we have a problem...*

> *— C. N.*

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Another participant described how her culture helps her to deal with everyday life:

...the way I work, five days, late hours, I need my energy. That's my strength

going out in the bush. ...I can survive another week.

– Jane

Much literature concerning culture and education in the formal education of Aboriginal students focuses, as did participants in this study, on cultural dissonance between the school and the community. Many authors speak of the school and the community being in cultural conflict and of the need to reduce this conflict (for example: Battiste, 2000; Douglas,1994; Marker, 2000; Perley, 1994; Reyhner, 1992). For these authors, the educational system is a colonial construct (Smith, 2000), a tool which is used to assimilate.

Basing her work on Bourdieu (1977,1986) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1986), de Carvalho (2001) speaks of the school system as symbolic violence when one culture arbitrarily dominates or imposes itself upon another. Similarly, Battiste (2000) tells us that:

the education system, fostered by government and society, is the basis of

Canadian cultural transmission. However, for children whose languages and

cultures are different from mainstream immigrant expectations, this educational

system is a form of cultural imperialism. (p. 193)

Smith (2000) asserts that questions "need to be asked of the total education and schooling system and culturally defined way it does its business" (p. 61). Both Smith and de Carvalho see school as agents of social reproduction, saying that we need to be completely aware of what we are reproducing, who is benefitting from the reproduction and at what cost.

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In fact, cultural dissonance between home and school is seen to have grave consequences on student self-esteem and positive identity formation. Cajete (2000) speaks of the *ping geh heh* concept in Tewa culture – working, thinking, living with a split head:

> As a result of colonization, indigenous people are in many was acting like the ping
>
> geh heh. We lead lives of paradoxical conflict and contrast...The split head, of
>
> course, leads to things...suicide, self-hate, the disintegration of cultures; the lack
>
> of knowing where we are, where we are going, and where we are coming from.
>
> (pp. 186-7)

Little Bear (2000) expresses a similar view saying that Aboriginal people daily deal with a "clash of worldviews" (p. 84-5). Reyhner (1992) tells us that frequently students are made to choose between their school and their heritage and that this leads to psychological problems. Children are deeply affected by the messages that they receive in school, says Reyhner, referring to the work of Erikson (1963):

> Positive identity formation ...is an on-going, cumulative process that starts in the
>
> home with a trusting relationship established between mother and child and
>
> develops through the child's interaction with other children and adults. To build a
>
> strong positive identity, new adults that the child interacts with need to reinforce
>
> and build on the cultural messages that the child has previously received. If
>
> teachers give growing Native children messages that conflict with what Native
>
> parents show and tell their children, the conflicting messages will confuse the
>
> children and hurt the formation of strong self-concepts. (p. 4)

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Literature also tells us that children who are well grounded in their home culture are more likely to adjust successfully to foreign environments (for example: de Carvalho, 2001; Hale, 2001; Reyhner, 1992).

Making a commitment to act:

Participants feel that making a commitment to act is a large part of solving our problems. This was voiced when participants spoke of developing a collective vision with the goals and sense of purpose coming from the community. Participants feel that taking action is up to them and that they can help our service entities, such as the Cree School Board and the Cree Board of Health and Social Services, to find new ways of providing services to the community. Participants also feel that by acting they will themselves encourage a higher level of involvement in our school system.

> *It's up to us to go on and do it...*
>
> *– Mabel*

When action is taken, participants want follow-up to be built into the process.

Ways in which community members want to be involved:

Participants of the study want to take action. They want to be part of building a vision for our community education system. They would also like to be part of purposeful action. Many distinguished this from being part of discussion without action following. Furthermore, participants want to be part of authentic action which is part of a whole community effort including all stakeholders in our education system and moving towards a vision or goal which

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has been developed collectively. This participant's words are representative:

the student is the focus... what everybody does around all has to support the goal

of that child ... everybody involved in that child .. Parent, uncle, community,

teacher, administration, staff has a role to make sure that the child succeeds... has

to be a partnership formed...

..[if] everybody will have their own visions ... we'll never come to terms with what

we should be doing. As a people we have to do things collectively and that's

something we're not doing ... the community has to do more to support, to partner

with whatever services are available whether social, culture, education...

-- Bertie

Participants want to unite with other community members, to make plans and to take action on those plans. They want to act along with the wider community, bringing all stakeholders and community entities together in action centered on the well-being of students.

Parents would like to have community meetings about our education system, but they would also like to meet with other parents. Some parent participants reported that the focus groups held for this study constituted the first time they had met with other parents to talk about education. Parents feel that meeting with other parents would be valuable; they could share parenting skills and exchange information. One parent told of how much she enjoyed speaking with other parents when a teacher held a group meeting instead of meeting with individual parents on report card night:

There's some teachers that on parents' night that they meet with the whole

parents but I notice other classes its only one parent at a time, but what I learned

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with the parents altogether in a class was we were open to discussing what's my

son doing, or what's my daughter, it was like helping each other whereas the

other classes its only one parent and the door is closed. I find that more

interesting when all parents are together and we are discussing our children's

behaviour or what needs to improve...

– Jane

One parent commented that it is through sharing stories that our people learn and that we would

gain much by sharing our experiences with each other. Other research studies have reported

similar findings such as Young's (2000), where parents felt that meeting with other parents

allowed them to share information, support each other, discover other parenting strategies, and

gave them access to bilingual persons to act as translators when information from the school was

needed.

Some parents also want to be involved more with their children's school work. These

parents would like students to be assigned project work which could be completed with parents

outside of the school. It was suggested that parents could use local elders, the internet, the library

and the surrounding land as resources. It is felt that this would bring parents and children closer

together in the area of school work. In Young (2000), Texas borderland parents also felt that

sharing activities with their children allowed them to share experiences, and supported

communication between parents and their children. Some participants in our study also

suggested an alternative to parents' night be explored; one suggestion was a whole week for

appointments depending on the availability of teachers and parents in the evening or during the

day.

Parents wish to be involved in social events with teachers. They suggest social nights, saying that building relationships is important to Cree people. According to Klug and Whitfield (2003);

> Parents and grandparents may be reluctant to approach teachers based on their
> own negative experiences with schools ... nevertheless, they may be more willing
> to interact with teachers after seeing them at social events taking place in the
> community. (p. 225)

Some parents would like the school to communicate with them about how they can become involved. These parents are interested in doing volunteer work within the school. Some parents would also like to be consulted about the school calendar and school rules, while other parents feel that decisions about these types of things should be left up to the school. During a focus group meeting, the idea of governing boards was brought up. These boards are employed by schools in the south and consist of parents, administrators and students; this was seen as a possible way to ensure input from everyone involved with the school.

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Part III

Interpretations and Recommendations

Chapters 8 and 9 present my interpretations of the findings of this study and make recommendations informed by participant responses and literature concerning Aboriginal education.

Chapter 8

Interpretations: Integrating the Concept of Formal Education with

Individual and Community Identity

At this moment, there exists a gulf between this community and its school. Many community members feel that relationships are not positive between themselves and the school, and many feel that the school does not serve our children well. But community members do not place all of the responsibility for relationship-building with the school; there is also the feeling that we as a community do not give our formal education system the place it deserves in our community. Some reasons given for this include a lack of communication, cultural dissonance, social problems, and our community's historical experience with formal education.

Although participants did not feel that our community values formal education as much as it should, the fact that people wished to participate in this research study is indicative of some things: formal education is seen as important, community members would like to forge a positive relationship with the school and thereby value and encourage the formal education of our children, and there exists a belief among community members that formal education holds a key to a better future both for individuals and for our community as a whole. This last point, however, carries with it the inconsistency that, while we believe that a formal education will help our children to be successful, participants in the study also acknowledge that the hiring practices in the community play against this; there are instances within the community when people who are best qualified to fill positions are not hired. On one hand, we believe something to be necessary, while on the other hand we do not value it. Perhaps this is evidence of our own "split-

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headedness" (Cajete, 2000): our community's dual identity as it attempts to navigate its way through "cross-cultural terrain" (Graveline, 2003, p. 71) with one foot in the bush and one in the town.

Perhaps the concept of formal education is not integrated with community identity and individual identities; we do not see ourselves *within* the school, and therefore, we are not *in* the school ... or *for* the school, or *with* the school, or even at times, *interested* in the school. A plethora of literature exists concerning the difference between school culture and community culture in Aboriginal communities (Battiste, 2000; Cajete, 1994; Taylor, Crago, and McAlpine, 1993 for example). Participants acknowledge that this dissonance exists. The system, after all, was not created for our comfort. Even when not directly addressed, evidence of this dissonance and discomfort has emerged throughout the study: participants feel they lack knowledge in academic subjects, do not know how to become involved in the school, are uncomfortable with writing reports on incidents concerning their children, feel uncomfortable upon entering the school environment, and speak of the historical role formal education has played in our community.

The roots of this discomfort run deep, stemming from the European Enlightenment period which informed the rationalization of imperialism and the development of colonial constructs (Henderson, 2000; Smith, 1999). The Canadian education system is one of these colonial constructs and, in many ways, still reflects the modernist world view. Furthermore, the mainstream system exemplifies the "ideological framework" (Scott, 2001) from whence the contemporary Cree education system was created.

With the Enlightenment, stratification was given "scientific" rationalization with

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positivism's compartmentalizing of discrete components. Smith (1999) outlines what this entailed, in terms of Imperialism and colonial enterprises, with the creation of the Other as a way of legitimizing European culture as the centre from which judgement was made:

> Views about the Other had already existed for centuries in Europe, but during the Enlightenment these views became more formalized through science, philosophy and imperialism, into explicit systems of classification and 'regimes of truth'. The racialization of the human subject and the social order enabled comparisons to be made between the 'us' of the West and the 'them' of the Other. (p. 32)

The classification of Other allowed for a line to be drawn between those who had a place in history (legitimate peoples) and those who were prehistoric (and therefore dying-out, illegitimate occupiers of space). Similarly, Henderson (2000) discusses the way in which Hobbes' and Locke's "State of Nature" theories informed the colonization of North America. According to Locke, "In the beginning... all the world was America" (quoted in Henderson, 2000, p. 18), but Europeans had advanced beyond this state and now were obligated to enforce colonial authority and order among Indigenous populations in those countries within their Imperialist eye. European culture positioned itself above the Other in order to justify control.

The residential school system was one arena in which this control played out over Indigenous peoples. This system was a manifestation of colonial dominance and the attempt to assimilate Aboriginal Peoples. The residential school system was imposed by the state in partnership with the churches using the Indian prisons in the U.S. as a model (Fournier and Crey, 1997). Many residential schools used "isolation, ...brainwashing...relentless labour and routine..." to enforce obedience (Fournier and Crey, 1997, p. 56). Whole generations of children

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grew up in situations where "expressions of Aboriginal culture and individuality were harshly

punished" (Fournier and Crey, 1997, p. 57).

The goal of assimilation informed the functionality of the residential school system and the implementation of Indian Affairs Day Schools. These experiences are a part of this community's history with formal education, and therefore have been integrated into community identity. Our community experience includes sending children out to residential schools in the south (many as far away as southern Ontario), placing children in residence on Fort George Island and enrolling children at the Indian Affairs Day School on Fort George Island.

Although people freely tell stories about the fun times they had at residential school (usually flaunting the rules), survivors are more silent about hurt endured. Tales of terrible loneliness, harsh punishments and abuse endured lie below, surfacing sporadically. One of the participants in this

> James removes his shirt and watches his hair fall and says nothing. David and Jake are smiling at him. They do look like porcupines. After their hair is cut, they are told to get undressed and their clothes are taken away. David leads the way into a room and for the first time in their lives, James and Jake take a shower. All their lives they've had baths: a big tub in the cabin in the winter and the Teal River in the summer. After their shower, they're given new clothes. James and Jake look at David, then at each other. They look alike. They have the same porcupine haircuts, the same shirts, pants, socks, and running shoes...
>
> Louise watches Sarah's hair fall to the floor and before she knows it, it's her turn. It's over in fifteen seconds, and six years of her hair lies on the floor. She's screaming, but no one can hear her. She's crying, but no one can see her tears. She's already gone Indian, only she doesn't know it. No one does...
>
> She pushes her wants down with her tears and follows the others into the showers and watches what they do. Afterwards, she's given a towel and new clothes. They all have the same haircuts, the same blouses, dresses, socks, and running shoes. They all look alike...
>
> Something is happening to them, but they don't know it. They are developing a routine and someone else is making decisions for them. Somewhere in the far distant future, they will be unable to make decisions for themselves, and will rely on others to do it for them.
>
> (Excerpt from: Robert Arthur Alexie's (2002) *Porcupines and China Dolls*, p. 54)

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study related a story so sharply painful it haunted her even into adulthood. Her father died while she was out at school and she was not allowed to go home to the funeral and, therefore, had never completed the grieving process. In fact, only a few years ago, while in Montreal, she happened to enter a room reminiscent of the dining room where she had been sitting when they told her that her father had died. Upon entering the room she felt at a loss for breath and nauseous. It was then that the memory came flooding back to her and she realized how much the experience had affected her. This person also remembers the terrible loneliness she lived through and the lack of affection endured by herself and all children who went through the experience.

The Indian Affairs Day School on Fort George Island comprised two parts: the residence and the day school. Teaching and learning at the day school followed a transmission model with an emphasis on discrete skills. For example, phonics was a subject unto itself. The behaviourist model of teaching does not see children as active agents in their own learning and therefore encourages passivity in students. Parents and other community members did not have a say in what went on in the school or what their children learned. All major decisions were necessarily approved by the Indian Affairs Inspector who only flew into the community once per year. In this way, teachers were relatively autonomous in the day to day running of their classrooms, but did not hold ultimate authority and certainly had very little say in financial areas. While teachers could work and plan together, the system itself was non-participatory and definitely did not encourage the development of critical thinking abilities among students.

The story of the residence on Fort George Island is more infamous and echoes the stories of residential schools across the country. Stories of sexual and emotional abuse have surfaced leading to the arrest and incarceration of a former principal. Tales of psychosomatic illness

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connected with trauma are told; it was not unusual for students to vomit or to faint in stressful situations. One of the goals of the residence was conformity through identity erasure with the tight control of students' appearances; uniforms were worn and hair was styled according to sex. Family groups were broken up; brothers and sisters only saw each other when all of the children were trooped into the dining room for dinner. The children lived on non-Native foods and were forced to eat this kind of food even when it made them sick to their stomachs. There was a definite pecking order in the way the residence was run with non-Native people being in charge of all decision-making, while the few Native people who worked at the residence performed duties like cleaning and laundry, and the children had absolutely no control over their own lives.

Recently the Cree Task Force on Residential Schools has issued recommendations (Nicholls, 2005). The task force has recognized that dysfunction on many levels has resulted from the residential school experience. It has recommended that healing incorporates the efforts of many organizations including the Cree School Board, the Cree Health Board and the communities at a local level. The Cree School Board was asked to teach about the residential school experience while the Cree Health Board would be involved in psychological healing and counselling services. Investigation, debriefing and healing are all necessary for we must deal with the residential school history if we as a community are to come to terms with using a formal education system to educate our children. This constitutes part of integrating community identity with the concept of formal education.

What effects have the modern view of education and the colonial education system as played out in residential schools and Indian Affairs Day Schools had on our contemporary Cree formal education system? Barakett and Cleghorn (2000) speak of the norms of an organization

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as being the ideas of "what constitutes appropriate behaviour" (p. 47). If identity is constructed by experience, it is plausible that the creation of the Cree School Board was informed by the norms of the education system of the previous regime.

We call the system our own, and yet, our community members feel uncomfortable with it. We have elected to use this mainstream system to educate our youth. The existence of a formal education system is not in question. What must be challenged is "the legitimacy of existing practices and structures" (Smith, 2000, p. 61). We wish this education system to work for us, but is this system as it stands capable of working for us?

One of the implications of this question is ensuring that blame is eliminated where the issue of involvement is concerned. Community members can not be blamed for feeling uncomfortable with their education system. Eliminating blame is the beginning of the journey towards reconciliation. It is a necessary step in building a productive and mutually beneficial relationship between the school and the community. In fact it puts us on our way to integrating the concept of formal education with the concept of community and thereby integrating the concept of formal education into community identity. This has far-reaching repercussions including a change in the way we value formal education, and according to Mackay and Myles (1999), would positively impact success rates of our students.

Part of eliminating blame is an acceptance of the ways in which parents wish to be involved in our education system. We cannot allow the education system or mainstream education literature's ideas of what constitutes involvement to dictate the ways that parents should be involved in the formal education of their children. In order to come close to a culturally appropriate, socially appropriate education system, the education system must accept

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the cultural and social situation of its community. For the most part parents choose to be involved in their children' education by acting within the home and not within the school. This must be recognized as valuable involvement. Most parents do not wish to be involved in decision-making within the school. This must also be respected. What does concern me, however, is the fact that parents appear to feel that teachers are experts and so the input of parents is not needed in matters of curriculum. If more culturally appropriate ways of teaching and learning, as called for by participants, are to be implemented, then parents need to see themselves as experts as well, giving themselves the authority to impart their knowledge and contribute their input to teachers and the administration. Furthermore, we must find ways of supporting children and families affected by social problems in our community, while also ensuring that they are in no way made to feel guilty because they lack the personal resources to share in educational involvement. Particularly distressing are responses concerning failed attempts at involvement (in the form of advocacy by parents) with parents being devalued by uncaring responses from the school. Clearly reconciliation is a necessity.

Communication and relationship-building are integral to reconciliation. One of the main points made by participants in the study is that there is not enough communication between the school and the community and that, if communication were increased or enhanced, the relationship between the community and the school would be enhanced. Communication is the key to creating an education system which truly works *for* and *with* community and is an *integral part* of the community.

At the heart of communication as an issue lies the question "what is our community vision of formal education?" Participants spoke of the importance of collective visioning and

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goal-setting, creating a clear path to the future. Perhaps this is also a necessary step in the integration of formal education with identity. If we are able to see a valuable use for formal education, we will claim it as our own; but first we must see the way in which it will act for us. Involvement in planning is integral to ownership. At this point in research into our community education system it is unclear how we, as community members, would define an ideal education system, how we view curriculum (broadly or in its limited sense), and whether we have ever questioned the integration of culture and education.

In my own mind, an education system which truly works with a community and for a community has the concept of community as its foundation. Cajete (1994) tells us that education is an "essentially communal, social activity" (p. 20) which is "an art of process, participation, and making connection" (p. 24). Furthermore, it is about "thinking the highest thought [meaning], thinking of one's self, one's community and one's environment richly" (p. 46). This "systematically influences the actions of both individuals and the community" (p. 46). For Cajete (2000), education is also about finding one's place in the world. Cajete speaks of finding "heart" and "face" – a special place that allows an individual to most fully express his or her true self. Consequently, "Indigenous education is, in its truest form, about learning relationships in context. This context begins with family. It extends to the clan, to the community and tribe, and to all of the world" (Cajete, 2000, p. 183). The extended family model of education is also spoken of by Smith (2000) as necessary to the functioning of the Maori education system and its involvement of all community members. Is this what is missing in our education system? If our school were seen as an extension of community and of family would we be more comfortable with it and within it? Everything seems to lead back to dissonance between home and school.

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Hampton (1999) outlines several stages of "Indian education." First is a traditional Indian education system employed prior to contact with Europeans, then schooling for self-determination employed by "native oriented" schools, next schooling for assimilation with high failure rates, low literacy, assimilationist goals, no community involvement and no involvement of culture or language, then education by Indians but using non-Native system and curriculum, structures and methods, and finally, Indian education *sui generis*. Indian education *sui generis* entails self-determined cultural models, the development of Native methods and structure with Native personnel and content. Where does the Cree School Board fit in? We employ a mainstream system structure, use provincial curriculum (although some programs are adapted and we teach our own language and traditions), and for the most part methods are transmissive.

Participants indicated an uneasiness with the ways in which their children are taught. In fact, it seems that the curriculum in terms of how things are taught in classrooms works against individual, and thereby societal self-determination. The day-to-day experience within our schools, as in other Canadian public schools, has been informed by those same theories which informed Imperialism, and colonial constructs. The Enlightenment agenda is evidenced in the widely-used 'transmission model' of teaching and learning with its base in behaviourism, rote learning, and the reductionist search for truth in discrete parts. What has been termed the "North American fetish for method" (Macedo & Araújo Freire, 1998, p.x) and the "capitalist 'banking model' of education" (Macedo & Araújo Freire, 1998, p.ix) are seen in our reliance on content programs and strategies for making children learn what we want them to learn.

The educational agenda behind this is functional which, according to Durkheim, works from a belief that education is "influence exercised...[an] agent of socialization" and responsible

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for "value transmission for stability of society" (Ballantine, 2001, p. 8). Functionalism is the immediate family member of assimilationism.

> Assimilationist learning theorists see learning styles as universal, often believe
> that curriculum materials should relate to the common culture, base their research
> on a deficit model, and, assuming that minority cultures are less "civilizing",
> focus on compensatory, less enriching programs for minority students. (Scott,
> 2001, p. 65)

It may be that this conception of learning and teaching is witnessed by participants and plays into their lack of comfort with our school system. This teaching paradigm incorporates deficit thinking in terms of culture, assessing, teaching, and interacting with students.

Many authorities on Indigenous education (Cajete 1994; 2000, Hale, 2002; Reyhner, 1992, for example) purport that a holistic approach must be used in teaching Aboriginal students. This approach concentrates on the whole being, making use of the affective domain in teaching and learning. These authors recommend active teaching approaches by teachers who realize the value that their relationships with students bear in student success. Input by participants in this study supports this view. Furthermore, participants see teaching from this paradigm as necessary to their children's and the community's future, calling for the development of critical thinkers. Participants want to feel that the school serves their children and the community well.

In summary, in order to increase community involvement in our school system we must first increase the comfort level with formal education. This entails dealing with our past where

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formal education is concerned (i.e. the residential school experience and its fallout), relationship-building between community members and the school, and creating a more socially and culturally supportive learning environment that is encouraging of individual and societal self-determination. The education system must become an integral part of community, working seamlessly in concert with the goals and dreams of the community. We live in a dual cultural reality where we have imported a mainstream construct to educate our children, but the model is not fully integrated into our daily lives. I believe that the answer lies in challenging the model and the norms we have accepted; we need to examine the ways in which our education system is Cree, the ways in which we wish it to be more Cree, and, if changes are to be made, decide how we will make those changes. This will be a journey through "cross-cultural terrain" (Graveline, 2003) in effect: developing the ability to comfortably *see education through our two pairs of eyes*. With this in mind, I move on to the next chapter which presents recommendations informed by data gathered for this research study and literature concerning Aboriginal education and community involvement.

Chapter 9

Recommendations

These recommendations are made based on the findings of this study and in the interpretation of data. Also included are recommendations made by participants of the study during the research process and recommendations made by previous research studies and education literature which are pertinent to the findings of this study. These recommendations are made as "food for thought" and are meant as possible directions for continued discussion.

Re-evaluating, re-visioning, re-structuring:

Evaluating our school system and its ability to meet our needs

Considering the degree of cultural dissonance and discomfort felt with our education system that is highlighted by this study, it is imperative that we begin discussions as a community about the model we use to educate our children. This entails beginning with an investigation into our reasons for choosing this model which, in turn, creates the requirement for a collective investigation of our history with formal education. We must ask ourselves whether we have internalized the norms of previous regimes – the residential school model and the Indian Affairs day school model – and if so, have we inadvertently imposed a mainstream model upon ourselves without investigating alternatives which could be used? Currently, education discourse within our community concerns itself with drop-out prevention. While dropout prevention is a whole community effort (Baizerman & Compton, 1993; Mackay & Myles, 1999; Reyhner, 1992) we must also realize that a drop-out problem is merely a symptom of a wider systemic problem (Smith, 2000). We are at risk of treating the symptoms while leaving the body diseased.

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We must ask ourselves whether the model we employ is the right model for us, whether it is the most comfortable model for use with our children and the wider community. In fact, we must ask ourselves what our goals are in educating formally and whether this model is conducive to these goals. This entails defining success as a community (i.e. asking the question what are we educating our children towards?) As well as discussing goals, we must collectively outline our values and those we wish to impart. Structure is a manifestation of values. The structure we currently utilize is highly bureaucratic and stratified. If we wish our school system to be a manifestation of social justice and democracy that encourages critical thinking and enhances community, then perhaps we should be looking to an alternative model. Hampton's (1999) sui generis ideal entails Aboriginal communities defining their own education systems. Our school system, as it now stands, is based on the typical mainstream model. This may not be the best for us.

If we are to look at developing an alternate version of a formal system, some further questions we might ask ourselves include: How do we wish our school to look in terms of the wider curriculum? How should time and space be organized? Is the calendar conducive to student success and community goals? Are we comfortable with the physical environment of our school? How should our students be taught?

Ultimately, based on the findings of this study, we must consider the possibility that our community would be better served by a formal education system based more on the open school and alternative school concept. These types of schools are structured according to student needs and not on the needs of the education system itself. One of the participants in this study asked whether our school was administration-centred or student-centred. This is the type of question

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answered by alternative education systems, most of which employ cooperative, constructivist teaching methodologies while focusing on the whole student including the cognitive, affective and physical domains (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2000).

Joe Duquette High School in Saskatoon is an example of one such school (Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier & Archibald, 1997). Joe Duquette caters to an urban Aboriginal population mainly serving children who are discouraged and would perhaps be prevented from coming to and completing school as a result of the various social problems they deal with in their daily lives and by the fact that the mainstream education system is culturally disconnected from their home cultures. Joe Duquette focuses on democracy and social justice and on developing community. Consequently, some characteristics of the school are a *restitution* based discipline system which is non-punitive but based on reintegration, open staff meetings, and the availability of counselors for students who are in need of counseling. At Joe Duquette, the whole child is the focus of both curriculum and staff; affective and spiritual domains play as large a part as the academic domain in the everyday experience within the school.

Creating a real community school means focusing on personal and social needs (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2000) as well as the academic needs of our students. According to participants in this study, the community would feel better about their school if it more closely met the needs of all of its students. Integrating social services within our school may help to provide positive support for our students who need it; counselors within the school would allow us to deal with fall-out from community social issues (Reyhner, 1992). Wotherspoon and Schissel (2000) highlight successful alternative schools for Aboriginal students that become involved in attempts at ameliorating social conditions with the implementation of breakfast and

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lunch programs, drug abuse counseling, and an understanding of any student misconduct which stems from conditions outside of school by being less punitive in disciplining. We must work from the position that no one is expendable.

Working with the extended family concept in mind would be conducive to this. Creating an environment of caring connections is key. Just as it is our responsibility to care for members of our immediate and extended family we must see it as our responsibility to care for all members of our community. The decision to work from a place of emotional involvement and caring necessitates further questioning the structure of our education system. In fact it means evaluating the size of our school. Our school serves approximately 950 elementary and secondary students. Is our school so large that it is not conducive to maintaining an environment of caring connection? Perhaps by creating schools within our school we would better be able to serve all of our students, and make it easier to create real connections to students' families.

We must also bring the issue of self determination into our evaluation. If our goal is to support individual and societal self-determination with our education system, we must ask ourselves what do self-determining individuals look like? A self-determining individual may be conceptualized as a person who is a self-empowered, critical thinker who has developed the tools to become an independent learner. This has implications for teaching methods and methodology.

Our teaching methods/methodology

We must ensure that every teacher, and every principal understands the importance of using the goal of self-determination to inform every interaction with students. Conceivably, the goal of self-determination entails working from a critical paradigm where "everyday life [is seen

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as] a theoretical and political sphere" (Barakette & Cleghorn, 2000, p. 34). The goal of self-determination should also be based in constructivism, which values the student as an active learner in an anti-behaviourist stance, and in social-reconstructivism with an "emphasis on individual empowerment, social transformation, and the need to develop critical consciousness among students" (Barakett & Cleghorn, 2000, p. 35). Teachers would truly need to invest in the "transformative intellectual" (Barakett & Cleghorn, 2000, p. 6) role, and become negotiators of curriculum in democratic classrooms in order to encourage student self-empowerment (Shor, 1992). This is true teaching for community:

> successful schools are not determined strictly through selected measures like
> standardized test scores, retention and graduation rates, or other indicators that
> narrow the mandate of schooling to academic matters or economic productivity.
> Schools must also be assessed in terms of their overall contribution to social
> justice and human and community development. (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2000,
> p. 198)

Such teaching sees children as active learners who are fully involved in determining their own learning paths. Commonly, the ways in which students learn are determined by the teacher, the curriculum and the school. We must begin to ensure that students are asked how they wish to learn and that their desires are acted upon. This means negotiating curriculum with students, using authentic assessment and evaluation practices, and co-creating engaging learning situations. All of these practices have proven success with Aboriginal students and students who are second language learners (Cummins, 1989; Hale, 2000; Reyhner, 1992; Reyhner & Davison, 1993).

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Professional development for teachers to encourage their development as critical intellectuals

The desire to help our children become critical thinkers and self-empowered learners means that we must help our teachers to become "change agents" using "a teaching approach for change" (Smith, 2000, p. 70). Professional development may be necessary with the caution that simply singling teachers out who are from mainstream cultures for professional development on working with Aboriginal children is both stigmatising and, according to the responses of study participants, uncalled for; the cultural background of teachers was not seen as integral to student engagement and parental involvement. In fact, all members of the school within the school environment should be engaging of students, creating a strong connection to school for all students and, thereby, parents and the wider community. This means: school board, community and teacher training programs all working to help all teachers to develop the tools to make cultural connections, to encourage students be active learners, and to work as facilitators of discovery and research. This is a true teacher-as-mentor role and can be encouraged by giving teachers the opportunity to develop as critical pedagogues.

Bringing the school and the community together

Community meetings

Of the many suggestions made by participants for enhancing communication and building relationships between the wider community and the school, the most important to participants was to create space and time for community members to meet and discuss our education system and our education issues. A series of meetings has taken place this school year where community members have been invited to the school to discuss issues laid out in an agenda developed by the

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school. While this has encouraged dialogue, space should also be made for discussion based on the concerns of the community. To ensure that community members are able to discuss matters of concern to themselves, perhaps meetings could be held where the agenda is not predetermined. Alternatively, if an agenda is seen as necessary, community input into setting meeting agendas could be solicited by means of a survey. This requires a large investment of time, but would be well worth it if it ensures that all community members feel that they are given an opportunity for input. During this school year there has been progress towards heightening community involvement in our education system.

We could also look into the use of governing boards as a means for giving a voice to community members. We have school committees made up of community members who constitute the local decision-making group, but participants of this study called for the involvement of students when decisions about education are made. A governing board may be a way to involve a more representative sample of community members, including students, which was of great concern to participants in this study. It would also give voice to teachers.

Enhancing communication

Participants in the study put forth many ideas for enhancing communication between the school and community members. These included:

- letters sent giving information about what is happening in classrooms

- phone calls (about positive as well as negative incidents)

- personal contact from teachers, personal invitations to parents

- creating social activities which involve teachers and community members

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- finding alternatives to parents' nights such as parent weeks and group meetings with parents on parents' night.

- creating learning situations which involve parents with their children's school work

- ensuring that teachers are available to parents / accommodating parents' schedules

- ensuring that parents feel welcome in the school / working constructively with parents who attempt involvement.

Most of these recommendations are consistent with "best practices" in literature on parent involvement (for example: Barclay & Boone, 1996/97; Hoover-Demsey & Sandler, 1997; Young, 2000). Literature also suggests that certain considerations in class make-up are more conducive to parent involvement. Core classes, block scheduling, and looping ensure that students spend more time with teachers and peers, enhancing engagement (Osterman & Freese, 2000), which, according to participants in this study, is a major predictor of involvement. Smaller class sizes are also recommended (Charters-Voght, Reyhner, 1992) as well as teaming teachers (Osterman & Freese, 2000). Cycle[6] teams are being implemented in our school because they are mandated by the new Quebec provincial curriculum. These teams could play a large part in encouraging parent involvement if members of the cycle team share the responsibility of keeping in touch with parents.

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[6]Cycle one comprises the first two years of secondary, while cycle two comprises the remaining three years. Cycle teams are made up mainly of teachers but may include any persons who have contact with students of a particular cycle such as counselors and administrators. Cycle teams are mainly responsible for curricular planning.

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Before these measures are implemented, teachers should be consulted about their views of involvement and what they believe are possibilities for enhancing communication. It could be that their task load does not leave them enough time to communicate effectively with parents, in which case, if we wish to enhance communication, it will be necessary to allot more time for involvement activities when developing schedules and school calendars. Another possibility is that teachers are unsure of what measures to take in enhancing communication and involvement. In this case, staff development on parent involvement is called for. These activities are more effective if principals lead and attend the development activities (Barclay & Boone, 1996/97).

Creating a parent centre and engaging a community liaison worker

Much of the literature concerning successful parent and community involvement strategies suggests that places be created within schools for parents. This is part of making parents feel welcome within the school and creating a sense of ownership and belonging. The parent centre would give parents a place to meet, and act as a work room for any parents who wish to volunteer in the school and as a social arena for teachers and school staff to gather.

Recently, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada has implemented a parent and community involvement program. Funding is available from this program and could be used to create and engage a person to fill a community liaison position within the school. This person could plan and perform duties encouraging parent and community involvement with the school. These activities would encompass bringing the school to the wider community by doing such things as exhibiting student work throughout the community, planning social opportunities for community members to interact with teachers and other school staff and students, and helping teachers to

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plan learning situations with their students which would involve taking students out into the community, bringing community members into the school and using community members as resources. This position would be especially valuable to us because many of our teachers are not from this community and may perhaps find it difficult to engage with the community they have come to teach within. The RCAP (1996) report does, however, caution that:

> These workers can be crucial in promoting an understanding of Aboriginal values, providing support for children in the school, resolving difficulties, and serving as an advocate for children and parents ... [but] the important work of liaison workers is not a substitute for real participation by Aboriginal parents in the school's strategic decision-making processes and the day-to-day education of the children. (p. 471)

Helping teachers to become part of the community

Other research studies have recommended using teacher aides from the community to help teachers better understand the children they teach and to help teachers build ties between the community and their classrooms (Barnhardt, 1999; Charters-Voght, 1999). Also of concern to participants in this study was retaining teachers long enough for them to build solid relationships. This means working on teacher retention and finding ways to make staying a more attractive option. Teachers receive a monetary incentive on top of the provincial teaching salary and northern allowance. This retention premium is, however, much less than that which is provided for other professionals (i.e. nurses) who work in our communities. Perhaps increasing the retention premium would encourage more teachers to remain in our community for longer.

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Participants also felt that teachers would be happier in our community if we are able to increase their participation in community life and help them to develop a sense of belonging. Social events bringing teachers and community members together was put forth as an option. Pairing teachers with families in the community may be another option. These families would act as resources and surrogate families for new teachers, helping teachers to learn about community life and become involved.

Maintaining and enhancing student connection to the community

Connecting students to their community enhances student feelings of self-esteem (Reyhner, 1992). According to findings of this study, increasing student feelings of self-esteem would encourage involvement. Mentoring programs are one possibility for creating connections for students outside of the school (Klug & Whitfield, 2003) and can be beneficial for students in terms of career choice and incentive to achieve qualifications. "Service learning" where students are involved in finding out about needs in their community and school lessons are integrated into fulfilling these needs (Klug & Whitfield, p. 226) is another possibility that would support goals of social justice and also help teachers to make community connections. Student work could also be used to create connections by exhibiting student work in public places in the community and inviting community members to come in and view special displays of student work. Science fairs within the school have been quite successful in this respect and could be used as a model in the creation of other community involving events.

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Recommendations for further research

This research study represents a brief survey of issues surrounding this community's relationship with its formal education system. The following recommendations for further research are meant to suggest ways of finding possible answers to the questions raised by this research project:

- Investigate the community involvement issue by including a wider representation of community membership than this present study. The present study included representatives who were parents, school committee members, school employees, one teacher, and a respected elder. Subsequent studies might include student representation, a larger number of teachers, and more members of our elder generations.

- Investigate various meanings and definitions, past and present, of education held by community members and the values and goals attached to these. This would be beneficial in the defining of, among other things, our education system, curriculum, and the roles of various stakeholders.

- A community wide investigation of the ways in which we have been affected by the residential school and off-reserve boarding home experience. This is necessary to understanding what we value in an education system and the reasons for which we value it.

- On-going evaluation of any measures taken.

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Conclusion:

This research study has investigated community involvement in our formal education system. Findings confirm that parents are involved in many ways in the education of their children while also confirming that parents and other community members wish to feel more connected to our education system and long for a sense of ownership. Questions raised by the investigation concern the ways in which we can begin to break down the walls which prevent authentic involvement and prevent our education system from working as an integral part of our community.

Our education system as it now stands is an admirable example of the ways in which culture and language can be integrated within a mainstream model. Culture is a part of curriculum albeit perhaps not to the extent called for by participants of this study. Our children are taught in Cree from pre-kindergarten to the end of grade three with Cree language and culture classes continuing as subject classes through to the end of the secondary level. We have come a long way. The next step in the journey is to begin an evaluation of the current system and its ability to meet our needs as a community and the needs of our children. I close with a collage of participants' words, showing what is truly at the heart of all issues surrounding community involvement in our education system:

"[We] do care."

and

"We don't see education with the same pair of eyes ..."

and

"It's all about communication."

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APPENDIX I

LETTER TO THE BAND COUNCIL AND CONSENT FORM

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Letter to Band Council requesting support for research project   **May 18ᵗʰ, 2004**

Dear Chief and Band Council

I am a graduate student at the Faculty of Education, Lakehead University and am working on the completion of a Master's Degree. I would like to conduct a research study for completion of a Master's thesis. The purpose of the study is to explore Aboriginal parental involvement in formal education, paying attention to the benefits of and barriers to such involvement, and the issue as it pertains to self-determination.

I feel that the issue is an important one in our community. We have an extremely high drop-out rate among high school students, low attendance rates for high school students, and work with the difficulty of teaching our children in a second language using an immersion format. We are also all members of a self-determining Nation. If our school system is to work consistently with the concept of self-determination, then we need to open information gathering forums for all stakeholders. To my knowledge we have not performed any research in our community concerning the involvement of parents in their children's education and the ways in which parents wish to be involved in their children's education. With this research endeavour, I hope that we can make a contribution to our community's education system and to our children's completion of a successful secondary school experience.
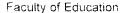
I am asking your permission to perform this research in this community. I will be asking parents of high school age children to participate in the study. The modes of data gathering and the schedule for data gathering will be negotiated with the participants of the study. I hope to have the data collection and analysis completed before the end of June, 2004.

If you give your consent for the study to take place, please understand the following:

* The research study is consistent with Lakehead University's Ethics Procedures and the *Guidelines for Research on Human Subjects*.
* I do not foresee any risks to the community or the participants.
* Participants have the right to withdraw from this research project at any time during the process.
* If participants wish, contributions will remain confidential and anonymous with pseudonyms being used in transcriptions or other form of data collected and the report.
* Data will be stored at Lakehead University for seven years as stipulated by Lakehead University's ethics guidelines.
* A report of the research results will be available to all participants and will also be made available in the Faculty of Education Library, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay Ontario

Please feel free to contact me by phone at 855-2170 or 855-2230, or by e-mail
[illegible]. You may also contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. Constance Russell at 807-
343-8049 or by e-mail [illegible].

Thanks for your time and consideration

Sincerely,

Sarah Pashagumskum

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Consent form for Band Council Permission

We have read the cover letter outlining Sarah Pashagumskum's Master's in Education research study and understand and agree with the following.

- The research study is consistent with Lakehead University's Ethics Procedures and the *Guidelines for Research on Human Subjects*.
- There are no foreseen risks to the community or the participants.
- Participants have the right to withdraw from this research project at any time during the process.
- If participants wish, contributions will remain confidential and anonymous with pseudonyms being used in transcriptions or other form of data collected and the report.
- Data will be stored at Lakehead University for seven years as stipulated by Lakehead University's ethics guidelines.
- A report of the research results will be available to all participants and will also be made available in the Faculty of Education Library, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay Ontario.

I, _____, representing the Chief and Council

☐ Agree   or   ☐ Do not agree   (please check one)

to allow this study.

Signature _____   Date _____

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APPENDIX II

LETTER TO THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE AND CONSENT FORM

Letter to School Committee requesting support for research project

Dear Chairperson and School Committee members

I am a graduate student at the Faculty of Education, Lakehead University and am working on the completion of a Master's Degree. I would like to conduct a research study for completion of a Master's thesis. The purpose of the study is to explore Aboriginal parental involvement in formal education, paying attention to the benefits of and barriers to such involvement, and the issue as it pertains to self-determination.

I feel that the issue is an important one in our community. We have an extremely high drop-out rate among high school students, low attendance rates for high school students, and work with the difficulty of teaching our children in a second language using an immersion format. We are also all members of a self-determining Nation. If our school system is to work consistently with the concept of self-determination, then we need to open information gathering forums for all stakeholders. To my knowledge we have not performed any research in our community concerning the involvement of parents in their children's education and the ways in which parents wish to be involved in their children's education. With this research endeavour, I hope that we can make a contribution to our community's education system and to our children's completion of a successful secondary school experience.
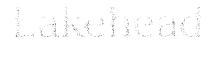
I am asking your permission to perform this research in this community. I will be asking parents of high school age children to participate in the study. The modes of data gathering and the schedule for data gathering will be negotiated with the participants of the study. I hope to have the data collection and analysis completed before the end of June, 2004.

If you give your consent for the study to take place, please understand the following:

- The research study is consistent with Lakehead University's Ethics Procedures and the *Guidelines for Research on Human Subjects*.
- I do not foresee any risks to the community or the participants.
- Participants have the right to withdraw from this research project at any time during the process.
- If participants wish, contributions will remain confidential and anonymous with pseudonyms being used in transcriptions or other form of data collected and the report.
- Data will be stored at Lakehead University for seven years as stipulated by Lakehead University's ethics guidelines.
- A report of the research results will be available to all participants and will also be made available in the Faculty of Education Library, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay Ontario.

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Please feel free to contact me by phone at 855-2170 or 855-2230, or by e-mail
_____. You may also contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. Constance Russell at 807-343-8049 or by e-mail _____.

Thanks for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sarah Pashagumskum

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Consent form for School Committee Permission

We have read the cover letter outlining Sarah Pashagumskum's Master's in Education research study and understand and agree with the following:

- The research study is consistent with Lakehead University's Ethics Procedures and the *Guidelines for Research on Human Subjects.*
- There are no foreseen risks to the community or the participants.
- Participants have the right to withdraw from this research project at any time during the process.
- If participants wish, contributions will remain confidential and anonymous with pseudonyms being used in transcriptions or other form of data collected and the report.
- Data will be stored at Lakehead University for seven years as stipulated by Lakehead University's ethics guidelines.
- A report of the research results will be available to all participants and will also be made available in the Faculty of Education Library, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay Ontario.

I, _____, representing the School Committee

☐ Agree   or   ☐ Do not agree   (please check one)

to allow this study.

Signature   Date

APPENDIX III

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS AND CONSENT FORM

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Cover letter: Aboriginal Parental Involvement Research Study

Dear Participant,

I am a graduate student at the Faculty of Education, Lakehead University and am working on the completion of a Master's Degree. I would like you to participate in my thesis research project. The purpose of the study is to explore Aboriginal parental involvement in formal education, paying attention to the benefits of and barriers to such involvement, and the issue as it pertains to self-determination.

I feel that the issue is an important one in our community. We have an extremely high drop-out rate among highschool students, low attendance rates for high school students, and work with the difficulty of teaching our children in a second language using an immersion format. We are also all members of a self-determining Nation. If our school system is to work consistently with the concept of self-determination, then we need to open information gathering forums for all stakeholders. To my knowledge we have not performed any research in our community concerning the involvement of parents in their children's education and the ways in which parents wish to be involved in their children's education. With this research endeavour, I hope that we can make a contribution to our community's education system and to our children's completion of a successful secondary school experience.

I am asking your consent to participate in a discussion of ways in which information will be gathered. I also ask your consent to participate in the information gathering. This may be done by interview or focus group, or another means with which you are comfortable. We will arrange to meet in a location or locations agreeable to you.

If you give your consent to participate, please understand the following:
- The research study is consistent with Lakehead University's Ethics Procedures and the *Guidelines for Research on Human Subjects*.
- I do not foresee any risks to the community or the participants
- You have the right to withdraw from this research project at any time during the process.
- If you wish, your contributions will remain confidential and anonymous with pseudonyms being used in transcriptions or other form of data collected and the report.
- Data will be stored at Lakehead University for seven years as stipulated by Lakehead University's ethics guidelines.
- A report of the research results will be available to all participants and will also be made available in the Faculty of Education Library, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay Ontario.

Please feel free to contact me by phone at 855-2170 or 855-2230, or by e-mail pashagum@lakeheadu.ca. You may also contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. Constance Russell at 807-343-8049 or by e-mail constance.russell@lakeheadu.ca.

Thanks for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sarah Pashagumskum

Participant Consent Form

I have read the cover letter outlining Sarah Pashagumskum's Master's in Education research study and understand and agree with the following:

I.   The research study is consistent with Lakehead University's Ethics Procedures and the *Guidelines for Research on Human Subjects*.

II.   There are no foreseen risks to the community or the participants.

III.   I have the right to withdraw from this research project at any time during the process

IV.   If I wish, my contributions will remain confidential and anonymous with pseudonyms being used in transcriptions or other form of data collected and the report.

V.   Data will be stored at Lakehead University for seven years as stipulated by Lakehead University's ethics guidelines.

VI.   A report of the research results will be available to all participants and will also be made available in the Faculty of Education Library, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay Ontario.

I, _____

☐ Agree   or   ☐ Do not agree   (please check one)

to participate in this study.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

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APPENDIX IV

CD ROM:

ELECTRONIC VERSION OF THESIS SUBMISSION

PERSONAL REFLECTION ON PROCESS

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