**Support for, and success of, Indigenous students in access programs at four Canadian**

**universities: Educators' perspectives and practices**

By

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## Abstract

Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada's recent report on Indigenous Post-Secondary Education reported that 10% of Indigenous peoples in Canada hold a university degree, compared to 26% of non-Indigenous people. Yet, Indian and Northern Affairs (2011) contend that education is key to future employment and income for Indigenous peoples. To address this gap, some post-secondary institutions in Canada provide access programs for Indigenous students. This thesis explored access programs within four postsecondary institutions in Canada. I asked how educators viewed their roles in providing academic, cultural, and personal support for Indigenous student success in these programs. The methodology used was Indigenous Métissage (Donald, 2009) with a desire-based framework (Tuck, 2009). Methods were interviews with educators using conversation method (Kovach, 2009). Four themes emerged: 1) Building and maintaining relationships, 2) Responding to the whole student, 3) Empowering students, and 4) Student success in access programs. The findings reflected educators' multiple roles within access programs and evoked wise practices (Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou, 2010), which informed data analysis. Educators' practices illuminated relationality with students in access programs through locally and culturally responsive practices that strove to balance student needs with university requirements. Conclusions and recommendations follow. This study contributes educators' perspectives on relationality and success for Indigenous students in access programs in Canada.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

## List of Tables

**Chapter 1: Introduction**

"Just as education was used as a tool to divide us, education is the tool that
is going to bring us back together, and it is going to take a long time."
– Justice Murray Sinclair

This study explored support and success for Indigenous students in access programs. This academic purpose was entwined with my role as the Native Access Program (NAP) coordinator at Lakehead University. These dual roles positioned me to explore the multiple roles that educators' serve for Indigenous students in access programs. Like the educators in this study, my role is to transition Indigenous students from the access program to a post-secondary program. Over the sections that follow, I set the contexts for this study—the purpose of the study, background, significance, the research questions I posed, and the limitations and the scope of the study. I introduce myself and locate myself within the research. These contexts ground my explorations for this study.

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how educators provide supports for Indigenous students' success within access programs at four universities across Canada. In this thesis, I use the term 'educator' (program coordinators, instructors, and support workers) in lieu of the term 'participant', as they are peers from whom I sought to learn and develop my own classroom practices. For supports, I follow Levin and Alcorn (2000) and Antone (2001). They described the purpose of access programs as providing academic, personal, and cultural guidance to Indigenous students. Levin and Alcorn found that students who typically would be excluded from post-secondary education gain potential to succeed with appropriate supports. Antone found that Indigenous students need a space to learn and practice their tradition and culture and

to be a part of mainstream society, to be able to walk in two worlds (p. 32). Providing these academic, cultural and personal supports encouraged success for students.

The term 'access program' describes a post-secondary program for Indigenous students who do not meet the admission requirements of the university but seek to attend a postsecondary institution. Some access programs in Canada were developed to meet disciplinary needs. For example, the "Native Nurses Entry Program (NNEP) and the Native Access Program for Engineering (NAPE) were developed out of an expressed need or shortage of qualified Aboriginal professionals, such as nurses and engineers" (Hartviksen, 2000, p. 8). The term 'Indigenous student' describes a student who self-identifies as First Nations, Metis, or Inuit or meets the criteria of the post-secondary institution (PSI).

**Background of the problem**

Access programs are also known as bridging programs, transition year programs, advantage programs, transition programs, foundation programs and preparatory programs. In this thesis, I focus on access programs that serve as preparatory programs exclusively for Indigenous students, and programs that accept Indigenous students within a larger, heterogenous group. At Lakehead University, the NAP admits Indigenous students exclusively. I applied Levin and Alcorn's (2000) findings from 'The Access Model' which they summarize as: recruitment, selection, integrated student supports, academic support and remediation, and personal supports, along with Antone's (2001) study that "found that to be in balance one must have a positive self-identity" (p. 31). For Indigenous students it means that they

> need to be able to learn and practice the tradition and culture of their own particular
> Aboriginal system as well as be able to function in the mainstream society. It is important
> to know what it is that shapes us as individuals. (p. 32)

These concepts of academic, cultural, and personal supports, as described by Levin and Alcorn (2000) and with Antone's (2001) addition of identity shaped my discussions with educators to learn how they support Indigenous students within their access programs. Levin and Alcorn's triad of appropriate supports that educators offer Indigenous students for their success served to set the background of the problem.

The Native Access Program (NAP) at Lakehead University has a 30-year history of commitment to Indigenous students expressed in its 2018-2023 Strategic Plan and NAP program description. The program was established to meet the needs of Indigenous students from Thunder Bay and the surrounding First Nations and small communities that ring the city, as well as Métis and Inuit students, and to support Indigenous students' transitions to university degree programs. Given NAP's 30-year history, and the program evaluations undertaken, I sought new approaches to re-imagine NAP.

I interviewed educators across Canada to explore how they implement access programs and the supports (academic, personal, and cultural) they have found that work with Indigenous students in access programs. I believed that these conversations would offer wise practices, to consider for the NAP at Lakehead University. Wise practices are "locally appropriate actions, tools, principles or decisions that contribute significantly to the development of sustainable and equitable social conditions" (Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou, 2010, p. 19). Wise practices reflect the importance and richness of relationships and respect the unique aspects of each community. Wise practices also consider leadership development and an understanding that things are constantly changing so each person involved brings in their own perspectives (Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou, 2010, p. 19). I considered wise practices within my contexts to consider new approaches to re-imagine my practices as an educator in the NAP (see Chapter 5).

**Research Questions**

My study had two research questions:

1. What academic, personal, and cultural supports do educators use in Access Programs?

2. How do educators describe success for Indigenous students in post-secondary education?

**Significance of the Study**

The literature on access programs consists of several areas: many studies on the history of education of Indigenous peoples pre-contact to contemporary education  (Cajete, 1994; Deer & Falkenburg, 2016; DeGagné, 2002; Kirkness, 1999; Neegan, 2005; Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003; Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015; White & Peters, 2009); the history, models and reviews of access programs (Alcorn & Levin, 1998; Brathwaite, 2003; Hartviksen, 2006; MacKinnon, 2015; Voyageur, 1993); and the overall success and retention of Indigenous students (Alcorn & Levin, 1998; DeGagné, 2002; Human Resource & Skill Development Canada, 2012; Lea, Stephenson & Troy, 2003; Long & Hachowski, 2015; R. A Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2004; Richard, 2011).

The literature contains few recent studies that consider educators' perspectives on practical ways to support Indigenous student success (for example, Alcorn & Levin 1998; Brathwaite, 2003; Malatest, 2004[1]). This study fills a gap with educators' perspectives and practices within access programs. To attain educators' perspectives, I began with the Universities Canada portal for an environmental scan of access programs. To narrow my search, I considered programs exclusively designed for Indigenous students. Once I had this list, I invited PSIs with access programs that met my criteria to participate in this study. Four PSIs accepted my invitation. Each of the universities had well-established programs that attract Indigenous students of all ages.

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[1] The author will use Malatest throughout the rest of this thesis.
[2] NAP has been in existence since 1990.

**Limitations**

This study had several limitations. Because educators hold views and cultural beliefs, it would be irresponsible to state that educators' experiences reflect others' experiences in similar institutions or programs. However, their work with Indigenous students may "be suggestive of what may be found in [a] similar organization, but additional research would be needed to verify whether findings from one study would generalize elsewhere" (Simon & Goes, 2013, p. 2). After collecting data, I found similarities among educators within access programs in Canada, which I share in Chapters 4 and 5 as themes and wise practices, respectively. I describe three of the limitations of this study below.

As the coordinator of the Native Access Program at Lakehead University, I am close to this study. The first limitation is having "insider" knowledge about the challenges and opportunities of access programs, which is a strength and a limitation. As Archibald (2008) asserts, "[w]e have three ears to listen with, two on the sides of our head and one in our heart" (p. 76). Listening was a critical component of this research, and I worked with my heart and mind together as one to make meaning of the stories that educators shared, "because often one [was] not explicitly told what the story's meanings" are therefore, "linking how we feel to what we know [is] an important pedagogy" (Archibald, 2008, p. 76). Archibald's words made me mindful through each step of the research process. Admittedly, I hold my own views and visions for the access program I have coordinated for the past six years.

The second limitation was that I did not interview Indigenous students about their perspectives on access programs. Rather, I focused on educators' perspectives, which fits my role as an educator. This framework does not dwell on the shortcomings of access programs, such as educator resources, funding, and other systemic aspects that may hinder access

programming. The third limitation is that each access program is unique within a place and space specific to the local Indigenous nations. The findings reflect common themes across locations.

**Scope**

This study focused on educators (coordinators, instructors, support workers, and Elders) from access programs at four PSIs in Canada. In March 2018, I travelled to four universities: Dalhousie University, in Halifax, Nova Scotia; the University of Alberta, in Edmonton, Alberta; the University of Manitoba, in Winnipeg, Manitoba; and the University of Toronto, in Toronto, Ontario. This study provides a broad view of educator practices in access programs from across the country. This study did not focus on the policies, politics, or funding of access programs, or seek Indigenous students' graduation rates within access programs. All of these aspects are important to assess access programs, yet beyond my purpose and the scope of this study. Educators and the supports they offer for Indigenous student success inform this study and aid in re-imagining the NAP at Lakehead University.

**Lakehead University Native Access Program**

At Lakehead, Indigenous students who enter the NAP have typically not earned the required high school credits to apply to university, or they are mature students who have been out of school for two or more years. Upon admission to NAP, they have one academic year to complete five courses; three courses from Social Sciences and Humanities and two non-credit study skills/upgrading courses. Students who successfully complete the program qualify for admission into the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities[2].

Lakehead has kept its Native Access Program viable for 30 years. However, NAPs are not accredited university or college programs: they must be externally funded (either partially or fully), usually with most funding from the Provincial Government. In Ontario this funding comes

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[2] NAP has been in existence since 1990.

from the Ministry of Education and Post-Secondary Funding for Aboriginal Learners. Monies

are used to second lecturers to teach and to provide space, technology, and lab materials to run

the programs. External funding is often provided for a three-year period, although ongoing

external funding is critical to the continuation of Lakehead's NAP (Barret, et. al. p. 10)[3] and

programs across Canada.

Universities rarely have core budgets to support their access programs, which "puts

considerable strain on those individuals responsible for organizing NAPs, particularly if funding

cycles are short" (Hartviksen, 2000, p. 11). Funding insecurity "results in significant amounts of

time, energies, and therefore money, being directed to securing funding, rather than into other

important things such as program development, promotion, advertising, support, and counseling"

(Hartviksen, 2000, p. 11).

The literature sets the intent of access programs to provide alternative access to university

for Indigenous students (Antone, 2001; Levin & Alcorn, 1998; Barrett, Farrell, Grenier, Leggatt,

Webster & Fedderson, 2003; Hartviksen, 2000, 2006; MacKinnon, 2015). Fortunately for my

purposes, two studies by Hartviksen (2000, 2006) evaluated the access program at Lakehead

University and provided recommendations on instructors and student supports. This study

extends Hartviksen's (2000) focus on instructors. She described the characteristics of access

program staff:

> Another characteristic of all effective programs for First Nations people is that staff are
>
> not only on the basis of their competence in the subject area in which they are to teach,

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[3] Currently, funding for NAP at LU has been on a three-year basis, and as of last year, a one-year basis, as the Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development's Postsecondary Funding for Aboriginal Learners (PEFAL) is undergoing review. Effective May 2019, the NAP coordinator position became permanent full-time.

but on how deeply they are committed to the academic and personal growth of their

students. (p. 17)

This study from educators' perspectives provides insights into their work within access

programs on supporting students holistically and on student success. In the next section, I locate

myself in this research.

**Self-Location in the Research**

> "We write about ourselves and position ourselves first because the only thing
> we can write about is ourselves." (Absolon & Willett, 2004, p. 5)

In Indigenous research, self-location is considered an important aspect and addresses

"issues of accountability and the location from which we study, write and participate in

knowledge creation" (Absolon & Willett, 2004, p. 5). It also shows to whom the researcher is

accountable, because as researchers, we can only write about ourselves and seek to clarify our

own perspectives on how we interpret the world (Absolon & Willett, 2004, p. 5). Self-location

imbeds gained knowledge in the experiences that influence our interpretations. In sharing our

stories, we present commonalities that allow us to make "sense of a particular phenomenon"

while understanding that we cannot generalize another's experience. Self-location ensures "that

individual realities are not misrepresented as generalizable collectives" (Kovach, 2009, p. 111).

Self-location allows us to "resist colonial models of writing by talking about ourselves first and

then relating pieces of our stories and ideas to the research topic" (Absolon & Willett, 2005, p.

98). Therefore, I begin the narrative of this research by locating myself in the study.

My name is Jerri-Lynn, and I grew up for most of my life in Winnipeg, Manitoba, but my

family moved around a lot between Northern Ontario and British Columbia. I live, work, study

and teach in Thunder Bay, Ontario, which is situated on the traditional territory of the Fort

William First Nation, signatories of the Robinson-Superior Treaty of 1850 (Lakehead University

Land Acknowledgement). I am from a mixed ancestry background.

On my mother's side, we are Cree and Metis, and my family comes from the Bigstone

Cree Nation in Northern Alberta, where my grandfather, Sammy Young was Chief from 1964 to

1976. I have not had the privilege of going to my family's community or meeting my

grandfather, as he passed away long before I was born. In the last ten years, I have connected

with many aunts from this side of my family. My mother did not grow up with her father, but

with her mother, in many small towns in Northern Alberta. I had the opportunity when I was

sixteen to meet my aunts from my grandmother's side of the family for the first time. These

aunts had a different father than my mother. It was such a blessing to meet and know where my

mother's roots were from. I remember I was excited to meet these wonderful people my mom

had told us stories about, and I felt an instant connection.

On my father's side, we are Swedish, German and Polish, and this is the side of my

family I grew up with. My mother was born in Wabasca, Alberta, and my father in Port Arthur,

known today as Thunder Bay, Ontario. They raised my sister and I, until I was about two or

three. My sister and I were raised by my mother in Winnipeg's West End after they separated,

and sometimes, we were cared for my aunt in Winnipeg. At other times, I was with an aunt and

uncle in British Columbia, and I also lived in a few foster homes. We were well loved and cared

for by our aunts who took care of us. We moved a lot, and because of the colonial system set in

place by the Government of Canada, mine is a complicated life story. My mother was a

residential school survivor, and I am on a journey to find out more about her experiences. Sadly,

she passed away 12 years ago before I had time to talk to her about it. I know, however, that her

experiences in the residential school affected the way my sister and I were raised. I know my mom did her best with what she had and loved us unconditionally.

I never thought much about our Indigeneity growing up. I understood, maybe not clearly, that we were Indigenous. When I look back at childhood experiences, I can see that we faced challenges because of who we were. I am not dark-skinned, and I have hazel eyes and black hair. My sister faced more challenges because although she also has hazel eyes and lighter hair, she is dark-skinned. Our mom would speak Cree to us occasionally and tell us stories of growing up with her family in Northern Alberta. I remember listening to her stories and wishing we could be there with our extended family.

It was not until I was in college and university that I learned the true history of Canada and had the opportunity to experience more Indigenous culture. My mom had taken us to pow wows and The Indian and Metis Friendship Centre of Winnipeg, and we had many Indigenous friends. But, it was within the learning spaces of the college and university, that I understood how the history of Canada shaped my family life. It is true for many other Indigenous students that they continue to explore who they are. Through my post- secondary education, I could explore who I was as an Indigenous person. I got to experience culture and ceremony and connect to others like me. I got to learn of a bigger world out there, and of passions I was not sure I should pursue. I began to realize that through education, there could be a different life, a better life, for my family.

I was a high school dropout and left school part way through Grade 10. I did not know at sixteen, how important education would become in my life. It was not until I met my husband and we had two sons and a daughter, that I dedicated myself to a better life for them. I made a promise to them and myself, that no one else would raise them. I went back to school at 23 years

old and got my Grade 12. I thank my teachers for opening my eyes to the possibility of a postsecondary education. I needed this awakening and then I needed my own children to understand the importance of education and how life altering it can be. At university, I got to explore who I was, what I was interested in, and my passion for education and for more knowledge about Indigenous peoples. I decided this would be my life's work as a dedication to my mom, my children and my people. Although I have walked a similar path as other Indigenous peoples, I know I do not understand it all, nor have I had the same experiences as them. I understand I still hold a responsibility to continue to learn and create change in my small way...and I am willing.

As coordinator of the Native Access Program at Lakehead University, I have had the privilege of journeying beside and supporting Indigenous students who come through the program. There have been many challenges that include the clash between the institutional and Indigenous students' worldviews, their definition of success, seemingly impossible circumstance such as family loss, and their identity of being Indigenous and going to school in a colonial institution, to name a few. But the triumphs are tremendous when I get to see students grow, learn and be their selves – a student who struggled with school now is flourishing with the support and encouragement from educators, peers, family and friends, a student who struggled to pay their bills or get their kids into daycare or was homeless manages to complete the program and continue on into their undergraduate degree. Being a safe space for students to come and share what is going on in their lives and to listen is what I most am honoured to be able to do.

As the Native Access Program is a microcosm of Lakehead University, polices and procedures are to be followed and funding is allocated through the University—less than what is needed to do all things that students may need to fully support their success. When I was

reimagining what the NAP could be, I wondered what other access programs in Canada were doing? What did other educators see as important in supporting students' academic, personal and cultural success in PSE? What were the similarities and differences in other access programs? My work and these questions created the basis for this research. In the conversations I had with educators, I found we had much in common from various aspects of our everyday work to the students we support in our programs and to the way we care for students in our own ways. I realized that educators who work in access programs do not often get the opportunity to speak candidly about the work we do with others.

**Conclusion**

I began this chapter describing the purpose of this study and background of the problem, I then explained the significance of this study, and gave an outline of the research questions, the limitations of the study and an introduction to the Native Access Program at Lakehead University. I then located myself in the research following Kovach. I also acknowledged the land. I believe that when we honour the land, we are connecting with her through relationship, understanding that without the land we are nothing.

Five chapters follow. Chapter Two reviews literature on historical and contemporary Indigenous Education, the ongoing legacy of colonialism, and responses within public education. Then I describe a history of access programs in Canada and success from both a Western and Indigenous lens. Admissions, the Access Program Model, retention, two program reviews and a closing discussion of moving forward position my study within other, relevant studies from Indigenous scholars who have worked in Indigenous education (Antone, 2001; Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 1998, 2002, 2013; Cajete, 1994; DeGagné, 2002). In chapter three, I describe the frameworks of Métissage and Indigenous methodology (Donald, 2012; Kovach, 2009; & Lowan-

Trudeau, 2012) and a desire-based framework (Tuck, 2009), which I use as the foundation for this study. In Chapter four, I describe the rich insights of the educators through the four themes and subthemes that emerged from my conversations with them: 1) building and maintaining relationships with students, 2) responding to the whole student, 3) empowering students, and 4) student success. In Chapter 5, I consider the themes from Chapter 4 with the scholarly literature and discuss commonalities among educators and place as wise practices (Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou, 2010). This approach helped me to glean locally-appropriate actions, tools, principles or decisions for NAP and other access programs. In Chapter 6, I re-iterate my research questions on educators' supports for the success of Indigenous students in access programs. I answer these questions based on the findings from my study. To close this study, I offer suggestions for areas of future research into access programs.

**Chapter 2: Literature review: What the scholars said**

"Yet there is little awareness that one cannot have a first-class education system when a significant number of the population are overtly oppressed." (Brathwaite, 2003, p. 43)

**Introduction**

Our society depends on the availability of knowledge holders and "the quality of its human resources" (Anisef & Okihiro, 1982, p. xiv). Many scholars believe that PSIs hold the potential to shrink the gap in employment and income levels and provide social mobility for Indigenous peoples (Cameron, 2009; see also Kirby, 2009; MacKinnon, 2015; Voyageur, 1993). There is increased demand for highly skilled workers in Canada, and projections show that almost two-thirds of job openings will require some PSE (Kirby, 2009). DeGagné (2002) asserts, "the need for trained and educated First Nations [Inuit and Metis] people is widely recognized" (p. 2).

While potential for Indigenous students appears strong, they may mistrust PSIs because "formal education has left a legacy of alienation and distrust within communities and families" and is seen "as an instrument of assimilation into the dominant society, a view that is well founded, rooted as it is in the historical experience of residential schools" (DeGagné, 2002, pp. 6-7; see also Battiste, 1998; MacKinnon, 2015). This mistrust extends beyond residential schools to current attitudes and approaches within public education that privileges one way of knowing and subverts Indigenous knowledge systems. Battiste (1998) calls this cognitive imperialism, which discredits "other knowledge bases and values, and [it] seeks to validate one source of knowledge and empower it through public education" (p. 58).

Cognitive imperialism in schools affects everyone differently. Battiste (1998) asserts that cognitive imperialism "may allow non-Indigenous students to assume a false, internalized sense of superiority and entitlement to land, resources, and power in society as privileged individuals"

(p. 58). Thus, cognitive imperialism that exists within PSIs requires Indigenous students to

navigate a system that may not acknowledge or value their worldviews and cultures (Battiste,

2013; DeGagné, 2002). They are expected to leave behind their ways of knowing and their

culture and adopt a new reality (Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2004). Further, DeGagné (2002)

contends, that new reality may ignore their lived experiences. Cognitive imperialism within

public education can contribute to Indigenous students leaving PSIs before completing their

programs.

One way that the Government of Canada has addressed lower levels of Indigenous

students in PSIs was to create access programs. This movement began in the late 1960s and

early 1970s. Over the past 60 years, access programs have offered Indigenous students an entrée

into the academy while providing additional academic and cultural supports (Malatest, 2002;

Brathwaite, 2003; MacKinnon, 2015). Brathwaite (2003) asserts that access programs provide

Indigenous peoples a space where students can "critically engage in education" and find solace

when they get homesick or overwhelmed (p. 13). Alcorn and Levin (1998) assert that programs

offer an "equality of condition that demands that mere access is not sufficient, but must be

accompanied with supports for students who are motivated, but poorly prepared and under

resourced, a realistic opportunity to succeed" (p. 4). These perspectives inform the creation and

continuation of access programs.

Therefore, access programs presume that non-traditional Indigenous learners excluded

from PSE can access the institutions' programs and added supports to succeed. Access programs

are intended to offer bridging for Indigenous students to transition to an undergraduate program.

The following sections of this review explore access programs in Canada. First, I begin

this review by briefly contextualizing Indigenous education historically from pre-contact to the

disruption that occurred in Indigenous education through colonialism. Next, I review access programs historically, retention and program completion data, and culturally sustaining pedagogy as a model often espoused for access and other programs for Indigenous learners. The review culminates with Indigenous education today within public schooling contexts, and includes responses that challenge colonialism within educational institutions, specifically, criteria for success.

**Indigenous Education: Pre-Contact**

Indigenous education evolves from Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge systems. Neegan (2005) explains that long before contact with Europeans, Indigenous peoples had their own educational systems that were highly developed. Parents and Elders were responsible to teach their children through informal experiential activities of daily life that included their spiritual, mental, emotional and physical self. Kirkness (1999) explains that education was viewed more broadly as the "community was considered the classroom and it was the responsibility of the community to make sure children were empowered to lead a good life" (p. 8), which meant having the knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes to function in everyday society. Included in this way of teaching was the ability to learn from the environment and incorporate a positive home life, which ultimately shaped the behaviors that would carry them into the future in a good way (Neegan, 2005). For Anishinaabe people, living a good life is called mino-bimaadiziwin. This concept incorporates learning as being about the whole person in relation to his or her community as a way to live and learn well. Deer and Falkenburg (2016) explain that mino-bimaadiziwin, "communicates that one's spirit and relationships must exist in good, healthy ways" and "are given to Anishinaabe [the Ojibwe word for Ojibway] people as their original instructions from the Creator" (p. 7).

More broadly, the premise of Indigenous education pre-contact depended on children "looking, listening, learning" and then doing, which then prepared them for everyday life. (Neegan, 2005, p. 5; see also Cajete, 1994; Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003). In the early 17th century, this approach would transform for Indigenous peoples.

**Disruption – Indigenous Education: Contact**

Jesuits led the initial attempts to assimilate Indigenous peoples. Residential schools were first created in the 17th century by these European missionaries to assimilate "First Nations children into a Euro-Canadian culture and economic system" (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003, p. 36; see also White & Peter, 2009). By the mid- 17th century, Jesuits sought to render Indigenous peoples sedentary to convert them fully to Christianity (White & Peters, 2009, pp. 13-14).

In the early 1800s, the federal government implemented residential boarding schools to increase the process of civilization. They withdraw children from parents and community to assimilate them sooner to the ways of a 'civilized' society. This system assumed that Indigenous peoples were unfit as parents and the European civilization and religion were superior to Indigenous cultures (Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, pp. 6-7; see also DeGagné, 2002).

In 1876, the government amended the Indian Act to add enfranchisement, whereby status Indians who got a higher education had to give up their Indian Status. In becoming enfranchised, Indigenous people were "no longer entitled to benefits. For example, [they] would be unable to live on the reserve with [their] family or hunt and fish without a permit" (Voyageur, 1993, p. 4). Before the changes to the Indian Act in the 1950s, Status Indians had to deny their Indigeneity to attend university–"hence, in addition to their experience of actual genocide in the past, those who

wanted access to higher education had to be complicit in their own cultural genocide"
(Brathwaite, 2003, p. 54; see also Alcorn & Levin, 1998; Malatest, 2002).

By law, children of status Indians and other Indigenous peoples, attended Indian
Residential Schools, as early as age 5, until they were sixteen (DeGagné, 2002, p. 7). Within
these schools, teachers and clergy taught "English literacy and numeracy as a means [for
Indigenous people] to become citizens of Canada" (p. 65). These were the skills regarded as
important in the growth and development of colonialism and imperialism in Canada (Anuik &
Gillies, 2012, p. 65). Alongside literacy and numeracy skills, Indigenous children received
vocational training to prepare them for farming and housekeeping (Voyageur, 1993, p. 3).

The last Indian Residential School (IRS) closed in 1996 in Saskatchewan (TRC, 2015, p.
6; see also Czyzewski, 2011, Voyageur, 1993). Although not all students experienced the same
degree of emotional, physical and sexual abuse, they were all made to live in fear. As DeGagné
(2002) states, "the effect of [these] polic[ies] and the system it created has been devastating for
the Aboriginal peoples of North America" and has left an inheritance of "social and personal
problems such as alcoholism, family violence, and a general reduction in the human potential of
Aboriginal people" (pp. 7-8).

The Indian Residential School system negatively affected Indigenous peoples' attitudes
towards education, "and this attitude has contributed significantly to a lack of engagement of
[Indigenous] people in Canada's system of education and training" (DeGagné, 2002, p. 9).
Below, I describe what post-secondary institutions are doing to change the 'lack of engagement
of Indigenous people' in post-secondary education.

**Legacy of Colonialism on Indigenous Education: Today**

"Changing times do require new approaches" (Brathwaite, 2003, p. 68).

The legacy of colonialism and continued cognitive imperialism has led to the "under education of Indigenous populations around the world" (Levin & Alcorn, 2000, pp. 2-3). This can include many factors including "the impact of K-12 preparation on the participation and success of First Nations students at the university level" (DeGagné, 2002, p. 9). Battiste (2013) identifies cognitive imperialism as "white washing of the mind" through Eurocentric education and Eurocentric views that permeate through everyday life from the books we read, to the media we interact with daily and the laws and values of our country (p. 26).

Today cognitive imperialism affects Indigenous students pursing a post-secondary education, as they may feel they are rejecting their "Indian-ness" (Voyageur, 1993, p. 5). Scholars believe that the public educational system maintains barriers of race, class and gender that have not been meaningfully reformed (Brathwaite, 2003; Czyzewski, 2011; Razack, 1998). DeGagné (2002) asserts that the lack of reforms continues to hinder Indigenous students' success: "there is some desire to believe that Aboriginal students come to learn about the world in a fundamentally different way, and that performance problems might be linked to a failure in the education system to accommodate this difference" (p. 12). While Indigenous peoples continue to assert their sovereignty over education (see, for example, Dechinta Bush University; Freeland Ballantyne, 2014; McDonald, 2014), public educational institutions have also offered programming specific to Indigenous students and made changes to post-secondary institutions.

**Responses to Colonialism within Public Education**

"Now that we know about residential schools and their legacy, what do we do about it?"
(Truth & Reconciliation Commission Final Report, 2015, p. 6).

Some university programs have been able to develop "holistic models that integrate

Indigenous knowledge and reciprocal learning relationships that move students from passive

receivers of knowledge to active participants" (MacKinnon, 2015, p. 71). Over the years, there

has been a proliferation of programs that empower Indigenous students to become active

participants, such as the Program of Legal Studies for Native People at the University of

Saskatchewan, which provides an alternative means for Indigenous students to be accepted to

law school while increasing the number of Indigenous professionals in the legal field[4]. Relatedly,

the First Nations Transitions Program at the University of Lethbridge that enables "First Nations,

Métis and Inuit students returning to university after an absence or who may not meet all

the requirements for general admission to uLethbridge to make a smooth and successful

transition to university life. " Successful completion of this program gives entry to most

University of Lethbridge programs.

As access programs for Indigenous students develop and change, the meaning of equality

of educational opportunity changes as society evolves (Anisef & Okihiro, 1982; MacKinnon,

2015). For example, access programs have the potential to align with the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) Calls to Action (2015). Within the section called

Education for Reconciliation, calls 62 to 65 apply to the work of reconciliation within PSIs:

#62–"We call upon the federal, provincial and territorial governments, in consultation and

collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators" (TRC, 2015, p. 7) include age

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[4] Offered by the Gabriel Dumont Institute with the Ministry of Advanced Education, the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan.

appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, historical and contemporary Indigenous contribution to Canada, education for teachers to learn to integrate Indigenous knowledges (IK) and teaching methods, while providing appropriate funding for the teaching and implementation of IK and teaching methods in the classrooms. Create senior governmental positions dedicated to Aboriginal content in education. #63– "We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues" (TRC, 2015, p. 7) that include Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum and learning resources about Indigenous history in Canada and the legacy of residential schools while sharing wise practices among educators. Creating an environment for students to understand cultural similarities and differences that foster mutual respect and empathy. #64 – "We call upon all levels of government that provide public funds to denominational schools [that] require" (TRC, 2015, p. 7) them to learn a segment on Aboriginal spiritual beliefs, created alongside Indigenous Elders.
#65– "We call upon the federal government, through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, post-secondary institutions and educators, and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and its partner institutions, to establish a national research program with multi-year funding to advance understanding of reconciliation" (TRC, 2015, p. 7). Collectively, these four Calls to Action commit PSIs to change how Indigenous Knowledges are included, shared, and taught.

Calls to Action also provide the opportunity for PSIs to address what Lea, Stephenson and Troy (2003) call the 'inside-out approach': those on the 'inside' (post-secondary professionals) know what is best to meet student needs. Successful post-secondary institutions need to think 'outside in' by researching, talking with communities, understanding their students' needs and responding to their needs holistically. Students need to be empowered to adapt to the

workforce, become flexible and apply skills to a wide range of situations. Lea et al. (2003)

contend that an inside-out approach will "have an indirect impact on admissions and retention

statistics" (pp. 323-324), thus attracting more students by meeting their learning needs. Through

these programs, Indigenous knowledge is placed "at the centre of learning" (MacKinnon, 2015,

p. 73), which allows Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike to see that there are

"alternative ways of coming to know, and of being" (MacKinnon, 2015, pp. 73-74). Having

Indigenous staff and faculty in these programs, along with Elder and community input and

consultation, allows access programs to use internal and external Indigenous resources to

understand and meet their Indigenous students' needs. Part of meeting student needs includes

success criteria.

The next sections explore the concept of success criteria. I consider success through a

traditional lens of PSIs, which I call a western lens. Then I consider success criteria as they align

with Indigenous students' holistic needs (academic, cultural, personal, and financial) within

access programs, which I call an Indigenous lens.

**What is success in post-secondary education?**

Cuseo (2007) asserts that success within higher education asks the following three

questions:

1. What constitutes student success? (How should student success be defined or described?)
2. How do postsecondary institutions promote student success? (What specific types of educational processes contribute to, or increase the likelihood of student success?)
3. How can student success be measured or assessed? (What constitutes "evidence" that student success has been realized and that certain experiences during the first year are responsible for its realization?) (p. 2).

Cuseo (2007) asserts that the following aspects are frequently cited as student success indicators in PSE: student retention (persistence), educational attainment, academic achievement, student advancement and holistic development. It is this last indicator, holistic development, that Cuseo cites as a leading source of student retention. He argues its lack is the reason that students withdraw from PSE, rather than poor academic achievement (p. 2).

Of course, student success is predominantly defined by institutional standards, which include grades and graduation. This is partially due to several institutional factors, such as program and student funding requirements, attracting donors and program marketing, which includes recruiting students, paying for instructors and maintaining class sizes. Below, I describe success from Western and Indigenous lenses to show two disparate approaches to student success.

**A Measurement of Success through a Western Lens**

Success can be viewed in a variety of ways, and I detail the general view of success through a western lens or perspective below. Human Resource and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) (2012) presents data from an evaluation of 24 access programs across Canada. HRSDC assessed program success based on definitions formed by the access programs themselves, which was the percentage of students who completed the program. The HRSDC authors use five criteria: 1) funding per student; 2) Entrance requirements; 3) Student age; 4) Institutional characteristics; and 5) providing a holistic approach. I review the findings for each criterion.

The authors found a relationship between student funding and success. The study showed that access programs with the lowest funding per students had a success rate of 60% or lower. Access programs with funding over $8000 per student were among the most successful access

programs in Canada in terms of their success rate of students completing the program. Access programs with high or substantial entrance requirements, including high school completion and pre-testing or interviews, showed the highest success. The researchers found success rates of five programs at approximately 75% for programs with high or substantial entrance requirements. They compared this to 50% or lower for access programs with none to moderate entrance requirements.

Student age when entering an access program also impacted success rates. Programs with an average age of 25 or older had success rates of 72% or higher. Conversely, programs with students aged 25 and younger had success rates of 55% or lower. This is not entirely clear-cut: mature students coming into an access program are more likely to have dependents, which may or may not hinder success for these students, but dependents create a greater financial burden, which may lead to students working more hours, or dropping out completely to support their family. DeGagné (2002) provides another way to view 'dropping out' for Indigenous students: "perhaps dropout represents resistance to assimilation, and in this way can be viewed not as a failure, but as success in cultural preservation" (p. 21).

Institutional characteristics also played a role in student completion of access programs. HRSDC (2012) authors found higher student completion rates within First Nations' post-secondary institutions' access programs[5]. Notably, the authors explained success was not based on whether a university or college delivered the program; rather, it was the type of institution. First Nations organizations had higher success rates. As DeGagné (2002) pointed out, it is important to remember that "from the time of arrival at the mainstream non-Aboriginal university, [Indigenous] students must deal with the pull towards integration and assimilation

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[5] The First Nation post secondary institutions were not named in this study.

into the life and culture of the university" (p. 16). One factor that scholars consider for students in access programs are success measures though an Indigenous lens, as I explore next.

**A Measure of Success through an Indigenous Lens**

Pidgeon (2008) states that "Indigenous definitions of success in education are also about larger societal issues of social justice and equity" (pp. 340, 343). Richard (2011) suggests success measures consider the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of students, which includes asserting their Indigenous identity proudly. It also includes persistence, "taking risks and not giving up", while striving to achieve desired outcomes as they are ready (p. 123). Some scholars also argue that educational success is culturally dependent and that there are "some students [that] can meet their educational objectives by completing components of a course or a program, without intending to complete the entire course or program at that time" (Malatest, 2002, p. 10; see also Ottman, 2017; Richard, 2011).

In 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood released the foundational document Indian Control of Indian Education (ICIE). The ICIE document stated that education was to "give our children a strong sense of identity, with confidence in their personal worth and ability" (NIB, 1972, p. 3). Indigenous perspectives on success differ from the Western perspective which has been well- defined "through an imposed, quantifiably limiting framework. Limiting success to this narrow definition, narrows our understanding and subsequent approaches and processes to facilitate success for Aboriginal post-secondary students" (Malatest, 2002, p. 19).

Another definition of success is described in The Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework (APSETPF) (2011), which asserts that holistic measures of success need to be included, and given more weight than graduation and completion rates. Further, the APSEFPF asserts, Aboriginal worldviews need to be represented, proper assessment

tools provided, and engagement undertaken with communities to ensure that strategies apply to both parties involved. Long and Hachowski (2015) write that success is not an individual construct for Indigenous learners. They explain, two aspects of Indigenous success include: success for the student and success for our people. Indigenous peoples are relational, and the intent of education is not only to make the individual's life better, but that of the community. Although their scholarship is not based on access programs, Indigenous scholars have advocated for holistic measures of educational success for Indigenous students that includes Indigenous ways of knowing that meets the spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual aspects of a person (Battiste, 1998; Cajete, 1994; Hampton, 1995; Pidgeon, 2008).

In the two disparate approaches to student success noted above, each has criteria for success; however, the challenge for access programs and their staffs is to consider both academic success as it is defined institutionally and success from Indigenous perspectives. Blending these disparate approaches may increase success and retention for Indigenous students, preparing them to feel part of the academy (APSEFPF, 2011; Anuik & Gillies, 2012; Medin & Bang, 2013) and potentially develop a greater capacity to succeed in future PSE programs. To recap, this chapter has reviewed the importance of access programs while looking at Indigenous education pre-contact, during settler contact, the responses to colonialism today, and success measures through western and Indigenous lenses. In the next sections, I describe the history of access programs in Canada, the admissions process, program models, and retention.

**Access Programs in Canada: Overview**

"Access, by its very nature, is known to disturb traditions held sacred by those who are privileged in society; it challenges the standards of excellence, which world-class universities like the U of T [University of Toronto] hold as sacred. Access disturbs standards of excellence because under excellence lies merit or worthiness, which is not access related." (Brathwaite, 2003, p. 66)

Access programs began in the 1960s and 1970s from "the community's will for change and full participation" in PSE (Brathwaite, 2003, p.12; see also Alcorn & Levin, 1998; MacKinnon, 2015; Voyageur, 1993). The Transition Year Programme (TYP) at the University of Toronto and Dalhousie University emerged from student movements. The philosophy of the TYP at U of T was born from this movement and Brathwaite (2003) states its purpose as:

To make university education more equitable and attainable by providing opportunities for participation to students from groups and communities who were traditionally under-represented in PSE, student backgrounds include: Aboriginal students, Black/African Canadians, women who are single parents, working-class students, students with disabilities, diverse sexual orientations, refugee students, experiences homelessness. (p. 12)

A group of young immigrants who moved to Canada and found their education opportunities disrupted by access criteria and transition demands encouraged this chance at gaining a university education. They wanted to transition to PSE without an onerous progression through the various levels of school upgrading required by Canadian universities (Brathwaite, 2003, p. 7). In 1970, the University of Toronto and Dalhousie University were the only universities to put access models in place. Dalhousie University accepted Aboriginal and African Canadians students and University of Toronto targeted Aboriginal and African Canadians, the working class, women and others who may need an access route (Brathwaite, 2003, p. 69).

The University of Manitoba (UM) was working on an access program model around the same time (Malatest, 2002). The New Democratic Party or NDP in Manitoba, "began to introduce a series of post-secondary education programs known as ACCESS programs" (MacKinnon, 2015, p. 94) intended to create a comprehensive recruitment, financial support, and counselling program. The purpose was to empower Metis students and the working poor to enable them to gain a university education. These programs were "initially administered through the Department of Education and Training" (MacKinnon, 2015, p. 94) and partially funded by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada[6]. As the program continued, it was open to other Indigenous students.

In the 1980s, the University of Alberta also "undertook the initiative to provide alternative access programs to the Non-Traditional student" (Voyageur, 1993, p. 6), which since then has been a route to post-secondary education "for 70% of the University of Alberta's Native Student population" (Voyageur, 1993, p. 6). Students who entered this program were Indigenous students who had just graduated with their high school diploma, but did not have the grade point average to enter, or older Indigenous students with little to no high school education who were out of school for several years (Voyageur, 1993, p. 7). This program included strategies for the "careful monitoring of the performance experience and problems of special admission students and attempts to ensure that they are academically prepared to meet the demands and rigors of university work" (Voyageur, 1993, p. 7). Voyageur (1993) affirms the importance of providing holistic wrap-around supports for Indigenous students were educators carefully monitor students so they can intercede where they would need it most.

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[6] Known today at Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada

In their almost 60-year history, access programs have been implemented in many other PSIs across Canada (Brathwaite, 2003; Levin & Alcorn, 2000; MacKinnon, 2015; Malatest, 2002). Today, access programs seek to empower those who attend, successfully finish the program and move on to an undergraduate program, which creates a way out of poverty to social mobility and freedom (MacKinnon, 2015). Antone (2003) writes about the TYP program, an access program at the U of T. She sees the TYP program as a steppingstone for Aboriginal students "to higher levels of education. The TYP program gives support and encouragement to the Aboriginal students as they struggle to incorporate their experience and knowledge into the academic expectations of the university milieu" (p. 178). Her comments can be extended to educators' beliefs who took part in the study from across the country.

Access programs create opportunities for Indigenous peoples to attend PSI and access higher education. At Lakehead University, we believe our access program (NAP) does the same when we can keep the students in class, and we can provide them with the supports and understanding they need to be successful. Below, I explore some common admission standards among PSIs.

**Access Program Diversity, Admissions and Model**

Admission requirements for entry into an access program vary across Canadian universities and can include the applicant being a mature student (age 21 or older, who has been out of school for at least two years) or a recent high school graduate who did not take sufficient academic credits to meet university entrance requirements. There are two types of access programs: 1) general access that requires pre-course work to enter the general student population; and 2) program-specific access to a department or program, for example English, Social Work, or Nursing (Levin & Alcorn, 2000, p.6). Access programs typically offer skill

development for learners, including Math, English, basic study skills and some offer credit courses (HRSDC, 2012, p. I; see also Alcorn & Levin, 1998; Hartviksen, 2000; Malatest, 2002, 2010).

These programs often provide a range of academic, cultural, personal and financial support for students. Academic supports include strategies to empower students to transition into an undergraduate program such as study skills and tutoring; culturally relevant programming to foster learning and strengthen identity; personal supports include help with finding daycare, housing; being a liaison for the student to access funding agencies and outside resources; and help with accessing funding for tuition, books and cost-of-living needs along with help in applying for bursaries and scholarships. No access model provides all things to all students and what is provided varies by province. Next, I offer two examples from the University of Manitoba—the Inner-City Social Work Program and the University of Saskatchewan's Aboriginal Equity Access Program in Dentistry—to show the varying admission requirement, the diversity of types of access programs for Indigenous students and the need for these access programs.

One example of a need for an access program is the University of Manitoba's Inner-City Social Work Program (ICSWP) which was created specifically to educate Indigenous social workers and came from the recommendation of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry which suggested that there was a need to have more social workers who were Indigenous. Today the program accepts full-time and part-time students. Applicants complete an "extensive intake process to determine readiness and suitability" as the program aims to have thirty-five new students in the program annually. They require students to "demonstrate academic and social need, but they must also demonstrate their suitability to the profession and their potential ability to handle the

academic demands of the program" (MacKinnon, 2015, p. 97). There is, then, tension "between need and eligibility. However, program staff maintain that it is not in the best interests of applicants to be accepted into a program if they will not be able to handle the demand" (MacKinnon, 2015, p. 97). MacKinnon (2015) explains that need and eligibility can sometimes go against each other; even with the need, if students are not prepared to meet the demands of the program, they will not be successful.

Another example of the admission requirements and access program diversity is the University of Saskatchewan's (U of S) Aboriginal Equity Access Program in Dentistry, another program-specific access program. Indigenous students must meet the regular admission requirements of the U of S College of Dentistry. They assess each candidate in three categories and include their overall academic record (scored at 65%), their score on the Dental Aptitude Test (scored at 15%) and an interview (scored at 20%). This total corresponds to their admissions score and rank in this competitive process. Each stage is examined, and students can move forward in the process only if they meet specific criteria. There is no differentiation in the minimum admission requirements for the Aboriginal Equity Access Program in Dentistry and the mainstream route into Dentistry. Every potential student who applies must hold a 70 percent average in pre-dentistry courses with an overall 75 percent average in 30 credit hours. Once admitted, they hold all students to the same academic standards, whether they enter through the mainstream program or the access program. Program staff state that "this minimizes the likelihood of differential evaluation based on a student's cultural background" (Teplitsky & Uswak, 2014, pp. 183-184). These admission policies follow the components of the Access Program Model, discussed below.

### *Access Program Model*

According to Alcorn and Levin (1998), the model of access programming includes six key components (recruitment, selection, student supports, financial supports, academic supports, and personal supports): recruitment involves identifying prospective applicants and connecting with communities by program staff; the selection process includes reviewing applications and interviewing; integrated student supports help meet students' financial, academic, personal and cultural needs, with the heart of the access model being the integrated student support system; they once offered financial support to students who qualified, though this changed in 1988 when the federal government withdrew support (pp. 7-12).

As mentioned previously, the fundamental principle of access programs is equality of condition and opportunity. Brathwaite (2003) suggests this model aligns with the Canadian democratic philosophy of building a foundation of upward social mobility, recognizing the importance of young people having opportunities to improve and better their lives, in a way consistent with their abilities and interests, no matter their background (p. 80). The rewards of a university education are significant, especially today in an era of technological growth. As a society we are in an era of social movement and change, therefore we should no longer "condone the limited access" to PSIs for under-represented groups (Brathwaite, p. 76). Access programs provide an opportunity to get a PSE that offers social mobility, and better health, and overall well-being: "the success of Aboriginal students in postsecondary education will have a positive correlation for the progress of Aboriginal communities and Canada as a whole" (Cameron, 2009, p. 28).

**Retention of Indigenous Students in PSE**

> "Success must be determined not only by how well the student does, but also by how well the system does, and how well the system is able to meet the needs of the student."
> (Brathwaite, 2003, p. 103)

Retention of Indigenous students includes "early identification of supports coupled with early and continuous interventions" (Cameron, 2009, p. 11), including the availability of the supports throughout their whole university experience. It cannot be assumed that each student will take the first step needed to pursue the help needed: universities need to be proactive in meeting with the student, outlining the supports, and walking the student to the centres of academic, personal and social supports (Cameron, 2009, p. 11). These supports are generally delivered through Aboriginal initiatives administrative offices and Aboriginal student resource centres, which are dedicated to increasing Indigenous student recruitment and retention.

These centres provide encouragement and guidance while providing a sense of belonging to students who may feel "that the university environment differs greatly from, or is alien to, environments in which they had previously lived" (Malatest, 2010, p. 28). Staff at these centres are trained to support Indigenous students and may include a coordinator, transitions advisor, cultural coordinator, Elders in residence, outreach and recruitment officer, access program coordinator and academic supports, who have the specific skills necessary to work with Indigenous students throughout the whole university experience. These duties range from being responsible for "recruitment, enrollment, and transitioning to post-secondary studies, and finally assisting students to graduation" (Long & Hachkowski, 2015, p. 10-11). As DeGagné (2002) explains:

> some universities have recognized the needs of [Indigenous] students and have responded in a variety of ways: establishing support services on campus; establishing new academic

programs for [Indigenous] people; working with [Indigenous] communities to offer

programs within communities; and modifying admissions protocols for [Indigenous]

programs. These adaptations, along with tutoring, counseling and financial services form

a support service network which some argue, promote the participation and persistence of

[Indigenous] students. Undeniably many of these programs have helped, although they

are not widespread within the Canadian university system. (pp. 17-18)

Relationships between students and the faculty, staff, and peers can improve student persistence

in post-secondary environments. These connections ensure, "education becomes a shared

activity, and in this way becomes more relevant to the First Nations [Metis and Inuit] learner"

(DeGagné, 2002, pp. 18-19; see also Brown & Burdsal, 2012; Nipissing University, 2015).

Another aspect for Indigenous student retention is program evaluation. Access programs

need student voices in the creation, evaluation and evolution of these programs (Brathwaite,

2003). Community voices are equally important including Elders and community role models

that can empower the success of these programs (Long & Hachkowski, 2015). While program

evaluation and community engagement are very important to the success of access programs, it

is also important to address barriers to Indigenous students' success. Cameron (2009) encourages

universities to look at their programs and services and ask the following five reflective questions:

1. Do the supports and services help bond students to students?

2. Do the supports and services help bond students to the university?

3. Do the supports and services identify academic or social areas in need of assistance?

4. Do the supports and services remediate areas in need of assistance?

5. Do the supports and services continue throughout the post-secondary experience? (pp. 11-12)

These questions fit with the access program model. Elements of the model include a holistic

approach for supporting the student's academic, cultural, personal and financial needs, and

enabling students to focus on their studies, which decreases the likelihood of them leaving their

post-secondary studies (Malatest, 2010, see also Cameron, 2009; Long & Hachkowski, 2015;

Rosenbluth, 2011).

Long and Hachkowski (2015) add several other factors to enhance student success. For

example, role models help Indigenous students to see themselves reflected in other Indigenous

people who have done what they are trying to accomplish. DeGagné (2002) asserts that programs

that reflect history, culture, worldview or language back to the students augment their success

and retention (p. 18). These program factors exist alongside the move within universities toward

hiring Indigenous faculty, staff and other role models, and implementing Indigenous Content

Requirements (Brathwaite, 2003; Long & Hachkowski, 2015). These factors also exist within the

contexts of program oversight, which consider student retention and program viability.

**Program Reviews**

In 2006, Connie Hartviksen held dual positions within Lakehead University as the

interim coordinator of the NAP and the Coordinator for the Native Nurses Entry Program.

During her tenure, she created the *Native Access Program, Lakehead University:*

*Recommendations for Improvement* report, that included an overview and explanation of the

program to help improve the delivery (Hartviksen, 2006, p. 1). Hartvikesen offers ten areas of

recommendation for NAP:

1. NAPs Fit Within the University's Strategic Plan

2. Vision and Mission Statement for NAP

3. NAP Staff

4.  NAP Teaching Faculty

5.  Clear Lines of Reporting

6.  Consistent Policies and Procedures

7.  Cohesiveness and a Place to Call Home

8.  NAP Curriculum–Current and Proposed

9.  Testing/Student Assessment

10. Adequate Program Funding and Ability to Seek External Funds if Necessary

According to this report, the NAP still has some work to do to fulfill the recommendations to create a fully successful access program for Indigenous students.

In 2002, Lakehead University tasked the Vice President and Provost to form a task force "to review the Native Access Program and to make recommendations concerning the program's role in assisting the University in its commitment to 'working with Aboriginal peoples in furthering their educational aspirations'" (Barrett et al., 2003, p. 6). They struck a task force to address the concern of student success in the NAP and success in completion of a university degree. The 2003 Report to the Native Access Task Force was drafted by six members—a member of administration, a dean, two professors, a NAP student and a NAP alumna. This report examines the recruitment and selection processes, competition of other PSIs and a historical review of the admission process. The authors made thirteen recommendations. Importantly, task force members recommend joint recruitment efforts among access programs, curriculum enhancements, external university partnerships with Aboriginal Institutes and a fully established distance access program so Indigenous students do not have to leave their communities (Barrett et al., 2003, pp. 3-4).

The reports from these two program reviews have prompted some changes to the NAP; however, some recommendations remain outstanding. The NAP and all programs at Lakehead University, with appropriate funding and resources, could feasibly implement the recommended changes, and they would support student success.

**Moving Forward**

> "It is important to help students to see relationships between what they are learning in school and their lived realities so that they can increasingly have faith in both themselves and in their education." (Brathwaite, 2013, pp. 98-99)

This literature review introduced an historical and contemporary overview of Indigenous education across Canada, discussing the Indigenous and Western worldview of 'success,' and it provided an introduction and overview of access programs. This study adds to the extant literature by providing access program educators' perspectives about how their programs support Indigenous student success. To review the literature, I used the following data bases: Ebscohost, Proquest, Google Scholar. Within these data bases, I used the following search terms: Indigenous, Native, Indian, Native American, Aboriginal, access program transition program, foundations programs, transitions year program. In the next chapter, I describe the methodology and methods that I used for this study.

**Chapter 3: Methodology**

Kovach (2009) states that "one's methodological choice should encompass both theory and methods" (p. 122). I approach this research as theory and methods that are intertwined and related to each other. To illustrate how I conducted this qualitative study, I begin by describing the Indigenous methodologies I used, and then place the study within a desire-based framework (Tuck, 2009). Next, I position myself within my community, career and academic contexts. After looking at these contexts, I describe the design of this study, and the methods, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations. I start by describing the methodology used for this study.

**Indigenous Métissage Methodology**

This study is informed by Indigenous Métissage (Donald, 2012, Kovach, 2009; Lowan-Trudeau, 2012) as methodology. Wilson (2001) states, an Indigenous methodology is "talking about relational accountability" and "answering to all your relations when you are doing research" (p. 177). Wilson explains relational accountability where the central tenet is that 'knowledge is relational' and is to be shared with all creation. Relational accountability is not only between humans but with the cosmos, animals, plants and the earth in which we share knowledge which "goes beyond the idea of individual knowledge to the concept of relational knowledge" (Wilson, 2001, pp. 176-177).

Kovach (2009) concurs with this approach and commitment to relational accountability. She writes, "Indigenous epistemologies live within a relational web, and all aspects of them must be understood from that vantage point" (p.57). Kovach describes this web as "non-fragmented, holistic nature, focusing on the metaphysical and pragmatic, on language and place, and on values and relationships…. they are all bound by the relational" (p. 57). Kovach discusses Indigenous methodologies as 'action-oriented', where life is lived by certain values that include

kindness, friendliness, and someone who puts others first to name a few, that reflect "a holistic, value-based knowledge system that consistently returns to the responsibilities of maintaining good relations" (p. 63).

Donald's (2012) explanation of Indigenous Métissage corresponds with Wilson (2001) and Kovach's (2009) focus on the relationality of research. He states that we need "to enact ethical relationality as a philosophical commitment" (p. 535). This is an ecological recognition that human relationships do not deny differences but explores to understand how our different experiences and histories puts us in relation to one another (Donald, 2012, p. 535). I also chose Métissage, as Donald (2012) explains the in-between space he occupies in his research:

> My particular problem, in terms of identity and belonging, is that I have been led to believe that I cannot live my life as though I am both an Aboriginal person and the grandson of European settlers.... there has been considerable pressure to choose sides, to choose a life inside or outside the walls of the fort. (p. 534)

I connect to Indigenous Métissage through my personal and family history. Like Donald, as I work in a PSI and am of mixed heritage, this methodology fits my life and work contexts. I too have a "strong desire to speak, write, teach, and act with a spirit and intent that enable[s] me to assert Indigenous philosophies and ways, while also drawing on the diverse influences and affiliations that have constituted my life" (p. 535). As Lowan-Trudeau (2012) asserts, "As people of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry, we are not either/or, we are both at the same time, simultaneously colonizer and colonized" (p. 114). Recognizing this space, I occupy, I conduct this research "to make things better, that hopefully there will be an outcome that will be useful to the community in some way" (Absolon & Willett, 2005, p. 103). For me, it is important that I am transparent with whom I am and where I come from and how my own experiences, attitudes and

beliefs informed how I conducted this study and understanding that I come from these two worldviews. It is the commitment of many of the Indigenous students I have worked with over the past six years to live those values into their academic careers.

This research is for the benefit of the community (Weber-Pillwax, 2004, p. 80). Ultimately, my purpose is to improve access programming in the NAP at Lakehead. My goal is to find approaches that support Indigenous students' success in access programs across Canada. Weber-Pillwax (2004) reminds me of the responsibility "that goes along with carrying out a research project in the community I have decided to work within" and "I am accepting responsibility and accountability for the impact of the project on the lives of the community members with whom I will be working" (Weber-Pillwax, 2004, p. 79). To activate my responsibility to Lakehead University and the NAP, I use this thesis to continue to re-imagine a program that reflects the needs of communities and their students.

**Desire-Based Research Framework**

I see this research as a way to support Indigenous students' pathways into PSE through a lens of what positive impact this can have for the next generations who will enter these access programs (Wilson, 2001, p. 175; see also Kovach 2009, p. 21). Looking at the positive impacts this research could have, follows Tuck's (2009) description of damage-based and desire-based frameworks. Tuck (2009) argues that historically, research on Indigenous peoples has "been damaged centered, intent on portraying our neighborhoods and tribes as defeated and broken" (p. 412) causing our spaces and places to become seen as saturated in the fantasies of outsiders. Damaged-centered research aims to document the "pain or loss in an individual, community, or tribe" (Tuck, 2009, p. 413). It invites the oppressed to speak from the margins, showing deprivation, documenting pain and loss to "explain contemporary brokenness such as poverty,

poor health, and low literacy" (p. 413). Further, damage-centered research "operates, even benevolently, from a theory of change that establishes harm or injury in order to achieve reparation" (p. 413). As an antidote, Tuck (2009) asserts:

> One alternative to damage-centered research is to craft our research to capture desire instead of damage....desire-based framework is an antidote to damage-centered research. An antidote stops and counteracts the effects of a poison…. desire-based research frameworks are concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives. (p. 416)

A desire-based framework allows for the expression of social realities, with emphasis on the wisdom and hope of what is good in Indigenous communities. A desire-based framework sees beyond the "experiences of dispossessed and disenfranchised communities so that [Indigenous] people are seen as more than broken and conquered" (p. 416). In Chapter 5, I use wise practices (Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou, 2010) to apply a desire-based framework (Tuck, 2009) to this study. Building on my earlier description of wise practices, "wise practices are locally-appropriate actions, tools, principles or decisions that contribute significantly to the development of sustainable and equitable social conditions" (Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou, 2010, p. 19). Indigenous scholars assert a need to re-invigorate "wise practices" and engage community members, such as youth, educators, and Elders in a reassertion of fundamental belief structures, values and ceremonial practices (Calliou, 2005; Cowan, 2008; Little Bear, 1998, 2004; Redpath & Neilsen, 1997; Warner & Grint, 2006). Having the framework in place, I next describe the steps I took to collect data for this study.

**Data Collection**

To begin the data collection process, I gained support from the Interim Vice-Provost (Aboriginal Initiatives) and then approval from the Research Ethics Board (REB) at Lakehead University. My data collection instrument included conversation as a method, an informal form of interviewing that does not use a formalized interview guide and requires that the researcher participate, more like a conversation happens. Kovach (2009) describes this approach as 'conversation as method', which gives educators control over what they want to say and share and shows respect for their story (p. 124). I used this method by offering guiding questions to participants (see Interview Guide, Appendix C). As noted previously, these questions were based in Alcorn and Levin (2000) and Antone's (2001) concepts of academic, cultural, and personal supports that explore the strategies, resources, and networks of support that access programs offer Indigenous students.

Still, I expected educator participants to lead the conversation in storied ways that gave me a sense of what was important to them. My prepared questions ensured that I covered many aspects of the access programs with participants. The conversational approach along with prepared questions or topics allowed me to explore and understand access programs holistically through conversations with educators in these programs across Canada. I received permission from the educators to record the interviews and on average, each interview took approximately one hour. Interviews were held at each of the educators' respective institutions.

To conduct relational research (Kovach, 2009), I began each conversation in a good way, from the protocols I have learned (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001, p. 12). Protocols included reaching out to educators to invite them to participate by email and then following up with a phone call. I explained to them my role in this research and why it is important to me because of

my work in access programs. I went over the participant information and consent forms with each educator. I listened intently during our conversations and encouraged comments from the educators by probing for clarity and understanding. To demonstrate the value of reciprocity, I offered medicines and a small gift to show my appreciation for the time and words that educators share with me. I also offered a copy of this thesis to each educator as it is a part of their contribution to access programming in Canada.

**Locating a Sample, Participants, and Site Description**

To find educators for my study, I conducted an environmental scan of the Universities Canada website. I looked for access programs for post-secondary students in Canada. My priority was for access programs that serve Indigenous students. I also considered access programs that served a large population of Indigenous students. From these criteria, I found four universities that were located in different provinces of Canada and served Indigenous students as their student population. I reached out to access program staff at these institutions. All four responded that they were willing to take part in my study. Interviews with educators within access programs took place at the program site. The educators held various positions (for example, managing the day-to-day administration and finances, staffing, teaching, mentoring students, liaising inside and outside the university, advocating, and counselling).

***Characteristics of the Four Access Programs: Site Description***

Table 1 below, Access Program Characteristics, outlines seven salient features of each of the programs offered at four sites. These features are: the population of students the program serves, tuition requirements, admissions requirements, application processes, credits that can be obtained, the location of the program, and financial supports available.

Table 1

*Access Program Characteristics*

|  | Dalhousie University | University of Alberta | University of Manitoba | University of Toronto |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Who is the program for: | African Canadian and Aboriginal Students | Indigenous students | University of Manitoba Access Program (UMAP): Any resident of Manitoba may apply. Preference given to Aboriginal people, residents of Northern Manitoba and low-income earners, and newcomers.<br><br>Health Careers Access Program (HCAP): prepares Indigenous (Metis, Status, Non-Status, Inuit) residents of Manitoba for entry to health-related professions.<br><br>Professional Health Program (PHP): supports Indigenous (Metis, Status, Non-Status, Inuit) residents of Manitoba pursuing health-related professions.[7]<br>ICSWP: Indigenous, immigrant/refugees and newcomers. | For adults who do not have the formal qualifications for university admission. Actively encourage Native-Canadian, African-Canadian, and LGBTQ communities, sole-support parents, persons with disabilities and individuals from working-class backgrounds. |
| Tuition: | Waiver: all African Nova Scotian, | $1000 additional program fee; assists | $4700.00 + (30 credit hours) | -$5750 for Regular Program |

[7] https://umextended.ca/access/

|  | Dalhousie University | University of Alberta | University of Manitoba | University of Toronto |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | status, non-status Aboriginal and Metis students accepted into the program may be eligible for a tuition waiver. | with cost of program resources, social & cultural events which allow the "campus to feel more like a community and creating a home away from home." (webpage). -$8673.00 (tuition and books) | ICSWP: $5600 (33 Credit Hours, full course load)[8] | -additional $2860 for Extended Program. |
| Admissions: | Admission criteria is flexible.<br><br>-Each application is reviewed on its own merits.<br><br>-Maturity and seriousness of purpose are vital components of TYP success (webpage). | Provide proof of Aboriginal Ancestry.<br><br>-18 years old<br>-Minimum mark of 50% in each required subject, with a minimum overall 60% average.<br><br>-Each faculty route has specific high school subject requirements. | Students must qualify for regular University entrance or be mature students (21 years of age or older and admissible to University 1).<br><br>Full-time & Part-time: Have inner-city or similar experience, employed by a social service agency in Winnipeg or by an Aboriginal child welfare agency, minimum 2 years Canadian employment in the social/human/health care services field, or Three years extensive Canadian volunteer work with one year of relevant Canadian employment, demonstrate suitability for the | No fixed standard, considers each application individually to assess the need of candidates. Considerations for each applicant include level of motivation, commitment and academic promise, existing academic skills.<br>-Min. Requirements: 19 Years of age by Sept. 30 of admission year, away from regular high school for at least one year, excludes academic upgrading, must have left school early for reason connected with social or economic difficulties, illnesses or some other personal problem mainly beyond their |

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[8] The University of Manitoba hosts four Access Programs, three through Extended Education that include: University of Manitoba Access Program (UMAP), Health Careers Access Program (HCAP), and Professional Health Program (PHP) (https://umextended.ca/access/). The Inner-City Social Work Program is a program specific access program, off-campus, that leads to a University of Manitoba Bachelor of Social Work degree (https://umanitoba.ca/faculties/social_work/programs/inner_city/598.html).

| | Dalhousie University | University of Alberta | University of Manitoba | University of Toronto |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | social work profession. | control. At least two high school courses at Grade 11 or higher in academic subjects. |
| Application process: | Application form (paper). -Three reference forms. -Academic - Transcripts -Personal statement | Application form (paper/pdf or online) -Letter of intent -Documentation of all previous education (official or unofficial transcripts) -Two reference letters. | Must submit two applications: one to the UM and one to the AP. -Application form (paper or online). -Transcripts -Two reference forms. -Deadline: April 1st, midnight. -Application form (paper/pdf). -3 references -Autobiography -Post-secondary transcripts. | Application form (paper/pdf) -Two references -All official transcripts (high school and post-secondary) -Personal statement -Proof of status (non-citizen permanent residents of Canada or Convention Refugees) -Writing sample (supervised writing sample after all application materials are submitted. Topic given in a limited time. No special preparation is necessary). -No fee to apply. |
| Credits: | No credits for courses | 18 (24 for Education) credits completed will be transferable to degree program. -Credits, open credits | HCAP take general first year to include a min. Of 21 credit hours and max. Of 24 credit hours (students then streamed to faculty of choice). | -2.5 FCE |
| Dedicated space: | Yes, a house. | Yes, TYP office and lounge. | No, located in Migizii Agamik (Bald Eagle Lodge) at UM's Fort Garry Campus. | Yes, a house. |
| Financial support: | Can apply for university bursaries and financial | Can apply for scholarships including the | Can apply for scholarships and bursaries. | Can apply for bursaries and scholarships. |

|  | Dalhousie University | University of Alberta | University of Manitoba | University of Toronto |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | assistance during the transition year. | Indigenous Entrance Scholarship, Faculty and department awards as well as access to First Peoples' House which lists additional awards and funding options on their website. -Band funded -Student loan funded. | -Band Funded -Student Loan Funded.<br><br>ICSWP: -ACCESS Bursary -Band Funded -Student Loan Funded. | -OSAP -Band Funded[9] |

Taken together, these four access programs served a variety of students. These programs vary on features such as tuition, admission standards, application process, credits obtained, dedicated space and financial support, among other things. Students may be eligible for INAC funding called the University and College Entrance Preparation Program that "aims to increase the number of First Nations and Inuit students with the academic level required for entrance into post-secondary programs."[10]

The educators developed relationships with funders and others within the universities where they worked. In the next table, Table 2—Educator Profiles, I introduce the educators and share information about their roles, while maintaining the anonymity that some requested by using pseudonyms for some of the educators. It provides demographic data about the educators at each of the sites—their roles/positions, gender, and years worked within access programs. Other positions—people I did not interview—are also shown.

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[9] Band funded also known as Post-Secondary Student Support Program was created by the Canadian Government. It "aims to improve the employability of First Nations and eligible Inuit students by providing them with funding to access education and skills development opportunities at the post-secondary level." "Funding is administered by the First Nation, or the First Nations or Inuit designated organization that determines the funding selection criteria" (https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1100100033682/1531933580211).

[10] (https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1100100033688/1531936422341).

Table 2

*Educator Profiles*

| University | Roles/Position | Gender | Years worked |
|---|---|---|---|
| Dalhousie University | Director | 1 Male<br>3 Females | 11 Years<br>12 Years<br>20 Years<br>25 Years |
| | Assistant Director | | |
| | Program Assistant | | |
| | Professor | | |
| | Former Director | | |
| University of Alberta | Program Coordinator | 2 Females | 5 Years<br>14 Years |
| | Instructor | | |
| University of Manitoba | | 1 Male<br>6 Females | 9 Months<br>7 Years<br>7 Years<br>9 Years<br>15 Years<br>26 Years<br>29 Years |
| | Directors | | |
| | Former Director | | |
| | Instructors | | |
| | Academic Advisor | | |
| | Selection coordinator | | |
| | Community liaison | | |
| | Recruitment | | |
| University of Toronto | Director | 1 Male<br>2 Females | 6 Months<br>9 Years<br>40 Years |
| | Assistant Director | | |
| | Register | | |
| | Instructor | | |
| | Professor | | |

Strikingly, most educators have held their positions within the access program for seven

years or more: their years of experience total 230 years. The shortest tenured educator in a

program is 6 months and the longest is 40 years, both at the University of Toronto (Transitional

Year Programme). Thirteen women and three men participated in the study. Women educators

outnumbered men in all programs, by at least a 2:1 ratio. Importantly, all educators held multiple

roles within the access programs. For example, one educator was an instructor in the program

and held the position of Registrar in their specific access program. Because some educators did

not want to be identified, I did not place each educator within a specific institution (only in

certain instances, i.e. if they specifically gave me permission). This snapshot of the educators

within each of the four programs shows the variety and commonalities among the programs and

the educator/participants.

Sixteen educators took part in the study. Tables 1 and 2 in Chapter 4 provide snapshots

of the universities, programs, and educators that comprise the sample for this study.

**Data Analysis**

All data were transcribed and then printed. In total, there were 214 pages of data. The

longest interview was two hours twenty-six minutes, the shortest interview was twenty-one

minutes, and the average was one hour and twelve minutes. Transcripts of the interviews were

coded and analyzed manually. Data were analyzed through a qualitative analysis process

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I coded and analyzed the transcripts by searching for common

themes, patterns and ideas that emerged from the interviews/conversations. Next, I cut out each

interview by theme and taped them by categories on large sheets of paper. Then I re-coded to

ensure I had captured all relevant themes and what themes could be collapsed. Once this process

was finished, I sent my thematic interpretations to the educators for member-checking (Merriam

& Tisdell, 2016, p 246). Seven educators responded with comments. I included their comments

into my analysis. I explore the four themes that emerged as findings in Chapter 4.

**Assumptions**

We each carry our own assumptions in our lives. Kovach (2009) explains that we carry our conceptual framework with us, which is neither good nor bad; however, it is necessary we recognize that we employ this framework when we view data. Understanding this is "an individual and collective process" (p. 42). I am aware of the way I look at the world and how my own life may impact my research. To counter my biases, I member-checked (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 246) the data findings with participants to ensure that I conveyed their ideas.

A second assumption I held is that because I am the coordinator of the Native Access Program at Lakehead University, I am embedded in the program, therefore I have an insider perspective. I came to these interviews with some advantage as I understand the structure of the programs, and how they are connected to the larger university. I may have missed some aspects from the interviews because I am so entrenched in the access program, maybe not paying close enough attention to things like relationships between peers and how educators may be involved in fostering those relationships, for example.

A third assumption I held is that research participants would share and be as open and honest as possible about the strengths and weakness (and possibly the retention rates) of their access programs. Beyond assumptions I carry, there are also ethical considerations to note, which are described below.

**Ethical Considerations**

Beyond the ethics approvals noted above, I acknowledge a grant from Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) though Lakehead University. This grant supported my travel to interview participants at the four access programs of this thesis.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I described the methodology I used called Métissage (Donald, 2012; Kovach, 2009, Lowan-Trudeau, 2012; Wilson, 2001). Métissage is guided by remembering the importance of relationships, being accountable to those who participated in this research, and by explaining who I am and the worldviews I hold. I applied Tuck's (2009) desire-based framework, by acknowledging the challenges that access programs face within PSIs yet focusing on improving the NAP access program I run at Lakehead University. I discussed assumptions of bias and the member checking I did with participants to counter this bias. For ethical considerations, I shared that this study received funding for travel from Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). The participants I interviewed welcomed these approaches and they led to rich findings which I will share in the following chapter. As a reminder, I refer to participants as educators.

## Chapter 4: Findings: What the Educators Said

This chapter provides tables that show the access program characteristics of the sites for this study, educator profiles to introduce the educators, and the themes that emerged from their interviews. The first two sections offer contexts for the study and illuminate differences and similarities—the complexities that emerge through the participants' interview data. The characteristics of access programs reveal where the conversations for this research took place.

Within the contexts of funding and the broader universities that housed access programs, as well as the educators' roles, each participant discussed his or her work for Indigenous students. Their rich responses to questions elicited four themes. Relationships ran through all themes. In the sections that follow, I show how the educators described how relationships are central to their work in the access programs.

**Themes**

Four themes emerged from the rich conversations that I had with educators:

1. *Building and maintaining relationships with students*

2. *Responding to the whole student*

3. *Empowering students*, and

4. *Fostering success*

These themes recurred among participants and highlighted approaches to student need.

**Building and Maintaining Relationships with Students**

The educators at each university expressed the importance of relationships with students. In relationships with students, educators talked about their student support process in three ways: 1) building relationships by supporting each student; 2) solidifying the relationship through caring about their lives, 3) maintaining relationships through food, feasting, and events

throughout the year. Educators at all universities expressed the importance of connecting with students individually and creating community among students. Patti shares an example of what creating community looks like: "what I try to do is establish a sense of community in the class and be open to students for them to come and see me if they have issues". Many educators expanded on this idea of community as connecting with students individually, which is explored next as building relationships.

For building relationships, educators reflected on the differences between students in each new cohort and the importance of honouring students' lived experiences and building genuine, lasting relationships with students (i.e. Adrienne, Nicky, Diane, L.A.). Every year there is a mix of mature students, aged 19 or 21 and sometimes older, or high school graduates who took college-level credits rather than university-level credits in high school who take an extra year to gain credits for university admittance. Some students have families with small children or teenagers, and some are single parents or newly independent from parents and community. The next section shows how educators described building and maintaining relationships with students and groups, solidifying these relationships, and maintaining them, a process that builds a rapport between educators and students.

### *Building Relationships*

Educators shared how they built relationships with students by providing opportunities to have their voices heard and offer support, whether academic, cultural or personal. Adrienne explained how students have the opportunity provide feedback on their educational journey:

> We used to have student assemblies twice a year. We would provide lunch and bring them all together and encourage them to come out to socialize and provide us with feedback on the program supports. The staff would ask informal questions such as; "This was what we offered this year, and this is kind of what we've done. What do you think worked well and what do you think we need to improve upon? It was kind of like an informal evaluation. That gave the students an opportunity to talk with us and let us know

what was really awful, don't do it again (both laugh), or what worked well for them. It's really important because I always think the more opportunities, we can create to have student voice in program development, the better.... Try something new, evaluating, and [asking] what do you [students] think worked well and what do you think we [educators] need to improve upon? You always kind of have to be in a process of change in order to be responsive.

Similarly, for Lakehead's NAP's intake process, students are assessed as they apply; we ask them to describe their goals for attending NAP. The coordinator reviews their responses, and then students are invited for a personal interview to check their desire to achieve graduation in the program. While not all access students graduate, every educator I interviewed strived to know who was coming into their program and understand their needs, strengths and weaknesses in order to support them effectively.

### *Solidifying the Relationship Through Caring*

Educators solidify relationships with students by showing them that they genuinely care about their lives. As Noddings (2012) explains, caring is:

> an encounter or sequence of encounters that can appropriately be called caring, [when] one party acts as a carer and the other as cared-for…. Although these potentially caring relations are not equal, both parties contribute to the establishment and maintenance of caring. (p. 772)

Each of our lives starts with a relationship, "and it is through relations that a human individual emerges" (Noddings, 2012, p. 771).

Educators in all the access program understand the need to build and then work to solidify relationships and community. Most do this by assigning each student a personal counsellor and academic advisor with whom they have a set number of mandatory meetings per semester. One educator described how students begin to solidify relationships with educators in the program through those mandatory meetings. Nicky shared the value of having students step

into her office even if it only meant she could see their faces and know they are still around, and doing okay, "even if they have no problems, they can go in and say, I have no problems, just want to check in".

In these regular meetings students can celebrate successes or ask for extra support, whether it is in their personal or academic life, or culturally. Sometimes it is because they were raised in urban centres with little access to cultural experiences or their First Nation, Metis or Inuit communities, and sometimes it goes back to influences from intergenerational trauma that results from Indian Residential Schools. These are important conversations, and educators are trained to respond to students' concerns. These discussions also provide space for students and educators to get to know each other, even if they have 'no problems.'

Educators work to support students to meet academic standards set out by the programs, and they are frequently challenged by student absences or silence. A holistic approach along with getting to know students relationally gives educators an opportunity to connect with them about problems early on. Educators need to know whether a student has a young family or is a single parent, whether they struggle with math or are working and going to school at the same time. Ongoing conversations to build relationships help give students who find it difficult to reach out an opportunity to seek help and provide a safe space for them. In these regular encounters, educators share empathy and express an understanding of student's needs and living circumstances.

Several participants explained that students are also encouraged to meet with resident Elders. Educators assured students that Elders, whether they were in residence daily or weekly as supports, were there to help them on their learning journey. As Diane explained,

> even the personal counselling, it's not about getting therapy or anything, it's like what
> Nicky said, it's about them developing the relationships, so that when something does

> happen in their life, they'll feel more comfortable, and it's also a way for our staff to pre-
> empt, or maybe catch on that something might not be going well.

L.A. explained how she worked to model and create a sense of community among faculty, staff

and peers. She shared with students that the journey through academia is not a competition:

> I tell them at the beginning of the year; you know look to your left, look to your right,
> let's make sure that that person is there at graduation when you look to your left and look
> to your right that that very same person is still sitting beside you, so almost like that
> personal responsibility without saying you have to develop a personal responsibility.

While L.A. focused building personal responsibility among students, Melanie discussed the role

of educators as carers as a basic need for students. She shared:

> It really is as basic as that, knowing that someone cares. Someone cares, and we're still
> here. And sometimes that email will lead to a meeting and just a check in with them.
> Sometimes that leads to people switching programs, or at least dropping a course and
> taking a different one. So, sometimes it will be a major change that happens from just that
> little check in. Educators care can go a long way in supporting and empower[ing]
> Indigenous students in access programs.

Yvonne explained that another way that educators could solidify relationships with

students and show their caring was through their monthly staff meetings. In the Inner-City Social

Work Program, educators dedicate two hours a month to talking about student issues, the good

and the bad. This gave educators in the program a general sense of each student's progress. They

were briefed through these meetings on the most effective way to support their students. Yvonne

shared, "then we can support them to get through whatever it is they're getting through to be

back into a classroom and participating fully again". At Lakehead University, we also conduct

regular meetings with educators. Similarly, we meet individually with students to keep good

relationships going throughout their time in the program, through their undergraduate studies,

and beyond, or to listen to concerns in areas we are not privy to every day.

Wanda talked about how they provided support for students who left the access program because of life circumstances and returned later. She shared how "we follow their educational journey right up until the end [to graduation]." It was clear during my conversations with access program educators that caring is not only confined to when students begin their educational journey, or when times get tough, but that these relationships are built to last many years. L.A. describes below how even their personal lives intertwined and students moved on into undergraduate programs. L.A. shared how she also works a lot with alumni; she explains they do not always feel as connected to the rest of the university, so:

> They often come back and so there's no way in determining how many students I'm actually helping at any given time because it's just constant, they're calling me, they're texting me, they're coming to my door, they're emailing me, there's a lot of pull on me.

Creating this space where students feel comfortable to return in times of need, or to stop by to say hi and share their successes means a lot to students, and it gives them a sense of belonging (L.A.). I learned through the educators and readings for this research that even if some do not feel like they belong to the larger university community, they still feel they have a 'home' within the access program. Many of these educators' dedication to students, for them it was more than just a job. It becomes a genuine family experience because so much time and energy are invested in creating these spaces of safety and caring. Jackie expressed this idea,

> that's been one of selling feature of the Transition Year Program is that, like once you're here, it's like joining a family, and so we're always supported, I mean the [TYP] house is open and anyone really can come in and use the lounge or the kitchen or use the study space and a lot of students do come back, especially in the year after they graduate, but even in subsequent years to just chat or just to have a familiar and friendly place .

Diane, L.A., and Melanie reflect that caring went beyond just being an educator in an access program. They expressed reaching out to students as an important part of solidifying relationships between student and educators through caring. Educators recognized that each

interaction with them could change the course of a student's life. Jackie, Melanie, Wanda and

L.A. expressed a strong sense of connectedness through the relationships they were building with

students. These educators shared the characteristics of a 'carer' that Noddings (2012) described.

Educators interests were not based solely in the "needs assumed by the school as an institution

and the curriculum as a prescribed course of study" (Noddings, 2012, p.772). They understood

Indigenous students may have different needs and provided them within a caring environment in

which those needs could be met effectively (Noddings, 2012, p. 772). They understood that a

caring relationship allows educators to "best meet individual needs, impart knowledge, and

encourage the development of moral people" (Noddings, 2012, p. 777).

Educators were attentive, watched students as they made their way through the program,

listened well, reflected on student's needs with their teams, and then responded to what they

learned. They encouraged the students to express their needs and gave them safe spaces in which

to do this. However, some educators expressed meeting institutional needs, which sometimes did

not align with meeting students' holistic needs.

Tensions arise because Indigenous students are humans, with lives outside of the

institution, who carry intergenerational trauma. With that, Debra shared some wisdom on how to

do things a bit differently:

> we're a university program with supports but if the issues [that students have] are too
> intensive or the level is so high that we just don't have the staff here to deal with those
> kinds of [serious] issues, I don't think any faculty would have that, I'm not just saying us.

She shared that as educators in an access program, her team provided more direct supports than

mainstream programs. At the same time, access program educators need to balance student

supports within the context of the university, mindful they are not a social service agency.

Educators need to engage in caring relationships while understanding the limits of the support

they can offer to students. Debra explained further,

> Sometimes we have to clarify what our role is here in terms of education and yeah; we
> deal in social services, but we are not a social service agency, we're an education institute
> and we're a university that is trying to help people be as successful as possible, are we
> flexible? Probably more so than you might see, maybe not, I don't know. And do we
> have more supports in the full-time programs? Yeah, but we not a social agency, so that
> 'really important to delineate.

Debra identified this tension that was shared by other educators (Adrian, Nicki, Dianne). They

expressed that they provide extra time and supports for access students to succeed in the

program.

The educators solidified relationships with students through various means such as

holding mandatory meetings with students and/or regular meetings with other educators in the

program and prioritized knowing the whole student and the ways to support them best. Mostly,

educators talked about the importance of caring. They showed how they applied Noddings'

(2012) description of caring through an Indigenous, relational approach (Wilson, 2008). This

approach included welcoming students back to the program (Tom), keeping tabs on students

(Dianne, Nicki, L.A., Adrian, Jackie, Yvonne, Michael, Jane, Tom, Suzanne, Nicole), creating a

sense of familial belonging (Jackie), and supporting students (Dianne, Nicki, L.A., Adrian,

Jackie, Yvonne, Michael, Jane, Tom, Suzanne, Nicole). The role of carer came naturally to many

educators (Dianne, Nicki, L.A., Adrian, Jackie, Yvonne, Michael, Jane, Tom, Suzanne, Nicole);

yet, tensions arose with the institutional goals of access programs to get students through in the

specified time period. In the next section, educators expressed how they maintain relationships

with students through sharing food and feasting as a feature of the access programs.

*Maintaining Relationships Through Food and Feasting*

Educators in this study believed that food and feasting was a great way to bring students together as a community. Food and feasting provided a way to create community and ensured that students who experience food insecurity ate a solid meal several times a month, as described by Debra, Suzanne, Isaac and Wanda below. They used food to talk informally, build rapport, and learn about students' lives in informal settings. Debra shared, "food is relationship building... there's something that happens that's different than just having a meeting together." Suzanne reiterated how food brings meaning. She shared about many feasts and food-sharing events throughout the academic year. Suzanne shared, "I always make sure there's something to eat in this space, I know that fulfils the physical need, but it also gives [us] a chance to connect [with the students]". Providing resources for students to get food is also important for access program educators such as Isaac and Wanda, especially if students are pregnant or have young children at home. Isaac described that they, "have had students in the program who…[are] pregnant and we want to make sure their nutrition is taken care of, so they have access to all of that. It is about sharing together like a family and food security for some students. Overall, it is relationship building.

Debra, Suzanne, Isaac and Wanda's responses show that relationships are key to creating a space for Indigenous students. The ways to build relationships are varied, but most include genuine or authentic caring which these educators expressed through sharing food and conversation. From the educator's experiences, each built access program spaces where Indigenous students can feel that they belong.

**Responding to the Whole Student (The Medicine Wheel)**

"The medicine wheel teaches us that we have four aspects to our nature: the physical, the mental, the emotional, and the spiritual. Each of these aspects must be equally developed in a healthy, well-balanced individual through the development and use of volitions (i.e. will)"

(Lane, Bopp, Bopp, Brown & Elders, 2004, p. 12).

By responding to the whole student, and using a medicine wheel approach, access program educators believe they offered students an opportunity to hone their gifts for themselves in the contexts of their families and communities. There are four dimensions of "true learning". These four aspects of every person's nature are reflected in the four cardinal points of the medicine wheel (i.e. north, east, south, and west). To paraphrase Lane et al., they explain: These four aspects of our being are developed through the use of our volition (our will). It cannot be said that a person has totally learned in a whole and balanced manner unless all four dimensions of her being have been involved in the process (Lane, et al., 2004, p. 29). For educators, true learning through the four aspects of being meant responding to the whole student and working in a holistic manner.

Holistic supports in access programs across universities were similar in scope, although there were differences. For example, some programs were larger (i.e. University of Toronto's Transition Year Programme), had more funding, (i.e. Dalhousie University), or had a higher level of supports available to students (i.e. University of Manitoba). Many of the supports offered by Indigenous Student Centres and Student Success Centres (each university had various names for its support centres) are open to all students and access program students were encouraged to use program-specific supports and the general university supports to meet their needs. Importantly, all educators worked across the university community to build relationships with services, faculty, and staff to help meet the holistic needs of students. Suzanne, who has

worked in access for 14 years, explained how she works with services and supports across her

campus to meet the needs of her students  by inviting colleagues from the awards office to work

with students on budgeting and applying for bursaries. Importantly, she invited resource people

to come to the students:

> So, we've got our key people, our key community stakeholders that will come to our
> centre rather than sending students out to different spaces on campus, we bring them here
> and make sure they are able to connect in a space where they [students] feel safe and
> make sure the support that's supposed to be there, is actually there, because sometimes
> we think we do good service and we think we have good resources but when you
> actually send a student down that path to seek those resources it's not as easy… So,
> there's a lot of advocacy that goes on.

Nicole agreed this was a good way to help students learn the new system, especially those

students who were coming from Northern communities:

> For some of the Indigenous students coming from more isolated communities, asking for
> help can be very difficult, so rather than putting them in the position of having to do that,
> just take the initiative and show them, give them the tools so they don't have to ask or be
> forced out of the box because it's hard!

As these educators show, bringing stakeholders to students enhanced relationship building with

other supports from across the university, so students developed relationships with these people

before asking them for supports. All educators in the access programs (Dianne, Nicki, L.A.,

Adrian, Jackie, Yvonne, Michael, Jane, Tom, Suzanne, Nicole) discussed the importance of these

relationships with staff and faculty from other departments, as Nicole, Suzanne and Patti

described above. They viewed relationships with staff and faculty from other departments as

importantly as relationships with their students.

Suzanne also worked to build relationships with First Nation funders to chat informally

with funding officers to support students and ensure that they do not fall behind. She says,

> I know a lot of the First Nation funders now and so I'll check in with them, and they'll check in with me and so there's a lot of, sort of an informal network of support that's keeping an eye on the students

Suzanne's example shows how the educators reached out to others, outside the university to support their students and their success in the program**.**

Educators in access programs (Suzanne, Patti, Tom, Debra, and Michael) identified gaps in services the university does not provide: 1. Meeting distinct needs of Indigenous students, 2. Securing financial support, and 3. Providing time for other responsibilities. Although students in access programs have access to services across the university, Suzanne explained that there are frequent gaps in what is available to support Indigenous students:

> We need our clinical social worker, but that person isn't here yet, we're working on that because that's still a gap in terms of dealing with... we have counselling services, literally next door but, you know, they're not necessarily really well versed in how to deal with intergenerational trauma [that Indigenous students may bring with them] and things like that so we need someone that is knowledgeable about our student's unique needs.

Students who have experienced intergenerational trauma need counselling services for healing, growth and success in academia. Students in several access programs, (i.e. Dalhousie University and Lakehead University), take mandatory Indigenous Studies courses on the history of Indigenous peoples. Often, access students have not been exposed to Indigenous perspectives of history. Students may experience anger and sadness when they learn about the history of this country. Yes, it will give them understanding about the colonization of their families' lives; but, for many, it is a difficult experience. Educators find that students continue to bring intergenerational trauma due to IRS. Qualified counsellors are needed to help students to overcome emotional trauma about their families.

Students in the Transitional Year Program at Dalhousie University are sometimes supported financially, and Patti explains:

> We are... provide[ing] the notion of financial support through living allowances and things like that. If students have difficulties making ends meet, they can go and see Isaac about that. We try to take care of all of their issues.

Educators in the NAP at Lakehead know that many students are financially challenged. Although Lakehead offers grants and bursaries for students, the access program does not provide financial support. Like other access programs, such at the University of Toronto and Dalhousie University, NAP provides time for students to attend appointments. Some educators, like Tom and Debra, had an ability to schedule classes with a morning or afternoon off each week for students to attend doctor's or childcare appointments. Tom explains, "at the moment we've managed to keep their Thursday mornings free, but that sort of not has always been the case. We've made an effort to reduce the pressure [on our students]".

Debra uses another approach to meet student needs in her program. "They usually have about a day and a half off per week to do parenting, appointments, doctors, stuff". At Lakehead, I too have scheduled classes to ensure students have early afternoons, or half days to address demands outside of school. Michael shared a rationale for this flexible scheduling in the access program that he worked in:

> The classes are scheduled around students' needs....Instead of having the same class three times a week, at whatever time is convenient for the computer to put it in, the class usually happens, half credit, or a half year course, a three-credit hour course, will just take place once a week and it will be at a time for those students who have children, which in the first year is most. They'll have enough time to get their children to school and class will start here at 9:30 am, and then they're done for the day by 3:30 pm.

In this small way, educators are working to ease some pressures for students, such as scheduling courses that will give them time, for those with children, to be there to get them off to school, or to go to appointments without missing classes.

This section has described how educators work to build and maintain relationships with students to create a space where they will open up and feel safe to ask for what they need to be

successful in PSE. They do this by providing resources and support to the students within the university and in the community at large. Educators also provide a time for students to have some time off during the week to attend appointments. This was an important aspect of all access programs and educators at each access program worked in various ways to build and maintain their relationships with students. Educators in all programs provided holistic supports to students through the four aspects of being, as I turn to next.

This next section expands upon the four aspects of being (Mental, Emotional, Physical and Spiritual) as true learning (Lane et al., 2004). Participants related true learning through all directions of the Medicine Wheel—north, south, east, west—to provide holistic supports for students. In the sections that follow, I follow the directions as they are laid out by Lane et al. in their book. This shows how the educators described the ways in which they felt that they met the needs of the whole student through the access programs in which they worked.

### *North—Mental*

Some Indigenous students who enter access programs have not learned about Canadian history, particularly colonial policies. Educators (Nicky, Patti, Nicole) agreed that some students had traditional upbringings and others did not; yet, all appeared interested in learning from an Indigenous paradigm. Educators shared that many gave it as a reason for registering in an access program. Nicky shared, "security in their identity…. for some students who come here, they don't have that security, because they don't know much about their history or their background. Patti echoed this idea in her work with students too: "This is what I mean about locating your learning within the work you are doing. Where do you fit with what's happening? Or [doing] something that will advance those interests that I've learned about in school". She does this so

their voices can be heard and understood, so they can learn and understand their histories. She

wants them to know education has something powerful to offer them for their futures.

Nicole shared that:

A lot of terms can be unfamiliar and they're intimidated so rather than just assume that they have that knowledge, you know, just right away, having that workshop, so that even students that do, can get a good start on their papers and not procrastinate.

Likewise, Suzanne brought in academic supports and workshops during orientation. Students

learned about academic skills for their courses. The academic skills Suzanne shared with

students included understanding,

How your brain processes information, you got to do that recall. So, they're already giving students time to think about how they are as learners…we do a lot of talking about learning...learning how you learn and learning what time of day you learn well and what spaces work well for you and finding your study spaces and stuff like that. And then just before the end of September, before exams start, we do another two-hour session of exam strategies.

L.A. agrees that students learn many new skills such as discipline as they weave their

way through an access program. Students become many things with these new-found skills and

their learning can 'fundamentally change their lives':

Many people go on to do business, like do their own entrepreneurial efforts and they learn discipline while they're here at TYP, so those again are transferable skills that allow them to be successful. If you're able to get through to the end of TYP, then for me that's a success rate. I don't know how other people measure the success, but you hear a lot of the students talk about how the program fundamentally changes their life. It makes them believe in things that they never thought was possible.

All universities offered orientation where students were introduced to university life just

before the beginning of the term. L.A. explained how she encourages students to look ahead and

be prepared when in post-secondary, as there is a pattern in behaviours and workloads as they

move through each term. L.A. described the "W effect" that she shares with potential students

during information sessions, reminding them that throughout the year things will get stressful

and thinking and planning, as described by L.A. below, will help (or empower) students to

successfully navigate their time in post-secondary. It gives her students a framework to follow

that helps them understand their mental state as they are navigating academia:

> The beginning of the "W" is where you are [when you start the program]. You're super excited, you're feeling really tall and on top of the world, and then close to around October, you start to slip down and get into the bottom first part of the "W", where fear manifests itself in a way that you don't even know what's happening. Children are sick, partners are leaving partners, family members are going...like, you can't sleep properly, there's stress, it's just manifested as a result of the fears that are coming up and that's when things are like their first midterms or major assignments have all of a sudden come to be due and they're not used to doing this so there not really sure how to handle it. Then they get to the bottom of the first part of "W" and then by December they get to the middle of the "W", as you can see it's not as high as the first part, and they're not as naïve because they've had some experience under their belt (both laugh) and they're just grateful to have gotten here. As the year goes on again, where it's like March, the end of March is where you'll be at the end of the "W" again. If you can hang on and get to May, June you'll be back up again and then it just starts all over again.

The "W effect" offers a mental frame for understanding the process of going through the

program. During each stage, L.A. reminds students to take care of themselves from all aspects of

the medicine wheel—suggestions to eat better, exercise, and to make time for self-care. It is a

time, as she mentions, to prepare for the storm so they will navigate through it and keep the "W

effect" top of mind mentally.

Nicky described that sometimes she only sees students when problems arise because she

is in upper administration in her access program, so she rarely sees students regularly. She says,

> my job would be to see, or meet with the academic advisor and personal counsellor regarding student issues, they'll bring to my attention difficulties that they're having, maybe getting students in to meet with them, or somebody's kind of disappeared, and they don't know what's going on with them and so I'll give them some advice on how to proceed.

She explains that if the issues then become severe, it would immediately go to Diane, as the

problems may affect other areas of the students' success. It may be because of behaviour issues

or emergencies and Diane would then take it to a status team for resolution and

recommendations. This happens quickly, so students can get back on track in their studies. Nicky

explains how this may be done:

> It's really about, sort of trying to find ways to support the students...at the staff level and then when it becomes an issue where they're having difficulties, then I try to help and then if…there's no resolution, or you know...so let's say, for example, a student is, their GPA is really suffering and they're trying to meet with them to talk about it, trying to find ways to help them when the student isn't complying with coming in to talk to them, and at some point we have to send letters or whatever, saying, look you have to meet with the Associate Director now; you know it starts to escalate then. The urgency increases because we want to be able to help them before we lose them.

Providing support to students as they move through the access program and reaching out

to students to ensure that we met their mental aspect seemed important to the educators. Patti

thought it important to teach students to develop the critical skills they need to succeed and to

locate themselves in the analysis. Nicole felt that having workshops prepared ahead of time for

classes that anticipates the students' learning needs was important because it could intimidate

students in a new setting. Nicky shared that providing academic advisors and counselling was

important in meeting the mental aspect of the students while Suzanne shared that teaching

students learning how to learn and the brain science behind it was important to meet this aspect

of the students. Each response and intervention in the mental aspect of student learning varied by

educator, but in their own way each understood the importance of the mental aspect. The next

aspect of being is the emotional aspect. Below, I describe how the educators view the emotional

aspect and discuss what steps they take to ensure they are meeting student needs.

### *East—Emotional*

Meeting student needs within the emotional aspects of their academic experience can

come in many ways. Some educators in the Inner-City Social Work Program at the University of

Manitoba in Winnipeg are social workers. They come with a background that has prepared them

to address emotional states in their students. The other access program educators were not social

workers, but they shared that helping Indigenous students navigate the emotional experience of

being a student in a western university setting is important.

Listening is an important skill for educators in access programs. Suzanne described how a

lot of active listening takes place in her office. She gives advice on various steps a student could

take to address their concern, like meeting with a counsellor, and going with them for their first

intake. Or, she will suggest a meeting with Elder. She attends doctors' appointments with

students for health and sleep issues. She knows this is important, because walking with students

to these places gives them a sense of confidence, and a chance to take the first step to have their

emotional needs met. As Suzanne explains:

> I do a lot of active listening, there's a lot of crying happening, this is a safe space to just
> have an emotional breakdown and that's okay and sometimes that all they need. It's so
> funny, I used to panic about making sure they were okay and doing all this follow up and
> sometimes they just need to come in here and kind of have an emotional sort of dump and
> it's gone and then they're good to go! Sometimes it's just that stress and so I kind of just
> sit back and see where it's going to go, and if it's something I'm more concerned about,
> we'll do a bit more follow up and referral.

Isaac also described the connection that students have within the TYP, with the staff,

faculty in the program and how this can support a student's emotional well-being. Within the

larger 'Dal' community, students have access to mainstream student support services and the

Indigenous Student Centre, which provides an array of emotional supports through counsellors

and Elders-in-residence. He said:

> In terms of emotional well-being, students interact with myself, with Wanda and interact
> with the instructors, but we also have specific advisors that have a group of students so
> they can talk and learn about the issues and so forth. They have access to counselling at
> Dal as well, but they also have the Indigenous student centre, as well as the Elders in
> residence. We bring people, for example, from counseling to talk about these issues…. If
> a student is not coming to class, if a student isn't handing in assignments, the first thing
> we think is, well what is going on in their lives? We try to talk with them, what is
> happening? What is going on?"

Suzanne and Isaac explain how they, themselves, faculty and staff are generally the first contact when there are things going on in their students' lives. Suzanne explains that if it is beyond her capacity to help the students, she does referrals and follow-up to ensure students are getting the correct support they need so that they can succeed in PSE.

L.A. acknowledges that she is aware that "sometimes emotionally, things are impacting people's learning and that's considered", especially when there is an accessibility need, which can either be disability or emotional, such as depression or anxiety which will then allow students to take the TYP over a two-year period. L.A. continues that "there's ways in which [students] can do the program over a two-year period that still allows OSAP (Ontario Students Assistance Program) so it doesn't take away their funds [for further study after TYP] even though they have a reduced course load".

As students will come to talk to educators about life and academic issues, they understand that if there is a situation beyond their abilities, they seek help, whether it is counselling or meeting with Elders, to ensure a student's emotional health. Educators agreed that it is also important to meet the physical needs of students, which could be their physical health or the space that is created for access programs students. The importance of this is explored further in the next section

### West—Physical

The physical aspect of a person affects one's ability to learn and participate in events. Adrienne believed more effort was needed to promote healthy coping skills. She suggested encouraging students to be physically active by joining walking or running clubs, depending on the students' fitness level. Jackie also recognized this lack of physical aspect for students in the access program for which she worked. She saw it as important to their overall well-being. She

included physical health and well-being in the course she taught. Beyond that, the access

program at her university does not promote physical activity for students. Nicky further

expanded by clarifying that students can access the university athletic facilities, which are

available through their student fees. Isaac explained that Wanda's sense of students' physical

needs was strong. For example, Isaac shared her understanding of nutrition for students who are

pregnant or experiencing illness such as diabetes or high blood pressure:

> she [Wanda] can notice that perhaps students are having issues and will talk with them, if there are issues around money to cover rent, cover certain bills, and food, we will talk about that. We have had students in the program who…[are] pregnant and we want to make sure their nutrition is taken care of, so they have access to all of that.

Isaac and Jackie saw both the physical aspect and the physical activity aspect—physically

moving one's body—as lacking for students in the program.

Some educators offered another perspective on the physical aspect. They talked about

physical aspects in terms of the structure of the programs and their physical space. Nicky and

L.A. spoke about how the access program space created a welcoming environment for students.

Having a physical structure to call 'home' helped students feel like they belonged at the

university. Nicky shared, "it's really the physical environment here [that matters for students]".

L.A. expressed how having a physical space for students, an actual house, created a place

like home. In this place, many families and community events occurred for the students, such as

Christmas parties and baby showers. It was also a place where students came together and helped

other students in need. Children were also a part of the place and space for these students, and

L.A. shared one way that they are included within the program:

> When the Equity Department made their exams from 7:00 pm to 10:00 pm, there were students that had children to care for, small children, that didn't have day care or evening place for them to go to, so I had a sleep party, a pyjama party.

Educators expressed Physical needs in a variety of tangible ways—healthy coping skills, nourishing students' bodies with nutritional and healthy foods, and access programs as physical spaces within the university and for them and their families. Educators saw these as meeting students' physical aspects of being.

### *South—Spiritual*

In meeting the spiritual needs of students on campus, Educators provided opportunities for students to participate in sessions on mindfulness and to participate in ceremonies with Elders. Melanie expressed how the educators in the access program at her university recognized that spiritual well-being is different for everyone. She shared that students practice many forms of spirituality. These educators knew that some have never given it much thought, or they kept it private. She stated that they respected how very personal it is, and she continued by sharing:

> Spiritual well-being, this is interesting. In discussions with Indigenous students, I've learned that spirituality is a big part of their lives; for others, they haven't thought about it much. But I think encouraging students to be involved in groups on campus that's certainly something we talk about a lot as well. There are the Elders in residence, in the Aboriginal Student Centre. Students can smudge in this place also. I think it's great for the students to make connections with them [the Elders].

Each of the educators discussed how cultural activities and teachings took place through their respective Indigenous Student Centres. They provided access to medicines and Elders who were connected to the access program by coming to their classes, or by inviting students to attend ceremonies and events hosted by the Indigenous Student Centre. One access program had an Elder dedicated to their program (UMAP), while others accessed various Elders through the Indigenous Student Support Centre (Suzanne, Nicole, Jackie, Tom, and L.A.). Sweat lodge and different ceremonies, such as smudging, were available to students who practiced traditional ways or were interested in learning more about traditional knowledge and practices through the

Indigenous Student Support Centres (Suzanne, Nicole, Jackie, Tom, L.A., Nickie, Dianne, Adrienne, Jane, Tom, and Michael).

Nicole shared they also offered a tipi raising ceremony, where students learned from an Elder's tipi teachings while helping to raise and take down the tipi. An Indigenous Student Centre offered fireside chats, an opportunity for all university students to learn from Elders and cultural teachers (Adrienne). Spiritual practices that most access programs offered included access to general cultural activities and traditions such as beading and making art. Teaching about language was also part of one access program (Nicole), and although it was faculty specific, Nicole believed it also carried a strong spiritual aspect to it. Nicole shared, "I think that some of the cultural component comes in naturally by teaching the language. Simply because language and culture are…you can't separate them". Nicole shows that the language and culture nexus is fundamental to the spiritual aspect of being.

The TYP at the University of Alberta gives students (and faculty) the opportunity to take Cree through the access program. Students gained a credit to learn or polish language skills. Nicole and Suzanne felt this is where they shine in "combining academia and culture." From an Indigenous perspective, this shows how the four aspects of being are interconnected with one another.

Patti talked about working with students to make a connection between their gifts and what they wanted to do in their future. Patti works with her students in a holistic manner to open their eyes to those gifts and strengths. She talks openly with students to help them,

> find that spark, that connection to what [they] want to do, and that's a very individualized process, you know. [Asking students] what are my gifts? What are my strengths? What am I put on this Earth for? What's my spiritual goals? Or what am I supposed to do in this life? Working with Elders or working through ceremony, or however people do this and supporting students through that process.

Patti believed that encouraging students to connect spiritually, in whatever way they defined it, would help lead them towards their purpose. It was important to Patti that students reach their goals and dreams. Other educators acknowledged that each student's spiritual journey was different, and it was important to make sure their voices were heard and they felt supported and encouraged in their purpose and goals. Educators expressed the importance of the cultural supports and access to Elders for students who wanted to explore or practice their spirituality in the university, most often provided by the Indigenous student centres. Nicole shared how language was connected to spirituality by culture.

Educators recognized that students come to the access programs with their own spiritual beliefs and practices, and they wanted to support students in any way they could, whether they were vocal about their spiritual beliefs, or chose not to share. By offering access to Elders, ceremonies and medicines, educators provided the opportunity for students to nourish their spiritual being and provide a balance in their lives. They felt they were giving students the skills they needed to keep walking well in their journey and to reach their educational goals.

This component of the study, which looked at "true learning and the four aspects" provided a gratifying experience when viewed through the lenses of Indigenous educators. Each of the educators strived to bring effective supports through all four aspects of the medicine wheel, such as activities, Elder supports, ceremonies, cross-university engagement and by attending to students' needs. All offered academic supports, to support the Mental aspect. Each had different ways to support the emotional, physical and spiritual aspects of students' learning. Table 3, below summarizes the holistic supports offered in access programs at each university:

Table 3

*Holistic Supports[11]*

|  | Dalhousie University | University of Alberta | University of Manitoba | University of Toronto |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Physical: | -Small class sizes<br>-dedicated space<br>Available through Indigenous Student Services (ISC):<br>-Potlucks | -small class sizes<br>-dedicated space<br>Available through First Peoples' House (FPH):[12]<br>Miyopimâtisiwin<br>-Housing<br>-Community Meals | -Small class sizes<br>-dedicated space<br>Available through Indigenous Student Services (ISC):<br>-Aboriginal Student Association Lounge<br>-Circle room for ceremonies<br>-Work-study positions<br>-Job and career workshops<br>-Social activities<br>-Volunteer opportunities. | -small class sizes<br>-dedicated space<br>Available through First Nations House (FNH) Indigenous Student Services (ISC):<br>-Tranquil Tuesday's-massages from student therapists |
| Intellectual/ Mental: | -Academic advisors<br>-Writing Centre<br>Available through Indigenous Student Services (ISC):<br>-Tutors<br>-Study skills and writing development workshops.<br>-Educational and information sessions<br>-Access to Indigenous Services Librarian and Student Success Advisor | Available through FPH:<br>-TAWOW (student orientation)<br>-Bridges Orientation<br>-Academic Resources | -Mental health & wellness workshops (non-credit: self- and stress management, etc.)<br>-Various academic workshops (study skills, note taking, etc.).<br>Available through ISC:<br>-Weekly Fire Side Chat<br>-Orientation<br>-On-site Indigenous librarian<br>-Science research talks | Available through FNH ISC:<br>-Academic advising<br>-Tutors<br>-Orientation<br>-Resource Centre and Computer Lab |
| Emotional: | -Access to DU counselling services.<br>Available through Indigenous Student Services (ISC):<br>-Access to an Indigenous Health | Available through FPH:<br>-Student Wellness Worker<br>-Mental Health Resources<br>-Aboriginal Student Council | Access Program has:<br>-2 Counsellors<br>-Social workers<br>Available through ISC:<br>-Advocacy and support | Available to First Nations House:<br>-Elder-in-residence<br>-Counselling |

[11] Indigenous students have access to regular university student services.
[12] TYP at the University of Alberta is administered through the First Peoples' House.

|  | Dalhousie University | University of Alberta | University of Manitoba | University of Toronto |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | advisor | -Volunteering | -Counsellor<br>-Peer support |  |
| Spiritual: | Available through Indigenous Student Services (ISC):<br>-Elders<br>- Cultural activities | Available through FPH:<br>-Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers.<br>-Tobacco (pouches) and prayer flags<br>-access to ceremonies and programming<br>-Round Dance<br>-Convocation Honouring | Access Program has -Full-time Elder<br>Available through ISC:<br> -Elders<br>-Smudging ceremonies<br>-Full Moon Ceremony | Available through FNH ISC:<br>-Elders and Traditional Teachers<br>-Ceremonies |

The discussions on why embedding the medicine wheel teachings and attending to the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of a student's lives are so very important were informative. There were a surprising number of commonalities, and a few surprises including a pyjama party for the children of students to ensure students could write their evening exam (L.A.). Each of the educators strived to bring effective supports through activities (e.g. academic supports and workshops), Elders (e.g. ceremonies and Traditional Knowledge), cross-university engagement (e.g. university athletic facilities) and by simply paying close attention to the needs of their students (listening and providing access to food, scholarships, bursaries and a safe space). Some educators shared specific activities more explicitly than others, but all were offering academic support and encouragement. Educators' enthusiasm, respectful use of Elders, the offering of traditional teachings and cultural ceremonies and activities (sweats, traditional knowledge and teachings, beading, etc.) made each access program a powerful example of Indigenous practice. In the next section, the discussion turns to the empowerment of students.

Educators' supports and the encouragement led to student empowerment, in ways that educators describe next.

**Student Empowerment**

Student empowerment was another theme that emerged from this research. For this study, I shared with participants the definition by Houser and Frymier (2009), "To be an empowered learner means to be motivated to perform tasks, and more specifically an empowered person finds the tasks meaningful, feels competent to perform them, and feels his/her efforts have an impact on the scheme of things" (p. 36). I discussed with the educators how they work to help students do, feel, and hopefully perform meaningful tasks in a meaningful way that they feel competent to achieve. Access educators believed they are helping and supporting, rather than doing *for* students. Diane shared how she sees her role:

> We must recognize that students need...to be empowered to be able to not only, in an academic setting, but in life, go out and be able to voice their own thoughts that they deciphered from a critical analysis of the material that they're getting.

L.A. and Debra shared how some students returned to their communities to "recruit for the program because of what it's done for them, there's a large amount of word of mouth that takes place with our program" (L.A.) I have had the same experience in Thunder Bay at Lakehead University, with former students bringing other potential students with them to the university, or, new students telling me the program was recommended by a family member or friend. These examples of LA, Debra, Dianne, and I show how peer recruitment gives the student/alumni an opportunity to be a role model, and the recruit builds confidence in themselves.

Having Indigenous educators working in access programs benefits students as role models to look up to. Yvonne shared that this was an important aspect to the program because

some educators grew up in their communities and understand the languages and ceremonies

practiced by their ancestors and understand what it is like to transition to a city for education.

Even educators that did not grow up in their communities come with a wealth of experience for

urban Indigenous students and what that means for finding their identity and learning how they

fit into this transition to post-secondary education. Yvonne asserted, "I think it's a real positive

[having educators from these backgrounds]. I think it's also a positive we are role models and

that we are mentors." Adrienne further explains why educators need to take this role of mentor

for the next generation seriously while modelling living a healthy and balanced life:

> [We] really [need] to listen and model that and honour the experiences that they bring. And then think about how to move forward and keep working with that because we need healthy young leaders; We need healthy young leaders to keep moving forward, but we have to be healthy ourselves.

Adrienne and Suzanne shared how being a role model to students has meaning for the way they

place value in education.

Many educators expressed the importance of working with the university community to

ensure that students get supports and that students can access services and supports for

themselves as they become more comfortable and can do better self-advocacy. Below, Jackie,

Adrienne, L.A., Tom, and Nickie express how they provide supports and opportunities for

student empowerment. Jackie wanted her students to feel empowered in their learning: she did

not expect them to know everything, but she wanted them to "learn how to learn" in a good way.

She found that those students who were more engaged with these supports often felt more

empowered earlier in the program. Adrienne believed, if students could "take ownership" of their

learning through opportunities to develop workshops that would help them and their classmates,

it also empowered those students to feel more of a sense of personal responsibility for their

education.

L.A. shared the balancing act of working with students. She explained a "dance that happens in terms of supporting students" because life keeps happening, and if something occurs in their lives, access educators work to give extensions when possible. Educators were cognizant of the line between enabling students to take personal responsibility and "empowering them to give them chances because their life situation is different from the mainstream student" (20-03-18, interview). Finding that balance—the 'dance' of not pushing students too hard but pushing them enough to be responsible for what they need to do as a student—prepares students for life beyond the access program and reduces the sense of difference that students may feel as they wend their way through the access program, gaining confidence and trying new skills in a supported environment.

Tom described how students who succeed in the access program grow "quite a sense of self-confidence, they understand their strengths and weaknesses and are ready to ask for help when they need it" (20-03-18, interview). Suzanne reiterates this idea when she says to her students, "I want you to leave TYP as prepared as a fourth-year student". Jane asserts that building confidence is a part of being a student in these access programs, along with skills they bring with them, new ones they learn, and old ones they build upon. In the end, what happens is that,

> they [students] are the ones that are advocating and participating in and not staying silent in the back of the room...and we really encourage folks to be vocal and you know, to engage in meaningful disagreements and express themselves well.

As students gain confidence, real transformation takes place. Students thrive in their programs, and then as they graduate with their chosen degrees, they become leaders in their communities. For example, Nicky shared,

> [Empowerment] produced through a program, such as ours, the leaders in our community who have now become leaders across Canada. That's empowerment, I mean you take

someone like [name] who's an access student, a former access student, who has been now voted one of the most powerful women in Canada!

Nicky's examples of access programs producing leaders illuminates how access programs create a space for Indigenous people to grow and to become role models and community leaders, a place where they can be accepted for who they are and a place to learn how to be a student in a post-secondary institution. Educators' actions empower students.

For educators, empowerment meant giving students the opportunity to voice their own thoughts academically and in life, confidence building and the opportunity to share their experience with others in their communities, and to act as role models for others. Having Indigenous educators helped students to see role models for themselves too. Empowering students is a way for them to take responsibility for their learning and lives. Educators believed that for many access students gaining skills to voice their own thoughts not only provides confidence; it leads to success in PSE.

**Success in Post-secondary Education**

Success can be defined in many ways. In post-secondary access programs student success means that students complete the access program and continue on into an undergraduate degree. For Indigenous students, it can feel disempowering when the university decides the definition of success for them. Educators communicated the importance of understanding what success means holistically. Eve Tuck's (2009) desire-based research framework was well communicated by educators and staff. They sought to "capture desire instead of damage…[which] is an antidote to damage-centered research" (p. 416). Tuck's framework expresses the social realities in which Indigenous educators' work and how they want to support and guide their students. They emphasized wisdom and hope, encouraging us to remember to focus on the good—the gifts students bring, and focusing on that. Adrienne mused,

We don't talk enough about [successes] because we're so focused on trying to reduce barriers and create more welcoming space. Meanwhile students are off doing what they need to be doing to create that themselves and we kind of miss that if we're focused on the deficit model all the time.... At the end of their first year, they [students] are starting to take on those leadership roles and they've kind of taken ownership and they believe they can do this! It doesn't happen for every student, but they are all coming with gifts, all of them are coming in with gifts and strengths so it's just a matter of supporting them in this. I always say we need to use a strength-based approach and get away from that old deficit model.

Building on a strengths-based approach, Nicky, Diane Isaac, and Tom respectively, showed the tensions between university definitions of success and the way that they viewed success:

It's hard to understand sometimes why you have to comply with somebody else's ideas about what success is and whatever but unfortunately that's the world we're in, and I always tell my students, it's my job not to lead you down the garden path, but to prepare you for what you face in these environments when you start working in them, or when you want to be successful in terms of graduating.

To me, success is when they actually graduate, I'm kind of more technical that way, but I agree that success can be, for some students, maybe it's the learning, being here for two years, not quite making it, but being able to go out and stick up for themselves.

Student success is defined by how many people successfully complete the TYP and how many of those [students] go on to get degrees.

So, measurement number one is how many get accepted into Arts and Science later on. And when our resources were extensive, we had a high success rate, averaging around 60%. Now between a combination of pressures that students in Toronto face and our reduced resources, it's lower. I think last year we can say we were at about 50%. I'm going to qualify that a little bit. Either 50% were accepted into Arts or Science, or because of their disability they were doing the program in two years and at least they've got through the first year successfully. At any rate, we measure success by those [institutional] rates but also by anecdotes as you can see, I'm pretty, a few I'm pretty proud of and we also try to keep track of anyone, because we can thanks to the way the student information service works, we can determine when our students go to Grad school here. What we can't determine is what they do if they don't go here [to another university program]. So, we do know a few of them go on to do first degrees or other kinds of other Graduate degrees elsewhere. We have a lot of teachers, a few lawyers, one med student, who should be getting his M.D. this spring, and he's a Metis guy!

This tension means that educators collect statistics for the university. At the same time, they support students' own paths and timeframes. Educators expressed an understanding that some access program students would take the long way in a longer route to obtaining a post-secondary education and some students would find university was not for them.

As Adrienne describes below, some students discover that there is a possibility the institution they started out in was not for them. She believed that educators need to support what students want and need, even if it means moving to another institution:

> For me, it means that they have found their passion and they are going to take that route' whatever that is. I don't believe that we should be territorial, and I see that happening too often with post-secondary institutions. When people are trying to recruit students, we need to support them wherever they want to go; not based primarily on the institution we work for. And why we should be doing whatever it is they need to support them to get there? Because this is their lives.

Adrienne described how education was not always a positive experience for Indigenous people and they may find university is not for them. She contended that success comes from the individual, not the institution. It comes from within the individual:

> This is really an individual question, so I'll just speak from my own definition of success. I never decide students' success. I encourage them to define success for themselves. I've had multiple students come to me and say; you know what, I love the university, but it's not for me. I'm more hands on so I'm going to Red River College to do something else. In my mind that is success because it is self-actualization and deciding to do something different based on their interests, passions and values. It may not increase graduation rates for the university, but it is their success.... If they come here and they decided that this is not for them that's success because...years ago, [they] didn't have that choice.

Isaac echoes Adrienne's sentiment that some student who enter access programs decide that it is not for them:

> It's important to know basically that maybe perhaps university is not an avenue for me and they discover that as well and they explore other things [and]...quite often people who are really movers and shakers in those communities are people who went through the TYP and many did not necessarily finish a degree.

For these educators, students who do not move on to undergraduate studies can still be

regarded as successful and are frequently involved in making change in their communities.

Michael felt that success is relational. He explained that it is

> much more of a qualitative form of measurement and it's something...that you can't really assign a number to. I think it's something that, you know, as the culture of this place, people start to form community and form relationships with each other, the measure is just how people are doing. There's a sense of accomplishment for most of the students when they even come through the door in the first place and many of them feel that, this is a really significant success for them to be accepted into the program in the first place and then, as they go on, the things that continue to motivate them when it gets really tough, usually are these relationships with their children or with their colleagues and their peers in the classroom and it's you know, at the end of the day they want to finish with this degree….Their sense of responsibility to each other, their sense of responsibility to their community, these are the things that I've seen so far, they matter more to the students than, of course, they want good grades, they are really valuing each other.

Jackie defined success as looking at the general overall health of students. She reasoned

that if students were happy, healthy and attending classes regularly, this was a measure that they

were successful. She explained that in the year before she started working in the access program

there were two student suicides, which affected the emotional stability of the rest of the students.

Many students were devastated by the losses and some students were not successful because of it

and did not meet institutional definitions of success that year. She described the impact on the

group's success:

> I think you know, this year is considered a very successful year, especially in comparison to last year because the students seem healthy, they seem happy, they're coming to class, so certainly attendance would be one measure of success, you know the fact that they're actually showing up and engaging. As you may have seen downstairs, we have quite a study space and a lounge area and I think the more full those are on a regular basis, that's another indicator of student success, because students are coming to campus, they're engaging with each other, they're figuring things out. The study room has a white board and I love to go in there and see the math equations and things that they've been working on. For me, of course, the retention and graduation rates are important but it's also important to visually see how students are interacting and that they're coming.

For Jackie, success included students engaging with one another, attending classes regularly and retention and graduation rates. Tom took a similar view of success. He described a situation with a student he worked with in 1989 or 1990 in the access program who got caught up in street life but stayed connected to him. To Tom's delight, the student,

> came back 10 years later, and finished an undergraduate degree, then a graduate degree in his field and I still hear from him. He lives in India now, but has written two novels, one of which is being launched in April!

Tom illustrated that despite this student's academic journey being disrupted, it did not mean he was not a success. He returned when he was ready and was able to meet the success requirements of the university and for himself.

> Suzanne shared a similar idea of what success could mean:
>
> In my mind, if they come here and they leave that was okay, that was a good experience, I feel safe here. That's a success for me. If they come to post-secondary and say, I could actually do this, this isn't so scary that is success to me. I don't care if they come here and bomb out academically! A lot of them do, but if they come here and say, when I come back next time, I'll know what to do and I'll know where to go and I'll be ready that's a success to me!
>
> Jane also illustrated the idea of building students' confidence, competence, and skills

over time as they study and learn:

> Confidence, I think is a big thing. I used to say that when I was teaching the writing skills course…half of it was about confidence and the other half was about competence, so confidence and skills…that to me, is a joy to see that flourish in terms of empowerment....So that by the time they're in third and fourth year and they're taking a course on campus, it's kind of like...(both laugh), they are the ones that are advocating and participating in and not staying silent in the back of the room. There's certainly that, and we really encourage folks to be vocal and you know, to engage in meaningful disagreements and express themselves well, so that's great and I mean to a certain extent, we're doing our best to encourage that in writing as well. [Asking students] 'what's your position, tell me about that! How are you going to develop that, where can you look for sources? Talk to so and so.'

Yvonne shared that another measure of success is about students who complete the

program giving back to the community whether it is working within the community or coming

back to the access program to help and support the work that is being done:

> We haven't done the research, but I think we've had certainly a significant impact in terms of the program was designed for this community, the population of students come from this community and then they go back out into the community. I guess another measure of success are those number of people who have gone out and want to come back and help us.

Yvonne gives another example of how one of her students gained in confidence and leadership:

"I think it helps her [student] in terms of her confidence and her esteem and being able to take on

any kind of challenge that comes her way".

Educators agreed how important it is to recognize that those faculties who work with

access programs care and understand the value of these programs. Suzanne shared that, "faculties

are not getting financial incentive to make room for our students, they do it because they

understand the value of it" (13-03-18, interview). When students took responsibility for their

education, educators believed they had done their job well. Yvonne remarked:

> We're celebrating our 40th anniversary here in a couple of years and so it's important to us and those of us who are Indigenous, those of us who have experienced discrimination in some way, sort of understand what that feels like and how perhaps it's challenged us in moving forward in our own development sometimes. I think, you know, certainly emphasize to students who come in who are successful to get through the process that you know what, we understand that you bring a history with you, we understand that you can deal with those and the expectation is that you will deal with those issues as you move through the program so that when you're done in four years, you've pretty much dealt with your issues and you're not taking them to your workplace and you're not then dealing with, or harming people any more than they've already been harmed. Those are some of the constant and consistent messages that we provide to students as they go through the program.

Participating in an academic community helps students, their families and their

communities understand why healing is necessary. Healing opens the gates wider for the next

generation of Indigenous students. Jane echoed that yes, the obvious success measure is the one

set out by the institution, but she goes further into detailing a more holistic definition of success:

> So, the obvious one is the B.S.W. degree and then the employment rate but beyond
> that, I mean even for people who don't finish the program, many of the students that
> we have here, are the first ones in their family who've been to university. And it's a
> big deal because they become role models themselves. I've been here so long that I'm
> now teaching some of the children of students that I taught. So, those children are now,
> because they were at the dining room table with mom doing homework, thought this
> would be a good place to be.... I think the impact that this has on families and
> community, I'm not sure how you measure that, but I can feel it!

Jane expressed that becoming a role model was an important indicator of her own success, and

being able to teach the children of previous students, because those parents were modelling to

their children what it took to be a university student; it is not something that can be measured.

She noted education has changed their lives, her life, and as Murray Sinclair stated, education

will do the same for coming generations.

As noted by the many comment's educators shared, success is found in many forms.

Adrienne explained that we need to focus on a strength-based approach instead of a deficit

model. Nicky, Diane and Isaac agreed that the institutional definition of success is important—

that graduation from the access program is important—but they also considered induvial success.

For individual success, Jane shared that the health of the students was an important indicator.

Tom described a student he had who left and came back 10 years later to complete the access

program. He framed this student as a success. For these educators, success according to

university standards (i.e. retention and graduation of access programs students) was important.

They also felt that alternative measures are needed.

Success is relational. For educators, student success is built upon the relationships within

the institutions, with other educators, Elders, traditional knowledge keepers, tutors and peers. It

is these relationships, with caring educators, where students feel comfortable to ask for what they need that will lead them towards their goals.

**Conclusion**

The interviews revealed educators' beliefs that student success in access programs has many dimensions. From a holistic perspective, success includes institutional measures and students' definitions of success. Taken together, the view of what success really means widens to include more than just grades and numbers. Throughout the interview process, there were many conversations filled with laughter and sadness. I learned more about the system we have to prepare our students to navigate and heard sad stories of loss of students who we had journeyed with. There was happiness and appreciation from each of the educators, and their passion and purpose were very clear. In Chapter 5, I discuss the four themes above that emerged from my conversations with educators. This discussion connects back to my purpose to reflect on my practices as the Coordinator of the NAP at Lakehead University. To do this I reviewed themes to discern wise practices and connected these local practices to the literature on wise practices, particularly their use within access programs in PSIs.

**Chapter 5: Further Findings and Discussion**

I begin this chapter by reiterating the purpose of this study and then discuss findings from

my conversations with educators in relation to the Literature Review (Chapter 2) and the guiding

methodological frameworks of Métissage and desire-based frameworks (Chapter 3). My

approach brings these sources together to discuss as wise practices. To extend from my

description of wise practices in Chapters 1 and 3, these practices are gleaned through the

experiential knowledge of educators in access programs across Canada (from Chapter 4). I

extend the findings from Chapter 4 as needed to illuminate wise practices through the voices of

the educators. Their descriptions of the academic, cultural, and personal supports for Indigenous

students' success are context-specific. Yet, for this study, educators' wise practices offer

guidelines to consider for one's practices within one's contexts.

This approach supports my practical interest in praxis (the conceptual frames and

practices used within access programs). In this study, I explored wise practices so that I could

adapt them for NAP, the access program at Lakehead University for which I am the Coordinator

and an educator. My intent is to benefit the community (Weber-Pillwax, 2004). I seek change to

improve NAP for Indigenous students at Lakehead University based on what I learned from

educators at access programs at four sites across Canada. I also believe these wise practices can

serve to start conversations amongst educators in PSIs that are looking to re-imagine their access

programs. For this reason, I begin by summarizing the wise practices model and then discuss

how the model has been used for the contexts of access programs for Indigenous learners.

The concept of wise practices was developed by CAAN (2004) and Thoms (2007). Both

describe the 'best practices' model taking "into account all that is known about a subject, takes

stock of lessons learned, and adds new knowledge drawn through the application of sound and

effective research methods" (Thoms, 2007, p. 8). CAAN (2004) asserts that best practices are "a

hierarchical non-Aboriginal construct that does not acknowledge Aboriginal perspectives" (p. 4).

Wesley-Esquimaux and Calliou (2010) extend this model to acknowledge Aboriginal

perspectives and for Aboriginal educators. They describe wise practices as "locally-

appropriate actions, tools, principles or decisions that contribute significantly to the development

of sustainable and equitable social conditions (p. 19). They note that researchers, community

members and social activists know that there is something missing from a 'best practices'

approach.

Thoms (2004) explains that sharing ideas, experiences, practices and knowledges is

important but when it comes to Indigenous communities, there needs to be explicit recognition

"that a 'best practice' in one situation should not automatically be regarded as replicable in

similar situations given the variety of unique cultural and situational environments that

characterize Aboriginal communities" (p. 8). Wise practices are fluid and move to meet the

needs of the community. Access program educators that I interviewed described fluid practices

that met the needs of their communities in various ways to develop sustainable and equitable

social conditions for Indigenous students in their programs within PSIs.

To discuss the findings through wise practices (as culturally- and situationally-specific, fluid, and

meeting the needs of community), I connect McCarty and Lee's (2014) culturally

sustaining/revitalizing pedagogies (CSRP) framework. Their framework is intended to "serve[s]

the needs of the Indigenous communities as defined by those communities" (p. 103), which are

locally-derived wise practices. McCarty and Lee (2014) assert that by stitching together

strong examples of culturally-sustaining and revitalizing pedagogies, CSPR provides guidance

for others to adapt to their own contexts (nationhood, language, communities, programs).

Melding actions, tools, principles or decisions of wise practices with CRSP principles provides

an opportunity to learn from Indigenous educators' localized practices within their access

programs and consider how I might apply these practices in the NAP:

    1. practicing and modeling relationality

    2. supporting and empowering students holistically

    3. culturally responsive practices (McCarty & Lee, 2014)

    4. balancing students' needs with university requirements for student success.

For each of these four principles, I introduce literature that supports the locally-appropriate and

shared practices that educators shared with me to theorize them. While practices always are

localized to place, I sought to stitch these together to learn about/discuss sustainable conditions

for Indigenous students' success in access programs.

**Wise Practice #1: Practicing and Modeling Relationality**

Wilson (2001) shares three principles of relationality, it is: at the heart of being

Indigenous, grounded in community, and binds a group together through interconnections and

interrelationships. He explains that relationality is understood broadly. It includes more than the

human relationships, such as relationships to land and non-humans (p. 80). Across all access

programs educators shared relationality as their wise practices. They expressed relationality

through three practices: (i) caring, (ii) mandatory meetings and (iii) internal/external relationship

building. I begin by describing what Noddings (2012) calls a 'carer', where one person acts as a

'carer' for another who is cared for.

*Caring*

Noddings explains that both the 'carer' and 'cared for' contribute to the creation and

maintenance of the caring relationships (p. 772). Caring seemed to come naturally to educators

as they sought to creating the caring relationship between themselves and students. Educators began the process of caring by building a sense of community within their classroom. Patti and L.A. illustrated how they begin this process as teachers in their respective access programs. L.A. began this caring relationship at the start of the academic year when she asked her students to look after one another and ensure that they are still sitting beside you at graduation.

By introducing caring, educators create connections among educators and peers, with the hope of students learning to watch out for each other and create supportive, caring relationships. For educator/student relationships, Patti described how she worked to "establish a sense of community in the class and be open for them to come and see me if they have issues" (06-03-18, interview). Establishing a sense of community in the class creates a sense of belonging and relationality so students know that others will support and watch out for them.

Kirkness (1999) described how in pre-contact times the community was the classroom. She believes that with changing times, educators are building community within the classroom (p. 8). Educators empower students through a strong sense of community within the program and within the contexts of the larger university to feel that they belong in these spaces. Noddings (2012) describes how "each of our lives starts with a relationship and it is through relationships that a human individual emerges" (p. 772). Noddings and Kirkness show the significance of educators' work with students to build relationships and community within access programs.

Educators also care by working with students to bring their whole selves as they learn how to learn within the access program. Nicky explained the value of caring where each student can emerge as oneself. Even if she sees her students' faces, even if they need nothing from her, she offers a space to celebrate successes with them. Neegan (2005) echoes this idea of learning how to learn about relations. She expresses that communal and relational teaching creates

behaviours for students to carry into the future, preparing them for their future studies. Thus, caring relationships are vital for relationality amongst educators and students.

### *Mandatory Meetings and Regular Check Ins*

Another way that educators build relationality among and with students is through mandatory meetings and regular check ins. Some educators assigned each student a personal counsellor and academic advisor with a set number of mandatory meetings per semester. Regular check ins included quick chats before or after classes, emails, and/or phone calls. Nicky saw the value of having students step into her office to check in with her regularly even if they have no problems. Melanie shared that check ins can create change in a student's life. She found that emails can lead to meetings, which can lead to changes that benefit students' academic program in small and significant ways. Suzanne provided another example showing the positive aspects of these meetings. She described that some students need a space for a moment to have an "emotional dump," a safe place where they can pour out all their worries, stresses and doubts. Then they are "good to go".

Mandatory meetings and regular check ins build ongoing relations between students and educators. As time goes by students become comfortable and develop deeper relationships with educators. Students share what is going on in their lives and educators adapt to support their students using locally appropriate actions and tools, to build these relationships within the PSI and in Indigenous communities. Also, through mandatory meetings students learn responsibility and the expectations of them as students in the program. Through these meetings, educators integrate "Indigenous knowledge and [building] reciprocal learning relationships that move students from passive receivers of knowledge to active participants" (MacKinnon, 2015, p. 71) within access programs. Educators used these techniques to meet students' needs within their

unique cultural and situational environments. Educators such as Nicky, Melanie, and Suzanne scheduled regular contact with Indigenous students in their access programs through mandatory meetings and check-ins for accountability and relationship building.

***Internal/External Relationship Building.***

The third way that educators build relationality is knowing that students' needs vary tremendously. Sometimes students are 'good to go' after a check-in: other times they may need further supports that educators cannot give them. One example that educators described was for counselling services for intergenerational trauma. This service is currently unavailable at the universities in this study. Suzanne explained that the access program at her university was next door to counselling services; yet, they could not meet Indigenous students' unique needs. For some access students, Suzanne had to go beyond the services available at the university.

Educators forged community connections too, to ensure that students' needs are met. They helped students to access resources because students coming from small or remote communities may have been overwhelmed within a university that is larger than their home community. For example, Nicole shared that Indigenous students from isolated communities have difficulty asking for help and how she showed them and gave them the tools to learn for themselves in a way that did not overwhelm the students further and supported a gradual release model. Suzanne also recognized the need to teach students to ask for help. She noted, "when you actually send a student down that path to seek those resources [from community support people] it's not as easy…. So, there's a lot of advocacy [for and with students] that goes on" (13-03-18, interview). She too spent time to give students tools and supported a gradual release.

At Lakehead University's NAP, some students also come to the program from remote northern communities. We also work to provide the supports and resources that students need

before they begin the program. In many instances we change what can throughout the academic year so that our students feel well supported and learn how to self-advocate. All educators advocated for student supports and resources. While handbooks and other resources were available for students in access programs, educators sought relational practices to build a bank of internal and external resources for student success. Nicole described this as an ongoing process, "as individual and community experience and knowledge expands". Educators in this study sought to meet students where they are at: they realized that students' needs are "not standardized, not off-the-shelf, and not one-size-fits-all" (Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou, 2010, p. 19). Thus, educators adapted and adjusted their programs to meet student needs by forming relationships internal and external to the program and the university as internal and external relationship building within access programs to foster relationality.

Educators practiced relationality with students and community as a wise practice in access programs at each university (Dalhousie University, University of Alberta, University of Toronto and University of Manitoba). They used mandatory meetings and check ins, and helped students to build internal and external relationships. This practice helped students to create and maintain relationships with outside resource people. Although educators took different approaches to meet the needs of the students in their specific program (e.g. the need for intergenerational trauma from IRS, connecting to appropriate locally-available resource people) they share relationality through caring relationships with Indigenous students in the access program, resource people within their universities, and broader community members and organizations that support student success. They modeled relationality for students and supported students to build relations that helped themselves to succeed in the access program and beyond.

This extends the literature that I reviewed because it documents the voices of access program educators.

The next wise practice that educators shared connected to supporting students extends beyond students' academic needs to include their emotional, physical, and spiritual needs. In Chapter 4, I introduced the four aspects of being, using the Medicine Wheel as a heuristic. In this chapter I consider these four aspects as a way to support and empower students' whole selves, as supporting students holistically.

**Wise Practice #2: Supporting Students Holistically**

For the educators in this study, supporting students holistically included two principles—*holistic supports and empowering students*. In this instance, 'holistic' acknowledged all four aspects of being—mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual. Here, educators' practices support students' mental/intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. Educators' practices showed how "each of these aspects must be equally developed in a healthy, well-balanced individual through the development and use of volitions (i.e. will)" (Lane et al., 2004, p. 123).

Educators applied holistic supports across all access programs in this study. As noted in the previous wise practice, educators used relationality to guide their interactions with students in the program. They gave students tools to learn how to learn and supported a gradual release model to meet students where they were at. Practicing and modeling relationality (i.e. wise practice #1) supports students' mental/intellectual as well as emotional aspects. Educators also provided supports such as tutors and services such as counseling (Nicky, Nicole, Patti, Suzanne). They provided opportunities for students to connect their learning to their identity (Patti). Educators, such as Nicole, also took time to help students prepare for the year ahead by explaining the 'w effect', which she explained showed the ebb and flow of what the academic

year is like. She used this tool with her students to discuss the ups and downs that they

experienced during the school year. Nicole also used this tool with students to talk about their

feelings.

To support students' emotional aspects, educators such as Suzanne and Isaac, shared that

they are generally the first point of contact for students when they need help. Being an active

listener was an important skill for these educators. Helping students address their concerns and

taking steps to reach out for help with counsellors, doctors, or Elders, and offering to go with

students for their first appointment was one of the ways that Suzanne supported her students.

Another way that educators met students' needs was adapting the program so students could

attend it over a two-year period instead of the one-year prescribed timeline, as L.A. did.

Educators connected students to organizations within the city and Elders within the campus.

Educators also connected students to off- campus resources if situations required (Suzanne,

Isaac). Supporting students' emotional well-being was central for all educators. Some educators

also connected students' emotional wellness to their physical aspects of being.

To support students' physical aspects, educators promoted healthy coping skills and

physical activity by using campus athletics. Several educators recognized the importance of how

these could impact students' overall well-being (Adrienne, Jackie). In some circumstances, Isaac

and Wanda would provide emergency funds for students struggling with making ends meet for

things such as food, rent and bills. Isaac and Wanda believed that keeping students' physically

safe within their homes was important for their physical well-being. As a related example of

supporting students' physical well-being, L.A. and Nicky talked about the importance of the

physical space and structure of the program. Having a place to call 'home', a place where

students feel safe and comfortable to work, was important to them. All educators supported

students' physical well-being in various ways—as healthy coping skills, providing food and shelter, and creating a home-like environment for students within the access program.

As another aspect of supporting students' physical aspects, Nicky, L.A., Adrienne, and Jackie shared that the physical location of the access program was important. The access programs at the University of Toronto, Dalhousie University, University of Alberta, and University of Manitoba all had dedicated space for access students. Dalhousie and Toronto had houses that included a kitchen, study space, a lounging area for students to relax, read and do homework, and offices for educators which were accessible for students. The University of Manitoba's access program shared space with the Indigenous student centre; the Inner-City Social Work Program had a building in the community. The University of Alberta had a dedicated room across from the Indigenous student centre so students could move between these spaces. As a wise practice principle, these physical spaces provided a sense of 'home'. As one example from the findings in Chapter 4, Adrienne shared how the access program served as a social space where students ate and socialized together.

Food and feasting together was one of the ways that educators forged and maintained relationships with students and created a sense of community with them. It is a way that students who are food insecure could eat a meal or snack and not worry about this important aspect of life (Debra, Suzanne, Isaac, Wanda). Suzanne reiterated this too, that food brings meaning to relationships with students by providing an opportunity to connect. In some instances, educators such as Isaac and Wanda were able to provide some program funds for students to buy groceries. Again, they believed these supports helped students to attend classes. All educators agreed that food and feasting forged and maintained relationships throughout the academic year.

Educators believed that having access programs with dedicated spaces and offering food created a sense of security and belonging for students. In my review of the literature, I found no sources that described the importance of providing space, food, and feasting for Indigenous students in access programs. Yet all educators from this study agreed on the importance relationship- and community-building in access programs for Indigenous students. This finding adds to the literature and suggests that further research is needed regarding food and space for relationship-building within access programs.

For spiritual supports, educators recognized that students were each on their own spiritual journey. Melanie saw that spiritual beliefs and practices varied greatly. She encouraged students to seek out the resources on campus that could help them develop this aspect of themselves, through programs such as the Elders-in-residence. Educators at all four universities provided opportunities for students to participate in-- ceremonies with Elders and knowledge keepers, local cultural teachings and activities such as beading, and mindfulness activities (Jackie, L.A., Melanie, Nicole, Tom). They provided students with access to medicines through Indigenous student support centres and within the broader community organizations. These spiritual supports were often available on campus, and some educators brought them into their programs. In this study, only one access program, at the University of Manitoba access program had an Elder dedicated to their program (UMAP). Other programs accessed Elders through the Indigenous Student Support Centre (Suzanne, Nicole, Jackie, Tom, and LA). Ceremonies such as the Sweat Lodge and smudging were available for students that wanted to learn more about local traditional knowledge and practices through the Indigenous Student Support Centres (Suzanne, Nicole, Jackie, Tom, and LA, Nickie, Dianne, Adrienne, Jane, Tom, Michael). It was important for students to have access to these knowledges and practices, as sometimes this is their first

exposure to local Indigenous ways of knowing and doing. Through the access program Nicole

offered a tipi raising ceremony that included traditional teachings offered by Elders.

Patti believed that encouraging students to connect spiritually would help lead them

towards their purpose. Educators acknowledged that each student's spiritual journey was

different and educators were "wise about the community [that they are working in] to be able to

recognize as well as define the wise practices" (Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou, 2010, p. 20) that

they need to implement in their programs. As a wise practice, the spiritual aspect supports varied

in access programs, depending on the traditional territory of the Nation(s) and the needs of

students within the access program each year. Educators are listening to what students need and

working to implement these supports for students.

Educators sought to support students' mental/intellectual and emotional needs through

the access program and referrals to services inside and outside the university, as shown in the

examples above. According to the report by HRSDC (2012), programs that include academics

and spiritual, physical, intellectual and cultural growth for students produced higher success rates

(pp. 25-31). This is echoed by Richard (2011), who suggests that success considers all four

aspects of the student—the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual, and includes being able to

assert their Indigenous identity proudly (p. 123). Richard extends beyond the HRSDC authors as

he connects four aspects of being with success as well as being strong in one's Indigenous

identity, which leads to greater empowerment. Educators embodied this holistic approach to

learning (Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou, 2010, p. 16). They provided opportunities to support all

aspects of learners' being.

### *Empowering Students*

To recount, I use empowered learner to mean one who "finds the tasks meaningful, feels competent to perform them, and feels his/her efforts have an impact on the scheme of things" (Houser & Frymier, 2009, p. 36). Educators Diane and Suzanne provided opportunities for students to be empowered by supporting their efforts. Diane supported and helped students to find their own way and voice and did not do tasks *for* students. She wanted her students "go out and be able to voice their own thoughts" (15-03-18, interview). Suzanne described active listening as an important part of her role as an educator in the access program. She provided opportunities for empowerment by giving advice on various steps a student could take to address their concerns, like meeting with a counsellor or seeing an Elder or doctor, and she sometimes went with them for intake appointments to model how to do it for future appointments.

Suzanne provided a safe space for her student to "have an emotional breakdown and that's okay and sometimes that all they need" but she recognized that if "it's something I'm more concerned about, we'll do a bit more follow up and referral" (13-03-18, interview). Other educators—Isaac, Wanda and Debra—echoed the importance of active listening or deep listening, a concept developed by Koori Aborigine graduate student cohort who developed the deep listening model. Voyageur, Brearley & Calliou (2015) explain how this model works:

> The Indigenous concept of Deep Listening describes a way of learning, working, and
>
> togetherness that is informed by the concepts of community and reciprocity…. Deep
>
> Listening involves listening respectfully, which can help build community. It draws on
>
> every sense and every part of our being. Deep Listening…involves taking the time to

develop relationships and to listen respectfully and responsibly. It also means listening to and observing oneself. (p. 91).

The deep listening model practiced by educator/participants connected to relationality and holistic supports. Educators used deep listening in their interactions with students by listening respectfully to what students need—a friendly ear or referrals to professional services that educators could not provide within the access program. Educators explained empowerment and practiced it through deep listening, which prepared students to perform and find tasks meaningful, gain access to resources they needed, and gain competence in performing tasks independently.

To sum, for the educators in this study, supporting students holistically included *holistic supports and empowering students*. Educators offered holistic supports to their students' holistically through all four aspects of being—mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual—based on their needs. Educators applied holistic supports across all access programs in a variety of culturally sustaining and revitalizing ways. The first wise practice of relationality overlapped with holistic supports, particularly for aiding students to learn how to learn and meeting the students where they are at in their educational journey. To me, this showed how relationality was a foundation that educators used to offer holistic supports. To foster students' mental aspects, educators offered tutoring and learning supports. To support students' emotional aspects, educators adjusted the programing to meet the needs of students with families and other responsibilities. They taught students how to balance the multiple demands they were juggling, in order to stay in school. All educators provided referrals to services inside and outside the university for students, especially as university services were not equipped to counsel students with intergenerational trauma and related events that may have occurred in their home

communities. Nurturing students' physical aspect included offering food, giving help with shelter needs, and providing a welcoming, 'home-like', and safe space for students. However, some educators noted that more could be done within programs to support students' physical aspect. One example of this could be land-based programming, which has shown success within the literature. Culturally sustaining/revitalizing practices were most evident with spiritual supports that were provided to Indigenous students in access programs by local Elders and knowledge keepers. Many educators named local ceremonies such as the Sweat Lodge and smudging for students that wanted to learn more about local traditional knowledge and practices through their programs and other programs within and outside of the university. Educators believed that engaging all four aspects of students' beings allowed them to hone their gifts within their contexts of family, community, and education.

For the educators in this study, empowering students meant used deep listening to provide supports. Educators built students' competency in the skills of being a university student while supporting their identities as Indigenous students with an understanding that their efforts have an overall impact on their communities and the world around them (Houser & Frymier, 2009). Educators empowered student to ask for what they needed to be successful. As a wise practice, educators supported students' four aspects of being in a holistic way and empowered their students. They ground this wise practice in relationality. Importantly, they offered culturally sustaining/revitalizing practices to ground Indigenous students in their identities, a practice that is often lacking within PSIs (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002; Pidgeon, 2008). Next, I turn to culturally sustaining/revitalizing practices as the third wise practice.

**Wise Practice #3: Culturally Sustaining/Revitalizing Pedagogies**

Locally and culturally sustaining/revitalizing practices represent wise practice #3. These practices reflected Indigenous students' cultural practices and traditions within the territory in which the access program was situated; for example, the Ininiw or Cree and Metis at the University of Alberta's Transition Year Program. Educators brought CSRP into their programs in three ways: providing supports for students, honouring students' lived experiences and building local practices in the access program, and recognizing that Indigenous programs offer more than a name to distinguish it from mainstream programs: educators strove to model locally and CSR practices as ways of knowing, being, and doing.

Educators provided supports (academic, personal, cultural) for each student. Educators respected that "nothing is static, as people bring in and send out different experiences, views, and energies" (Wesley-Esquimaux & Snowball, 2010, p. 19). Providing local and culturally sustaining/revitalizing student supports changed based on the students in the program in any given year and changed during the academic year as students grew in their familiarity with the expectations of the university.

Educators (Adrienne, Nicky, Diane, L.A.) honoured students' lived experiences in the creation and re-creation of the access program. These educators shared an awareness that "there is considerable variation in Aboriginal beliefs and traditions from one Aboriginal community to another….Therefore, there is no unified set of best practices but, rather, many such practices that emerge from diverse cultures and community experiences" (Thoms, 2000, p. 8). Adrienne shared that input and feedback gave important feedback and provided them a voice, a legacy for future students that followed in the access program.

Lastly, locally and culturally responsive educators such as L.A. are cognizant of the "dance that happens in terms of support students"—the fine line between enabling students and providing opportunities for them to take personal responsibility. Educators realized that Indigenous students' "life situation is different from the mainstream student" (L.A. interview). Educators provided locally and culturally responsive strategies to each new group of students to help them be successful in access programs and prepare them to transition to undergraduate programs.

Returning to the literature review (Chapter 2), I reviewed the literature showing that scholars look at success in PSI programs from diverse perspectives. Scholars assert that success is holistic (Battiste, 1998; Cajete, 1994; Hampton, 1995; Pidgeon, 2008). Long and Hachowski (2015) say success is relational and it includes having a strong sense of identity (ICIE, 1972). Success also includes meeting the institutional standards of success. In Chapter 4, I described how educators in this study viewed student success in their programs. With that background, in the next section I discuss the fourth and final wise practice of student success. In this wise practice, educators promoted student success. They described the dance of balancing the needs of students with the traditional institutional measures used by the university.

**Wise Practice #4: Student Success—Balancing the Needs of Students with the Requirements of the University**

PSIs measure the success of students in access programs with the same metrics they use for all students—through graduation and completion rates of students. The educators in this study defined student success as twofold—1. as students define it for themselves and 2. as PSIs measure it through graduation and completion rates. Educators (Isaac and Adrienne) argued that success included students who started the access program and left before completion. Scholars

have argued that metrics for success are culturally dependent and students can meet their educational goals by completing part of a course or program (Malatest, 2002 p. 10; see also Ottman, 2017; Richard 2011). For example, in Chapter 4 Tom shared a story about a student who left the access program and then returned some years later. He cited that student as an example of success with a rationale that even if a student enters an access program and does not complete it the first time, it does not take away from what the student gained. Students have the opportunity to return if they choose. The authors of the HRSDC (2012) assessed success as funders of the programs. They used a traditional, institutional measure—the percentage of students that completed the access program (p. 23). Two educators, Diane and Tom, used different metrics of success for students in the access program. They described success as obtaining a degree from the university.

Alongside the traditional success measures expressed by Diane and Tom, educators described success in a variety of ways but consistently applied Indigenous contexts (see, for example, Long & Hachowski, 2015; Pidgeon, 2008; Richard 2011). For educators, success from an Indigenous context meant the affect that students had on their community as role models, the ability for students to give back to their communities, their growth in confidence, and their abilities to take on community leadership roles back home.

Also, many educators (Adrienne, Michael, Jackie, Jane and Suzanne) considered student success holistically—through mental, emotional physical, and spiritual aspects of being and empowerment, which connects back to wise practice #2. For these educators, success included students' persistence and appetite for "taking risks and not giving up" (Richard, 2011, p. 123) by asking for what they needed to be successful, as empowerment and through their volition or will. Educators worked to create a space where 'success' met the needs of the students at the

alternative application process. Access program educators accept students into their programs based on academic history as well as life experiences and adding a personal statement and resume to the application process. Some access program sites offer an additional admissions process. Educators grant a personal interview to Indigenous applicants to learn more about their motivation and readiness for the program (see Table 1 above).

Educators also measured success by how students defined their own success, whether or not they completed the program and/or moved into an undergraduate program. Here 'success' echoes Pidgeon's (2008) measures of success, which consider "larger societal issues of social justice and equity" (pp. 340, 343). This critique of a pass/fail measure of success for Indigenous students is echoed by the NIB: "Limiting success to this narrow definition, narrows our understanding and subsequent approaches and processes to facilitate success for Aboriginal post-secondary students" (cited in Malatest, 2010, p. 19).

Educators in this study focused on graduation and completion rates as university requirements. They also provided an opportunity for Indigenous worldviews to be represented. They created a space where students can learn who they are as students and form a family-like environment away from home. If students left, educators gave them the opportunity to return, at a later time. From a wise practices approach, educators in access programs are using a "deeply humane way, of expressing and operationalizing the traditional knowledge base of Aboriginal Canada" (Wesley-Esquimaux & Snowball, 2010, p. 390) by allowing each student to define success for themselves, while being mindful they exist within a PSI setting.

Success for access program students in university has three aspects: 1) the institutional definition of success; 2) students' self-described constructs of success for themselves; and 3) the community definition for students within communities, as introduced in Chapter 4 of the

literature review, a measure of success through an Indigenous lens (Long & Hachowski, 2015).

This third aspect shows a relational lens where the intent of education is to make the individual's

life better within the context of making their communities better too (Long & Hachowski, 2015).

The literature review (Chapter 2) framed success from an institutional standpoint, based

on funding levels and admission procedures. In this chapter, educators expanded formal

definitions of success to include the relational aspect. They do this through building relationships

with students, providing supports to empower their success and giving students a space where

they feel at home so they can work in comfort with supports. As the institutional setting of where

an access program is housed, the responsibilities of the institution need to be respected and met.

Funding and admission processes are what help keep access programs going in an institutional

setting, but are beyond the scope of this study.

These three aspects of success—the institution, the student and the community—support

how most educators saw success for students in access programs. Educators' insights and the

actions they described about their programs illuminated wise practices that reflected relationality,

supporting students, locally and culturally responsive practices and new ways of articulating

student success. These wise practices from educators were specific to access programs and were

used to guide students through their educational journeys while respecting their identities and

creating sustainable and equitable social conditions that served to empower Indigenous students

(Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou, 2010). These practices show varied ways that educators

supported students while using locally and culturally-responsive practices. Relationality is not

generally promoted in PSIs between educators and students. Educators believed this is the kind

of one-on-one attention that students need to succeed. Educators in the mainstream programs in

PSIs may struggle to practice relationality—the very aspect that students may need to succeed.

Educators in access programs see this as an important aspect of working with Indigenous students who attend the programs.

**Conclusion**

For this study, I applied wise practices in the discussion of findings. Educators' wise practices showed commonalities across access programs while remaining culturally relevant and responsive to the lived realities of the people they serve, as much as possible within a colonial PSI (Wise Practices, n.d.a). Wise practices share two common criteria, they: 1) speak to specific practices that support Indigenous students in access programs; and 2) commit to centering Indigenous knowledges, and recognize the vital role of culture, community, spiritual life, and land in relation to access programs (Wise Practices, n.d.a) These ideas are reiterated widely by scholars who make recommendations for change within Indigenous programs (Battiste, 1998, 2015; Cajete, 1994; Hampton, 1995; Hartviksen, 2000, 2006; Pidgeon, 2008; Truth and Reconciliation, 2015). This study showed how educators in access programs implement wise practices in their programs including maintaining locally and culturally responsive practices for students. These practices also inform my thinking and praxis for NAP.

This study informs my understanding of access programs for Indigenous students and may contribute to wise practices of educators in access programs across the country. The rich conversations I had with educators extends the literature on access programs, which has mostly focused on program structure, Indigenous histories and knowledges. Educators' perspectives on supporting students' success by empowering students and being in relation with them, adds to the extant literature on access programs and showed wise practices.

In this chapter, I returned to the themes from Chapter 4 to discuss them as wise practices. This approach allowed me to bring together educators' insights and their practices from four

access programs across Canada with the literature on these programs. In this way, educators'

perspectives served to enhance the extant literature. I also integrated the concept of wise

practices (Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou, 2010) into the discussion. From educators' insights and

practices, four wise practices emerged: 1) practicing and modeling relationality; 2) supporting

and empowering students holistically; 3) locally and culturally sustaining/revitalizing practices;

and 4) balancing students' needs with university requirements for student success. I described

each of these four wise practices and showed how educators work within this wise practice

approach, without losing the differences that occur across access programs due to cultural

responsiveness to the local Indigenous communities and students in the programs. In Chapter

Six, I present the answers to the research questions.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

This final chapter has four parts, which I preview here. First, I connect my findings from the educators' insights and practices back to the research questions I posed in Chapter 1:

1. What strategies are used by educators in access programs to support learners holistically (academic, personal and cultural)?

2. How do educators describe success for Indigenous students in post-secondary education?

Second, I review how educators' responses to my research questions connect to the conceptual framework of desire-based practices (Tuck, 2009) that I used. Tuck's desire-based practices alongside Grande's (2015) idea of hope empower students to move forward toward the future they imagine for themselves nested within their communities. Third, I connect findings and discussions of Chapter 4 and 5, respectively, to my purpose for this study where I sought to uncover insights and practices that would inform the NAP at Lakehead University, where I work as the Coordinator. I conclude this study with recommendations for future research on access programs.

**Answering the Research Questions**

The next two sections show how 16 educators at access programs in four universities across Canada aided my understanding of supporting learners holistically and how they define success for Indigenous students in ways that continue to support learners and that recognize how universities define success for learners.

***Research Question #1: What strategies are used by educators in access programs to support learners holistically?***

Through this thesis I have maintained a description of holistic supports for students' physical, emotional, spiritual and mental/intellectual well being. Educators described many strategies they used to support learners holistically, which can begin, for some students, before they walk in the door of the university. Educators did this by building genuine relationships through communication with students—by listening to their needs, worries, dreams, sadness, frustration and successes—to ensure that student needs are met. Each educator understood the importance of meeting students where they were at, to openly listen to the student voice so programming and supports could be adjusted to what would work best for them. Educators understood that while they listen and respond to students' needs, they do not always get it right.

Educators used a variety of strategies that included a dedicated space for learners to call home, and gave them a sense of belonging, especially since for many Indigenous students who come to access programs, they are moving hundreds or thousands of kilometers away from their homes and families. The space of access programs becomes a safe space where students see themselves reflected through peers and staff. Cohorts of students are typically small, and most access programs had a cohort-only model of courses, while other programs used a mixed cohort model where students attended only some classes together. At Lakehead's NAP, students have a mixed cohort model where students take all of their classes together excepting one (Indigenous Learning 1100), for which they join the general student population.

When queried, all educators in access programs explained the components of their programs and all followed the access program model (Alcorn & Levin, 1998) that has six components: 1. Recruitment, 2. Selection, 3. Student supports, 4. Financial support, 5. Academic

supports and 6. Personal supports. More recently, the authors of an HRSCD (2012) report add holistic supports to Alcorn and Levin's original access program model. I briefly review each of these seven components for the access programs I visited.

Educators in access programs recruited students through local and regional events to promote their programs. Many educators highlighted that recruitment happened mainly through word of mouth, particularly from previous students and within their communities. To select students for the access program, all programs required students to fill application forms, send their high school transcripts, and provide references. Yet there was variety with access programs in some institutions requiring students to provide writing samples or personal statements. Educators in some programs used an enhanced selection process. They set interviews with applicants that met all other written criteria. For academic and personal supports, educators offered a variety of supports for Indigenous students that enter their programs. I detail these supports earlier in a table to show how these programs differ by institution (see Chapter 4, Table 3). Educators described academic and personal supports as holistic supports. I discuss educators' models of holistic supports from the HRSDC (2012) report after I discuss the final aspect of Levin and Alcorn's model, financial supports.

Most of the access programs offered financial support through bursary and scholarship programs. Only Dalhousie University offered a tuition waiver for students in their access program. The authors of the HRSDC (2012) report on access to postsecondary transition programs for Aboriginal students showed a relationship between funding and student success rates in the program. The found that programs with the lowest funding per students had lower success rates (i.e. 60% or less). Conversely, they found a funding threshold: access programs that offered funding over $8000 per student had the highest student success rates in Canada (HRSDC,

2012, p. 25). This finding supports the funding that educators provided to students in the program (e.g. food) or for emergencies (i.e. for shelter or utilities, bus fare) that educators provided students within their access programs. However, defined student funding varied widely among the four access programs in this study (see Chapter 4, Table 3).

Returning to the HRSDC's (2012) addition of holistic supports to Alcorn and Levin's (1998) model, educators echoed this component of the model in descriptions of their programs (see Chapters 4, theme 2—responding to the whole student. Holistic supports as a theme recurred across all educators in all programs. I discuss these findings in Chapter 5 as wise practice #2, supporting students holistically. Importantly, I found that in their practices, educators applied holistic supports for students alongside localized, culturally-sustaining/revitalizing pedagogies (McCarty and Lee, 2014) (see Chapter 5, wise practice #3). Thus, educators in this study demonstrated their use of the six features from Alcorn and Levin's original access program model as well as the holistic supports from the HRSCD (2012) report to support Indigenous students in their access programs. They offered holistic supports to students in combination with CSRP practices of teaching and learning.

***Research Question #2: How do educators describe success for Indigenous students in post-secondary education?***

Educators described success for Indigenous students in several ways, they: 1. provided a pathway for students to enter PSIs, and 2. used metrics to measure success that included completing all program requirements and obtaining a degree to graduate. Educators within these access programs promoted a "university education [which is] equitable and attainable by providing opportunities for participation to students from groups and communities who were traditionally under-represented in PSE" (Brathwaite, 2003, p. 12).

For a pathway, educators described flexible admission standards that include 'not needing a Grade 12' and admissions not 'based on marks'; rather their admissions were 'based on need' and readiness. Similar to MacKinnon's (2015) description, educators strove to accept students based on their readiness to enter the program. To determine readiness, access program students often completed an extensive intake process to determine their suitability for post-secondary studies. Through this process that students must "demonstrate academic and social need, but they must also demonstrate their suitability to the profession and their potential ability to handle the academic demands of the program" (MacKinnon, 2015, p. 97). Once educators admitted students to the access program, they provided holistic supports to foster student success. However, educators explained that these students came to PSE needing more supports than mainstream students. Educators provided students with academic resources such as the study skills classes to prepare them with valuable and needed study skills to carry with them throughout their academic journey.

For success, educators had a variety of perspectives that included traditional views of success. Nicky, Diane and Isaac supported an institutional definition of success—graduation from the access program. They also considered individual success of the students. Jane shared that the health of a students was an important indicator of success and Adrienne said success was looking for the strengths in students, instead of the deficit model. Educators also described success as holistic, relational and opportunity—Tom described a student who was his student and he decided to leave. He came back 10 years later to complete the access program. To Tom, this student was a success. (see Chapter 4). Educators sought to empower students and supported their students to live a good life –known as mino-bimaadiziwin, where spirit and relationships must exist in good, healthy ways and educators considered the whole person in relation to his or

her community (Deer & Falkenburg, 2016; Neegan, 2005). Within the contexts of holistic supports, community, and mino-bimaadiziwin, educators considered success from various perspectives: the institution, the students' own goals, and students' communities (Long and Hachowski, 2015). Thus, educators use a relational lens to frame success for Indigenous students.

In sum, educators worked to bring localized CRSP teaching and learning practices and holistic supports for students through their access programs where many Indigenous students begin their post-secondary journey. In their programs, educators applied localized, Indigenous worldviews and knowledges for student success. They could do this because many of them came from Indigenous communities and saw the work needed to support their communities and change the university experience. By bringing Indigenous approaches to access programs, they sought to disrupt the PSE model for mainstream students in order to foster student success (Battiste, 1998; DeGagné, 2002). These approaches also modeled for Indigenous students that their worldviews and cultures are important and belong in post-secondary spaces.

### Desire-based Framework and Wise Practices

This study used a desire-based framework and wise practices to ground the study in Indigenous approaches. This study sought to look beyond a damage-based approach that emphasizes the "experiences of dispossessed and disenfranchised communities so that [Indigenous] people are seen as more than broken and conquered" (Tuck, 2009, p. 416). It is easy to see these students through deficit lenses, given that many come to the program without the typical academic and personal backgrounds of mainstream students. Instead, I applied a desire-based framework, which emphasized the wisdom and hope of what is good in Indigenous communities. Although I did not share my desire-based framework with educators in this study,

they shared practices that reflected this framework back to me. They also shared what Grande

(2015) describes as hope. This sense of hope connects Indigenous peoples to our past through

ancestors, Elders, and knowledge keepers in order to carry us into the future. Educators in this

study demonstrated how they disrupted practices that did not serve their students and shared wise

practices that bind the past into the future as hope. Educators used a desire-based framework to

enhance access programs. Through this framework they described common yet localized

practices, which I described in Chapter 5 as wise practices, which I turn to next.

Wesley-Esquimaux and Calliou (2010) describe a wise practices approach as reflecting

the importance and richness of relationships, respect of the unique aspects of each community,

leadership, and an understanding that things are constantly changing while each person involved

brings in their own views and experiences (p. 19). Based on their description, I heard educators

discuss wise relational practices that differed by place. These wise practices were:

1. Practicing and Modeling Relationality

2. Supporting Students Holistically

3. Locally and Culturally Sustaining/Revitalizing Practices

4. Student Success—Balancing the Needs of Students with the Requirements of the University.

The four wise practices of educators are discussed fully in Chapter 5. I believe that

educators' wise practices offer me a guide to relational practices. This model of wise-practices

emerged from "stitched together" examples of culturally sustaining/revitalizing practices from

educators that I can adapt to my own contexts within the NAP based on students' nationhood,

languages, and communities. For my purposes, a wise practices approach is preferable to the

existing access program models (Levin & Alcorn, 1998; HRSDC, 2012) because it emerged

from Indigenous educators' perspectives from within Indigenous programs. Further, educators'

wise practices account for all of the elements within these existing models (Levin & Alcorn, 1998; HRSDC, 2012) and adds context to holistic supports. This model of wise practice for access programs extends the existing models through educators' use of CSRP and desire-based frameworks to ground Indigenous access programs within Indigenous ways of knowing and doing. I conclude this thesis with recommendations for further research for those who seek to learn more from access programs in Canada.

**Recommendations**

This study opens the potential for further research, which includes exploring the heart connection—the way in which educators work with Indigenous students in PSE to create a safe space where trust is built and vulnerability is welcome. While I pored over the rich interviews I had with educators in this study, I wondered if a heart connection (that I heard consistently from them) has an impact on learning and success for Indigenous students? I believe that future research needs to include the voices of the students. Their voices may inform and extend descriptions of success, from their perspectives. Gaining student perspectives on their experiences within the access program would enhance the literature and confirm how the wise practices of educators' match students' perspectives and experiences in access programs. Further, their voices alongside educators' practices could influence how access programs continue to grow and move forward within PSIs. For me, these recommendations mark the end of my study. The end of my thesis also marks the beginning of my praxis: to learn from the 16 Indigenous educators that contributed their wise practices. Their practices will live on as I adapt them for Indigenous students in the NAP.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMATION LETTER FOR PARTICIPANTS



Faculty of Education
t: (807) 343-8050
e: ldesmoul@lakeheadu.ca

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Jerri-Lynn Orr and I am the Coordinator of the Native Access Program at Lakehead University and a Master of Education (Indigenous Education) student, in the Faculty of Education. I am doing a study called Access Programs for Indigenous students in Canada: A Case Study. The purpose of this research is to better understand the experiences, best practices and wise practices of educators in four access programs across Canada. I am exploring this topic through the experiences of educators who work in access program at various sites in Canada. Educators include program coordinators, Elders, student services and any other person who plays a vital role in the success of your access program. You are being invited to participate because you are involved with an access program in your community.

Your participation is voluntary. This means that you can choose not to participate at all or you can withdraw from the study at any time. As well, you can choose to not answer any of the questions that I ask you during the interview.

Should you agree to participate, I will arrange a time that is convenient for you and I will travel to you for an audio recorded interview, which will last between one to one and a half hours. This interview will be guided by some questions, with plenty of room for the conversation to be guided by your thoughts and experiences. Interviews can may also be done in a sharing circle, and if you choose to do the interview this way, I cannot guarantee confidentiality because others will be present. You may request a copy of my research from me, by checking the box on the attached Consent Form.

I, along with my thesis supervisor, Dr. Leisa Desmoulins, will be the only people who will see and hear the information you provide, review the data in written form, and see any identifying information. Dr. Desmoulins will only see the data for guidance, if necessary. For confidentiality, any hard copies of the data will be stored in a locked cabinet and any electronic copies on a password-protected, secure software program on a computer, to prevent anyone from accessing it, for 5 years following completion of this study.

I do not see any risk to you as a participant in this study. Your identity will be anonymous, although I cannot absolutely guarantee anonymity because of the small sample size of participants, but will do my best to. You can choose a pseudonym (a name other than your own) or I will give you one so that no one can identify you if I present this study at a conference or write about it. You may prefer to use your own name or choose to do your interview with another person. The information you give me is confidential, although I cannot maintain your

anonymity or the confidentiality of your information if you choose to identify yourself or do your interview with another person. The intention of this research, once completed is to publish and/or make public presentations at conferences to share the best practices and wise practices for Access Programs in Canada.

The Lakehead University Research Ethics Board has approved this study. If you have any questions about this study, please contact me by telephone (807-346-7709) or by email (jorr1@lakeheadu.ca). If you have any questions about the ethics of the study and you would like to speak someone else, please contact Sue Wright who is with the Office of Research at Lakehead University. She can be reached at number (807) 343-8283. Should you have any further questions about my research, please feel free to contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. Leisa Desmoulins by phone (807-343-8050) or by email (ldesmoul@lakeheadu.ca).

Meegwetch,


Jerri-Lynn Orr
Coordinator, Native Access Program
Masters Student, Master of Education (Indigenous Education)
Lakehead University

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

Faculty of Education
t: (807) 343-8050
e: ldesmoul@lakeheadu.ca

Consent Form

Access Programs for Indigenous students in Canada: A Case Study

I have read and understand the covering letter for the study. This study has been explained to me and I agree to participate. I am a volunteer and I may withdraw from the study at any time and may choose not to answer any questions(s). Names as well as any other identifying information in our discussions will be withheld from the written outcomes of the study, to protect my anonymity. I may waive my anonymity by using my own name and/or by doing an interview with one or more others. I understand that the data that I provide will be securely stored at Lakehead University for five years. If I wish, I can request an electronic and print format of the report, when it becomes available. I understand that my institution will not be identified in any publications or reports.

I authorize the audiotaping of the interview.
Yes ____ No ____

I authorize pictures to be taken of the space that my program is housed.
Yes ____ No ____

I agree to waive my anonymity, by using my own name and/or by doing an interview with others.
Yes ____ No ____

I wish to receive a copy of the final report.
Yes ____ No ____

Signed this ____ day of _____, 20____.


_____
Signature


_____
Name (Please Print)

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

**Lakehead**
U N I V E R S I T Y

Interview Guide

[Complete consent first]

I am having a conversation/interview with educators who work in access programs across
Canada, which include: program coordinators, Elders, tutors, and other program supports.
I will be using what Margaret Kovach (2009) calls "conversation as method" during this
interview.

I would now like to ask you questions about your experience with working in access programs,
and how you support your students in working towards completing the program and ready to
transition into an undergraduate program.

When you answer the questions, please use examples. You are free not to respond to any
question or stop this interview at any time. Should you choose, you may also withdraw from this
study completely at any time.

| 1. | Introductory Questions | Prompts |
|---|---|---|
| | a) What is your role in the access program? | |
| | b) How long have you been involved in the access program? | |
| | c) What does a typical weekday look like look like for you? For your students? | |

| 2. | Strategies that support access program students | Prompts |
|---|---|---|
| | a) What strategies are used by educators in access programs to support learners holistically? | Physical well-being?<br><br>Emotional well-being?<br><br>Spiritual well-being?<br><br>Mental/intellectual well-<br><br>being? |
| | b) What academic supports do you offer that best support students?<br>      i. Who provides these supports? | Academic workshops?<br><br>Tutoring?<br><br>One on one student support?<br><br>Number of graduates? |
| | c) How does your access program measure student success? | |
| | d) From an educator's perspective, how have these strategies and supports empowered students in the access program? | "To be an empowered learner means to be motivated to perform tasks, and more specifically an empowered person finds the tasks meaningful, feels competent to perform them, and feels his/her efforts have an impact on the scheme of things." (Houser, M. L. and Frymier, A. B. (2009). p. 36) |

| 3. | Access and equity to PSE for Indigenous students | Prompts |
|---|---|---|
| | a) How do you define access to PSE for Indigenous students? | |
| | b) How do you define equity for Indigenous students in PSE? | |
| | c) How does your institution support access and equity to PSE for Indigenous students? | Admission requirements? What does your institution use to assess students who wish to attend your access program? |
| | d) How/ How has your institution implemented access into its strategic plan? | Is it mandated? For staffing? Instructors? Professors? Etc. |
| | e) How are resources allocated for access programs? | Classroom resources? Tuition? |
| 4. | Program evaluation | Prompts |
| | a) Do you track program completion for access students? | How do you do this? Do you have support to do this from the university? |
| | b) Are you still involved in their educational journey once the complete the access program? | How do you support access students once they move on to their undergraduate program? |
| 5. | Student characteristics | Prompts |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | a) What is the age range of students your program serves? | |
| | b) What academic background do your students generally come from? | High school graduates? Applied credits? Academic credits? |
| | c) Are your students mostly urban or rural? | Mature students? What age? Are they First Nation? Inuit? Metis? |
| 6. | Concluding Questions and Remarks | Prompts |
| | a) What steps for further research would you recommend for determining educator's experience in access programs? | |
| | b)  Is there anything further that you would like to add that we have not already cover? | |
| | c) Do you have any questions for me? | |