

A Seventh Fire Spark

Preparing the Seventh Generation:

**What are the Education Related Needs and Concerns
of Students from Rainy River First Nations?**

by

**Robert Animikii Horton
“Bebaamweyaazh”
Waabizheshi Dodem**

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Abstract:

This study examines factors that impact high school completion for Rainy River First Nations students living on-reserve in the Manitou Rapids community in Ontario. Utilizing traditional community knowledge as a guiding framework and a qualitative inquiry guided by Indigenous research ethics and Anishinaabe protocols, open-ended interviews were conducted with three key informants and six young people who resided on-reserve during schooling years to discuss their educational experiences, needs and concerns. Based on these interviews, this study brings First Nations student voices and experiences to the forefront to show that on-reserve First Nations high school completion is influenced by significant challenges that are related to the trauma and history of colonization in Canada. Former students discussed concerns and challenges in the intertwined areas of the school, family, community, and culture. The research reflections reported in this study prompted the development of a framework for a partnership model of educational support which incorporates the Anishinaabe Seven Grandfather Teachings.

“It is only by unveiling truth about reality that one can come to a critical understanding of the present and learn what needs to be done for the future.”

Paulo Freire

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From the memory and foundations of Chief Mawedopenais (Long Sault Rapids, Rainy River Anishinaabe) to the times of the Neesh-wa-swi Ish-ko-day-kawn and beyond; For our Youth. For our Leaders who lead by integrity and example. For our People. For Seven Generations Forward.

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Introduction

Chickasaw educator Eber Hampton (1995:261) says that no aspect of a culture is more vital to its integrity than its means of education. Likewise, Ron Mackay and Lawrence Myles (1995:157) state that the importance of a graduation diploma cannot be overstated in Canada today. And on both points, I agree.

The purpose of this research is to give voice to the education-related needs and concerns of youth in the community of Rainy River First Nations (RRFN). My hope is that these voices and the messages they carry will be heard by educators, families, and community leaders, and that this will lead to increased support to promote educational success for students of RRFN, also called Manitou Rapids or, traditionally, Manidoo Baawitigong.

In this thesis, except when utilizing primary sources such as the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP 1996) and information gathered from Statistics Canada, educators, and scholars, I do not use the term ‘Aboriginal’ (as used in the *Constitution Act* of Canada 1982) in this study. Instead, the word “indigenous” is used throughout this study to describe the three groups normally termed “Aboriginal” in Canada: Indians (status and non-status), Métis, and Inuit. However, when discussing those with whom Canada has a fiduciary and “status” responsibility (and who have their collectivities represented with a local government defined as Bands), the term “First Nations” is applied. Indigenous scholar Taiaiake Alfred (2005) states that the government-imposed classification of “Aboriginal” upon indigenous peoples has facilitated the continuation of colonialism, imperialism, and the further homogenization of a diverse people:

Unpacked as a social, political, and intellectual construction, it is a highly offensive word. It reflects the prevailing colonial mentality in its redefinition of Onkwehonwe (Original People) away from our original languages... ”Aboriginalism” is assimilation’s end game, the terminological and psychic displacement of authentic indigenous identities, beliefs, and behaviours with one designated by Indian Department bureaucrats,

government lawyers, and judges to complete the imperial objective of exterminating Onkwehonwe presence from the social and political landscape (Alfred 2005:126).

The First Nations, Métis, and Inuit population (collectively termed “Aboriginal” by the Canadian government) comprises 3.8% of the total Canadian population and is rapidly growing. Fifty-eight percent of “Aboriginal” people in Canada are under the age of 25, compared to 23% of non-“Aboriginal” people. One-third of the “Aboriginal” population is under 14 years of age and the birthrate is approximately 70% higher than that of non-Aboriginal Canadians (Avison 2004; Statistics Canada 2006). Between 1996 and 2006, the “Aboriginal” population grew by 45%, as compared with 8% for the non-Aboriginal population. Although these statistics indicate a growing indigenous population and youth base, “Aboriginal” students continue to demonstrate an alarming high school completion rate that is far lower than that for mainstream Canadians (ibid).

In 2006, 40% of those who identified as “Aboriginal” in Canada between the ages of 20 and 25 did not have a high school diploma, compared to 13% for non-“Aboriginal” Canadians. As well, 61% of registered First Nations people living “on-reserve” did not complete high school (Richards 2008; Statistics Canada 2006). Research suggests that it may take more than 20 years of accelerated and restorative education for First Nations people to catch up to the national average for high school graduation (Auditor General of Canada 2000; Battiste and McClean 2005).

Education and the completion of formal schooling is critically important for gaining the kinds of experiences, knowledge, skills, and credentials required for success in contemporary indigenous communities and Canadian society (Schissel and Wotherspoon 2003). When one does not attain such skills and credentials, the chances for success decrease while the likelihood of marginalization increases. Education and schooling are also at the heart of the struggle for

indigenous peoples to regain control over their lives, communities, and nations (Castellano, Davis and Lahache 2000:xi).

Since they come from different communities and are grounded in different family histories and influences, the voices of indigenous youth, as well as Canadian youth in general, represent a diversity of experiences, perspectives, and hopes (Schissel and Wotherspoon 2003:2). Accordingly, indigenous populations cannot be generalized or treated as homogenous in terms of experience and dynamics (although they may be similar). As well, Bergstrom, Peacock and Cleary (2003) state that the diverse voices of young people should be included in research regarding educational needs. They argue that no one can better describe needs and experiences than those living within the very heart of experience (ibid).

Ultimately, the research will demonstrate that, although various and progressive efforts have been undertaken to support the educational success of indigenous and First Nations students within Canadian schools, students from Rainy River First Nations have identified interrelated areas of experience where education-related support is needed and has been lacking in their lives. It will also suggest that the partnerships to promote learning that were central to traditional education, but which were fractured as a result of colonization, need to once again become commonplace. The Seven Generations Education Institute (SGEI), which combines education and culture to create a holistic approach to education, is an extremely valuable resource for Rainy River First Nations student support, and an example of the new approach to indigenous education that is beginning to be taken across Canada and the United States. To facilitate the visualization of what needs to happen, I have created a visual framework and analysis, **The Gikino Amawaagan Wheel**, which is shown on page 115 of this thesis.

Personal Connection to the Study

Community and Clan Responsibility

I am a proud member of RRFN, a descendant of Long Sault Rapids (“*Kaynachiwahnung*”), and strongly committed to the well-being of our youth, our people, and our culture’s continuity in contemporary society. When our People are born into this world, our personal responsibilities to our communities and People are not taken lightly. We are born into different clans (Dodem) which carry responsibilities to ensure that the needs of our People are met (Benton-Banai 1981). I was born into the Waabizheshi Dodem (Marten Clan) which is the Anishinaabe clan traditionally known as strategists involved with the defense of our People’s well-being (Benton-Banai 1981). This study, centered on identifying and understanding where support must be increased, works to fulfill this responsibility to my community with a good heart and in a good way.

Family Legacy

Further connection to the development of this research is that of the proud legacy of my family. My family has been very influential in First Nations and indigenous education and community leadership for many, many generations. Examples include our family’s grandfather, Chief Mawedopenais, who advocated for educational rights for future generations (lead negotiating the terms of Treaty #3 over eleven years until 1873), my mother, Shirley Horton (“*Niiyoobinesik*”) who has spent over 35 years as a First Nations educator and family advocate, Chief Jim Horton (“*Niishwasobenais*”, former Supreme Chief of the Indian Nations of North America), Chief Sandy Horton (“*Omishimaakonago*”), Delbert Horton (“*Gichi Anakwut*,” former Chief and founder of Seven Generations Educational Institute), lifelong Midewewin Lodge member and medicine woman Maggie Horton (“*Miskwaanamanok*”), educator and aunt Laura

Horton (*Niizhgnebig*), and many others. In our culture, the family's influence and the lessons that are brought to us by our families are central to our life in this world. In Anishinaabe life, across our years of lifelong learning, we learn by example (Peacock and Wisuri 2002). I hope that I may follow in the footsteps of my family and do so with integrity and consistency.

Personal Experience

Lastly and just as important, my connection to this study comes from my personal experience as a young man of indigenous heritage with recent memories of being a student in the public schooling system. I understand first-hand the struggles faced by many of our young people regarding issues such as identity and maintaining cultural affinity and pride, as we must “walk in two worlds” and struggle with ourselves. From my experience, I recall feeling that I had a perspective and valid concerns to share as a young Anishinaabe person, but rarely were these concerns and suggestions listened to by my teachers with open ears and open hearts.

Contextualization of the Rainy River First Nations Community

Rainy River First Nations (also known as Manidoo Baawitigong; Manitou Rapids; RRFN; and Indian Reserve #11) is a First Nations community located along the north side of the Gimiwani Ziibiing (Rainy River) approximately 30 kilometres west of Fort Frances, between the towns of Barwick and Emo, Ontario. Manitou Rapids has an on-reserve population of 340 with nearly every resident a band member of Rainy River First Nations. Fewer than 5% of residents are fluent in Anishinaabemowin; all of those who are fluent are older than 50 years of age. The majority of the on-reserve population is below the age of 15 (RRFN Housing Documentation 2008). Of the 57 Rainy River First Nations members on social assistance, over 80% are 25 years of age and under. Similarly, a majority of community members on social assistance (89%) are

without a high school diploma or grade-12 certification (RRFN Social Assistance Documentation 2008).

River of Time: A Brief History of Rainy River First Nations

Following the Anishinaabe Westward Migration across Turtle Island (North America), indigenous habitation of the Rainy River region resulted in many generations of traditional governance, seasonal migration and sustenance, cultural affinity, ceremony, and a close relationship with the traditional Seven Grandfather Teachings (Kaynahchiwahnung 2008). After the arrival of European explorers and settlers, the indigenous population was interested in developing positive and cooperative relationships between the Anishinaabe and European newcomers. Anishinaabe people of the Rainy River agreed to share their inhabited lands with the newcomers in exchange for goods and services to benefit the indigenous people, as well as services and protected rights for coming generations. Negotiated by Long Sault Rapids Chief and spokesperson Mawedopenais and supported by a number of regional leaders, Treaty #3 agreements (1873) led to the development of seven specified and selected areas of reserve land based upon the traditional importance and usage of such areas. These selected reserve lands spanned from Lake of the Woods to today's Fort Frances region. From West to East these protected reserve lands were: Paskonkin (also known as Hungry Hall No. 2); The Bishop (also known as Hungry Hall No. 1); Wildlands, Long Sault Rapids No. 1; Long Sault Rapids No. 2; Manitou Rapids; and Little Forks (ibid). However, with the development of railroads, European demands for more land and resources were constant. Due to jurisdictional and border disagreements between the governments of Ontario and Canada, Ontario "surrendered" six of the seven reserves along the Rainy River in 1914 and 1915. Prior to the sale of the lands by Ontario, an amalgamation from each reserve was enacted and all residents were forced to relocate to

Manitou Rapids. The residents of Manitou Rapids are the descendants of families who resided there before and after 1873, as well as the descendants of former residents of the other six amalgamated communities (RRFN Land Claim 2005). In 2005, RRFN settled a historic land and financial compensation claim due to the unjust amalgamation (totalling approximately \$72 million dollars) and an external trust account (and investment portfolio) was developed for purposes of future economic development, education, health, cultural purposes, and community growth (RRFN Land Claim Trust 2009).

The indigenous people in the Rainy River and Manitou Rapids region have a dynamic history of political involvement and engagement in cultural livelihood activities. Some examples of this are collaborations and partnerships with neighbouring communities, involvement in political independence struggles and resistance (such as the Indian Nations of North America, INNA), and an active history in the Midiwewin Grand Medicine Society (Peers 1994; Shewell 1999). RRFN employs 30 full-time staff, as well as a number of contract staff and students during the summer months. On-reserve resources available to community members include family and/or addictions counselling, other family services, youth recreational opportunities, education programs, housing, and social assistance. There is also a resource centre library, a gymnasium, a community park and playground, and events such as annual education awards, a regular Fish-fry celebration, and an annual summer Pow Wow at which all are welcome. A culturally significant historical centre (Kaynahchiwahnung) on the traditional lands of Long Sault Rapids (outside Stratton) is also maintained by RRFN.

A Current Community Education-Related Crisis in Context

In 2008, there were 44 on-reserve students from RRFN attending one of three area elementary schools (Emo's Donald Young Elementary, Stratton's Our Lady of the Way, and

Devlin's Crossroads Elementary). At the secondary level, 23 students attended Fort Frances High School, and 22 students were enrolled at Seven Generations alternative satellite school on the Manitou Rapids reserve to earn their grade 12 diploma by attending small classes with personalized attention from teachers, and engaging in self-directed study. Each school falls under the jurisdiction of the Rainy River District School Board (RRFN Education Documentation 2008).

The District has various support mechanisms in place, such as language programs for early elementary students and classes available for high school students, an annual Pow-Wow at Fort Frances High School, a strong bond between Seven Generations Educational Institute and the Rainy River District School Board involving the current Chief of Rainy River First Nations, breakfast programs for elementary school students, and annual awards/incentives for students from RRFN who do well.

Compared to the national First Nations graduation rate average of roughly 30%, RRFN has a graduation rate of less than 9% (RRFN Education Documentation 2008). According to Rainy River District School Board Superintendant Brent Tookenay (personal communication), although other area First Nations have begun to demonstrate progress in terms of beginning to increase high school completion rates at Fort Frances High School, Rainy River First Nations has hit a plateau whereby graduation rates are no longer increasing. As well, Education Counselor Marcel Medicine-Horton (personal communication) is concerned that few students are making progress towards earning their grade 12 diploma at Seven Generations Educational Institute by the time they are eighteen.

Organizing Framework: Mishkwegaabow's Perspective

At the development stage of my research; lodgekeeper, elder, healer, educator, and former RRFN Chief Mishkwegaabow (Albert Hunter Jr.) shared a teaching with me that would guide how I grounded my research. Grounded in traditional knowledge, a decade of experience as an educator, and familiar with the struggles of indigenous students and communities, Mishkwegaabow introduced me to an understanding that I have adopted as the foundational theoretical framework. He stated that our indigenous youth (just as all youth beginning to walk the four hills of life) are holistically shaped and influenced by their interwoven experiences which are like the quadrants of a medicine wheel. The four areas of experience identified by Mishkwegaabow involve time spent at home within the **family**, experiences within a young person's **community**, the experiences at **school**, and the relationship to their **cultural heritage** (Mishkwegaabow 2008).

Plan of Thesis

The first chapter offers a review of relevant literature to highlight issues and insights that are useful to understand the unique education-related challenges, needs, and experiences of First Nations students. The second chapter will present research methods that were central to the development and application of this study. The third chapter will introduce readers to this study's research participants from Rainy River First Nations and share their stories by means of brief narratives. The fourth chapter will utilize thematic themes of analysis to explore and present trends identified by interviews regarding education-related needs and support faced by students, as well as contrasting with previous relevant research. Lastly, the fifth chapter will reflect on research implications for action, as well as a developed framework for educational support.

Chapter One: Review of Literature

This chapter offers a review of relevant literature to highlight issues and insights that are useful to understand the unique education-related challenges, needs, and experiences of indigenous students. The review is organized three sections. First, a brief historical summary to show that many current circumstances and challenges are rooted in indigenous colonial experience will be provided. Also, the move from traditional education towards fragmented schooling impacted by current neoliberal policies will be discussed. Second, I will provide a thematic review of challenges and concerns facing on-reserve students in families, schools, communities, and with regard to cultural heritage. Lastly, a review of relevant qualitative studies with indigenous students about their experiences, needs and concerns will be presented.

A Historical Perspective on Indigenous Education

While there is a growing literature on the education-related needs and concerns of indigenous students written by educators and policy-makers, research that brings student voices and experiences forward is a fairly new and undeveloped area in comparison. To understand current challenges that affect indigenous students, one must become familiar with the legacy of colonization which Nicholas (2001) describes as a continuous wave of colonial pressures to eradicate or assimilate indigenous people.

Traditional Education

Although most mainstream accounts begin discussions about indigenous schooling with European arrival, the Anishinaabe and other indigenous peoples of Turtle Island (“North America”) had developed complex educational processes long before contact (Kirkness and Bowman 1992). Traditional education was defined by a supportive partnership and cultural

vibrancy; an informal, lifelong pursuit of knowledge and understanding that was based in respect and the honouring of all relations of creation. All adults, family, community members, culture holders and elders were consistently involved as partners and educators, valuing and cultivating traits such as observation and listening. This ensured the transmission of cyclical knowledge and self-reliance to younger generations (Peacock and Wisuri 2002). Such education was inseparable from the culture and spirituality, and promoted the holistic growth of a person regarding the spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual dimensions of human development (Armstrong 1987; Battiste and McLean 2005). This process was further shaped by ceremony and language, the sharing of values such as the Seven Grandfather Teachings, rites of passage, traditional principles, cultural teachings, observation, and storytelling (Ermine 1995; Kirkness and Bowman 1992; Peacock and Wisuri 2002).

Education Towards Assimilation

Beginning with the introduction of European missionaries, indigenous learning began to undergo radical changes (Nicholas 2001). McNeil (1999) argues that adaptations of ideas put forth by Charles Darwin by nineteenth century social theorists were utilized to prompt a widespread belief in White racial and cultural superiority. Darwin's theories of evolutionary biology were utilized to justify ideologies of survival of the fittest, competitive individualism, class structures, and the belief that indigenous peoples were socially primitive and in the early stages of civilization (ibid). Following the Bagot Commission's proposal for agriculture-based boarding schools situated far from parental influence and Egerton Ryerson's recommendation of religious-based government funded schools, assimilationist policies guided by a Social Darwinist ideology and a nationalistic push to create the Canadian citizen led to thousands of children being uprooted from communities to be indoctrinated through religious instruction (Nicholas

2001). Beginning in the 1840s, children began to be sent to residential schools to become Christianized labourers and indoctrinated with mainstream values (Castellano, Archibald and Degagne 2008; House of Commons 1883; Kirkness and Bowman 1992; Ormiston 2002; Stonechild 2006). Sections 114 through 122 of the Indian Act (legislation codified in 1876 without consulting the indigenous peoples it was created to control) required “Indian” children to attend state-sponsored schools (Mendelson 2008). Tens of thousands who were forced to attend residential schools faced unfathomable sexual, physical, and emotional abuse and were forbidden to have contact with parents and communities, or to speak their language; resulting in the tragic disruption of culture and identity (Kirkness and Bowman 1992). Although the residential school system began to be abandoned in favour of integrating indigenous peoples into the public school system in the 1940s, the last residential school did not close until 1996, and the impact of such a system has devastated indigenous communities and has been felt across generations (Jacobs and Williams 2008; Kirkness and Bowman 1992; Nicholas 2001). Many of the current challenges facing communities including substance abuse and loss of identity can be directly traced to the impact of the residential school system (Kirkness and Bowman 1992; RCAP 1996).

Towards Integration

As children were integrated into provincial schools and given Eurocentric instruction, assimilationist goals remained intact, and a Western framework using a formalized, depersonalized learning style of schooling replaced the traditional indigenous style of education and personalized inquiry-based learning immersed in practical experiences (Brokenleg, Brendtro and Van Bockern 1990). Kirkness and Bowman (1992) point out that integration was introduced with little-to-no consultation with communities and families, nor preparation of curriculum designed to accommodate students outside of the mainstream culture. This led to low completion

rates because assimilationist practices were still at the heart of the educational structure and experience (ibid). In a response to the 1969 White Paper which advocated for the obliteration of the Indian Act and Indian status, the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) released a position paper entitled Control of Indian Education (National Indian Brotherhood 1973). Supported by the Minister of Indian Affairs, the position paper advocated local control and parental responsibility to support indigenous student identities.

Schools and the Marginalization of Indigenous Experience

Theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Paulo Freire, John Ogbu and George Dei have discussed how modern schooling systems have further marginalized populations that have already been subjected to societal barriers and challenges. Such theories assist to frame an understanding of the role that the very structure of current schooling has had on indigenous people's mobility in society.

In a Canadian context, Wotherspoon (2004:40) draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu to discuss schooling as a mechanism of cultural and class reproduction across generations where various social groups struggle for position and advantage, as well as a vehicle for the maintenance of class privilege. Bourdieu (1977) argues that current social structures and the continuation of class inequalities are tied to the possession of social capital, which is defined in terms of having social and cultural assets that are linked to power, prestige, and economics. According to Bourdieu, schools are infused with many class-based value assumptions and expectations, so that one can succeed at school only to the extent that one possesses social capital. Social capital is generally transmitted through the family, so that those who are raised to value dominant manners of expression, attitudes, behaviours, preferences, and rules of conduct, are privileged vis-à-vis those social groups who are not taught dominant values and ways of

being. The possession of social capital gives one increased economic and social advantages over others who lack social capital, and this leads to the reproduction of the existing distribution of social capital across classes. A diploma, therefore, is less likely to facilitate access to privileged positions for groups with little social capital than for those with more. Discussing this reproduction process, Bourdieu explains:

By converting social hierarchies into academic hierarchies, the education system fulfills a function of legitimation which is more and more necessary to the perpetuation of the "social order" as the evolution of the power relationship between classes tends more completely to exclude the imposition of a hierarchy based upon the crude and ruthless affirmation of the power relationship. (Bourdieu 1977:498)

Paulo Freire (1970) argues that modern schools actively maintain the marginalization of certain social groups; formal schooling is a political process whereby privileged groups impose values, beliefs, and ideologies through non-democratic, authoritarian procedures. Social inequalities that benefit privileged and influential classes are maintained with limited challenge, as students in the formal schooling system are regarded as repositories of facts. Freire conceptualizes standard schooling practices as the "banking" form of education, whereby students are regarded as vessels and are given accreditation based on the ability to memorize facts which are presented as separate, independent, and unrelated units. Original knowledges (such as traditional education and indigenous worldviews) outside of a Western framework are discredited and there is little to no room for such knowledge or worldviews within the curricula, nor for critical thinking that may empower those who are subjugated. As Freire argues "[t]he more completely [students] accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them" (1970:73).

Freire argues that oppressed peoples need to be offered problem-posing education, designed to cultivate critical-thinking praxis skills through discussion. Problem-posing

education is transformative in that it offers them the tools needed to liberate themselves from marginalized circumstances. In the absence of access to this education for critical consciousness, oppressed peoples are not likely to contest their marginalized circumstances, and the existing structures of privilege and oppression are likely to be preserved (ibid).

Ogbu and Simons (1998) argue that while structural barriers or discrimination in society may be important deterrents to consider in terms of minority school achievement, as are factors of culture and language, they are only part of the picture. There are also structural barriers within the schooling system itself, such as the way minorities are treated in terms of schooling policies, pedagogy, and differential returns for schooling investments. In turn, minority communities are likely to respond to their poor treatment such that school adjustment and performance are negatively affected. The community responses are defined by the minority group's perception of their treatment within the school system, as well as how their minority/subordinate status was historically cultivated (such as involuntary minorities who are defined by conquering, colonization, or enslavement). The results may be contradictory and/or ambivalent messages towards schooling by parents and communities (due to such factors as mistrust of schooling, identity problems which are defined in opposition to oppressors, viewing schooling as a method of assimilation) which are passed on to students and manifest in behaviours such as reduced efforts, failure to pay attention, defiance, criticizing those who succeed in a school system as "acting white," giving up, and dropping out. In turn, parents may blame the school system alone for lack of student achievement, which works to maintain the cycle of poor performance (ibid).

Dei (2003) argues that the socially constructed concept of race has been an effective tool in society to categorize people in order to maintain the unequal distribution of power favouring dominant groups. Dei argues that modern schools are imbedded with not only biological forms

of racial marginalization such as categorization, but also a multidimensional form that includes culture, whereby coming from a minority culture is perceived as an educational deficit. In such a structure, aspects of teaching methodologies, curriculum strategies, pedagogy, knowledge production, and what is considered “valid knowledge” are exclusively Euro-Canadian, while knowledges and experiences that are culturally and possibly ideologically different (or in opposition to the status quo) are discredited. Consequently, student groups marginalized in the classroom may choose not to continue when schools cannot meet their needs or approaches to learning. Thus, power relations are maintained and reproduced through the monopoly of “valid knowledge” and the culture of schools and relations that lead to completion and success. Power relations are also protected by the lack of classroom discourse about power relations such as structural and ideological barriers that affect subordinated groups; systemically silencing viewpoints that may challenge or question the matter (ibid).

Understanding the Move from Education to Western “Schooling”

As Western formal schooling was forced on indigenous people, holistic education, knowledge, and learning was replaced with a rigid system geared towards compartmentalization, formal rules and procedures, administrative measures towards credentials and fragmented, distant bodies of support (Brokenleg, Brendtro and Van Bockern 1990). This fragmentation and distancing of support systems is antithetical to the concept of support embedded in traditional education. Hampton (1995) argues that the very structure of Western schooling is hostile towards indigenous people due to the curriculum, context, and personnel; the contemporary North American school is a political, social, and cultural institution that embodies and transmits the values, knowledge, and behaviours of mainstream culture. Although efforts have recently been undertaken to spur indigenous student success, many have felt that the fundamental aspects of

the Western schooling system have continued to be problematic (ibid). Brokenleg, Brendtro and Van Bockern (1990) argue that the Western framework reflects the concept of Taylor's scientific management, so that a hierarchical, impersonal system of "command and control," reflecting military, business, and industry structures has taken priority and dominance over indigenous learning. Hart (2005) argues that within such a framework, cooperative learning and the fundamentals of traditional education and being have been viewed as inferior and therefore ignored.

The Influx of Neoliberalism into Schooling: A Growing Challenge

Neoliberalism, the influx of business-oriented values into schools, has led to schools being restructured to serve expansionist economic policies, rather than teach critical thought and learning (Hill 2008; Hursh 2001). In the 1980s in the United States, the Presidency of Ronald Reagan began transforming society to meet the competitive needs of corporations, big business, and globalized capitalist markets, rather than the needs of citizens and communities (Hursh 2001; McLaren 2007). Based on capitalism's goal of the sanctification of private (or corporate) profit based on the appropriation of workers' surplus labour, schooling is currently being re-shaped on a global scale to support the policies of neo-liberalism that are favoured and promoted by governments and corporations, designed to create labourers rather than thinkers (Hill 2003; Hursh 2001). Hursh (2001) states that financial giants such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), whose policies focus on economic growth at the expense of social welfare and personal rights, are the specific policies currently being adopted into the school sector as values such as thought, democratic choice, and equality are sacrificed. This presents another dimension to challenges faced by indigenous learners. Dei (2002:1) argues that

corporate intrusion into learning has “disenfranchised” spiritual learners, undermining their inner strengths within a framework that defines learners “as objects in a social system.”

Neoliberal schooling policies, defined by business-oriented values, competitiveness, “teaching towards the test” rather than teaching for understanding, standardization of assessments and tests for promotion to a higher grade level, control of curriculum and theory, accounting and auditing, and accountability to the State and business investors rather than to the public well-being, serve two primary functions: to produce labourers for the service sector; and to control any ideological challenges to the stratified power structure by students (Hill 2003, 2008; Hursh 2001; McLaren 2007). Teachers, who are major players in shaping future ideologies and imaginations of students, are also constrained from teaching sociological and political examination of the structure of inequality, class struggle, and the very problems within schooling systems, as critical theories are relegated to teacher training only (Hill 2003; McLaren 2007).

Although neoliberal policies are promoted by State apparatuses as natural, free, and democratic, the effects of neoliberalism on education and schooling negatively impact learners and the quality of learning, and limit access to participation in economies for marginalized peoples. Neoliberal policies create outcomes such as increased social inequalities, stratified economies, the creation and maintenance of a perpetual working class, deepening poverty and increasing wealth, environmental degradation tied to shorter life expectancies, and learners who have been alienated from their own creative capacities (Hill 2003, 2008; Hursh 2001; McLaren 2007). Studies have shown that the introduction of neoliberal policies in schools are counterproductive for marginal students such as African American, Latino American, and South

Korean learners, leading to lack of performance, ambivalence about graduation, devaluation of completion diplomas, and settling for service sector careers (Choi 2005; McLaren 2007).

Neoliberalism also limits access to social mobility for marginalized groups. Students with impoverished parents (who may lack resources to support the learning of their children), as well as those from non-mainstream cultures who may lack the cultural and social capital valued by neoliberal schooling systems, are automatically marginalized and face challenges (Choi 2005; Hill 2008; see Bourdieu 1977). This is further exacerbated by the “racialization” of quality (or lower-quality) schools by means of “parental choice” and standardized assessments that place students on tracks of success or failure (McLaren 2007). McLaren argues that neoliberal financial domination, control of ideological thought and freethinking, and the maintained marginalization of certain groups allow the labour of a perpetual underclass to be used to benefit the wealthy, producing and reproducing class divisions and mass inequality (ibid). At the same time, elite control of what is learned means that the very structure “neutralizes and destroys potential pockets of resistance to global corporate expansion and neo-liberal Capital” at the expense of learners and communities (Hill 2008:40).

Impact of Colonization

Cassidy (2003) argues that the indigenous peoples of Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand share striking similarities due to the long term consequences of colonialism. Cassidy points out that each people’s history reveals “shared histories of segregation, assimilative processes, restrictive legislation, integration, and (to some extent) rights to land and self-determination and share tragic indices as direct consequences, finding themselves on the bottom rungs of the socioeconomic scale” (Cassidy 2003:409). Low

educational attainment is characteristic of each population and they are all more likely than others to live in poverty.

Yellowbird (1998) argues that every facet of indigenous life has been impacted by colonialism, including the economic, psychological, spiritual, intellectual, physical, and social elements of life. The effects of colonial pressures have been far-reaching in families, learning, communities, and cultural life and identity (Cassidy 2003; Nicholas 2001). Similarly, Wesley-Exquimaux and Smolewski (2004) argue that the psychological effects of areas of life impacted by colonial policies can manifest themselves in multigenerational traumas such as PTSD. Drawing on the work of Frantz Fanon (1963), Nicholas (2001) points out that a particular facet of colonialism is:

not merely the acceptance of colonial ideologies and views, but internal colonialism where the oppressed actively participate in their own indoctrination; devaluing their own cultural foundations and emulation of a colonizer's culture, beliefs, languages, and customs; emulating their oppressors in order to gain reliefs from their oppression; many times through the "need" for education that is often indoctrination (Nicholas 2001:11).

Why is Schooling Important for Indigenous Communities?

One cannot overstate the need for a high school diploma when considering future opportunities and well-being. Schooling represents a source of knowledge and skills, and school credentials can open doors to career opportunities (Alberta Commission of Learning 2003; MacKay and Miles 1995; Schissel and Wotherspoon 2003). Those without such credentials are more likely to encounter difficulty in entering and progressing in the workforce, face limited opportunities, find themselves dependant on social assistance, and face economic marginalization (Castellano, Davis and Lahache 2000; MacKay and Miles 1995; Schissel and Wotherspoon 2003:3). According to Richards (2008), families and communities living in marginalized and impoverished circumstances can escape poverty and transform their circumstances through education and schooling. Similarly, as pointed out by Poonwassie (2001)

and by Ferrer and Riddel (1994), schooling success and certification can lead to economic well-being and occupational/professional successes for families and communities.

Schooling can be a tool and central factor allowing indigenous peoples to regain control over their lives, communities, and nations (Castellano and Lahache 2000:xi). The RCAP (1996) emphasizes the need for educational attainment and training not only as a way to increase socioeconomic status for families and to improve employment prospects in a wide range of fields, but also as a path to rebuild political institutions, establish self-determination and self-government, manage economies, and to staff community social services. According to the RCAP, while youth need a strong foundation in traditions, educational proficiencies and skills valued by contemporary societies are essential (ibid). However, Wotherspoon (2004:224) points out that many indigenous people, more so than mainstream Canadians, continue to experience a disconnect between schooling and credential attainment and social and economic opportunities.

Increasing indigenous graduation rates would benefit not only First Nations students and First Nations communities, but Canada as a whole (Assembly of First Nations 2005; Brunnen 2003). Without a high school diploma, indigenous people earn less money than those who have graduated high school, and are twice as likely to be unemployed. Canada is likely to lose billions of dollars in productivity and labour growth over the next decade due to low high school and post-secondary completion rates for indigenous peoples. A study by Ottawa's Centre for the Study of Living Standards (Sharpe, Arsenault and Lapointe 2007) concludes that if First Nations people had the same graduation rate as the rest of the Canadian population, not only would two of the most significant dilemmas facing the economy of Canada (slow labour force and productivity growth) be addressed, but Canada's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would grow by \$71 billion dollars (ibid).

For these reasons, Battiste and McLean (2005) argue that “a tragedy looms” for Canada as a whole if the schooling systems do not correct the educational failures affecting indigenous students. Regardless of our backgrounds, we are all stakeholders in increased First Nations high school graduation rates, as well as a potential increased GDP due to increased First Nations workforce participation following increased credential attainment.

Education Related-Challenges in Context

Indigenous learners, in all colonized territories, share common experiences that are often very different from those of other student populations (Cassidy 2003; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education 2009). The legacy of colonization, assimilation, and imposed schooling systems has been the creation of significant challenges for indigenous students in the areas of the family, the school, the community, and relationship to culture. This section reviews literature focusing on each area.

Family Effects

Often, the family environment for indigenous peoples can be characterized by a lack of encouragement and support for schooling, there is often a high degree of substance abuse, and children may be traumatized due to being placed into foster care. This subsection reviews the literature on each of these problems.

Lack of Encouragement and Support for Schooling

Although parental involvement is a critical component for indigenous student success, Battiste and McLean (2005) point out that indigenous parents may not become involved in their children’s formal schooling for reasons such as feeling alienated by the school environment, speaking different languages than school staff, being contacted only for negative disciplinary

reasons, and feeling that the school does not reflect their values. Parents are typically invited to participate in limited ways in activities such as field trips, but are not invited to share their knowledge of skills and culture to help with their children's development. Although acknowledging that parents want the best for their children, Poonwassie (2001) states that parents may feel alienated from their children's schooling due to their own low levels of formal schooling, having to spend time caring for family members, feeling that elected persons or school officials are qualified to oversee their child's schooling, difficulties in communication, or feeling unwelcome in the school system. Faries (2009) argues that negative experiences faced by parents or grandparents in their own schooling have resulted in a lack of interest in education, apathy, and mistrust. Also, Mather (1997) notes that as the curriculum becomes more advanced, limited educational attainment makes it more likely that parents lack the content skills necessary to assist children with homework. Citing Delgado-Gaitan (1991), Friedel (1999) notes that low rates of parental participation in schooling may also be due to educators feeling they "know what is best" and therefore educational decision-making is done in isolation from family recommendations, and parents may lack knowledge about school system processes. Rather than having parents involved on a continuous basis, schools may involve parents when it is convenient, on the educator's own terms, or with primarily problematic children (Delgado-Gaitan 1991; Steinberg, Brown and Dornbush 1996). Due to a lack of trust or feeling unwelcome, Haig-Brown (1988) adds that parents who have been victims of the residential school system will likely not fully enter into school activities when they become parents of students.

MacKay and Miles (1995) conducted research in Ontario indigenous and non-indigenous communities in 1989 to better understand factors leading to indigenous non-high school

completion. They interviewed 310 participants, asking them about their reasons for dropping out of high school. They found that key factors associated most strongly with First Nations students dropping out of school were lack of parental support and encouragement towards schooling, lapsed communication between the school and home, and English language proficiency of parent and child. Parental support was greatly emphasized as the critical variable in a student's decision to stay in school. In homes where graduation and education is stressed, they found that students graduate. It was found that key issues were almost always intertwined with other factors such as socioeconomic factors and social problems that affect families and communities and which lie beyond the control of the school system.

Based on survey data collected from 240 urban American Indian students in two urban settings in the American Midwest, Powers (2005) identified educational variables that were negatively correlated with student age. Powers concludes that parental involvement may be increased by involving parents in curriculum design and instruction, but points out that some parents may need assistance in helping older youth meet academic and homework demands.

Substance Abuse in the Family

Anxiety and pain as a result of traumatic collective pasts, along with disconnection from cultural values, has led to widespread substance abuse amongst indigenous peoples (McCormick 2000). Bergstrom, Cleary, and Peacock (2003) found that substance abuse within the family and indigenous communities is a direct result of experiences of negative circumstances such as powerlessness, neglect, and racism. Sochting, Corrado, Cohen, Ley, and Brasfield (2007) argue that post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has become common amongst indigenous peoples; as well as an impaired ability to satisfactorily engage in interpersonal relations with family and others. Black (2001) argues that abuse is a strong contributor to PTSD and there may likely be a

legacy of multigenerational abuse within many families (see also Abadian, 2006; Sochting et al. 2007). Black also stresses that children in families where adults abuse substances are at high risk for addictions themselves, due to living in an environment defined by inconsistency and unpredictability rather than consistency. This has a devastating effect on children. Dysfunctional family processes such as substance abuse, conflict, and negative modeling can significantly affect children's school achievement in terms of class attendance, literacy skills, and behaviour (Biddulph, Biddulph and Biddulph 2003).

Trauma of Children in Care

Due to people's experiences of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, as well as a lost sense of belonging, severe objectification, and high mortality rates connected to the residential school system, previously healthy family structures were destroyed and people became overwhelmed with trauma (Chrisjohn 2006; Nicholas 2001). The lingering effects of multigenerational trauma, as Morrisette (1994) and Bennett, Blackstock, and de la Ronde (2005) note, meant that the ability to parent effectively was significantly impaired, and people were left with confusion about how to raise children. One consequence of the residential school system and its impact on parents was the "sixties scoop" whereby large numbers of indigenous children were taken from their parents and placed into foster care in non-indigenous homes (Bennett Blackstock, and de la Ronde 2005). Kline (1993:306) argues that "current child welfare models continue to reflect colonial patterns, in terms of both the imposition of dominant cultural values and practices in relation to child-rearing, and the consequent devaluation of Aboriginal values and practices."

According to Trocme, Knocke, and Blackstock (2007), indigenous children are twice as likely as Caucasian children to be placed into foster care. Lawrence, Carlson and Egeland

(2007), Cahn (1999), and Troutman, Ryan, and Cardi (2007) point out that when children are in foster care, there is instability and a lack of permanence which inhibits children's ability to form a secure attachment with parental figures or primary caregivers; children placed into foster care typically experience negative impacts such as separation anxiety, attachment disorder, and when the placement is prolonged, problematic behaviour following departure from foster care and reunification with parents. Similarly, Trevenhan, Auger, and Moore (2001) point out that family disruption due to placement in foster or group homes can have negative effects on children and adolescents, including problems with intellectual and academic functioning, and the development of behaviours that may be disruptive.

Contemporary Experiences of Schooling

This subsection reviews the literature on educational attainment for indigenous peoples and the literature about problems with what is offered to indigenous students. These problems include the lack of options for culturally appropriate schooling, Eurocentric pedagogical methods; a racist curriculum, ineffective teachers, and the lack of indigenous control over the educational system.

Non-Completion

High school diploma attainment for on-reserve residents is consistently lower than that for off-reserve residents in all age cohorts, resulting in underrepresentation in post-secondary institutions. Indigenous students are most likely to leave school between grades 9 and 10 (Battiste and McLean 2005; Brunnen 2003). Battiste and McLean (2005) identify a variety of reasons for withdrawal including: feelings of alienation after spending years in a school system that does not support their identity as indigenous people; the lack of opportunity to study indigenous languages, cultures, history and political issues; the lack of parental and community

involvement especially when there are no local high schools; encountering racist attitudes that undermine self-esteem; and marginalization in schools. As Richards (2008) points out, elements such as school quality, curriculum, teacher proficiency, school strategies to engage parents and students, student assessment, facilities, and teaching material have a bearing on student achievement.

Lack of Cultural Options

The invisibility of indigenous culture within schools has been a long-standing issue which strips indigenous students of heritage and identity (Battiste and Henderson 2000). Kirkness (1992, 1999) states that the educational shortcomings identified in 1972 such as assimilationist curriculums, ineffective resources and materials, pedagogy, learning objectives, and teacher/administrator training were still significantly present after two decades. Citing the Assembly of First Nations, Faries (2009) notes that limited resources and limited connections to indigenous culture can cause internal conflicts for First Nations students, contributing to problems with identity. Standard resources such as textbooks continue to downplay indigenous histories and contributions, and contain inaccuracies, while programs are isolated from the philosophies and values essential to the development of a strong indigenous identity. Further, schooling today is not adequately funded at the federal and provincial levels, which results in uneven capacities for learning, curriculum content problems, and poor programming which, in turn, result in high drop-out rates, low educational attainment, and uneven quality of schooling for indigenous students (Battiste and McLean 2005).

Problematic Curriculum

In the midst of ethnocentric school curriculums, indigenous peoples face invisibility and ignorance about indigenous cultures, and many students may be confused by curricula that are

not culturally relevant, authentic, tribal specific, or reflective of regionality (Skinner 1999). It is rare, for example, that students are taught about treaties or tribal sovereignty in high school. Nicholas (2001), moreover, points out that teachers are widely reluctant to conceptualize or discuss colonialism as anything other than a phenomenon of the past. Yazzie (2001) argues that too often, educators work with an outside consultant to develop curricula which teachers are required to implement and facilitate, rather than work in partnership with elders, area communities, and families. Many indigenous teachers feel that indigenous content is not valued, that multiculturalism often dismisses the value of indigenous content, standard curricula ignore indigenous issues or misrepresent them in a negative way, there is a lack of acknowledgement of overt and systemic racism, it is difficult to find credible people to teach about indigenous content, and issues such as oppression and colonization remain discounted (St. Denis 2010).

Ineffective Teachers

Reyhner (1992) argues that many of the problems faced by indigenous students such as drug and alcohol abuse arise from unresolved conflicts of identity; in order to avoid having students experience a disconnect between the cultural values learned at home and those taught at school, teachers need to be familiar with the cultural backgrounds of their students so that they may offer them lessons and methods rooted in cultural identity. This will lessen the possibility of students experiencing an identity crisis whereby they are required to choose between their heritage and a commitment to studies (ibid). Powers (2005) also argues that teachers need to learn how to understand divergent cultural behaviours, and need to negotiate cultural discontinuities between school and home.

Freire (1970) argues that teachers need to encourage their students to engage in critical thinking. This can be difficult for teachers to do, however, as teachers themselves face

significant challenges in the current educational system including the constant revision of curricular demands, the continual restructuring or reform of their work, and a lack of resources to allow teachers to adequately support student development (Wotherspoon 2006).

Control of Education

Hampton (1993) advocated the need for indigenous control of schooling institutions due to the massive differences between Western and indigenous pedagogical styles which are tied to identity, as well as because Western schooling styles were experienced as hostile, assimilationist structures limiting the cultivation of indigenous identity. With reference to the 1996 RCAP report, which also advocated the need for indigenous control of education, Battiste and McLean (2005) say that although federal policies have been moving in the right direction, educational authorities have failed to restore control of First Nations education to First Nations people and there are “few mechanisms for accountability to First Nations, involvement of parents, implementation of curriculums, and worldviews” (Battiste and McLean 2005:3). As Binda (2001) argues, indigenous struggles for true control of education have been met with significant roadblocks. Today, problems including underfunding, governance difficulties, and lack of guidance for running reserve schools have led to increased challenges for many First Nations to attain decentralized education options (Binda 2001; Burns 2001; Stolte 2010).

Despite these overarching problems, there are several promising initiatives currently in operation. Binda (2001) states that decentralization of education has manifested through increased community control and participation, as well as emerging management and administration of First Nation schools. Various institutions such as Blue Quills Education Centre (the first locally-directed band-controlled school in Canada), as well as cultural survival schools such as Toronto’s Wandering Spirit and Vancouver’s Spirit Rising, emerged to meet the cultural

and identity needs of students while maintaining the legitimacy of indigenous knowledge (Bashford and Heinzerling 1987; McCaskill 1987). In recent years, elementary and secondary schools such as Winnipeg's Children of the Earth High School, Winnipeg's Niji Mahkwa School, the Akwesasne Freedom School, and the proposed Prince George Aboriginal School infuse cultural teachings and values, language, literature, community involvement and leadership, relationships with elders, and indigenous history with mainstream standards (D'Oyley et al. 2000; Ezeife 2002; Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development 2008; Michael, Erikson, and Madak 2005). At the post-secondary level, First Nations University of Canada in Saskatchewan, the First Nation Technical Institute of Ontario and Mohawk College, and Yellowquill College follow similar methods for student cultural support (Dahms, McMarin, and Petry 2008; Evans 2000; First Nations University of Canada 2001; Michelson 2002; Stonechild 2006). Similar initiatives in the United States have established schools such as the Anishinaabe Academy in Minneapolis, the Tiospa Zina K-12 school on the South Dakota Sisseton Wahpeton reservation, Lac Courte Oreilles' Waadookodaading School, and the All Indian Pueblo Council-directed Santa Fe Indian School (Anishinaabe Academy 2011; Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development 2008).

In close proximity to the Rainy River First Nations community is the Seven Generations Education Institute (SGEI), which shares a common purpose, vision, and similar strategies with the institutions mentioned above. As Battiste, George and Anuik (2009) state in their discussion of contemporary initiatives, SGEI's programs include culture camps, applying Anishinaabe ways of knowing, involving local traditional teachings and communities, medicine gathering and preparation, working close with area elders, enhancing awareness of indigenous culture and heritage, and forging partnerships with area educators. These programs not only promote

educational success, but SGEI also “nurtures the student’s learning spirit” (9). As an ongoing intervention controlled by the bands that make up the Rainy Lake Ojibway Education Authority, it represents an important and significant step towards indigenous control of education.

Community Challenges

This subsection reviews challenges faced by indigenous communities that make it difficult for students to succeed in completing high school. The challenges reviewed are community divisions, the widespread availability of illegal drugs, the lack of meaningful on-reserve employment opportunities, and the lack of childcare availability.

Community Divisions

Although a 2002 survey by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) stated that First Nations people do maintain a feeling of belonging to their communities and their family, Nicholas (2001) argues that First Nations communities are divided as a result of colonization which tore apart nations on an international scale. Hart (2002) argues that the very structure of the imposed reserve system has contributed to community division as families whose social systems may or may not have been aligned with each other were forced to live together with massive restriction of mobility. This has given rise to severe social rifts and a sense of hopelessness, as colonial trauma continues to affect larger socio-political realities. Within communities, destructive relationships due to instability remain a key component of negative transactions that can put youth at further risk for negative outcomes (Brokenleg, Brendtro, and Van Bockern 1990).

Prior to colonization, indigenous communities were equipped to deal with challenges and grief by using traditional healing practices, but prolonged collective oppression has mostly destroyed the ability of communities to use traditional methods of healing (Abadian 2006).

Moreover, the multigenerational traumas that have affected indigenous communities have meant that attempts at cultural revitalization have often been internally “toxic” and damaging. Rather than a life enhancing spiritual renewal, these toxic relationships and social interactions can become frozen, so that hostile messages and rigid narratives of “better than” or “less than,” tinged with racism, sexism, ethnocentrism or chauvinism can overtake positive narratives (Abadian 2006).

Drug Abuse and Availability

Many youths from troubled and depressed communities may turn to substance abuse (among other behaviours such as crime, abuse and violence) to deal with lives they perceive to be in social cul-de-sacs with little opportunity for upward mobility (Brokenleg, Brendtro and Van Bockern 1990). Chandler and Lalonde (2008), Chansonneuve (2007), McCormick (2000), and Rothe (2005) argue that substance abuse such as drug and alcohol use has been linked to the effects of colonialism, including the devastation of traditional cultural values. As Chansonneuve (2007) discusses, many individuals become trapped in a cycle of emotional trauma, shame and addictive behaviours to deal with the shame.

Drug use and drug abuse have been identified as unique contributing factors for students leaving school early (Mensch and Kendel 1988). According to Health Canada (2003), the use of illegal drugs, narcotics and alcohol is a frequent problem on First Nations reserves, as is the abuse of solvents. Addictions Services of Kenora (2005) also identified drug and alcohol abuse as major risks for First Nations students between grades 7 and 12; noting that in the Rainy River District of Northwestern Ontario there is higher cannabis, alcohol, and cigarette use, but lower use of “hard drugs” such as cocaine than in the rest of the province.

Meaningful Community Employment

Unemployment and poverty rates in First Nations communities are much higher than in mainstream Canada (AFN 2004). As Sharpe, Arsenault, and Lapointe (2007) argue, unemployment and low household incomes can impact learning outcomes. Worry (1998) points out that poverty also influences health and limits people's abilities to respond to stress, illness, and social problems in positive ways, while the absence of meaningful work opportunities creates reliance on welfare, and poor educational experiences. When perceiving limited meaningful employment options, an individual may be less interested in completing school, and this creates the potential for the continuance of social problems such as continued impoverishment, family breakdown, substance abuse, and other widespread problems (Schissel and Wotherspoon 2003).

Lack of Childcare

Another challenge faced by the fastest growing population in Canada is the lack of child care. This is a particular problem for single parents who have no one to help them in the face of family breakdown. As Greenwood (2009) points out, even though provinces have developed limited childcare delivery mechanisms, childcare services are not available in reserve communities. Currently, reserve families are caught between a legal and jurisdictional ambiguity whereby the federal government claims that anything not outlined in the Indian Act is a provincial responsibility, while provinces claim that on-reserve services are under federal jurisdiction and will not provide services without reimbursement. For single parents, lack of access to childcare restricts their ability to complete formal schooling or engage in vocational training in preparation for employment, and they are typically unable to earn wages to support an acceptable standard of living (Kerka 1988; see also Shissel and Wotherspoon 2003).

Cultural Knowledge and Affinity

The residential school system and other colonial/assimilative practices have significantly damaged the ability of indigenous peoples to transmit traditional cultural values and practices to younger generations. For example, Yellowbird (1998) identifies the outlawing of ceremonies and use of sacred medicines, limited access to sacred sites, and the imposition of Christianity to replace traditional spirituality, as practices that devastated traditional cultural life. Battiste and McLean (2005), as well as Wesley-Equimax and Smolewski (2004), agree that such dispossessions and prohibitions have darkened the picture of cultural well-being.

Hill (1995) argues that under the weight of colonialism and its effects on communities, there has been a disruption of the indigenous spirit and people's connection to traditional culture has suffered due to the disruption of beliefs and identity, oppressive environments, negative experiences within one's own group, and feelings of powerlessness when one's basic needs are not met. Consequently, indigenous people suffer from a loss of belief in their own culture, which leaves them vulnerable to cultural/religious imperialism, and problems such as internalized oppression, tribal isolation, internalized factionalism as demonstrated by criticism and lateral violence, and adopting self-destructive behaviours in order to cope with stress or anxiety (ibid).

Elders are pivotal in cultural continuity and identity, but it is not common in contemporary communities for them to be honoured (Kirkness 1999). Hart (2002) notes that healers and helpers such as elders who serve as transmitters of cultural knowledge have been pushed aside in contemporary communities. In the imposed schooling system, they are not given a role to play (Medicine 1992). Consequently, today's youth are disconnected from elders who have indigenous knowledge of healing ceremonies and cultural identity (Ranford 1998).

Indigenous languages, which are central to indigenous identity, are spoken by only a minority of indigenous people in Canada and the number of speakers is declining (Norris 2006; Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures 2005). Over the past 60 years, mother tongue speakers of indigenous languages have decreased dramatically from 87% in 1951, to 21% in 2001 and 19% by 2006 (Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures 2005). Without prompt intervention, only a few of over 50 indigenous languages across Canada are expected to survive current language erosion (Statistics Canada 2006; Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures 2005). Kinkade (1991) and the Task Force on Aboriginal Language and Cultures (2005) state that speakers of Cree, Anishinaabe, Inuit, and Chipewyan are the most numerous of any indigenous language speakers in North America, whereas languages such as Ham, Tagish, Tahltan, and Western Abenaki have become critically endangered with less than fifty speakers. Paupanekis and Westfall (2001) argue that significant reasons for indigenous language loss include merging with outside neighbouring colonial societies following community disruption, use of English-language-only curricula in schools, monolingual prestige, persecution and coerced assimilation of speakers, minority-group marginalization, and parents choosing not to speak their indigenous language with their children. Elders interviewed by the Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures (2005) voiced the crucial importance of language survival, saying that it is entirely inseparable from the survival of indigenous culture, identity, spirituality, and worldview:

The philosophy and culture of a people are embedded in their language and given expression by it. Language is the vehicle for a network of cultural values that operate under the level of consciousness and shape each speaker's awareness, sense of personal identity, and relationships with others and with the universe itself. (Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures 2005:21-26)

Qualitative Studies Showcasing Indigenous Student Perspectives

Although research investigating the experiences and perspectives of indigenous students regarding their education remains sparse, there are nevertheless several noteworthy studies which are reviewed in this section.

Utilizing in-depth, phenomenological interviews with 120 students from a variety of indigenous nations attending public, tribal, federal, and alternative schools in cities, on reservations, and near reservations across North America, Bergstrom, Cleary, and Peacock (2003) examined personal experiences related to indigenous education-related challenges and support, as well as factors that foster resiliency, strengthen identity, and help students to stay on the positive “Red Road” while facing such challenges. The four year study found that students faced a variety of challenges in the family, schools, community, and cultural contexts. Among the stories told, students identified a variety of family factors that serve as challenging barriers such as dysfunction and substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and confusion about past adoption. Factors such as connection to a healthy person or place, having family members as role models, seeing mutual respect among relatives, and experiencing high family expectations, were identified as family supports (*ibid*).

At school, barriers to success identified by students included having teachers who treat students differently or maintain stereotypes, experiencing peer harassment and racism, encountering double-standards, and internalizing low expectations. However, students identified having understanding and respectful teachers, as well as a curriculum that reflects indigenous culture, as factors that support them. Students said they were more likely to succeed at school when they have supportive and effective teachers who have cultural knowledge, who are

encouraging, who use examples and analogies in explanations, who have high expectations of all students without singling anyone out, and who are good listeners (ibid).

In the community sphere, many challenges affect students such as living in poorly organized communities, lack of access to adequate childcare, and experiencing vandalism, misunderstandings about culture and rights with nearby mainstream communities, and contradictions between substance abuse and culture. Some identified a disconnection from culture and elder's teachings and felt that it was due to the residential school experience. However, students found resilience and support in spirituality, cultural connections, taking pride in one's own identity, and honouring elders (ibid).

Schissel and Wotherspoon (2003) conducted research with 65 elementary and 25 secondary school students of Metis and First Nations heritage who were attending four atypical Saskatchewan schools geared towards student needs. They organized talking circles to better understand indigenous student accounts and perceptions of their educational experiences in relation to practices and expectations both inside and outside of the school setting, to determine perceived strengths and limitations of schooling, the relevance of schooling, and the relationship between perceptions and various social factors. They found that both elementary and secondary students placed importance on learning about their culture and heritage in an educational context. Cultural components (such as language and ceremonies) were found to serve as a support for personal identity enrichment, made school more enjoyable, and were associated with the likelihood that students would remain in school. Students who received cultural programming were more likely to enjoy school. They identified a need for traditional elders to teach heritage, culture, and Native studies because non-indigenous educators lack knowledge about indigenous culture, even though positive intentions were acknowledged and all found their teachers to be

satisfactory. They expressed concern that elders and community leaders who should be in the classrooms or working with administration are overlooked as lacking professional expertise by administrators. It was felt that increased cultural programming and understanding deserved attention as a way to combat racism and prejudiced attitudes. Students interviewed found that school was an enjoyable experience, but many faced a variety of challenges such as coming from impoverished homes, having to balance parental and student responsibilities, or experiencing housing insecurity.

To investigate the educational circumstances and experiences of indigenous students in Winnipeg inner-city high schools, Silver, Mallett, Green, and Simard (2002) utilized interview questionnaires with 132 research participants comprised of 47 indigenous students, 50 indigenous school leavers, 25 adult members of the indigenous communities, 7 indigenous teachers, and 3 non-indigenous teachers. The study found that many students felt that their life experiences and cultural values differed significantly from the dominant culture they encountered in mainstream school systems. Although students viewed teachers as dedicated, committed, and helpful, it was felt that many teachers may not understand indigenous students. Students identified matters related to curriculum as important, as well as the desire for courses and knowledge about selves. They experienced both marginalization and racism to a degree that researchers found very significant. Factors in day-to-day life such as parenting responsibilities, abuse of drugs and/or alcohol as a response to overwhelming experiences of racism, impoverishment, and living conditions in their urban community, were identified as affecting student achievement. Those students who reported positive experiences and have stayed in school had developed positive relationships with teachers and reported a high degree of parental support.

Tuharsky, Buisson, Barns, Britton, and Enion (2005) interviewed indigenous students at Cochrane Alternative High School in Regina, Saskatchewan in order to understand why over half of Aboriginal students were leaving school between Grade 10 and 11, as well as to determine what the administrators, teachers, and community partners of Cochrane High could do to prevent them from dropping out. They conducted in-depth, open-ended qualitative interviews with twelve indigenous participants consisting of current students, students who chose to drop out, and one high school graduate. They found that students had common needs and concerns that could mean the difference between staying in school and dropping out. Students identified family, community, elders, and a meaningful support system as significant in influencing their educational choices and the chances of staying in school or returning to school. Students identified supportive factors as having knowledgeable and welcoming teachers, curriculum that reflected indigenous knowledge, a sense of belonging in the school community, and having a strong indigenous identity. Students also identified barriers such as overt and subtle racism, substance abuse, and poor self-esteem/self-identity.

Examining factors that contribute to indigenous student success between grades 6 to 9 by means of phenomenological interviews with 18 indigenous students from six rural and urban schools in southern Saskatchewan, Melnechenko and Horsman (1998) conclude that supporting success in schools needs to be a process of understanding what success in schools means to each student and then finding ways to provide for their needs. The impact of the family on success in schools was found to be profound, pointing to the need for familial support and the need for strong home-school connections. What students found helpful were having healthy relationships with understanding, friendly teachers who were strong leaders, good listeners, and who made

efforts to understand the world students came from at home. As well, cultural programming and curriculum materials, as well as support from peers were found to be key supports.

Finally, Nechako Lakes School District 91 (2001) assessed indigenous educational needs by surveying 1,724 respondents comprised of parents of indigenous and non-indigenous students, current and former indigenous students and current non-indigenous students, school staff, and education stakeholders. The researchers found that indigenous students felt that support from family to do well in school, access to Aboriginal culture and identity, encouragement from parents and educators to stay until graduation and to do well in school, and being given the chance to learn as others in the district were key emphasis points. In contrast to elementary school students who felt their teachers were knowledgeable about Aboriginal culture and issues, many Aboriginal secondary students did not believe this. District parents saw the need for increasing Aboriginal teaching staff, relevant training for future employment, workshops for parents to better understand the school system, developing a welcoming atmosphere for parents to contact school administration, and greater Aboriginal awareness training for school-based staff. District staff saw a need for Aboriginal students to have the same access to educational opportunities as others, interactions with the general student body, adequate access to extracurricular activities, and computer access as key areas of concerns and focus. Only a few staff respondents felt that they were satisfied with Aboriginal parent support, input, and communication.

Conclusion

Remarkably, the literature is consistent in terms of identifying barriers to student success and in terms of identifying supportive factors, even though research has been conducted by different people, at different times, in different places, and with different indigenous populations.

Indigenous education challenges are complex, interrelated, and are connected to the residual effects of colonialism. The effects can be seen today in terms of dysfunctional families and communities, and in terms of a lack of connection to traditional cultural practices including educational practices. This, along with the widespread incursion of neoliberal policies into the school system across various jurisdictions, has led to the current situation whereby indigenous students face overwhelming obstacles as they attempt to complete their schooling. In the next chapter, I will discuss the methods and process of my qualitative research in the community of RRFN.

Chapter 2: Methods

Research should have the goal of improving some social circumstance, whatever form that takes... Qualitative researchers seek answers to their questions in the real world. They gather what they see, hear, and read from people and places and from events and activities. They do research in natural settings rather than in laboratories or through written surveys. Their purpose is to learn about some aspect of the social world and to generate new understandings that can then be used. (Rossman and Rallis 2003:4)

My goal in this research study is to expand on existing knowledge and explore the education-related experiences, concerns, and needs specific to young adults in the Rainy River First Nations (RRFN) community (also known as Manitou Rapids or Manidoo Baawitigong). Although common trends have been identified in terms of First Nation educational and community realities, every community has its own specific history and social dynamics. Therefore, the specific needs and concerns of communities and sovereign nations need to be addressed on an individual basis, so that present needs and issues can be contextualized (Smith 1999). Qualitative research methods, which allow for attention to context, are therefore appropriate for this study.

Qualitative research methods can allow the researcher to document and understand the lived experiences of research participants (Denzin and Lincoln 2003; Novak and Campbell 2006). Qualitative research techniques can allow researchers to “capture and represent the richness, texture, and depth of what they study” (Rossman and Rallis 2003:172). The “hallmark” of qualitative research is the in-depth interview, which is used to understand individual perspectives, to probe and clarify, to deepen understanding, to generate rich and descriptive data, to gather insights into participants’ thinking, and to learn more about the context (ibid: 180). In-depth interviews can be characterized as a “conversation with a purpose” (Burgess 1984) and “a conversational partnership” (Rubin and Rubin 1995). I chose, therefore, to use in-depth

interviews for my research to gather information from RRFN young adults about their experiences of attending area schools, growing up in their family, and living in their First Nation community. I also used in-depth interviews with key informants to gain background information and learn about their perspectives.

Conducting Research on Sovereign First Nations Lands

Throughout the history of research on indigenous communities, colonization has typically been furthered due to Eurocentric perceptions and assumptions, gaps between research and practical applications, and the failure to respectfully observe cultural protocols in an ethical manner (Smith 1999:43-54). Mainstream research has wielded an “underlying code of imperialism” using a Western lens, with little consideration for how indigenous peoples themselves understand their culture and experiences. In this manner, much research has been intertwined with forms of injustice (ibid). Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) recommends that all researchers (especially indigenous researchers) challenge the positivist assumptions that have plagued research about indigenous peoples for centuries.

An example of problematic research that previously took place in the RRFN community is anthropologist Ruth Landes’ work, *Ojibwa Sociology* (Landes 1969). This work was an example of standard research practice in the positivist research tradition (e.g., the belief that researchers should be objective and dispassionate) and in the academic community it is still widely considered a landmark study. Nevertheless, numerous RRFN community members have been very vocal regarding their disdain for her published work, saying it was based on little more than “kitchen-gossip” and highly problematic (Lovisek, Holzkamm and Waisberg 1997:140). As well, as a member of the RRFN community myself, I have heard about similar dissatisfactions with her work. With this in mind, I found myself treading very lightly and carefully as I planned

my own research, placing great emphasis on the need to create respectful partnerships with RRFN leadership and administration. Even though I am a community member of RRFN, throughout every step of this study I remained mindful of what Landes before me had done, and I worked to engage in vigilant and cautious self-reflection.

Recommendations and ethical guidelines for indigenous research, published by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP] (1996:22), gave further direction for conducting a responsible and respectful inquiry on my First Nation. The RCAP report states:

These guidelines have been developed to help ensure that, in all research sponsored by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, appropriate respect is given to the cultures, languages, knowledge and values of Aboriginal peoples, and to the standards used by Aboriginal peoples to legitimate knowledge.

Below is a paraphrased summary of the RCAP Ethical Guidelines for Research (1996) which has been applied to this qualitative study:

- Research about Aboriginal peoples must reflect their own perspectives and understandings.
- Knowledge that is transmitted orally in the cultures of Aboriginal peoples must be acknowledged as a valuable research resource along with documentary and other sources.
- The multiplicity of viewpoints present within Aboriginal communities should be represented fairly.
- There is an obligation to understand and observe the official protocol concerning communications within the community.
- Informed consent shall be obtained from all persons participating in research, obtained in writing, and all those participating will be provided with information about the research purpose,

research activities and expected benefits and risks with guaranteed confidentiality maintained in the study. Such information must be fully understood by participants, without pressure of having to take part in the study, before research begins.

- Collaborative procedures and consultation with community representatives will be established to participate in the planning, execution and evaluation of research results.
- The benefits of the community and those who participate in the research are extremely important.
- Research skills and strategies must be transmitted to indigenous and Aboriginal communities so the community can work toward managing their own research.
- Results of research shall be made available to participants and to community representatives, as often as possible, with efforts to present them in accessible terms.
- Cultural knowledge, perspectives, and personal experiences will be wholeheartedly respected.

This study was designed to comply with all of these guidelines.

Appeasement and Preparation

As Anishinaabe people, one of the most fundamental values we are taught is that of appeasement and balance. Just as we place Aseymaa (tobacco) on the ground before we pray or take anything from the ground or Earth, we must give and contribute before we ask or take. It is this value that led me to put in roughly two years of service, including employment and community volunteer work, before offering to our Chief and Council members my ideas about potential research in the community. Prior to approval and in the spirit of giving before asking (traditional balance, appeasement, and reciprocity), I worked for RRFN as a social policy

analyst, and as a consultant for the new education policy and recent governance/organization reviews. This work also allowed me to further solidify relationships and partnerships with the band administration. Only after I had contributed towards the well-being of the community did I feel it was appropriate to discuss such matters with our respective leaders.

Following submission of a letter outlining my study's framework (Appendix B-2) and asking for the band's approval, initial meetings with RRFN Chief Jimmy Leonard, Band Administrator Dean Wilson, and Education Counselor Marcel Medicine-Horton took place in February and March of 2007. Preliminary approval of the study was given in March 2007 by RRFN administrators, as well as by RRFN Family Counselor Pauline Hyatt for post-interview counselling for research participants if needed (in accordance with Lakehead University ethical approval). Ethical approval from the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board was granted during the third week of December 2007 (see Appendix H-2).

The Interview Guide

As recommended in the qualitative research methods literature, I developed a semi-structured interview schedule so that common areas and themes could be addressed in each interview (Adler and Clark 1999). A prepared interview guide can be utilized to focus on specified areas and questions, but it can also be modified and expanded within the interview process with individual respondents. All questions developed were open-ended to allow for the free flow of expression, opinions, and conversation. Open-ended questions allow the person being interviewed to select from among their full repertoire of possible responses, to take whatever direction they wish from the presented question, use whatever words they want to represent their feelings, and do not presuppose which dimension or feeling will be salient for the participants or key informants. There are no right or wrong answers and this allows the

participants to assume a degree of control and feel comfortable with the direction of their replies (Adler and Clark 1999).

The goal of the interview guide was to understand the education-related needs and concerns specific to the community of Manitou Rapids. The semi-structured interview guide with open-ended question sets for research participants were therefore designed to elicit reflection on the major areas of family, school, and community (see Appendix F-1). These question sets were developed because literature suggests that such elements have an impact on the educational success of indigenous students. To supplement the valued perspectives of my research participants, I also developed a similar set of interview questions for key informants, designed to encourage adults to reflect on their experiences as educators or educational administration working with Rainy River First Nations students in the district schools and in the community (see Appendix F-2).

Recruitment Process

(a) Young Adults in the Community

I felt that a small sample of community research participants, supplemented by interviews with educational and community administrators, would be sufficient to provide common themes and exploratory detail about the education-related experiences, needs, and concerns of young adults from RRFN. With a small sample, general comparisons and common themes could be discovered and established in a timely fashion. A larger sample, although it would have allowed me to generate a wider variety of interview responses, would have taken much longer to examine and analyze, and this was not feasible given time constraints. Rossman and Rallis' (2003:15) emphasis on paying attention to the "*do-ability*" of research, speaks to this issue.

With this in mind, I sought to recruit a sample of eight research participants who were: RRFN band members between the ages of 18-25; former students of area schools (regardless of how many years they had been enrolled); classified as “on-reserve” residents during enrolment in area schools; and both high school graduates and non-high school graduates. It was my plan to give males and females equal (or as equal as possible) representation in my study, and I expected that the number of high school graduates would be much smaller than the number of non-graduates given the low rates of high school completion in the Manitou Rapids community.

In the weeks leading up to approval from Lakehead University’s Research Ethics Board, three flyers (Appendix B-1) announcing the study to be conducted over the following months were included in bi-weekly community newsletters. RRFN administration distributes bi-weekly newsletters to every household in the community to communicate events and announcements. This was the initial method to introduce basic information to the community. Upon receiving formal ethical approval, I began to discuss my study with a number of our community members at local gathering places and business areas around the reserve community. I was pleased to find that the vast majority of community members were very inviting about the idea of the study because of the trust that I had built in the community and what was perceived to be an important subject matter. In fact, even during initial conversation, others talked to me at length about concerns in the community such as drug sales and family divisions. These concerns would be discussed again during interviews.

After ethical approval was granted, I worked with RRFN educational administration to construct a list of 20 people who fit my participant criteria as discussed above. This list of people constituted my pool of potential participants. Then I began “hanging out” at various community places such as the band office, gymnasium, and local store, hoping to meet these potential

participants, engage in casual conversation with them, and discuss my research. My plan was to include as participants the first eight who agreed to an interview, and I hoped to recruit an equal number of men and women. As it happened, all of the potential participants I spoke to expressed interest in learning more about my research and participating in an interview, and I recruited nine potential participants. I followed up on these casual conversations with a telephone call to give more information, and schedule an interview at a convenient time and place. In all cases, participants (and key informants) were asked during the time between initial contact and the actual interview (between six days and two weeks) to reflect and think about experiences and concerns relevant to the study.

Once I felt confident about my interview guide, I spoke with each potential participant and key informant on the telephone to establish the purpose of the research and give a general overview of what areas would be discussed, and I gave them the opportunity to ask questions about the interview. Every individual I spoke to about the study was very interested and stated that they wished to participate. At that point, we scheduled a time and place of their choice to conduct the interview.

Three research participants cancelled at the last minute. One cancelled due to needing to suddenly leave for substance rehabilitation, and two cancelled due to pressure from their family not to participate on account of my family name. In this regard, recruitment was hampered by the tradition of family divides in Manitou Rapids. I was unable to achieve gender balance and my final sample consisted of six young adults: two women and four men.

(b) Key Informants

To supplement information offered by research participants, I recruited three key informants to examine their perspectives on First Nations educational barriers generally and

barriers specifically preventing high school completion, and related trends in the community and within schools. I sought to recruit education administrators, area educators, and community administrators who were familiar with community members. I first recruited RRFN Community Education Counselor Marcel Medicine-Horton by means of a phone-call and a scheduled meeting at the RRFN Band Office to detail plans of the study, and he referred me to two more key informants. The two referred key informants (Seven Generations Education Institute Director of Post-Secondary Education Laura Horton and Rainy River District School Board Superintendant Brent Tookenay) were contacted via phone, informed about major research points, and a time and location of their choice was arranged for each interview.

Participant Characteristics

My research participant sample consisted of two women and four men who had been students in area schools while living on-reserve at Manitou Rapids. Each research participant was a registered band member of RRFN. Brief profiles of these research participants, each of whom has been given a pseudonym, can be located as Appendix I-1.

Five of the six research participants did not earn their high school diploma or high school equivalency. Like a number of RRFN students in the past, the sixth earned his high school equivalency as opposed to high school diploma. One of the female participants was a mother of several children. One of the four male research participants was a father of three. None of the others had children. Three of the six research participants were placed into foster care for varying lengths of time while they were growing up. Three of the non-high school graduates were enrolled at Seven Generations Education Institute to work towards grade diplomas, but none stated that they were making any significant progress or regularly attending classes.

At the time of the interview, all but one of the participants were living in their own home. One was “between residences” and residing with friends. All participants had lived in the RRFN community for most if not all of their lives. Three of the six participants (all male) were employed at the time of interview. One male participant, who completed college, said that he was currently unemployed because of full-time student status. All but one participant continued to reside in Manitou Rapids.

The key informant sample consisted of three area educational administrators; two of whom lived in the Manitou Rapids community (Marcel Medicine-Horton and Laura Horton) and one who was an administrator in the area school district (Superintendent Brent Tookenay), and who had personal knowledge and experience with RRFN students and with the community itself. Brief profiles of key informants can be located as Appendix I-2.

Interview Process

(a) Preparation for the Interviews

Prior to carrying out both sets of interviews, I conducted two pilot-interviews to learn how to effectively phrase interview questions and maintain the flow of the interview. During the pair of pilot interviews, I made a conscious effort to take short side notes so that certain questions would not be repetitious. In this manner, I learned how to best gather the information I was seeking from research participants.

(b) Conducting the Interviews

I conducted interviews with research participants and key informants between January 4th, 2008 and January 20th, 2008. As discussed by Manderson, Bennett and Andajani-Sutjahjo (2006), interviewing participants in a place where they feel safe and comfortable can empower

them and help to shift some control of the research process to them. Thus, I asked the participants where they would feel most comfortable for an interview, and two research participants chose their homes as an interview location. As I later discovered, going to participants' homes allowed me to gain insight into their lives and living conditions. That is, one interview was regularly interrupted by the participant's children demanding attention. Another female participant's interview was interrupted a number of times by visitors and phone calls. The participants who chose a location away from their home described their households as not very conducive for allowing privacy, and they requested the home or office of an individual they viewed as a role model and source of support. Three selected the home of a trusted RRFN administrator and one selected the same administrator's office after hours.

Before beginning each interview, I verbally reviewed the cover letter (Appendices D-1 and D-2) about the research and the consent form (Appendices E-1 and E-2). I made a point of ensuring that participants understood that the interview would be audio-recorded to allow for post-interview transcription, and I made it crystal clear that any personal information offered in their interview would remain 100% confidential and they would be allowed to withdraw at any point for whatever reason they felt. I also reminded each participant that if the interviews caused any psychological or emotion distress, the RRFN Family Counselor was willing to meet and speak with them. I also made "small-talk" with participants and key informants about what is going on in their lives. General discussion about sports, recent vacations, and relatives seemed to effectively lighten the atmosphere and open the doors of communication in a light-hearted way. In qualitative research, establishing rapport with participants and creating a positive atmosphere conducive to open communication is fundamentally important for placing all parties at ease (Rossman and Rallis 2003; Palys 1997).

Prior to formally beginning each interview, I found that participants were particularly interested in hearing about my own experiences in post-secondary education. I welcomed such questions as I felt they helped to further create bridges for communication and had the potential to build more trust between us. In most cases, participants told me that they respected the fact that another First Nation young person was dedicated to their studies and was “*bringing an education home to help.*” This demonstrated to me that even before we began the interview, there was awareness among our young people that a problem existed with education. Such comments also showed me that there was sincere curiosity and interest about higher education and what life was like when one is a student. As I listened to their questions, I remember hoping that these young people were thinking to themselves in terms of the opportunities that education can hold for them as well. With their questions and inquisitive natures about my experiences in school, I felt this was a strong possibility.

Although I framed each interview around the organizational flow of the interview guide, I remained mindful of the need to allow participants to guide the direction of the interview as they expressed their experiences and concerns. In areas where I felt clarification was needed, or to deepen the response to certain questions, I used qualitative exploration strategies (also called probing) to allow for greater depth of understanding (Patton 1990; Seidman 1991). In retrospect and after reviewing the interview transcripts, I found that my use of probing techniques and requests for expanded clarification were central for allowing me to gather rich data during the interviews.

All interview participants (both young adults and key informants) responded in positive ways to my requests for clarification. At times, my probes led to lengthy discussions that deviated from the prepared interview guide. For this reason, no two interviews were the same in

terms of content. I believe, however, that my explorations demonstrated to participants my sincere interest in learning about their experiences and opinions, and my unwillingness to treat them impersonally as repositories of information.

At varying points in each interview, I asked each participant and key informant whether they required a break. When they said they wanted a break, we usually stepped outside for five minutes or so while they took a “smoke break.” Because of the very personal nature of many of the questions, I remained observant of each participant’s body language. I wanted to avoid stepping into areas that caused too much discomfort for participants to talk about. When I observed that the participant was becoming uncomfortable, I inquired as to whether we should continue talking about such matters. As it happened, no one asked to stop talking about distressing topics.

I found that both participants and key informants showed a great deal of pain and personal distress in describing their past experiences and the current realities they see occurring with the young people. I could see this pain in their eyes, and I could hear it in how they spoke. In some interviews, pasts were opened up and tears were shed, but the choice to continue the interviews to “say what needs to be said” was undertaken with immense dedication by those who spoke. As a researcher, I often found it difficult to see the pain and listen to what I was being told. Yet, seeing and hearing the degree of pain, concern, and hopes for improvement in the eyes and words of our people who wished to make their voices heard or give insights in their areas of expertise, revealed to me the importance of this project and has created a bond between myself, them, and the spirit of the study.

A symbiotic relationship began to take place – if only for a short period of time. An element described as the “therapeutic effect” whereby researchers invest themselves into the

interview process so that a participant's subjective thoughts can be expressed (Hutchinson and Wilson 1994), started to become a foundational element in the discussions between myself and my research participants. Although I did not actively seek out narratives of trauma and struggle, these are what I collected as my participants' thoughts were turned into words and their voices were heard. The interview process provided them with the unprecedented opportunity to make their voices heard and thoughts expressed.

All but one interview lasted between one and three hours with most averaging two hours. One participant's interview lasted about three and a half hours. After each interview, every participant and key informant was thanked with a handshake and a "*Miigwech!*" (Thank You!) for their time and involvement. I gave a *Migizi Miigwan* (eagle feather) to one participant in particular who had shared a lot of his experiences which personally affected me as a researcher, and who is striving to move beyond very traumatic memories stemming from his surroundings and upbringing. Respectfully, I told him the teaching I was given about the eagle feather in relation to respect and keeping one on the "Red Road" and good way of life. This is similar to what someone did for me, which helped me a lot when I was younger.

Following the interviews, I sent each of the participants a "Thank You" letter (Appendix G-2 and G-3) and a certificate of involvement (Appendix G-1) to show sincere appreciation for sharing their time and experiences with me. I also prepared and sent a statement of appreciation to RRFN Council, Chief, and Administration for their partnership and support in this study. This statement of appreciation can be located as Appendix G-4. With a First Nation community curious about the study being conducted, I made another flyer available to administration to be placed in two bi-weekly RRFN community newsletters to state that interviews were concluded and I was very appreciative to everyone who participated, as well as to the community for being

so supportive (Appendix G-5). I also informed the community about where they will be able to get a general summary of results upon completion of the study.

Many of the research participants told me that there was a great deal of frustration with the lack of educational support in many areas and they had given quite a lot of thought to this problem. Talking to someone about it, as many told me after the interview had formally ended, was a positive step for them, as it let them express their concerns about things that were occurring but they did not know who to talk to about their concerns. Some participants mentioned that they felt my research was important work and it got them thinking about issues that they would not have thought about had I not asked certain questions that led to a certain degree of reflection. In this regard, we were able to “co-construct” meaning. As Rossman and Rallis argue (2003:180):

Often, deeper understandings develop through the dialogue of long, in-depth, interviews as interviewer and participant “co-construct” meaning. Interviewing takes you into participants’ worlds, at least as far as they can (or choose to) verbally relate what is in their minds.

In conducting the interviews, I felt that a personal bond was created between the participants and myself because of the reciprocal nature of the interviews. Despite differences between us, we were able to share many very personal life experiences. Equally important, we developed trusting relationships. Understanding that they trusted me enough to share their deeply felt experiences, I feel a significant responsibility to ensure that these experiences, needs and concerns are retold in constructive, progressive ways. Similarly, following interviews with each key informant, I felt there was a reciprocal professional bond with the educators and administrators who chose to offer their insights to me, a young person who shares their dedication to our young people’s success in education. I believe both participants and myself

walked away from each interviews with insights and realizations. Given the bonds developed in the course of this research, my motivation to complete this study has been even more solidified.

Research and the Role of the Researcher

Rossmann and Rallis (2003) argue that a researcher's presence in research does have an effect on the information that is gathered, as there is a relationship between researcher and participant. A researcher's identity comes into play to affect how knowledge is produced and researchers must be aware of their assumptions, identity, and representation in the process (Rossmann and Rallis 2003; Shacklock and Smith 1998).

As I reflect on how my own identity affected this research, I realize that my gender may have had an impact on the information shared, as male participants may have felt more comfortable than female participants talking openly to me. This may have been because of perceived common ground with members of my own gender, but also because in a patriarchal society, women may have been more reluctant to openly express their thoughts with a male. In retrospect, the women's replies to research questions did seem less lengthy and less specific than the replies from male participants. This may or may not have been due to my gender and my different ways of being with both women and men.

My educational background may have had an impact on the knowledge produced and information gathered as individuals without high school completion may have felt intimidated or imposed upon on account of my own status as a student pursuing post-secondary education. I attempted to lessen the possibility of impact in this area by telling all participants that I was using my education to benefit the community, and by clarifying that I wanted to create a research partnership with them to determine where areas of support are needed. I also attempted to make

clear that their experiences as students, whether they have completed high school or not, were very valuable.

My heritage and status as a community member provided a degree of common ground with my participants. In many ways, I am an “inside-outsider” -- I am a band member with family living in the community, and so I have important ties to the community. Yet, I have also lived many years away from the community, and have limited experience living on-reserve. Thus, I brought to this research an outside, external perspective that has aided in seeing and acknowledging social processes and trends. Each of my participants knew that I was raised around the Twin Cities in Minnesota, and they seemed to appreciate my sincere efforts to understand and help them express their concerns. Our common ground is something which I feel was beneficial and facilitated communication. Similarly, I am relatively close in age to the research participants, and I suspect that this helped to create an increased sense of comfort and trust, allowing participants to communicate their feelings and concerns in a way that they might not have with someone much older than themselves.

Andrea Doucet (2008:73) argues that there is a need to consider “critical relationships that are part of how we come to know and write about others.” In this regard, she suggests that the metaphor of “gossamer walls” is useful:

for theorizing the diverse sets of reflexive relationships that occur throughout the research process of conducting, writing and reflecting back on one’s research. These three gossamer walls, which illustrate the thin and tenuous lines that exist in research relationships include relations between: researcher and self (including the ghosts that haunt us), researcher and respondents, and researchers and their readers/audiences (74).

Using Doucet’s terminology, the “ghosts” from my past include personally experiencing dissatisfaction as an indigenous person within the secondary school system. This dissatisfaction led me to want to assist young people from my own First Nation to express their concerns, make

them heard, and assist in the development of better support where it may lacking. My second “gossamer wall” includes dimensions mentioned at the beginning of this section, such as the influence of gender, education, and limited experience living on-reserve. As I developed this study and considered the establishment of relationships with respondents, I gave great consideration to matters such as the method of audio recording, phrasing of questions, and my ability to understand what participants were expressing.

The third “gossamer wall,” the relationship between myself and my readers, concerns how my research will be read and understood by others. Although I have been consistently up front about my desire to create knowledge that will lead to progressive and critical change regarding support for Manitou Rapids students, I am also aware that my work may not be read in the way I intend. There are two communities of readers that are relevant: the academic community with the power to approve or reject my work; and the community of RRFN. Regarding the academic community, I hope that I have not only met acceptable standards, but also educated people about current realities. Regarding my own community of RRFN, things are more complicated because a number of individuals may not understand why this work is being done. Although I have received a great deal of support and encouragement for the study, a number of other community members have been very vocal about seeing my work as problematic. At times, expression of their displeasure has ranged from discussion to threats. I can only hope that my core motivation, to give our young people a voice to help create positive change, will be understood.

Data Analysis

During the interviews, I made notes about non-verbal cues and other factors that seemed to affect the process, such as interruptions or emotions. Following each interview, I reviewed and

entered into my laptop computer all notes that I had taken during the interview, so that I would be able to draw upon them in developing interview themes and analyzing the data. Each interview was transcribed shortly after completion, to ensure that my memory of each interview was fresh enough to allow my notes to be accurately introduced into each transcription.

My first step in the analytical process was to re-read each interview transcript and make notes regarding my thoughts on initial emerging themes. This was in accordance with Patton's (1990) advice to search for naturally occurring patterns, trends, and thematic similarities in the interview data as the first step in analysis and inquiry. Thus, working within my pre-established framework that identified family, school, and community as important considerations, I remained watchful for reoccurring themes within and between interviews. When I saw that reoccurring and continuous themes were emerging across my sample, my next step was to organize them.

I read all interview transcripts multiple times while listening to the audio recordings of each. This helped me to further reflect on aspects that were emphasized by all participants. Using open coding (Strauss 1987); I went through all interview transcripts to identify themes and emerging relationships. I paid attention to themes and trends that began to stand out as I noticed similarities and continuous concerns, and this allowed me to see emerging links between each interview. In turn, this led me to reconsider different focus areas from my literature review and solidify others already developed. That is, relying on relevant literature about indigenous education, I began by paying close attention to areas that have been highlighted as influencing student success, such as family and classroom content. As I continued to study and reflect on the interviews, however, I began to see the emergence of themes such as sobriety and cultural foundations. Although very time consuming, this process allowed me to identify specific circumstances which were relevant to the RRFN community.

In the end, I categorized the data under three major themes: family; schools; community and included internal areas relevant to relationship with culture. I then broke each of these major areas into sub-themes to reflect the themes and concerns that emerged from my analysis. I am confident that this process has allowed me to offer a clear and accurate reflection of what was communicated in my interviews.

Data Limitations

Because each research participant was only interviewed once, only a limited amount of experiences and concerns could be communicated, documented, and appreciated. Nevertheless, I believe that I was able to learn a great deal from each participant regarding their lives and their educational concerns. Another limitation is that the sample size is small and not necessarily representative of the larger population, so that generalizations cannot be made based on my findings. Nevertheless, my research participants (as well as key informants) represented a heterogeneous set of diverse experiences, backgrounds, and family relations. As such, I believe that their experiences and concerns are suggestive of issues likely to be of wider concern in RRFN.

Conclusion

In the spirit of service, my research study consciously blends the utmost respect for my People and First Nation community with qualitative methods to examine and facilitate a better understanding of education-related needs and concerns specific to Rainy River First Nations. Throughout this research, I remained mindful of the importance of respect and ethical processes. Working in partnership with Rainy River First Nations administration, I have utilized open-ended qualitative interviews with young adults from RRFN who have attended area schools to facilitate in-depth discussions about their experiences and concerns as former students. As well, I

conducted interviews with area educators and educational administrators (key informants) to better understand what needs and concerns must be addressed to better support students from RRFN. As a member of RRFN, I was granted a unique opportunity to engage in in-depth discussions with research participants about their diverse lives and experiences, which helped me better understand the current education-related concerns for the purpose of helping RRFN support current and future students. Following in-depth interviews to gather detailed and rich experiences, I analyzed all data thematically to determine major themes in the research. The next two chapters present what my six research participants and three key informants had to share regarding the education-related experiences and concerns of RRFN young adults. In chapter three, I present narratives that I constructed for each young adult, based on my interviews with them. In chapter four, I review what my key informants had to say and offer a thematic analysis of all data.

Chapter 3: Voices and Narratives

This chapter offers an introduction to the young adults who participated in this research and presents narratives that I constructed for each, based on my interviews with them. As you will see, each participant discussed a diverse set of experiences. Collectively, participants identified and shared many challenges, needs, and concerns they faced as they went through the school system, both within and outside the schools, but the narratives are presented in this chapter without analysis so that each person's story can be understood as a whole. A thematic analysis of the narratives will be presented in the next chapter. As previously noted, all six research participants are members of RRFN, between the ages of 18 and 25, and lived on-reserve in the Manitou Rapids community during their time as students in area schools. The participants are referred to by pseudonyms to ensure anonymity, but more information is available in Appendix I-1.

Regina

At the time of interview, Regina was a twenty year old female member of RRFN. Although she remained a student until grade twelve at Fort Frances High School, she chose to drop out of her program at eighteen years of age due to a number of circumstances in her life. Regina had been living with her boyfriend in the town of Fort Frances for six months, was not employed, and was expecting a baby.

Regina started life on another reserve in the Treaty #3 region of Ontario as one of seven children, but was placed into foster care at the age of four when her biological parents could no longer care for her. After being "bounced from home to home," she was, along with her brother, taken into care by a family on the Manitou Rapids reserve. Regina and her brother were

welcomed into this household where six other children were being cared for in the home. Even though sleeping arrangements were crowded, she felt comfortable being there and enjoyed spending her time playing with other young friends in the community. She remembers these early years growing up with her friends Manitou Rapids as the happiest time of her life.

Although Regina found her foster parents to be loving and caring, she also experienced many years of frustration and confusion because she felt unwanted by her biological family. Regina shared that this confusion and hurt led to her becoming “destructive and violent” in her early years of schooling. She used to lash out and beat up teachers and other students. Reflecting on her younger years, Regina said:

When you're in care, you have so many mixed emotions. You always wonder about your parents ... and why they didn't want to be a part of you... That's part of the reason why I was so angry, was because my biological parents, I felt unwanted. I didn't know why I was in care at that time. I didn't know why or why they gave me away or whatever. I was more, I would say, hurt, but I didn't want to show it, so I was just mean to people.

Such destructive behaviour would cause her to be expelled from her elementary school in grade three after a series of violent outbursts. Regina was transferred to another elementary school in the same district and sent for behaviour improvement sessions with a counsellor. This helped her, but she shared that the “mixed feelings” she had about her biological parents putting her into care would contribute to her becoming a “tough girl” throughout her elementary and middle school years, and getting into many fights in and out of the classroom.

She began working at the local reserve gas bar as a teenager. She enjoyed this because it gave her a chance to have her own money and learn to be responsible, even though she disliked staking the pump levels at the end of the day. Through her teenage years, she worked for RRFN at a variety of different jobs whether at the band office, the community gas bar, or at the band-

run historical centre and restaurant. From Regina's perspective, it is not difficult for band members to get a job on-reserve, but it takes a lot more effort to find meaningful employment off-reserve. She could see that her on-reserve jobs had not boosted her chances for getting jobs elsewhere, and thinks that easy access to jobs at the gas bar or the reserve's partially-owned lumber mill may enable students to not finish school.

Her experiences with her foster household remained encouraging through the years and Regina found significant educational support from her foster father who she proudly calls Dad. "My dad had plans for us" she shares. She feels that her dad, who graduated from high school and college in his younger years, really invested a lot of time to support her schooling because he went above and beyond what she expected, perhaps because his older children had struggled so much. Regina credits the progress she has made to her dad's commitment to her. From the time she began school at Donald Young Elementary, Regina's dad made it a point to keep school a priority in her life and he attended parent teacher conferences until halfway through her high school career. To keep Regina focused on her schoolwork, her dad enrolled her in a variety of school sports (such as volleyball, cross-country, and volleyball) and promised that he would keep her enrolled in these activities as long as she was doing well in school. Her favourite sport was volleyball and she was very committed to her team which, in turn, served as an incentive to keep her productive in the classroom. Her mom and dad always made it a point to come to her games. She continued her dedication and desire for sports into high school. Regina remains the only child in the house who had made it to the beginning of her twelfth grade year.

During her time in area schools, she felt a strong connection to any program that was sports oriented and especially when educators showed sincere concern and support for her as a student. Her elementary school teachers who offered behaviour counselling, as well as an

educator who taught her as part of a cross country running program, were those with whom she felt a particular bond and she excelled in their classes. She also appreciated the cultural knowledge and support that she got in the Anishinaabe language classes. Regina especially appreciated the “Quest for Knowledge” program that was put on each year in the district (in partnership with Seven Generations Education Institute) as she could learn more about the region around Manitou Rapids and the Treaty Three region, including memorable Chiefs and significant cultural teachings and practices to which she could relate. In her experience, general school experiences were the most supportive when teachers regarded her with the same high expectations that they had for non-indigenous students, rather than giving her special treatment about the work she would have to do. “You don’t want to be labelled as a minority,” she said. She also believes that teachers should have an understanding of where many indigenous students come from and should teach about what has happened in the past to bring about increased understanding.

Regina thought that the cultural support that she found in the schools while she was a student is significantly decreasing in the Manitou Rapids community; very few families practice the culture, and seasonal ceremonies and feasts are not being followed. This is upsetting to her. Regina figures that the residential school system has had a significant effect on how much cultural knowledge is passed down from elders to young people. She thought that with decreasing cultural support in the community it is harder for students to succeed because all the families are fighting amongst each other rather than supporting students. She talked about her aunts going out of their way to make things difficult for other families living in the community. Also, she spoke with frustration about her perception that the community that made her happy as

a child when all children played and hung out together has gradually changed so that families increasingly are disrespectful to each other based on family name.

As she became a teenager and entered high school, Regina found little in common with other indigenous students who went to school with her, whether from her community or not, as many would go out of their way to call her and other indigenous students who were doing well in classes and sports, “apples” (pejoratively meaning red on the outside and white on the inside). She feels that it was due to jealousy. Regina spent most of her time with non-indigenous students because of this treatment. She did not want to bother with people who treated her badly for trying to better herself and her situation.

Even though Regina’s dad gave her a lot of support towards schooling (such as encouragement, attending parent teacher conferences, and entering her in sports) until her middle teen years, she found very little discipline and guidance in the household; at times staying out all weekend with friends. As early as thirteen years old, Regina would stay gone for days at a time when there was no school, never got grounded, and would only call for money when she ran out. Regina commended her dad for emotional support and encouragement in her classes early on, but in retrospect said that she did not get enough discipline and boundaries at home; both factors she considers to be “what everyone needs in their life.” Regina claimed that she was a “bad kid” who was taught to be “sneaky” from older children who were being cared for in the house. When she began to use hard drugs at eighteen years of age, she kept it from her mom and dad and eventually moved out to an apartment on the reserve.

Regina recounted been exposed to drug use by others she lived with and said that played into circumstances that affected her progress in school. At the age of ten, older children would smoke marijuana in front of her. By twelve years of age, she tried marijuana, as well as

mushrooms by age fourteen. Although she recalled such times as experimenting, the availability of drugs on the reserve community seemed to greatly increase through her teenage years and would affect her life. It was not long until she lost her motivation to do anything else; she even lost interest in pursuing the sports she enjoyed. At eighteen years of age, Regina began a two year period of using and dealing Oxycontin and Percocet pills after doing them with fellow community members. Using “almost anything and everything,” she recalled using pills, acid, and morphine. Crack and cocaine were readily available to her and within a few months of turning eighteen, she was taking massive amounts of Oxycontin daily for six to eight months while buying and dealing to friends on the reserve.

I did them every day for about six months and every day I was doing more or just about 200 milligrams a day. I did some “percs” when I would get up, do some “20s,” then do some “40s” before lunch, and after that, you’re ready to go out and hang out with friends who ARE doing them so you get offered them at night. Then you do them. Then I was also selling them, so I had my profit from the pills. You sell them for more than you buy them. Once you make your money back, you do the rest.

Also when she was a teenager, Regina’s boyfriend began playing hockey out of town which added to her being distracted from schooling as she would join him on the road. With her previous interest in school and sports having been replaced by drugs and new friends, she had little desire to continue her studies. She dropped out during her final year of high school to spend more time with her boyfriend from another First Nation who would later move to Ottawa without her. As soon as she turned twenty years old, Regina grew tired of the prevalence of drugs and quit “cold turkey” by moving to a nearby town to distance herself from her friends and the community. At the time of the interview, she had been sober for half a year after leaving the reserve, but she worried that methamphetamine and many other hard drugs, which were

becoming more readily available in the surrounding area, would affect her friends still living in her home community.

Looking back on her experiences and the choices she made, Regina said that she had come to see education as one of the most important things someone can attain in their life and she intended to earn her grade twelve equivalent. She was concerned, however, that she would not be able to pursue schooling until after her baby was born and was a few years of age so she would be able to focus. She said that she would like to work with children in the future. In the meantime, she was opening her home to be a care provider for her eight year old biological sister who was in foster care.

Jared

At the time of interview, Jared was an eighteen year old male member of RRFN living on-reserve in the Manitou Rapids community. He was attending Seven Generations Education Institute to earn his grade twelve equivalent after being asked to leave Fort Frances High School during grade eleven for only earning one credit out of eight for the entire year. He was employed part-time at an on-reserve business and had no children. Jared said that he had experienced a multitude of challenges to his educational progress, notably in his family and community environment, but said that earning a grade twelve equivalent was something that is important and worth finishing, even if completion had been delayed.

Jared began school while living in the Manitou Rapids community. His parents worked off-reserve with First Nations services in the region while he and his siblings attended school. Alcohol abuse in his household steadily increased after he began school, to the extent that Jared had few memories from his childhood (into adulthood) where alcohol abuse in the family was not a consistent factor in his surroundings. Jared said very candidly that because of the alcohol

abuse in his household, he preferred to be at school as a child (and later as a teenager) as often as he could rather than coming home. Many times as a child, Jared would awake to find his parents involved in a domestic abuse situation, with police removing one of his parents from the home, or one of them having to sleep in his room because their drinking would cause them to fight. Jared remembered thinking when he was a child: “We should be waking up to Cheerios and our cereal, instead we got bottles and tobacco and shit lying all over the floor.” He said that it was impossible for him to go to school without being affected by his home environment, both because he felt depressed and anxious and because of the limited support he got for his homework and studies. This worsened when his parents divorced when Jared was ten. Again, at the root of what troubled him when he returned home from school, he says, was the drinking.

Jared often felt that he had to tend to his mother because he was afraid she would be hurt or lose her life on account of alcohol abuse. His worry for his parents’ well-being at times was greater than his frustration over having to go without what most other kids his age had, such as winter coats to wear to school or backpacks rather than plastic grocery bags.

As he made his way through elementary school, things would get worse as his mother started drinking with his older sisters. Jared felt that his sisters had little trouble completing high school when they were students because they drank with his mother and did not consider that it was wrong. He also wondered whether he was affected the most because he was “the most sensitive.” He told a story about a time when he was playing a video game and was dragged by his ankles out the door by his sisters to the backyard where they were drinking. His sisters and his mother found it humorous and laughed when his sisters dumped the beer cooler full of ice water, ice cubes, and beer cans over him; soaking him. He later told his father what happened but his father was intoxicated and Jared had to stop him from fighting his mother and sisters.

Because of incidents such as this, he chose to keep quiet about the environment at home. He tried to forget about it when he went to school, but he felt depressed, ashamed, and struggled to stay focused.

Jared pointedly commended district educators in the schools for doing their jobs and said that they are “not the problem.” When he moved from middle school into high school, one teacher in particular really made an impression on Jared’s life. This grade nine teacher helped him as he felt that she held high expectations for him, believed that he was capable of doing great things, and took a personal interest in him. However, it only took a return home to the troubling environment to bring back his dissatisfaction.

Years after his parents’ divorce, his father chose sobriety, became more responsible, and began to acknowledge that Jared’s home life with his mother was affecting him in negative ways. When Jared was in grade 10, his father decided to rent a house in Fort Frances for Jared to live in while he went to school. Jared remembered this time as his favourite time in life because he was away from not only the alcohol abuse in his mother’s home, but also similar substance abuse and other problems in his community. He stayed in Fort Frances for a year into eleventh grade until his father could no longer afford to provide a second residence for his son and Jared had to move back to his mother’s home. It was not long after his return home that Jared stopped going to classes that he didn’t care for and he was asked to leave Fort Frances High School for not doing his work. He felt troubled with the continued drinking and lack of support in his mother’s home. When his then-current teachers wished to communicate with his mother, he never found that there was ever any reciprocation on his mother’s end. She did not attend parent-teacher conferences or help him with homework.

Looking to the past, he feels his parents always seemed too busy to spend time with him and quite often that “Busy was spelled B-E-E-R.” Because of this, Jared turned to his friends for support and he envied his friends with parents who took an interest in their children’s schooling and lives. However, he remained frustrated by his memories and how it affected his life and schooling.

Jared said that his personal challenges related to his schooling and general well-being were tied to not only his family, but also the influence of his community. He remembers wishing that his parents would both choose sobriety, but at the same time thinking that the influence of the community would derail such improvements given the presence of dealers in the community, along with what he saw as a widespread climate of “disrespect for everyone.”

His mother and father came from two prominent families in the Manitou Rapids community but there was a “gang” mentality of “wars” between their families. This led him to many times feel torn and he had come to identify with one family more than the other because of the disputes. Jared said passionately:

The family conflicts and what is happening right now. All the greed and all these things. Families, I wrote something: “let’s all just sit back until we can kill each other and then we can act like we care.” [frustration building] I can’t remember how correctly it was, but I wrote it one night because one time my cousins were ready to beat the shit out of each other over past stuff and they were drunk obviously. It’s sad to see because families were trying to kill each other. You look out to this magnificent piece of land where we have so much opportunities and what’s happening. We got all this money and all this land now and it’s like “Let’s keep killing each other. Because we’re bored, let’s beat the shit out of each other. Let’s tear each other’s families apart!”

Given the prevalence of family divisions and the drug trafficking that he saw on the reserve, Jared felt that community members lacked respect for each other. Jared first saw marijuana as a child. As he reached his teenage years, he became increasingly aware of hard

drugs in his reserve community. He saw people he cared about becoming addicted and families falling apart because of parents becoming addicted rather than “being responsible.”

There’s cocaine. Ecstasy. Everything. I haven’t heard of heroin or anything, but I wouldn’t be surprised if it comes down here in the next ten years because you have so many people in each and every house who has their own story to tell about drugs. I’m not just talking about pot. It’s EVERYTHING. You hear about it and you try to phase it out. You can’t. It’s there. Cocaine. Percs. Money. Telephones. Everything has to interact with everything. This whole reserve is just feeding off drugs. It’s so bad and nobody acknowledges it. A lot of people deal the shit and it’s respected members of this community, too. You can’t hide from the shit. Rez life. It’s not thug life, but it’s Rez life. This is the way it’s going to keep going; suicides are going to keep going up, alcoholism is going to keep going up, and they don’t have to make us extinct, we’ll make ourselves extinct. It’s fucked. It’s sad. It’s pathetic to see. We can’t respect our own beliefs. Why can’t we just live as one? No, let’s just beat the shit out of each other. Let’s corrupt our women. Let’s corrupt our children. Let’s just make this world see us as this dirty thing they’ve proclaimed us to be.

Jared told me that he feels lost as an Anishinaabe. He was dissatisfied with the quality and challenge of the Ojibwe Language class in the high school (as well as lack of attention to the practical need for cultural knowledge today). He critiqued the Ojibwe language programs offered as not challenging, saying that one does not learn much beyond basic words. Jared stated:

Ojibwe class. It’s a joke. It really is. We go there, colour, say one or two Ojibwe words and colour for the rest of the time. At the high school, even now for like three months, we would just play cards and this, and our teacher, it’s hard to say, he wasn’t there for three months. Our substitute teachers would just make us watch a movie or answer two or three questions and then we can do whatever we desired. A useless class, everyone got all tens in it, which means what’s the teacher doing for their responsibility because every single kid all has the same highest mark they could get?

Jared felt that his people are “lost.” He really did not know what it means to Native because of his family environment and the surrounding community. These things led Jared to feel depressed and “ashamed to be Indian.” By the time he reached high school, Jared purposely

tried to maintain friendships with non-indigenous students because of how often he saw Native families and neighbours in his community using hard drugs, maintaining family divisions, and because of “people not even being able to respect our own culture.” Thinking of his community and how it affected his schooling, he said, “it’s the worst feeling to be ashamed of who you are.” Jared said that he was even ashamed to use his status card for tax exemptions when he purchases things at stores.

Since leaving Fort Frances High School, Jared has had time for reflection. He thought that young people were required to learn far too much that they won’t need later in life, and it would be better for the school curriculum to emphasize things that interested students, but he also thought that to get ahead in life, high school graduation was important. He was very appreciative that his boss allowed him to devote time to furthering his schooling through Seven Generations. He had dreams of music or sociology and wished that the schools and community would accommodate young people’s interests more. Having worked only at on-reserve jobs, he said that he has fun working with community members and is very appreciative for the small contract jobs, but questions how much his on-reserve jobs will help him to get ahead. As Jared put it:

Who the hell wants to be a gardener for the rest of their life especially with all this stuff around us? You can be what you want. Do you like gardening? Do you like cutting grass? I mean, come on. We all want better, but how far is that [student jobs on the reserve] going to take? I don’t know.

Although Jared felt that he lost his innocence on account of his surroundings in the family and community, he said that he does have dreams and goals for the future and was working to finish his last two compulsory courses for his grade twelve equivalent. He felt that he would be able to do this despite his negative circumstances but also stressed that ideally, parents

should begin supporting their children so they will grow accustomed to being proud and feeling satisfied about life. On his striving to finish school he said rather glumly:

I'm trying to make the best of it, but sometimes I feel so lost. Not just with family stuff, but with everything in general. The future is so blinding and with such a shitty background, that bright future becomes very dull and faded. We all want more to try and switch on the light bulb, but no, that one's burnt out, so we try to find something in the dark. We still remain lost and with this environment and family and the caring and the responsibility; or should I say uncaring and irresponsibility, whatever you call it; just has the biggest impact on you, I guess.

Although he had a troubled home life and was sad for the people in his community, Jared nevertheless hoped he will see better days on his reserve and for his people and he thought that would help him not to feel ashamed. He hoped that other young people won't feel like he has for so long and will be able to find appropriate support. He said, "To see good things happen for this reserve, yeah I would be proud."

Joe

At the time of interview, Joe was a twenty-five year old male member of RRFN living on-reserve in the Manitou Rapids community. He was a father of four children and was employed at the Manitou Rapids Forest Products wood-mill. Joe chose to drop out of Fort Frances High School in ninth grade and had recently begun working towards his grade twelve diploma at Seven Generations Education Institute. In the seven years between dropping out and returning to school, Joe said that he had learned the value of education because of his own hardships and struggles. Following an intended graduation in a few years, he hoped to become an Emergency Medical Technician in the future to help people, and to provide for his children. He wanted to be able to support his children's schooling so that they would not face the many challenges and hurdles he had faced in his own life as a student.

Joe started life in the Manitou Rapids community living with his mother, without his father present in his life. He had numerous brothers and sisters, although none of his siblings lived with him while he was growing up. From age three to four, he was placed into foster care with his grandmother across the reserve community because his mother had difficulties providing a good life for her child. His grandmother, however, did not provide him with a peaceful, alcohol-free home. Memories of alcoholism, violence, and gambling still remain strong from this time of his early life under his grandmother's roof. When he returned to his mother, similar experiences of heavy alcoholism, neglect, and drug use in his household were common; hardships that still affect him today. "Parties, drinks, drunks all the time and drugs" is how Joe described his childhood years. He said that many times he was "shut away like I never existed and thrown into garbage cans when I was four years old because my mother wanted to drink." At times, he was put into closets and dark basements so he would not be a burden to a mother abusing alcohol. At his visiting uncle's request, a young Joe was asked to fill a syringe and inject him with drugs because he was "too strung out." These experiences led Joe to become closed and shut off to the world to the point where he was too scared to ask for simple things – including what he needed in his life and help in school. Joe recounted how such an environment contributed to him being sexually, physically, and mentally abused by distant relatives. At times, family members and uncles wanted to keep him home from school so their abuse would not be exposed. He suffered broken bones and bruising on different occasions and remembers telling a teacher who did not believe him. However, under advisement from a teacher, Joe went to see a counsellor and a psychologist. He explained and demonstrated what was happening to him using dolls, and he was believed.

Because of the neglect and abuse, Joe was placed back into foster care homes until he was returned to his mother in third grade. His foster homes were both on and off-reserve, with both Native and non-Native families, but all in the immediate area around RRFN. Although being removed from his home was supposed to be an improvement for the young Joe, he said that in many ways it was worse:

I remember counting and out of those thirty-six homes (family and foster), only five were healthy. No drugs, no alcohol, no smoking cigarettes. No physical, sexual, or mental abuse. That's why I'm so amazed that I turned out to be the nice person that I am. I mean, I'm not trying to get pity. I'm not trying to get pity. It was a hell of a life.

Joe's early years were difficult not only because of his experiences with abuse and multiple foster homes, but also because he had Attention Deficit Disorder. All of this made schooling very difficult for him and he said that he was a handful for his teachers. He said:

It was frustrating, it was discouraging. It brought a lot of depression on. It brought a lot of anger on. A lot of anxiety. A lot of fatigue. Trying to teach myself things that to other people was simple, but to me was difficult.

However, he said that the few foster homes that he described as healthy would do their best to support his success in his classes. Many times, they would take the time to sit with Joe and help him with mathematics using numbered blocks and spend hours at the kitchen table helping him with homework. Many times, Joe would have to catch up on lessons he fell behind on due to moving from foster home to foster home, but healthy foster families would make the time to help him. Unfortunately, by the time he got comfortable with his caregivers and began to form bonds, he was moved to another foster home.

Joe was returned to his mother because she began to make improvements in her life, notably going to school and choosing sobriety with her new husband. Joe was happy to be back with his mother, and came to share a very special bond with his mother's new husband. Upon

returning to his mother's home, he remembers that the value of education was given a new importance, and Joe was encouraged to succeed in school. He said that the support he got was limited, but that "they did their best" given the circumstances. Following his mother's change in life, she began going to school in Thunder Bay, and rather than bringing Joe back and forth with her, Joe stayed with his stepfather to attend school. Although Joe was delighted that his mother was making significant efforts to improve her life, he said that he missed out on "mother-son" bonds because it seemed that she was never home due to her educational and career pursuits. This continued until Joe was a teenager. Joe's stepfather, who had only a grade six education and admitted to feeling very intimidated by his stepson's schooling, could not help him with his homework. This made Joe feel very frustrated because he was finally getting the care and affection from his own family that he had longed for, but he was discouraged about the lack of support for his schooling. Looking back, he felt that his stepfather and mother did their best given the tools they had at the time, but nobody was actively supporting him so that he could succeed. He began getting very discouraged about continuing his studies. He felt, he said, "If no one takes an interest in my schooling, than why should I?"

In addition to his frustrations at home, Joe's life at school was challenging. As a child, teachers showed very little patience towards him because of his behaviour and learning challenges. On one occasion, a teacher threw him off of a desk which prompted his mother to confront the teacher at school. Through the years, he experienced racism and sarcasm from students (as well as a few teachers) about his indigenous heritage. Many times he heard comments about Indians being drunks and recipients of welfare, which made him feel that he would end up going nowhere. Joe was still very scared to ask teachers for the help he needed and he felt very alone and aggrieved as a child and as a teenager at school. He said he can relate to

younger people being ashamed to ask for help because they may feel stupid when they begin falling behind. His frustration led to him acting out and eventually getting suspended in ninth grade for pulling the school's fire alarm. He chose not to return.

After leaving school, he left his community to go to the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul and began spending time with friends he described as gang members, drinkers, and drug-users. Under their influence, he began living a similar life. To provide for himself at sixteen years of age, Joe would begin working many "labour jobs" such as pushing carts at a grocery store and roofing, but they didn't last long. He decided to try to escape such a lifestyle by moving back to the Manitou Rapids community in his early twenties. He was happy to be home around family and began working at Manitou Rapids Forest Products wood mill not long after he found out that he was going to be a father. He thought about going back to school, but his motivation to begin school again (and to continue being a responsible worker) was disrupted as he became involved with drugs and violence, and began living a life similar to the life he had tried to leave in the cities. He said that the drugs he used turned him into a liar, obsessed with only getting another fix.

It was after witnessing a lot of violence in his home community, such as an occasion when a good friend of his was nearly "stomped" to death at a party because of his family name, that Joe decided to try to walk a responsible path and make something of his life. He enrolled at Seven Generations Education Institute to earn his grade twelve equivalency. There, he enjoyed the extra attention he received, the smaller classroom size, the one-on-one help that was available, and that his Education Counselor was committed to helping him succeed.

In recent months, he had been trying to help his girlfriend (who he was supporting as she overcame her own substance addictions) and family speak more Anishinaabemowin, something

he had come to see as a strength and that he felt should exist in his family. He said that although he had a few years before completing his goal, he thought that working to reach his aspiration of a diploma and a career in helping others was well worth the effort, especially if he can give his children a better life than he experienced. In the meantime, he was trying his best to be a good example for them.

Owen

At the time of interview, Owen was a twenty-five year old male member of RRFN. He dropped out of school at the end of his ninth grade year, and had not since enrolled to complete his grade twelve equivalency. He worked off-reserve as a line-cutter.

Owen's life began on the Manitou Rapids community and he said that his childhood was quite enjoyable. His parents (both high school graduates and his father a college graduate) divorced when he was only a few years old. According to Owen, their divorce created a better situation for his upbringing because his only memory of his parents being together was one of a physical fight. Apart, they were able to maintain a positive friendship for the sake of their children's interests and support. Owen and two of his three siblings (two younger sisters) continued to live with their father on the reserve community while their mother moved to Minnesota. Owen and his siblings visited their mother often.

Although his father was often away so he could further his education and provide for his children, Owen recalled a very positive home life with strong bonds between the children as they would help take care of each other. Throughout the years, Owen had come to view his father as his role model because of his dedication to supporting his children and instilling positive values and cultural teachings into Owen from a young age. His father kept a strong cultural foundation at home and Owen said, "I know who I am. I have no doubt where I stand in my community, my

society, and my family. I'm a Native person and I know where I come from." This type of cultural foundation he described as a "balance in life."

However, Owen did not appreciate his father's guidance very much as he became a teen and he began to rebel. This tension was exacerbated by the relationship between Owen and his mother because when he would visit her, she seemed concerned more with treating him "like a friend than like a son." When Owen would stay with his father, his choice of friends and influences was watched closely as his father tried to guide him away from negative influences. When he visited his mother on weekends, Owen said he was given full reign without much discipline and this contributed to him rebelling more against his father's direction. Owen said:

I think that was one of the big conflicts with me as I was Mama's boy, I was her baby boy, so I got to do whatever I wanted when I was with her, but when I came back home, it was back to business. You know, my dad didn't mess around. He wasn't mean or anything. He was stern and he knew the kind of morals and everything he wanted to instill in us.

He said that both parents did their best to show support for him getting ahead and succeeding, but there was a clash of standards in his upbringing as he maintained close relationships with both parents. Although Owen stayed close to his traditional ceremonies at his father's home, Owen and his father would begin "bumping heads more" about his attitude when he would return from his mother's. In retrospect, he wishes he had listened to his father's guidance more and that he had received similar guidance from his mother.

Owen remembered his father being very involved with his schooling through elementary into high school. He attended parent-teacher conferences and was consistently in contact with his teachers to make sure Owen was doing well in his classes. Owen's grades were strong and he thought that the schools did a great job teaching students. The Pow-Wow for students at the high school and the language option were things that delighted Owen.

However, as a teenager Owen became increasingly frustrated. Although he maintained good relationships and friendships with most non-indigenous students in the schools, rivalries between students from different area First Nations began to develop around him. These rivalries were minimal when he was in elementary school, but worsened over the years. He said that many people did not like him just because he was from Manitou Rapids.

Through his time in area schools, Owen wished that classroom sizes were smaller. He thought the student-teacher ratio was too high, and teachers did not have enough time to spend with each student. Yet, the main, consistent frustration that Owen experienced in high school was with regard to the content of what he was learning. Many times, Owen felt that options were limited for students like him who wanted to train for certain trades. Owen began to lose interest in going to school because he did not see the purpose of having to learn subjects such as science which he thought he would never use in a practical manner.

With his interest in school waning because he didn't see that what he was learning would be useful to support the direction he wanted to take in his life, Owen chose to drop out of Fort Frances High School at the end of ninth grade and move to his mother's house in Minnesota. Not long after he moved to Minnesota, he enrolled in ninth grade classes. He really enjoyed that students there had the option to spend more time focusing on what they wanted to learn, as opposed to what was compulsory and repetitive. Owen said that students who had an interest in carpentry were able to spend time in the wood shop as opposed to taking multiple science courses. However, he felt that much of what he was learning in Minnesota had already been covered in Ontario schools during his previous year. Although Minnesota classes were smaller, he did not think class periods were long enough. He was frustrated that there was little time to absorb the course content the way he had in the Rainy River District:

I used to spend a lot of time in shop and learn all those trades and everything like that, but if you wanted to spend more time with your teacher and learn about history and learn about math, there wasn't time for that. It was onto the next thing. It was rapid pace, you know? It was a rapid pace where it was like, "ok, where am I going next, what class?" But they do it good here (in Canada) because there's only five periods a day, something like that, so there's longer classroom time, more time spent on one subject, but when I was in the States, there was eight periods a day. You would get into class and the teacher would say 'do this, do that', then boom, the bell rings and you're off to the next class. Go to your locker, grab your books, go to the next class, sit there for 40 minutes, a half hour, sometimes it was only 25 minutes a class.

Owen continued with school and enjoyed his time living with his mother, but claims that being away from his cultural foundation in his community took away his balance in life. Without his connection to his culture and the land, Owen said he "went off the deep end" and dropped out of school completely. Owen said that an "after-effect" of being disconnected from his culture was getting involved with drugs and alcohol, which was a major reason why he did not return to school. Instead, Owen struggled and worked in factory and restaurant jobs. He said that both of his parents voiced their concerns often about the way he was living, but at the time he did not care and he would fall back into drugs and abusing alcohol.

At the age of 22, Owen returned to Manitou Rapids for his grandfather's funeral. He saw the divisions between families as soon as he returned when he was told not to associate with childhood friends because of their last name. He also was saddened by the widespread availability of drugs and drug use in the community. Emotionally, Owen said, "it's not supposed to be like this."

Owen's father brought him out to the traditional lands of Kay-nah-chi-wah-nung, near Manitou Rapids, and he felt that the missing part of him began to come back. Regarding his cultural foundation, he said:

I lost that when I moved to the States. I forgot a lot about who I was and where I came from and it was up to me in remembering and I went wild man. I was angry about I don't know what. I hated the world, I hated myself, I hated my parents, my family and then once I moved back here and being back here and realizing this is my home, this is where I come from, and I started remembering everything and what brought that back was when I went to the mounds for the first time, because that's where my dad used to take me.

Owen decided to stay in the community and to spend time with his father in ceremonies.

As well, his mother moved back to Manitou Rapids, and Owen also maintained a positive relationship with her. She was always included in family ceremonies and feasts. Owen believed that his culture was able to fill the emptiness he had felt. He stopped using drugs and has remained healthy ever since. He began working full-time as a line-cutter to assist with the RRFN Land Claim and remained employed doing that. He enjoyed his job, but would like to return to complete his grade twelve equivalency in the future if it does not conflict with his job.

Although Owen thought that living in the community was difficult because of the drug availability and family divisions, he turned to his traditions for strength. He said that he had come to realize the importance of education due to the struggles he faced before finding meaningful employment, and intended to stress the importance of education, as well as the importance of traditional culture when he has his own children in the future.

Samantha

At the time of interview, Samantha was a twenty-two year old female living in the Manitou Rapids community. She dropped out of school during her eighth grade year. Since the age of seventeen, she occasionally enrolled as a student at Seven Generations Education, but had not made significant progress towards her grade twelve completion. She is a mother of three children who are all under the age of five. Samantha said that she faced much frustration because without a grade-twelve education, opportunities for meaningful employment have been out of

her reach. She said that she would like to attend college someday so she can work to help benefit children.

Samantha's early years were tumultuous and had very negative effects on her overall well-being and her life as a student. Her life began in the Manitou Rapids community living with her single mother. Samantha's mother, a non-high school graduate, struggled to provide for her children. Her mother used to tell her about the importance of schooling and how she "had big plans" for her children. Because of her mother's heavy alcohol abuse, however, Samantha and her two older brothers were placed into foster care with a non-indigenous family living in a township located alongside her RRFN community. She continued to attend school in the Rainy River District.

Although the alcoholism she was taken away from was not a factor in her new home, Samantha nevertheless did not think she was in a healthy environment. In her foster home there was little consistency and support for her elementary schooling. In the foster home, Samantha began to experience regular physical and verbal abuse from her caregivers when they got frustrated or when she performed badly in school. She remembered being blamed regularly when her brothers or other foster children would break something in the house. Samantha began to feel withdrawn. She said:

I just kind of stuck to myself in school, like I wouldn't talk to anybody, I was very closed off, so basically I spent all my time doing my school work in school and then I was pulling really good grades and then...and then if I did have homework and I needed help with it, um, because I was like pulling A's and B's, they thought that me wanting help from them was just a way of getting attention, so they would tell me "you're not stupid, go figure it out yourself." Or "I don't have time for it, go do it yourself."

When Samantha brought her foster caregivers a report card with good grades, she felt that it did not matter to them, but they had small parties for her when she succeeded. Samantha was

confused by the co-existence of physical and verbal abuse and little support, along with praise when she did well. Further into elementary school, Samantha visited her aunt in the community, and she felt pressured by her aunt to keep up her grades. Samantha said:

It wasn't really supporting my education. It was more forcing it on me. I think it was more the fact that she didn't finish high school and she didn't get the education that she wanted and she didn't want to see us to be where she was at, so she kind of forced it on all of us.

Samantha grew more frustrated and withdrawn. During this time, Samantha and her brothers would also spend weekends with their mother. She would be sure to be sober when the foster family arrived to drop off her children, but would drink throughout the weekend visit. Samantha said that she had to care for her mother on visits, doing things such as cleaning the house and putting her to bed when she was too intoxicated to manage. Her mother would do her best to appear sober when her caregivers came to pick her up again.

During fourth grade, Samantha and her brothers moved back in with her mother on the reserve community, even though her mother continued to drink. Samantha found little support for her schooling, although her mother continued to lecture her about the importance of school. Samantha began feeling like the adult in the household. Because of her mother's alcoholism, she would shop for groceries cook the food, clean the house, look for her mother when she was out and then bring her home and put her to bed. She even gave her mother her insulin each day; as young as nine or ten years old.

Reflecting, Samantha said that her frustrations during her time as a student rarely had to do with teachers as they seemed to be "doing all they could do" to support her. She remembered her teachers trying to get in touch with her family, as well as being very pro-active in attempting to put together parent-teacher conferences, but it was never met with any interest from her home. She commended her teachers for doing what they could. However, she recalled some teachers

demonstrating more patience and support for non-indigenous students than for indigenous students. During her time at school, she received rude remarks from fellow students:

They would just kind of like make discrete, really rude remarks about how our parents would rather drink than, you know, be a part of our education or like how our parents just didn't care about our education. I would just replay, in my head, what the other kids were saying and it would be like "they're right, what the hell am I trying for?" but most times it was like "you know what, piss on them, I'm going to do it" to prove to them that I could do it.

Such remarks made Samantha wish that schools would help non-indigenous and indigenous students learn more about each other's culture and the circumstances they came from.

She said:

Just so that non natives can understand where we are coming from and we can understand where non-natives come from, so we're not being judgmental on people's beliefs and stuff when we have PowWows and stuff like, the actual reason for having Pow-Wows are, not to just sit there and eat like 'Indian Food' and you know, not to just sit there and watch and hear the drums. Like, getting them to really understand what the Pow-Wows are for and, you know, what the feasts and stuff are for, cuz I think that they just, like, think that it's someplace to, basically music and a show like they really don't understand it.

Weeks after she turned thirteen years old, Samantha's mother passed away. This was very hard on Samantha and her brothers, and they moved in with her aunt in the community. Not long after, Samantha began to rebel against her family and those close to her. Samantha said:

A lot of it had to do with the fact that my mom died 'cuz I basically parented her...like, I cared for her, rather than the other way around and then all of a sudden she was gone and I had nobody to take care of anymore and I didn't know how to take care of myself, cuz I was always taking care of somebody else and it was...that it just was that everything became, like, overwhelming.

She rebelled due to her overwhelming feelings of frustration and dropped out of school less than a year later, during grade eight. Over the next four years, Samantha worked at a series of on-reserve jobs such as being a homemaker, doing maintenance work, and she worked at the

RRFN Band Office. When she was seventeen years old and thinking more about her future, she decided to enroll at Seven Generations Education Institute to try to finish her high school credits, but she soon found out she was expecting a baby with her boyfriend, and put her schooling on hold. Her family grew with two more children by the time she was twenty-one, and she became a single parent. Since having her first child, she had attempted numerous times to complete high school, but has encountered many challenges in terms of finding child care and not being able to focus on her lessons because of the demands of being a mother. Indeed, during our interview, she was interrupted numerous times by her children wanting to play and, at times, crying.

Although the community houses a Child Resource Centre, Samantha hoped the RRFN administration will invest in a daycare with a regular schedule so that single parents such as herself, who wish to create more opportunities for themselves in the future, can complete education programs. She wondered with much frustration whether RRFN, despite claiming to promote educational success for their students, truly supported her and other single parents in the same circumstances:

The community makes it seem like it's basically all talk and no action. "Oh well, this is what we want to do so the kids will graduate," but then it never gets done and then they're like "why aren't any of our kids graduating high school?"

In recent years, Samantha also said it had been hard to live in her community and finish her schooling because of negative factors such as the conflicts between and within families, drug availability, and pressure (rather than support) to graduate. Samantha said:

It's almost like a feeling of being ripped apart. It's like, you want to finish school because you won't get anywhere without schooling and then you're getting pulled in the other direction by the whole drug and alcohol thing and part of you is "I don't want to graduate because of that pressure." I'd say half of it is the availability of it and how easy it is to walk down the road and pick up something to smoke or how easy it is to walk down the road or to get a ride to go find it – I think the other half of it is the pressure of having to graduate.

Samantha observed that drugs and alcohol have taken the place of traditional culture which allowed people to be proud and live in a healthy manner. Because of the challenges and limited opportunities for employment she found without a diploma, she hoped that her own children will have the support that she went without. She was raising her children the best she could, but wondered when she will have increased support to finish school. In the meantime, her dream of someday finding a career to work in child services and advocacy remained strong.

Chuck

At the time of interview, Chuck was a twenty one year old male member of RRFN who was raised in the Manitou Rapids community. He was living off reserve while completing his college degree. Having graduated from Seven Generations Education Institute when he was eighteen, he was the only research participant who had completed their grade twelve education.

Chuck began life in the Manitou Rapids community but when he was a small child, his family began to move “all over” in Canada and the United States. They returned to the reserve when Chuck was six years old. His home was quite full much of the time with his grandparents, parents, two sisters, and occasional foster children who were placed in their care. Throughout elementary school, Chuck said that his parents were active in his schooling by attending parent-teacher conferences and his mother remained in touch with his teachers. However, Chuck’s home life became difficult quickly, as there was a lot of drinking, drugs, and partying in his home throughout his childhood. His parents were always there for him, but during this period, it was often “after the booze.” At school, he turned “mean.” He was very angry and had a tendency to get into fights and trouble.

When Chuck was twelve years old his family began bringing cultural teachings and ceremonies back into the home. The improvement in his environment happened quickly and was

a one-hundred-and-eighty-degree turnaround. Suddenly, there was less fighting at home, his family began healing and getting closer with each other, and there was more money to be spent on things other than substances. The new dedication to ceremonies (such as the sweatlodge, healing ceremonies, attending shake-tents, and visiting annual sun dances) shown by Chuck's parents (both high school graduates) turned their lives around. Chuck did not think that he would have been able to be a student and live in a good way had his parents not reconnected with traditional culture. Happily, Chuck said that the respect he learned from his cultural teachings helped him with school and dedication to his work.

However, not everyone was supportive of his family's new-found sobriety. Many people in the community began harassing his family for returning to their traditions and Chuck said these others were like a "bucket of crabs." They called his family devil worshippers and harassed other community members who remained close with his family. Once when Chuck was in grade nine, he and his father got into an argument and other community members his age were very forceful in trying to get him to compromise his dedication sobriety. Recounting the memory, Chuck said:

All these guys my age cared about was getting me drunk and getting me stoned. That's when I realized these guys aren't my real friends is they couldn't respect the fact that I didn't drink or didn't get smoke or do drugs. But, like I said, they just wanted to get me drunk or stoned. I said "No, I don't drink" but they want to bring you down with them because, I don't know, out of spite or whatever.

Chuck observed that although the community may feast with a drum or give a river offering at different times of the year, such community-wide practices were rare. He sometimes wondered whether people were at all interested. When asked if lacking cultural identity in the community affected students, he affirmed that it can and does:

Because they can't really understand where they came from if they don't know their path of their ancestors. They'll get stripped of that sense of pride. All they'll see themselves as and looked at as [is as] drunks or drop-outs. They won't have pride. They'll just have not cared.

Because his father stayed committed to "The Red Road" even though many people turned against him, he was a role model for a very proud Chuck. Chuck said that growing up on the reserve meant constant peer pressure to use drugs or abuse alcohol. He said that he would probably be heading down "the same road" as many who had fallen into drugs and alcohol if he had not had someone at home to look up to during his younger years. Chuck began to associate more with non-indigenous friends than with those from his community because of the respect he was shown by them:

I always grew up with white people, I played on hockey teams with them. I knew them all from hockey and they were way better friends than any of the Native friends I've had from the reserve. They supported the fact that I don't drink. They think it's awesome that I'm going to be a cop. They support everything. When I go out with them, they buy me my own pop and everything. They don't try to offer me a beer or anything or offer me a joint because they all know that I don't use. They respect it. They don't try to pass it to me or nothing.

Chuck's experiences in area schools were predominantly positive as he found teachers in the district to be very dedicated to all students. Although some people said so, he disagreed with the idea that teachers and administrators were "racist" as he always had positive relationships with teachers and staff. When he would hear the occasional "war chant" in the hallway from non-indigenous students, he just let it roll off of his back because he knew who he was as an Anishinaabe person. He said:

Native Pride, I wouldn't go no hats or nothing, but I was proud of who I am. I'm not ashamed to be Native. I'm not ashamed to tell people who I am or what I do.

However, his time in area schools was not always without challenge. When Chuck began high school in Fort Frances, he developed a temper and began acting out. He described himself as a “jerk” when, even though he and his parents remained close and loving, he developed a grudge against his parents because of the drinking and partying that had surrounded him as a child. Chuck said that he began:

Getting in fights, skipping, trying to get in fights with my teachers even. Mostly because I was pissed off with my parents and how they used to live. I was holding a grudge still. In my senior year, I was short like 11 credits and I knew I wasn't going to graduate on time. I failed a lot of classes. Skipped a lot of classes.

Chuck made the decision to drop out of high school and enroll in Seven Generations Education Institute. Working hard with the support of his parents and an educator at Seven Generations (both encouraging him to not give up and letting him know they were there if he needed anything), Chuck completed a year and a half of schoolwork in one year and graduated on time.

Upon graduation, he was frustrated because certain community jobs were going to individuals who had not earned their grade twelve completion. This led Chuck to decide to enroll in college to become a police officer. His family continued to give words of encouragement and stayed committed to helping him along with school. During his freshmen year in college, his parents made a weekend out of helping him move to his new place of residence, which he greatly appreciated. At the time of interview, Chuck was completing the last semester of his college degree; to become the first in his family to do so.

Conclusion

My research participants from RRFN offered a great deal of reflection about their time as students in area schools. They offered stories about their upbringing and their education-related

concerns, needs and experiences over the course of their educational pursuits in the local district. In the next chapter, their stories are organized thematically and analyzed. This is supplemented with reflections from key informants about the education-related needs and concerns present in the RRFN community. The next chapter's key informants consist of area and district educators and educational administrators.

Chapter 4: Making Sense of Interview Trajectories

This chapter begins with an analysis of the experiences of the research participants who were introduced in the previous chapter. This helps to contextualize the students' experiences and make it clear that the students interviewed were not anomalous. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the ways in which experiences reported by RRFN students compare with experiences reported elsewhere in the literature.

Generally, students identified many challenges that they faced as they went through the school system. Only one of the students I interviewed had completed high school. Key informants also discussed their perspectives as educators and made it clear that they were aware of the challenges faced by students. Concerns are discussed here under the thematic headings of family, school and community, and comments related to the theme of cultural heritage are integrated into these three sub-sections. As noted in the previous chapter, pseudonyms are used to refer to the students to protect confidentiality. However, key informants did not request anonymity for this study.

Concerns and Challenges in the Family

The Role of Education Related Support and Encouragement

Four of the five non-high school graduates identified educational support and encouragement as particularly lacking while they were attending area schools, but recalled that at the time, stronger encouragement and support regarding school attendance was something they desired. Owen, for example, said that although his father was very involved with his schooling, his mother was not as supportive. This caused internal conflict for Owen and after moving in with his mother he dropped out of school and did not return.

It is significant that Chuck, the only student who finished high school, was also the only one to say that he had consistent support and encouragement from his parents as he went through high school. Regina had some support when she was still in elementary school, but did not feel support and encouragement in high school. None of the others said that they had ever felt any support or encouragement regarding finishing school. They all felt that such support would have made a difference and might have helped them to remain in school until they could graduate.

All research participants agreed that educational support and encouragement in the family, especially from parents, should be promoted and taken seriously.

Challenges Related to Being “In Care”

Three research participants, none of whom had completed high school, were removed from their homes when child welfare agents deemed their parents to be incapable of properly caring for them. Each of them said that it had affected them later in life as students, even if they were subsequently returned to their parents. While in care, Joe and Samantha typically felt unwanted and unsupported and this prevented them from concentrating on schoolwork. Regina, who said that even though her foster parents were very nurturing, she experienced significant confusion and hurt because of having been placed into care at a young age, and this had negative emotional and behavioural consequences during her time as a student.

Drugs and Alcohol

All students had personal experience with living in a family where there was either occasional or constant lack of sobriety due to drug and alcohol use. Each felt that this had affected their ability to focus on school and be successful in education, and had also had a negative effect on their pride and identity as First Nations people. Chuck, the only graduate, credited much of his success in education and life to his parents’ decision to lead a life of

sobriety after many years of abusing drugs and alcohol. However, Chuck would struggle and act out through his high school years because of his memories of lack of sobriety in the family, and this negatively affected his progress in school.

Cultural Affinity

Two research participants, Chuck and Owen, spent at least part of their childhoods in families that were involved in traditional cultural practices. Owen's family believed that it was important to keep traditional culture alive and was regularly involved with traditional practices, and Chuck's family began to consistently follow traditional teachings when he was 12 years old. Other participants, however, did not experience growing up in a home that promoted traditional cultural affinity.

Although Chuck passionately believed that his family's turn to tradition was a key factor giving him the ability to succeed in school, it is clear from analysis of the narratives of other participants that positive exposure to traditional culture in the home is only one factor among many. Success in school cannot be predicted based solely on whether a child lives in a family that adheres to traditional teachings and practices, but it can play a part. Owen, for example, was raised in a household in which cultural traditions were consistently practiced, yet he only finished grade nine and had no plans for getting his high school diploma. It should be noted however, that Jared said that when he moved away and had little access to traditional ceremonies, he felt displaced and empty, and "went off the deep end" to quit school and get involved in drug culture. Jared, moreover, was not exposed to any traditional culture while growing up, but when interviewed at age 18, he was committed to finishing high school and had almost finished grade 12.

Concerns and Challenges in the Schools

Cultural Programs

All students thought that the educators and teachers in the schools that they attended were effective and making significant efforts to promote success for First Nations students. Regina commended the partnership between the Rainy River District School Board and Seven Generations Education Institute to institute the Quest for Knowledge program which offers knowledge about area treaties, communities, and Chiefs, which she greatly enjoyed and could identify with at school. Regina said:

Well there's this one thing that Native students have in schools. It's called Quest for Knowledge. I really think that's a good thing for Native kids to have because it's fun, you learn about your culture, and about politics and who people are and why they're so important. I think that's the most important for Native kids in schools. You practice up on the bills that were put in place for Treaty Three and then you learn about which people were involved in it and why they were important or what's their significance in it. We have to know all the Chiefs around Treaty Three.

With the exception of Jared, who was frustrated and struggling with his identity as a young Anishinaabe man, the students said that cultural programs were very important in the schools to continue promoting indigenous student success. Jared, however, said that he did not understand the value of learning the language and how it applied to life later on. Owen thought that school partnerships with communities and elder involvement were very important for keeping the culture alive in places of learning. Both Owen and Joe saw the need for elder involvement in cultural education, both within the schools and the community.

Regionality of Histories

Looking back to when he was a student, Owen spoke about the lack of attention to the local histories of his people in the region. From his own experience, Owen stated the need for

students to learn about Chiefs and regional leaders, Chuck agreed and Regina shared similar views. As Joe reflected:

We've all heard about Columbus and Queen Elizabeth, but what happened to all those old Chiefs of ours, I can't even remember their names right now. Chief Sitting Bull. You hear a lot about the Queen, you hear a lot about Princess Diana, Christopher Columbus – but there's no education on our Native Chiefs and stuff.

Effective Teachers

All students said that when teachers took an interest in them, encouraging and supporting them to succeed, they were more motivated to work at their studies. Chuck and Joe identified one-on-one support as very important. Chuck said that getting one-on-one support was key on his road to graduation. Regina thought that it is important for teachers to understand that life on a reserve is different from the mainstream and that sometimes student behaviours might reflect challenges at home.

Concerns and Challenges in the Community

Family Divisions and Lack of Respect

Manitou Rapids is a deeply divided community, in part due to the history of forced settlement that was imposed in the early 20th century. Decisions about who to associate with or trust are often made on the basis of someone's last name, and each of my student participants has had negative experiences on account of their last name. The lack of community solidarity led them to experience concern, stress, and strain not only on the reserve, but also off-reserve at school. This is another factor to make it difficult for them to take pride in their identity as indigenous young people and focus on school. Many described it as a lack of respect. Both Chuck and Regina told stories of being ostracized by their peers on the reserve for trying to better themselves during their high school years. They were told they were “acting white” – Chuck referred to this as feeling like “crabs in a bucket.”

Drug Availability and Dealers

Each participant expressed serious concerns about the sale and use of illicit drugs and other substances in Manitou Rapids, and saw the need for such things to cease. They saw that the easy availability and damaging effects of such substances and addictions not only lessened the motivation and desire for educational success, but lessened pride in indigenous and community identity. Joe, for example, dropped out of high school after becoming addicted to drugs. He thought that if illicit drugs were not available, students would be able to have a better chance to succeed in school.

Decreasing Cultural Identity and Affinity

All participants agreed that the dwindling community relationships with traditional teachings and culture negatively affected student success. They discussed the ways in which cultural affinity affects aspects such as identity, sobriety, and relationships in the family and across the community. All agreed that very few families were practicing cultural traditions and young people were distanced from them.

Role Models and Leaders

All students thought there was a lack of positive role models in the Manitou Rapids community, yet all could identify at least one person they looked up to. All but Owen identified the current RRFN Education Counselor as someone they looked up to as a role model because they saw him as supportive, encouraging, and dedicated to youth and students in the Manitou Rapids community. Regina also viewed her foster father as a role model because of his educational accomplishments. Similarly Jared looked up to his father who was pursuing school, and Owen also saw his father as a role model he wished to emulate. Mostly, though, the students felt as Samantha did when she said:

I think we're always told where hard work leads to, but there's very, very few people who are able to show us where hard work leads to, so we're always going on hear say. We're hearing it, but that's as far as it goes.

Meaningful Community Employment

Each participant had worked on contract in summer student positions in the Manitou Rapids community, but none saw that such work could lead to meaningful employment in the future. As Jared said, "who wants to cut grass for the rest of their lives?"

Access to Daycare

The female students, one an expectant mother and the other a mother of three, voiced concerns about the difficulty with going to school while taking care of young children. Samantha wanted to go into the childcare field, but knew that grade twelve certification was needed first. Frustrated, she said that "trying to focus on doing the work, but then having to focus on the children too and what they need" kept her from going back to school. Regina, meanwhile, said that she would have to wait until her expected baby was older to even start to work towards graduation. As Samantha said, community daycare services would be beneficial for struggling single mothers seeking an education.

Key Informant Perspectives

Key informants Marcel Medicine-Horton (lifelong resident of RRFN and RRFN Education Counselor), Brent Tookenay (Superintendent of the Rainy River School District), and Laura Horton (30+ year resident of the Manitou Rapids community and Director of post-secondary education at Seven Generations Institute) expanded on the themes discussed in the previous section. This section reviews their perspectives on the challenges faced by RRFN students.

Concerns and Challenges in the Family

The Role of Education Related Support and Encouragement

The issue of family support was addressed by all key informants, each of whom shared the students' concerns regarding lack of family support and involvement with schooling. Each saw the need for students to have such support. Marcel Medicine-Horton argued that first and foremost, the number one role model and support in a child's life should be under their own roof. He regarded good school attendance and educational success as linked to a strong family structure and foundation. He discussed a young woman from RRFN who was selected as a National Aboriginal Role Model in 2007 and thought that her educational success was directly linked to family support and involvement. He said, "Again, that's the catalyst. For everything. Not only success in schools, but everything. The family is the foundation."

Brent Tookenay commented on the need for family and parental support for students from First Nations communities, and what he saw happening when there was not this support for students. Discussing his experience at Seven Generations Educational Institute, within the Rainy River District School Board, and within the Manitou Rapids community, Tookenay said that:

The big thing is the parental involvement. Kids who do well, their parents are involved. Kids that don't, the parents may be involved but a majority of the ones that struggle, the parents might not even know what classes they're taking. That's pretty significant, you know?

Tookenay said that he appreciated that a parent's previous experience in schools may have been negative and the schoolwork that students bring home may be intimidating for parents, but he still saw the need for families to get involved in supporting their children's schooling. Medicine-Horton agreed with this point, and thought that a legacy of the residential school system was that parents wanted to avoid educational systems later in life. Indeed, Medicine-

Horton and Tookenay have organized evening meetings on the reserve for parents to begin processes of increasing support for students, but each time, not a single parent showed up.

Drugs and Alcohol

All key informants were concerned about the negative effects on student success of alcohol and drug abuse in families. Medicine-Horton has seen numerous students suffer academically because families are unable to offer educational support and encouragement to children, when the family should ideally be the most important source of support. He was able to tell several stories about children being affected by their family's drug use. For example, he knew of a girl, eight or nine years old, who "knows how to crush up Percocets and snorts them. She's learned that from some place." He also related the following story about how illicit drugs have affected a student as young as five years old:

A Junior Kindergarten student had missed the equivalent of six weeks of school and the parent was unfortunately angry with me because [the parent said] I wasn't doing my job, but [that parent] failed to look in the mirror and say, "I have a social problem and it's affecting my children."

Laura Horton discussed the damaging effects of drugs on young children and the choices of individuals who are making readily available drugs a priority. With emotion, she said:

Get on it and make sure you know where you want to go ... and love your children! And stop taking the damn drugs! I can't imagine. I'm already hearing stories of teachers who have had methadone children in their classrooms who were born drugs addicts. Worse than fetal alcohol syndrome. It's worse than the alcohol. It's worse because the neurons and the dendrites are not attaching at the developmental stages of the children and they're not able to do things. We've got kids that will never grow up to be healthy Anishinaabe kids and they're doing it by choice and by not stopping the drugs in the community, we're enabling people do it and saying "It's okay, we don't mind having a bunch of disabled, dysfunctional Anishinaabe kids because ... I don't know why."

Cultural Affinity

All key informants spoke of the need to reestablish in families connections to traditional culture. Horton, for example, said:

If the children are connected to teachings of their culture where they can sundance, go to lodges, the Midewewin lodge, have strong connections to a sweatlodge, the PowWow trail, and they live in that society, it is a cultural thing that is far beyond school itself. The school is just one aspect of your whole base. It's only 5 hours a day. Out of 24 hours, 5 when you're in the classroom. The cultural teachings are far greater than that. Those kids that I know that have grown up in a strong cultural setting or with parents that are going back and finding these teachings, they're coming along quite nicely.

Similarly, Tookenay said that he sees that students with an active culture life at home become very well-rounded, demonstrate positive values, and have a true understanding of who they are which reaches into other areas of life.

Concerns and Needs in the Schools

Cultural Programs and Regionality of History

In terms of offering cultural programs for First Nations students, educators Horton and Medicine-Horton thought that the schools were doing a good job. Medicine Horton considered it very important for language to be an emphasized area for students. Superintendent Tookenay agreed, but noted that economic considerations meant that language teachers were not given many hours to work in the schools.

Tookenay was pleased that there were partnerships with elders and culture holders, and was pleased that the schools were offering:

the language and the Native studies and the content that's appropriate to this area. Meaning the history of Manitou and Rainy River First Nations, that kind of stuff.

He thought cultural programming could be further strengthened by incorporating the Seven Grandfather teachings such as Respect and Truth into the daily school day routine and within cultural programs.

Medicine-Horton agreed that local indigenous histories and culture need to be taught in the schools. He said that this would allow students to take pride in their indigenous identity:

I think that's where you have to start. I think you have to instil pride and honour back in our young people so that they know they come from extremely intelligent and powerful (ancestors). We sit here and that same blood runs through our families. It's in our blood, but how do you crack that acorn to get the nut out. I think that's what you have to do and I think, um, a curriculum that's based with our own regional history would instill some of that pride back.

Tookenay however, was unsure about how to move forward with such ideas. He said that he had met with RRFN administrators as well as elders to discuss the issue, but no one seemed prepared to do the time-consuming work required to ensure that local history was incorporated into the school curriculum.

Effective Teachers

Tookenay felt that a lot of student satisfaction within the schools depended on having positive relationships with teachers. At Fort Frances High School he saw that teachers who treated students fairly regardless of skin colour, who encouraged students to finish what they started, and who were willing to accommodate individual needs, were teachers that First Nation students "really take to." He did not think there was enough of that, however, and he said he could understand why some students chose to attend Seven Generations Educational Institute to finish high school. There, they could learn in small classes and get one-on-one, personalized help, unlike in Fort Frances where the student population and class sizes were higher.

Concerns and Needs in the Community

Family Divisions and Lack of Community Support

Regarding community divisions, Medicine-Horton said:

Our community is often referred to as being one of the most progressive [in terms of the recent land claim victory and economic base] First Nations in our Treaty area and nationally. The frightening part is that we're missing the spokes of the wheel because we don't have all our families involved because we have young kids on our playground that are told "don't play with that kid because his last name is different than yours." We have divisions on school buses that one school should not talk to that guy because my Grandma is mad at you. It is also the family divisions that are also part of the problem

here because if we had those seven original communities, all those spokes in the wheel, the sky is the limit in what we could do, but we don't because there's family divisions, there's family politics, there's that inner-hatred and jealousy that comes with us still having that blood memory of those seven reserves that were forced to be here.

Medicine-Horton was able to personally relate to what my participants Chuck and Regina had to say about being treated poorly by peers because he was trying to better himself. As Chuck did, he referred to the "crab bucket" reality of the reserve. Tookenay, meanwhile, said that he sees not only intra-reserve divisions being brought into schools, but also divisions and rivalries between different First Nation communities. All agreed that these divisions made it difficult if not impossible for students to focus on completing high school.

Role Models and Leaders

All key informants thought it was very important for children to have role models to look up to. Ideally, children should be able to look up to their parents as role models to emulate. That was not happening enough, however. Horton said:

We do what we see. Anishinaabe, our favourite way of learning is apprenticeship model and whatever we see of the people we admire the most, then that's exactly what we're going to be. If we're watching drug pushers, we'll be a drug pusher. If we watch someone work hard, we may work as hard unless it's a workaholic, over the top, then it's just as abusive when finding a good balance is difficult. Role models are critical. Absolutely critical because we watch. We're born and the first things that work are our two eyes and our two ears. We will talk the way we hear and we will act the way we see. It doesn't matter if you tell me to do something different, if I see you doing something else, I'll do what you're doing, not what you tell me to do. That's as old as the hills. We have to be responsible and always pay attention to our own behaviours.

Meaningful Community Employment

Tookenay was concerned that many students face anxiety about the prospect of going away for post-secondary education because there may not be jobs for them to assist their communities when they are finished. He said, "That's part of the problem, many have trouble seeing where they're going to fit back in once they go away to and come back from school."

Interconnectivity of Issues

Each key informant stressed the interconnectivity of issues, and believed that solutions would lie in the forging of partnerships between educators, families, and the reserve community as a whole. They saw a need for the resurgence of traditional culture, knowledge, and identity to increase support for students. As Medicine-Horton said, “it takes a community to raise a child.”

Similarities to Previous Research Findings

In general, my research participants expressed views similar to those expressed in qualitative research done by others. For example, in Bergstrom et al.'s (2003) study, indigenous students identified a variety of barriers to educational completion stemming from factors including family challenges (such as instability, dysfunction, confusion due to adoption, alcohol and substance abuse), school challenges (such as a curriculum that does not reflect indigenous culture and teacher practices), and reserve community challenges (such as family divisions where “it’s all politics,” alcohol abuse, internalized racism where some are viewed as “apples,” fighting, lack of adequate childcare, and disharmony). Numerous participants in Bergstrom et al.'s study said that they experienced a cultural disconnection from the elders and culture holders in their communities. Some felt that this was because those who attended residential school were taught that their cultural lives were wrong.

My findings are congruent with those in several previous studies which highlighted the importance of students having parental encouragement and support towards schooling. In particular, MacKay and Miles' (1989) study of Ontario First Nations communities determined that parental encouragement and support towards schooling was the key factor and critical variable that was strongly correlated with whether a student would choose to complete formal education. Similarly, the Nechako Lakes (2001) research showed the importance of family and

parental support as a key factor for indigenous students to do well in school. However, unlike the situation on the reserves studied by MacKay and Miles where a parental lack of English language proficiency was noted as a barrier preventing support for students, most members of RRFN were raised speaking English in the home, and so lack of proficiency in English was not a barrier.

My own findings reflect those from Schissel and Wotherspoon (2003) in Saskatchewan, as a majority of my participants placed importance on cultural programming and having options in school. Also as Schissel and Wotherspoon found, my participants felt that school was an enriching and enjoyable experience, but a number of circumstances in other areas of life such as community problems and living in single parent homes meant that it was difficult to succeed at school. For example, one of my female participants discussed the difficulty of balancing the roles of being both a single-parent and a student without daycare services and the participant who had a child one the way shared the same significant concerns. My research shows, as does research such as that by Schissel and Wotherspoon, or by MacKay and Miles (1989) examining Ontario First Nations communities, that experiences in different areas of life are intertwined, and need to be understood as all of a piece.

As found by Silver et al. (2001) in their interviews with students in Winnipeg inner city high schools, I also found most of my participants saying that although they had some positive relationships with teachers, they did not see their own cultural values and background reflected in the schools. However, unlike Silver et al., I did not find my participants highlighting experiences of significant racism. Interestingly, Tuharsky et al.'s (2005) study of students at an alternative high school in Regina also found that racism was identified as a major theme acting as a barrier to educational completion. Thus, my findings are different from those in two other

locations. This difference could be an artifact of the interview process, or it could be that racism, while a problem in Fort Frances schools, is less of a problem than in Winnipeg's inner city schools or in Regina's alternative high school.

Rather than focus on experiences of racism in the schools, my participants were more likely to highlight experiences with supportive teachers as important for motivating them to succeed at school. To this extent, my findings are similar to those of Tuharsky et al. (2005), Melnechenko and Horsman (1998) who interviewed students in southern Saskatchewan, and Nechako Lakes (2001). As well, my participants highlighted the importance of being exposed to cultural programming and a relevant curriculum at school as did other researchers such as Tuharsky et al., Melnechenko and Horsman, and Nechako Lakes.

Beyond previous research that brought forth indigenous student voices, there are a number of similarities between my findings and the general literature review presented in chapter one. To begin, it is apparent that my research participants are experiencing numerous effects in the wake of colonialism imposed upon indigenous people and First Nations communities. The residual effects are taking place in different areas of their lives and have affected their learning and progress in school. As identified in relevant literature, my participants not only place great importance on the significance of family support for schooling as a critical factor in schooling, but many believe that their family's capacity for such support has been minimal to non-existent with negative results. My lone participant who graduated high school and began college said that support from his family was instrumental to his situation. Each participant also identified substance abuse in the family to some degree which has impacted their well-being and school support. Also identified in relevant literature, each participant who was placed in care when their

parents could not care for them experienced emotional trauma which affected their schooling and/or well-being in some way when they were older.

At the community level, relevant literature was reflected in each research participant's account that family divisions, as well as drug use and availability, had negative effects on finishing school and their personal well-being. Both of these challenges were explained with significant anger among participants as they felt this needed to change. My two participants who voiced concerns regarding child care and its connection to schooling challenges also reflected relevant issues outlined in the literature review. Each participant also spoke of the decreasing reality (and need) of cultural knowledge and affinity and guidance from elders in the community. The only high school graduate stated that cultural teachings, ceremony, and support for his identity not only assisted him in schooling pursuits, but had very positive effects on all areas of his life. Key informants, meanwhile, took up a theme identified in the literature which was that collaborations between school, family, and community to support students left much to be desired. As the literature identifies, the imposition of Westernized schooling led to the fracturing of support-systems which were fundamental to education in traditional times when education was understood as a communal responsibility and learning was not compartmentalized.

However, there are differences between the literature review and my research findings. Most notably, while relevant literature noted many issues within schools that were counterproductive to indigenous students, a majority of my research participants reported favourable experiences in area schools. Research participants shared generally positive opinions about teachers and experiences at school. This is not to say they saw no need for improvement. Indeed, most expressed concerns such as the need for increased cultural options, teaching about

local indigenous histories and culture, and the need for understanding between indigenous and non-indigenous students.

Their curricular concerns can be understood with reference to the literature on the relationship between neoliberalism and schooling, as reviewed in a previous chapter. This literature demonstrates that elite control of what is learned is maintained via the implementation of strategies such as requiring standardized curriculums, and because standardized curricula do not encourage an understanding of counter-hegemonic perspectives, the very structure of the schooling process neutralizes awareness and critical thinking. Freire (1970), for example, argued that by limiting critical thinking, the elite preservation of power structures could be maintained, and opportunities for the development of pockets of resistance to current structures of inequality could be negated.

Further, literature on neoliberalism explains how it is that marginalized communities remain marginalized even when there is access to formal schooling. For example, social mobility by means of schooling becomes limited for marginalized groups when their parents lack education and have limited access to resources such as cultural capital, to support their children in schools. With regard to my research participants, factors such as limited parental support and lack of scholastic background were identified as significantly hindering their ability to succeed at school. Stepping back from what participants had to say, we can also place their experiences within the context of the low levels of high school completion for RRFN members generally, and the general existence of negative or ambivalent attitudes towards the value of school completion.

In light of the global push of neoliberalist agendas and the effects at local and regional levels, the existence of Seven Generations Education Institute (SGEI) as an educational resource

for indigenous students is highly significant. It serves as more than a source of student support. It also serves as a local challenge to the neoliberal agenda regarding education. Described by research participants as offering programs of high value, cultural programs offered in area schools by SGEI, such as Quest for Knowledge and Fall Harvest, can be viewed as a type of progressive resistance to neoliberalism by transmitting indigenous learning, indigenous cultural and social capital, and localized, democratic cultural knowledge to students, as a supplement to and corrective for general mainstream schooling. Battiste, George and Anuik (2009) commend SGEI for complementing formal schooling by means of culture camps, activities to support indigenous identity, and forging relationships with elders; all to affirm student's learning spirits through local traditional knowledge and language, indigenous worldviews and Anishinaabe ways of knowing and learning, and consciousness-raising. The continued involvement of SGEI personnel with area schools works to legitimize indigenous knowledge and culture, thus overcoming the historical discrediting of indigenous knowledge and culture.

The SGEI facility near the RRFN community is utilized by students who are proceeding with their studies after leaving the local high school, as well as by those who return later in life to attain their grade twelve diploma. My participants commented on how highly they valued being able to have access to the SGEI facility, because their individual circumstances and challenges were accommodated. Although lesson plans are condensed and may demand a high degree of personal discipline and time management for the individual, the personalized attention that students get at SGEI addresses and confronts the neoliberal educational strategy of depersonalized learning. Unlike mainstream schools, SGEI offers smaller class sizes, increased teacher-student communication and positive relationships. Participants identified these factors as highly beneficial as they feel welcomed, cared for, and listened to by SGEI teachers.

In summary, comments from my research participants make it clear that there is reason to be concerned about neoliberalism in area schools, but local resistances to neoliberalism do exist.

Conclusion

Appendix A offers a chart to summarize and outline challenges faced by RRFN students. There were commonalities in the experiences of the students who participated in this research. Each had faced a series of challenges within their families, schools, and community, which made it difficult if not impossible for them to complete their formal schooling. As they grew older, they were able to reflect on the choices they made regarding education, and all came to recognize that the lack of high school completion would set limitations for them in life. Each acknowledged the crucial need for, at the very least, high school certification for future career opportunities and/or schooling. Key informants, moreover, identified the same problems as the students, and made it clear that they were aware of the problems preventing RRFN children from finishing their schooling. Thus, the students who participated in this research may have been few in number, but it is clear that their experiences were indicative of widespread and ongoing problems. There are, moreover, many similarities between my findings and previous research studies.

The concluding chapter reflects on my findings to offer a way forward as RRFN (and all indigenous communities) struggles to find ways of supporting students as they work towards completing their educational goals.

Chapter 5 – Reflection and Conclusion

As the indigenous population increases in Canada while educational completion remains low, indigenous peoples experience marginalization and a lack of educational and career opportunities. This is particularly so for students living on-reserve, where rates of educational completion remain especially low. Participants from RRFN identified numerous factors that either hindered or supported their progress. Many of the challenges they identified are related and interconnected, and they need a variety of sources of support. Parents and other family members, culture holders, community leaders, and educators all have a place in a dynamic potential partnership to address the educational challenges faced by students and find solutions. Such a partnership, reflective of supportive partnerships once found in traditional education, is strongly suggested because issues and challenges in each area do not occur in isolation.

Learners and the Megis Shell

The Sacred Megis Shell is what the Anishinaabe followed along the stopping points during the migration across Turtle Island. Just as the Megis Shell has guided the People and now serves as a reminder of Anishinaabe identity and culture; so can the Megis Shell remind us that our young people are sacred and deserve respect and our best efforts to support their learning.

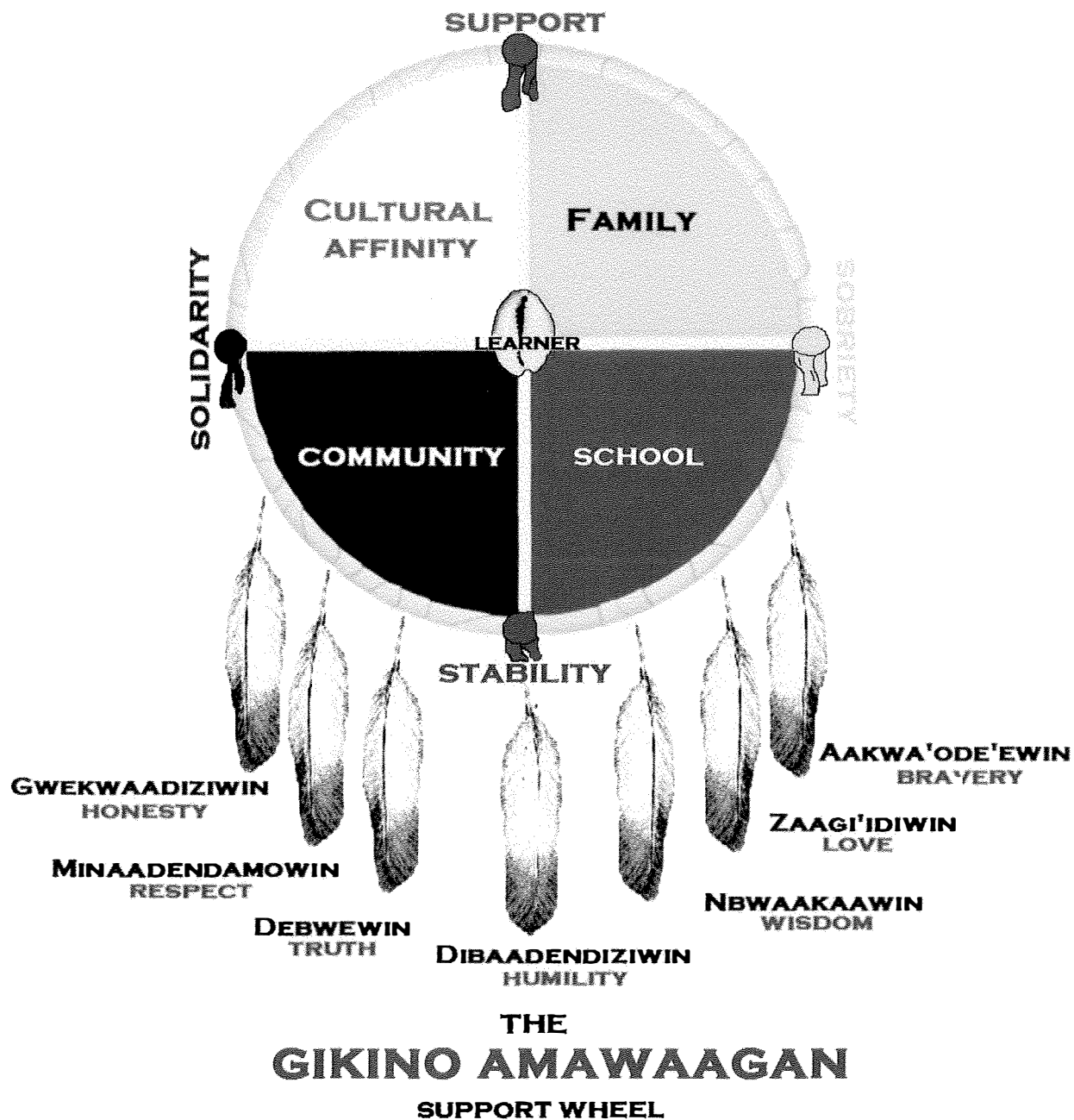
The Gikino Amawaagan Support Wheel

Based upon my research, and founded on traditional teachings which I have been given to carry, I have created a framework to better support indigenous students in their educational pursuits. It is inspired, in part, by Toulouse's (2006) work which incorporates the Anishinaabe Seven Grandfather Teachings into solution-based educational frameworks for student support, as well as Epstein's (2005) promotion of active partnerships and equity between the school, the family, and the community, and the demonstrated crucial importance of culture holders and

elders. The framework also incorporates Dei's (2002) position that bringing spiritual values and teachings into learning and schooling can support connectedness, transformative learning and enhanced learning outcomes, while reflecting and weaving the common knowledges of local peoples into a socially responsible structure of support. It heeds Dei's contention that such fundamental teachings can emphasize well-being for students of multiple backgrounds and foster an atmosphere of respect as the self and the collective learner is strengthened (ibid). It is created specifically for Rainy River First Nations, but is also designed for potential use at the regional, provincial and national levels, as a way to address the fragmentation of traditional educational supports by modern schooling, along with imperial and colonial structures.

To visually represent the framework, I created **The Gikino Amawaagan Support Wheel** (figure 1) which is modeled upon the traditional medicine wheel and divided into four quadrants. Given its name by fellow RRFN youth leader Carissa Copenace (Nigaan-niga-bawik), Gikino Amawaagan translates to "student" or "a learning person that's actively given knowledge." As my research reflects, challenges and potential solutions exist in various areas that "surround" a student. Thus, partnerships must be forged to address challenges and solutions that do not exist in isolation from each other. In this circle, there is no end to this vision.

Figure 1: The Gikino Amawaagan Support Wheel



Fully around the circle is wrapped braided sweetgrass. As a sacred medicine reaching all partners, this is a reminder to ground partnerships in spirituality and culture (fundamental for

supporting the identity of indigenous peoples) while moving towards increased support for indigenous students.

In the centre, represented by a sacred Megis Shell is the student (the **Learner**). Learners are to be included in the relationship, not only as the focus of the support, but in the support processes where their voices, experiences, needs, concerns, and perspectives are valued.

Surrounding the learner in these quadrants are four dynamic sources of support and influence:

Family (parents and relations); **School** (teachers, tutors, educational administration, educational leaders, and policymakers who have an influence on the learning and climate of an institution);

Community (the collective gathering of families, residents, and community leaders); and

Cultural Affinity (having a relationship with sources of cultural knowledge and identity such as elders, storytellers, healers, and traditional teachers). Each partnership is multi-directional.

A fundamental teaching of the traditional medicine wheel is that balance must be struck in life on The Red Road. In this visual representation of partnership, value is placed upon the equal balance of power and influence of each partner.

Sacred Ties

Indigenous architect Douglas J. Cardinal (1998) believes that when people declare a commitment to a project which arises from People's needs and their actions are based on integrity, the universe shifts and new possibilities open. Relevant to Cardinal's point, declarations and commitments by partners are required within this wheel of support, based upon learner's identified needs. Connecting the areas of influence at the outer meeting points are four sacred **Tobacco Ties: support; sobriety; solidarity and stability**. Each represents a declaration for key partners to uphold in their commitment to each individual learner (with their own needs, expectations, and need for support) who is at the centre of the partnership. Just as the learner

holds the partners to the centre of the relationship, these tobacco ties strengthen all relationships to ensure that work is done in a good way and effectively, with all partners laced together.

Support- In which all partners work in a good way to support the student, work to support each other, and to support the well-being of the continued partnership for future learners.

Sobriety- In which all partners work to promote sobriety in their lives, spaces of influence, which is also advocated and supported in the life and environment of the learner; not only abstinence regarding alcohol and drugs, but from toxic relationships with one another such as prejudice and family/community divisions.

Solidarity- In which all partners work to maintain healthy, interwoven relationships for the best well-being of the learner, each other, placing respect and value on one another's areas of expertise, professions, and knowledge they bring to the outcomes of the partnership. The envisioned outcome should bind all partners together.

Stability- In which all partners (to best support learners and one another) work to maintain consistent (rather than sporadic) and progressive motion that moves forward in such a way that, as long-term collective partners, they do not walk alone.

Seven Grandfather Teachings

Anishinaabe culture is embodied by seven fundamental values called the Seven Grandfather Teachings that keep the People on The Red Road – the Path of living life in a good way. The teachings are foundational, complex, and are typically shared in teachings from elders

or traditional teachers. Utilizing the teachings I have been given, I have incorporated the values into an application of this partnership to increase educational support for students.

Honesty: Gwekwaadiziwin

The ability to be honest with ourselves about the need for change and intervention, as well as the seriousness of the matter. The commitment to view, acknowledge, and accept the reality of the matter at hand, the challenges, the expressed needs of learners supported by all partners involved, the effect of the history of colonization, and the courses of action needed to offer support.

Respect: Minaadendamowin

Listening is the highest demonstration of respect. This means understanding that the voices and perspectives of the learners who share their voices and experiences are to be valued, just as the perspectives, suggestions, ideas, and perspectives of partners have a place in the partnership to support such learners.

Truth: Debwewin

To collectively communicate each other's shared vision for learners, as well as cultivate collaborative efforts and plans to bring the vision into reality.

Humility: Dibaadendiziwin

Accepting that we cannot walk alone, that we are not alone in our shared concerns for learners, and that we are not alone in our roles as influential supports for learners, and that our roles as support do not exist in isolation from each other.

Wisdom: Mbwaakaawin

Understanding that the knowledge, gifts, and expertise that all partners hold in their hands contain value which can be shared across lines; these lines often divide potential partners.

Love: Zaagi'idiwin

Understanding that love and care for the learner can only be demonstrated through commitment and dedication to their need for support.

Bravery: Aakwa'ode'wein

Choosing to actively move forward in our commitments to our learners in new, collaborative, proactive ways. Also, choosing to continue towards the envisioned outcomes through future challenges and barriers to overcome.

Directions for Future Research

This research shows that there is a shared awareness of the issues, challenges, and needs on the part of both research participants and educational leaders who served as key informants. Such awareness of the education-related needs and concerns is based in the everyday personal experience of all individuals interviewed. Naturally, the next step is to bring together people from each identified area of experience (parents and families, local educators and administration, community leaders, elders and culture holders, as well as past and present students) for discussion and progressive planning to further identify what can be done to better support students and set it into action. Based on his focus group research involving educators and parents, Poonwassie (2001) suggests preliminary meetings and gatherings with each individual group before bringing together the larger focus group. This seems an excellent suggestion.

Another area that requires further exploration relates to the role and process that elders will play in the development and application of regional histories and cultural knowledge for educators. Superintendent Brent Tookenay pointed out that there has been discussion with the RRFN Chief and Council and community elders about bringing the knowledge from the land to the learners, but how to develop and implement a workable process that would benefit RRFN and other indigenous communities remains unknown.

As research that brings the voices of young people, learners, and students forward is a relatively undeveloped area of inquiry, continued research that values such experiences and gives a forum to learners and young people should be supported.

A Final Reflection

To say that this research project was a memorable journey would be a vast understatement. As an indigenous person, hearing many traumatic stories of young people from my family's community while educating myself on matters such as the devastating effects of colonization, the residential schools, and Canada's agenda of forced assimilation, I was on an emotional rollercoaster as I began to realize how my own family was impacted. Many answers I have sought for many years about why many realities were present in my family were answered, but not without a series of emotions such as sorrow, anger, mourning, and what can only be described as researcher trauma. In retrospect and after pursuing avenues of traditional and cultural healing, I am very pleased to have been part of a project with which I have been very personally invested.

At the beginning of this research, I expected that I would find that the main issues leading to graduation or non-completion would exist in the area of schooling. However, this was not the root of the issue as it became clear that family and community well-being, impacted by

colonialism and assimilationist policies, played significant roles. Many times during the process of completing interviews with research participants and researching the literature, I considered aborting the research altogether out of concern for “rocking the boat” at the community level. I carried on, however as I did feel it was my responsibility to honour and share the voices and experiences of the young people who came forward to offer their stories and insight. These young people candidly told me about their lives with the expectation that their experiences would be communicated to leaders and educators. The heart of the leader can and must beat with the voices of the people.

A common experience for research participants and key informants were many moments of breakthroughs as they shared with me experiences that they had not previously recognized as important. I can relate. Not only do I thank our young people and educational leaders for sharing their experiences with me; I thank them for helping me find answers in my own life that we share. Gichi Miigwech!

So in the end, what have I learned? Above all, it has been shared with me that it takes a community to raise a child. And I agree. But I also believe that in a sacred relationship, it can take a child to raise a community by reminding us of our priorities and the work to be done.

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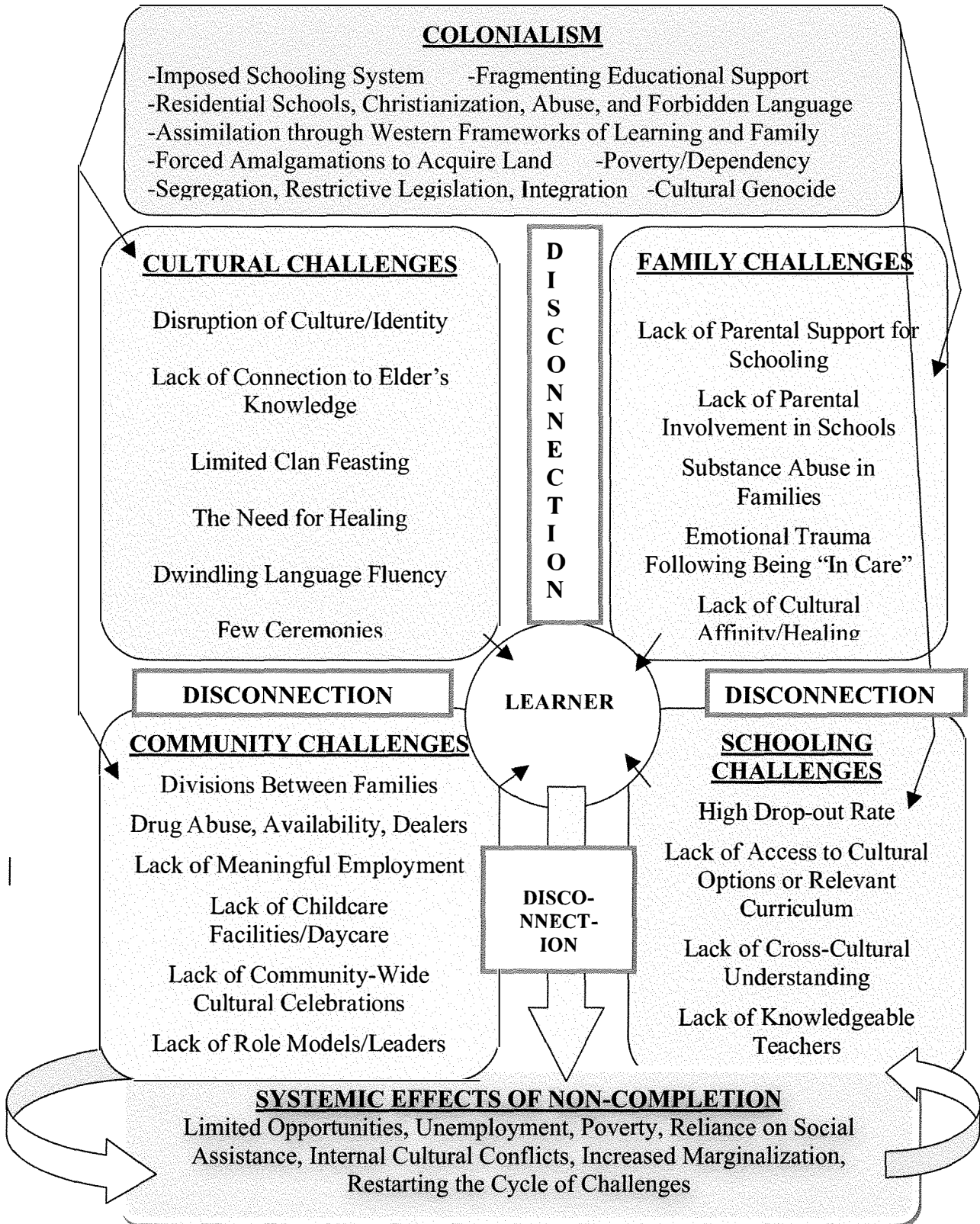
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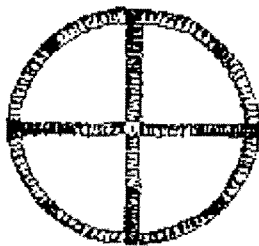
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Appendices

A: Chart outlining RRFN Student Challenges



B-1 Project Flyer included in three bi-weekly RRFN Community Newsletters



“Preparing the Seventh Generation”

**What Are the Educational Needs and Concerns of Students
from Rainy River First Nations?**

Attention Former Rainy River First Nation Students!!

One of our Rainy River First Nations Band Members who is completing work on their Masters Degree has developed a research study to give voice to many of the education related concerns and needs present in the surrounding area schools and communities specific to Manitou Rapids. The study has been designed with the intention of better communicating these voices and issues to educators, community leaders, and those involved in policy so our youth may be given the tools and experiences for educational success in coming years.

To attain a full-degree of experience, the study will involve people of the following criteria:

- Male and Female Band Members between the ages of 18-25
- Former Students who attended area schools while living “on-reserve”
- Both high school graduates and non-graduates

This study will be taking place in early 2008 during the winter months. If you would like to show early interest to be a part of this study before general contact and recruitment begins, it would be most appreciated.

All participants will be kept 100% confidential and anonymous and each interview will be between one and three hours of discussion.

If you are interested in offering early interest, please contact Rob Horton via e-mail at r.horton.rrfn@gmail.com

B-2 Initial Letter from Robert Animikii Horton to Rainy River First Nations

Dear Rainy River First Nations Chief and Council,

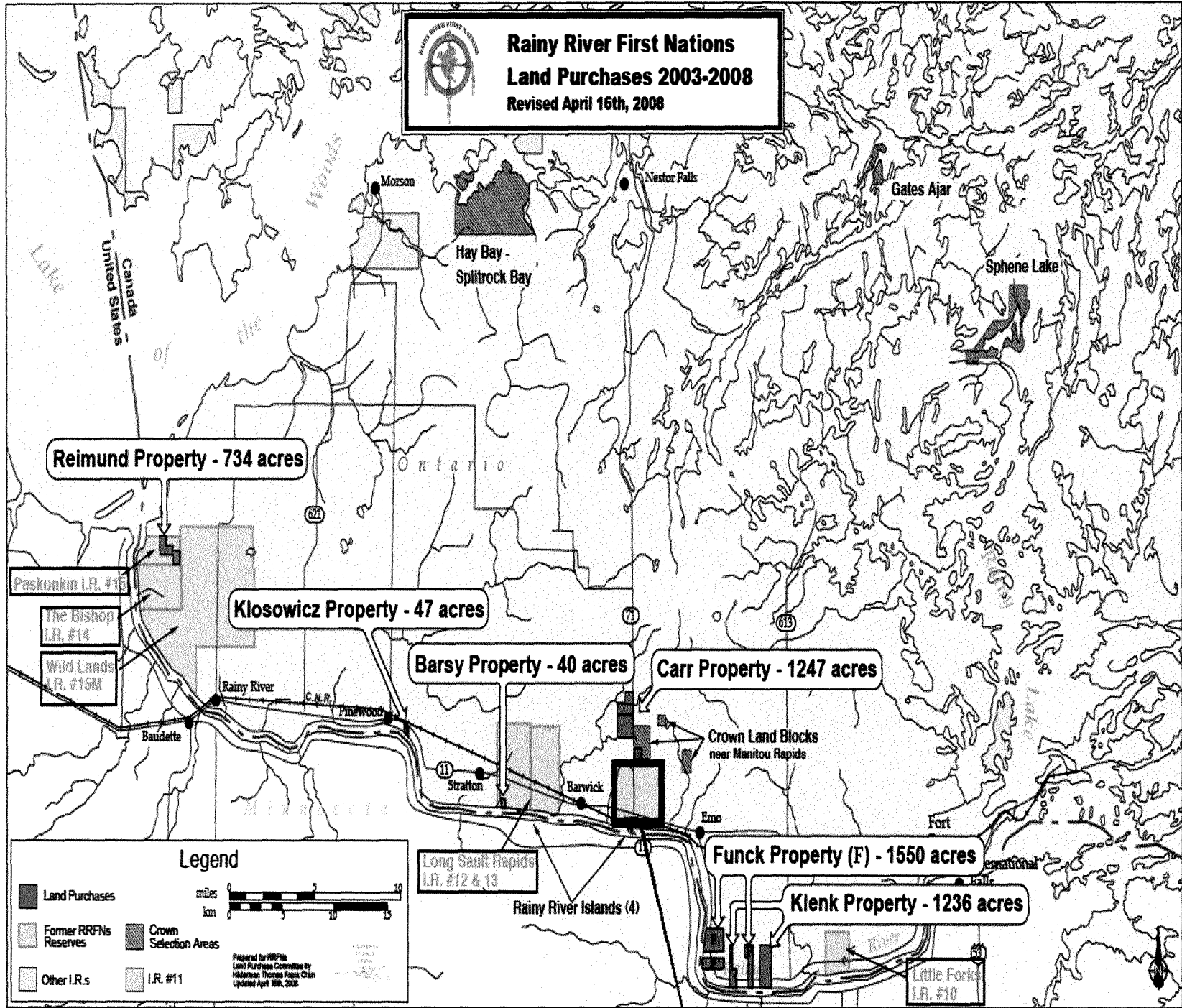
Boozhoo!

I hope everything has been going well for you all and within the departments of Rainy River First Nations. I am happy to tell you that graduate school is going well and that we are preparing to begin our thesis research projects in the coming months. In previous discussions, we have shared thoughts on the current state of educational success and completion within the community of Manitou Rapids. With sincere concern of such circumstance in mind, I would like to develop and produce research, in accordance with my graduate program at Lakehead University, to address such concerns from our youth directly. Such a study would, ideally, bring the voice of a number of our youth forward to voice their concerns and experiences centered on a number of education-related areas in their life so we may better accommodate educational success for them in our community, families, and within schools.

With the support of our Chief and our Councilors, following more information and logistics being provided to Rainy River First Nations, I would like to propose support for such a study to be conducted. If there are any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at (807) 768 9103.

Miigwech!

Robert A. Horton



D-1 Research Participant Cover Letter

PREPARING THE SEVENTH GENERATION: WHAT ARE THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND CONCERNS OF STUDENTS FROM RAINY RIVER FIRST NATIONS?

Dear Potential RRFN Research Study Participant:

Boozhoo!

As a graduate student at Lakehead University, I am conducting research during early 2008 on the specific educational experiences, needs and concerns of Rainy River First Nations students. This research is being conducted towards requirements for the Masters of Arts degree in Sociology. I am interested in interviewing Rainy River First Nations band members, both males and females, who are currently between the ages of 18 and 25, are former students of area schools, and who were and classified as 'on-reserve' residents during enrollment in area schools. I am interested in both high school graduates and non-high school graduates. Various experts, administrators, and educators will also be interviewed to learn their perspectives on the educational needs and concerns of Rainy River First Nations students. This study is being supervised by Dr. Sharon-Dale Stone in the department of Sociology at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, ON.

Researchers and Aboriginal experts have identified factors that contribute to Aboriginal educational success in schools. However, there is inadequate information on the specific educational needs of students of the Rainy River First Nations community. Also, many times, the direct experiences of Aboriginal students remain ignored by educators and policymakers, and I hope that the results of this research will help to change this situation. This study will give those from Rainy River First Nations who have the greatest familiarity with the educational needs of band members a voice to express and identify their experiences, needs, and concerns. Benefits for the Rainy River First Nations community, specifically current and future students, exist at the very heart of this research.

If you choose to take part in an interview, we can arrange a date and time to meet at a location at Manitou Rapids. It is expected that the interview will take between one and three hours, depending on how much you care to say. If you find it difficult to finish the whole interview the first time we meet, we can finish it at a later time. With your consent, the research interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed for later analysis. My questions will focus on your personal educational experiences, needs, and concerns. The questions will be of a personal nature, but please note that you are not required to answer any questions that you are not comfortable with. Also, keep in mind that you are a volunteer and may withdraw from the research at any time. After the conclusion of the research interview, should you want to talk about post-interview concerns or feelings, I will provide a contact number and related information for a counselor who can assist with such concerns.

Your personal identity will be kept completely anonymous and confidential. You will be given a pseudonym (fake name) in any written or oral reports, and other potentially identifying information will be changed so that no one will be able to tell who you are. I will be the only person with access to any information that identifies you. The audio-recordings from the interviews, as well as all potentially identifying information, will be stored in a safe and secure fashion at Lakehead University for seven years after completion of this research study.

If you wish to receive a summary of the research findings following completion, you may e-mail me at bebaamoyaash@hotmail.com. If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, please contact me or my research supervisor who is listed below, as well as the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board at (807) 343-8283.

In sincerity and solidarity,

Robert A. Horton
"Bebaamweyaazh"
Waabizheshi Dodem (Marten Clan)
Member of Rainy River First Nations
Lakehead University Graduate Student
Masters (MA) Program in Sociology
bebaamoyaash@hotmail.com
(907) 482-2296 (*on reserve*)
(807) 768-9103 (*off-reserve*)

Supervisor:

Dr. Sharon-dale Stone
Department of Sociology
Lakehead University
955 Oliver Road
Thunder Bay, ON, P7B 5E1

Tel: (807) 343-8530
Email: sdstone@lakeheadu.ca

D-2 Key Informant Cover Letter

PREPARING THE SEVENTH GENERATION: WHAT ARE THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND CONCERNS OF STUDENTS FROM RAINY RIVER FIRST NATIONS?

Dear Potential RRFN '**Key Informant**' Research Participant:

Boozhoo!

As a graduate student at Lakehead University, I am conducting research during early 2008 on Aboriginal/First Nations education – specifically, the specific educational experiences, needs and concerns of Rainy River First Nations students. This research is being conducted towards requirements for the Masters of Arts degree in Sociology. Supplementary to personal interviews with a sample of Rainy River First Nations band members with educational experience in area schools, I also hope to interview various experts, administrators, and educators (*'key informants'*) to learn about their perspectives on the educational needs and concerns of First Nations and Rainy River First Nations students. This study is being supervised by Dr. Sharon-Dale Stone in the department of Sociology at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, ON.

Researchers and Aboriginal experts have identified factors that contribute to Aboriginal educational success in schools. However, there is inadequate information on the specific educational needs of students of the Rainy River First Nations community. Also, many times, the direct experiences of Aboriginal students remain ignored by educators and policymakers, and I hope that the results of this research will help to change this situation. This study will give those from Rainy River First Nations who have the greatest familiarity with the educational needs of band members a voice to express and identify their experiences, needs, and concerns. Benefits for the Rainy River First Nations community, specifically current and future students, exist at the very heart of this research.

If you choose to take part in an interview, we can arrange a date and time to meet at a location at Manitou Rapids or another location of your choosing. It is expected that the interview will take between one and three hours, depending on how much you care to say. If you find it difficult to finish the whole interview the first time we meet, we can finish it at a later time. With your consent, the research interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed for later analysis. My questions will focus on your insight and experiences within the Rainy River school district, as well as Aboriginal and First Nations educational needs and experience with working with First Nations – more specifically, Manitou Rapids. Also, keep in mind that you are a volunteer and may withdraw from the research at any time.

Your name and position/title will be identified in this study and documentation, but if you **request** it to be so, your personal identity (name and position) will be kept completely anonymous and confidential, as you will be given a pseudonym (fake name) in any written or oral reports and other potentially identifying information will be changed so that no one will be able to tell who you are. I will be the only person with access to any information that identifies you. The audio-recordings from the interviews, as well as all potentially identifying information,

will be stored in a safe and secure fashion at Lakehead University for seven years after completion of this research study.

If you wish to receive a summary of the research findings following completion, you may e-mail me at bebaamoyaash@hotmail.com. If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, please contact me or my research supervisor who is listed below, as well as the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board at (807) 343-8283.

In sincerity and solidarity,

Robert A. Horton
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Tel: (807) 343-8530

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E-1 Research Participant Consent Form

Preparing the Seventh Generation:What Are the Educational Needs and Concerns of Students from Rainy River First Nations?

I, _____, have read and understood the **research study cover letter** explaining the nature of the above-named study, its purpose, reasoning, procedures, and I agree to participate in the study conducted by Robert A. Horton. I also understand the following points:

1. I have received and understood explanations about the nature of the research project, its purpose, and procedures.
2. I understand that I will be asked questions of a personal nature and about personal and work-related experiences and I am under no obligation to answer questions that I am uncomfortable with answering.
3. Interview data will be audio taped for later transcription, but will be kept confidential.
4. I am a volunteer and can withdraw from the study at any time.
5. There is no apparent risk of physical or psychological harm.
6. My identity will be kept anonymous and confidential in any written or oral presentation of research findings.
7. Upon request, I will receive a copy of research study results, following the completion of the project.
8. All data arising from this research will be securely stored at Lakehead University for a period of seven years.

Research Study Participant Signature

Date _____

E-2 Key Informant Consent Form

Preparing the Seventh Generation:What Are the Educational Needs and Concerns of Students from Rainy River First Nations?

I, _____, have read and understood the **research study cover letter** explaining the nature of the above-named study, its purpose, reasoning, procedures, and I agree to participate in the study conducted by Robert A. Horton. I also understand the following points:

1. I have received and understood explanations about the nature of the research project, its purpose, and procedures.
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3. Interview data will be audio taped for later transcription, but will be kept confidential.
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7. Upon request, I will receive a copy of research study results, following the completion of the project.
8. All data arising from this research will be securely stored at Lakehead University for a period of seven years.

Key Informant Participant Signature

Date _____

F-1 Research Participant Interview Questions

Preparing the Seventh Generation:

What Are the Educational Needs and Concerns of Students from Rainy River First Nations?

*

Research Participant Questions

Section A

Basic Demographics

1. Good morning/afternoon. How are you today? (*ice-breaker*)
2. How old are you?
3. What area schools did you attend while living “*on-reserve*”? Which grades did you attend at each?
4. Did you graduate high school? Grade 12 equivalent?
If no, what was the last grade you attended in school?
If yes, what year did you graduate? What was your age? Did you ever repeat a grade or take a break?
5. Are both your parents high school graduates? If not, is one? Which?
If so, did they attend college/university? Graduate?
6. Do you have any brothers or sisters? Ages? Did they graduate HS or earn their grade twelve?
If not, do you know what their last year of school was?
If so, did they attend college/ University? Graduate?
7. Do you have any children of your own? Ages? In School? If so, what grade?
8. Are you employed?
If yes- what sort of work do you do? Do you enjoy it? Do you work on-reserve or off-reserve? What sorts of jobs have you worked in the past?
If not – what sorts of jobs have you worked in the past? (*similar questions as above*)
9. What do your parents do for work? Siblings (if any?) Are these jobs on-Reserve or off?
10. Are you satisfied with the job opportunities for yourself thus far? Have there been any major challenges for you in this area? Anything that has boosted opportunities for you?
11. What were your living arrangements on-reserve when you were attending K-12 school?
12. What are your current living arrangements? Is it on-reserve or off-reserve? (Prompt usage)
13. What sort of career do you wish to be involved with in the future? What sort of challenges do you feel may come before that? What sort of things do you think will help you (or can help you) reach this goal? Where do you see yourself in 10 years from now?
14. (If you have employment history) What was your first job? Was it on/off reserve? Did you enjoy it? Tell me about it (usage of prompts).
15. For this study, to keep confidentiality, research participants will be given a ‘pseudonym’ or fake name. What would you like your pseudonym to be – such as a first name?
16. What is your opinion of education? Whether you have graduated or not, do you find it important in today’s world –for anyone- such as high school graduation, college, and University? Why or why not? (Prompt usage)

Section B**Family**

1. Tell me your experiences in growing up in your family. Was it a positive experience? Was it memorable? Why or why not? (Prompts)
2. Given your experiences, did you find that your family actively fostered success with you as a student attending schools? Why not why not? Give examples? Do you feel that your family sees education is an important trait to have? Explain. Examples? (Prompts). Do you feel that family support helps promote success for children and teenagers in school? Why or why not? Examples.
3. How would you describe your family's influence on you while you were a student? Explain.
4. Did your parents attend parent/teacher conferences? Did they show interest in your grades or report cards? Given your experience, did they reward good grades? If so, in what way? Were they disappointed in poor grades/outcomes? If so, in what way? Give your experiences, do you feel that incentives in the family are important to student success? Why or why not?
5. Do you feel that a strong and active cultural life at home is important for indigenous students? Why or why not? Given your personal experience, do you think a strong cultural life at home helps FN students in schools? Why or why not? Explain. Personal experiences?
6. Was your family (parent/s) in contact with your teachers in area schools? In what capacity? If so, did this help? In retrospect, do you think such communication can help promote success in schools? Why or why not? Personal experience?
7. If you could write a letter to your parents and family regarding their place in your education, what would it say? (Further probe this question).
8. Do both sides of your family maintain a positive relationship with each other?
9. Given your experiences, did you find that other friends' and acquaintances families in your circle of friends were supportive towards school? Why or why not? How or how not? (Further probe).
10. Thinking back – what kind of place did your family have in your education? Did they have any place at all? What sort of significance?
11. As a parent, what you will say to your children about education? Why? Where does this advice stem from?
12. Do you think family life and family influence have an impact on how students perform in schools? Yes or no, why or why not? To what degree? Looking back at your experiences, both good and bad, what can families do to promote school success in their children?

Section C

Schools

1. Tell me about your experience as a First Nations person in area schools. What was the experience like for you? Do you feel that schools tried to foster success and completion for you? Why or why not. Explain (prompts).
2. Have your schooling experiences, whether good or bad, impacted your life outside of schools? (Prompts) Such as preparing you for employment? (Prompts) Why or why not. Explain.
3. Given your experiences, what are the important factors that schools must maintain to promote success and graduation for First Nations students – specifically from Manitou Rapids? (Prompts).
4. Tell me about your experiences with non-indigenous students while going to school. Was the experience positive or negative? Why not? (Prompts). Were the experiences such as this the same outside the school setting? Yes or no. Explain. Given your experience, why do you think that is?
5. Given your experiences, do you think it is important for indigenous students to learn lessons and material relative to our specific histories? Why or why not? Is this something that you feel strongly about? Why or why not? Tell me about your experiences that make this opinion present. How do you feel, looking back, about these experiences in area schools?
6. When considering your experiences, do you feel that non-Native students are taught enough of First Nations? Why or why not? Explain?
7. How would you describe a situation where schools foster success in students? Explain. Given your experiences, how would you describe a situation where schools promote success for indigenous and First Nations students? Please explain a bit further. Do you find, give your experiences, that First Nations students have specific needs in schools? Please explain what they are. Can you give examples?
8. Given your experiences, please describe what an effective teacher is. What sort of teacher promotes success for students? For indigenous students? Please use examples. What sort of elements do you feel that teachers should remember when indigenous students are learning in their classes? How important are these points? Why or why not? Did you find this in your experience in schools? Please give examples.
9. All in all, how would you describe your overall satisfaction with the area schools, given your personal experiences? Do you find that they helped promote success in First Nations students? Please explain? Can you give examples.
10. After a bit of reflection from these questions, how would you describe your experiences in area schools as a First Nations individual? Has it changed at all from the initial question asked? Why or why not.

11. If you could voice every approval and concern that you have gained through your experiences in area schools, what advice would you give area schools in the future, for teaching First Nation students? Given your experiences what are the most important aspects to remember to foster success. Give examples. (Prompts).

12. Did you notice a change in how schools present their information to First Nation students over time – say from younger years to later years in high school? How so? Examples. Given your personal experience, did each foster success for FN students (such as the traits you described before?) Examples. How did the methods change over time? Personal experiences? As a First Nations student - what was it like for you in elementary school? Middle school? High school? What were some things you enjoyed about your classes? Disliked? (examples)

13. Do you feel that the area schools properly prepared FN students for college or University? Why or why not? Examples?

14. What are some things that you feel will keep indigenous students in school?

Section D **Community**

1. How would you describe what it's like living in your First Nation community? Do you find it conducive to promoting success in schools for students in schools? Was it conducive for you? Why or why not? Examples? If so, how?

2. What was your friend-circles like throughout your time in school? What did you do in your spare time? Do you find that most of your circle of friends, throughout school, found education important? Why or why not? Examples? Do you find that they completed high school? University? Do you feel that friends have an influence on each other? Why or why not? Personal examples?

3. If you had to describe one person you really looked up to or wanted to be like – who would it be? Tell me about them and your relationship? Are they still a part of your life? Why did you want to be like them? HS Graduate?

4. What sort of incentives did your community have for those who excelled in school? Explain? Did you find this effective in promoting success in school? Why or why not? Personal experience.

5. Given your experiences, do you think the Rainy River First Nations community promotes educational success? Do you feel it establishes education as important? Why or why not? Personal experiences? If not, what are ways that this may be done. Are there ways that the opposite is being done?

6. Do you feel that the Rainy River First Nations Education Counselor is effective? Why or why not? If you have had experience with them, do you feel that the Rainy River First Nations Educational Assistants do an effective job? Why or why not?
7. Did you find that there is support for excelling in school by people your own age? Why or why not. (Probes) Do you see this sort of support today in the community? Explain.
8. Do you find that your community supports the well-being of its students in schools? Why or why not? If not, in which ways could the RRFN community be supportive of students, given your experience?
9. Do you find that your First Nation community works well together with each other? Why or why not? What sort of an effect does this have on students' success? Is this a negative or positive thing, given your personal experience? (Probes)
10. Given your experiences, have you found that your community has a presence in the schools? Do you feel that the voice of FN needs and concerns are voiced adequately when they are needed to be? Do you find that the community stands behind their students? (Probes on each question, experience)
11. Do you find that your community promotes cultural well-being and cultural presence, both in and out of schools? Why or why not? Personal experience? How do you feel about that? (Probes)
12. Do you find that the RRFN community demonstrates 'fruits of labor' by utilizing role models and demonstrating where hard work leads to – such as role models etc.? How or how have they not?

Section E

Retrospective and Conclusions

1. Given your experiences, what kinds of changes are needed in your community to ensure a better future for tomorrow's children? What kinds of changes may influence success in schools for these children?
2. Given your experiences, what kinds of considerations are needed in families to ensure a better future for tomorrow's children? What kinds of changes may influence success in schools for these children?
3. Given your experiences, what kinds of changes are needed in our schools to ensure a better future for tomorrow's children? What kinds of changes may influence success in schools for these children?
4. Do you have anything else that you would like to share...any ideas that might promote success in schools for indigenous students? Any specific needs or concerns that I haven't gone over? Any personal educational needs or concerns for future students?
5. How would you like education to change for your children and grandchildren?

F-2 Key Informant Interview Questions

Preparing the Seventh Generation:

What Are the Educational Needs and Concerns of Students from Rainy River First Nations?

*

Key Informant Questions

Section A

Basic Demographics

1. Good morning/afternoon. How are you today?
2. What is your current position? How long have you been in this position? What other related positions have you been employed with or involved with?
3. What sort of familiarity with education and students from the Rainy River First Nations area do you have? How about with First Nations and Aboriginal students in the area?
4. What sort of experience do you have with students specifically from Rainy River First Nations?
5. In what capacity have you worked with Rainy River First Nations general or educational administration? Tell me a bit about your experiences.
6. What other educational personnel or services have you worked with in the area? (Prompt)
7. What sorts of First Nation and indigenous services have you had experience with in the past. (Prompt)
8. Are you of indigenous ancestry? First Nations? (Prompt) If so, tell me a bit of your background. If not, tell me a bit of your heritage and background.
9. Where did you attend school?
10. What sorts of developments in improving the First Nation and Aboriginal graduation gap are on the rise, currently, are you aware? (Prompt).

Section B

Schools

1. Do you feel that indigenous students in the RRFN area face specific challenges that non-indigenous students do not face (as relevant literature suggests)? If so, Above all, what are the biggest challenges Rainy River First Nations students are facing in schools today? What do you feel are the root causes of these challenges that they face? What are the effects? Please explain. (Prompt).
2. Do you feel that a significant amount of these effects we see in relation to indigenous success in schools is related to the content? Teaching Method? The teachers themselves? (Prompt). Are there specific shortcomings in schools today in this light? What sort of shortcomings? Please explain.
3. In your opinion, how have the schools in the Rainy River district (specifically the schools which Rainy River First Nations students attend) compared to other such schools today on a larger scale? What sorts of trends have been found? Are they specific to these schools? Region? Or are they consistent with the challenges faced by Canadian schools?
4. (Discussing the scope of educational institutions surrounding Rainy River First Nations) Do you find specific differences in indigenous student success between culturally centered schools, public schools, and/or private/denominational schools? Why or why not might this be?
5. Do you find that educators in schools have trouble or difficulties teaching indigenous students? Relating to indigenous students? Why might this be? What are some of the larger difficulties that you know of, which educators face with students from Rainy River First Nations?

6. Do you find that our Reserve's students have difficulties with the present curriculum? Why or why not? What are the trends found relative to this question? (Further probe).

7. How has schooling changed/and or/been improved in the last 5 years in the Rainy River Board of Education district? (Probe)

(Discuss research findings, following tentative questions to be developed after research participant interviews and trends discovered)

Section C

Family

1. Do you feel that indigenous students in the RRFN area face specific challenges that non-indigenous students do not face (as relevant literature suggests) in terms of family? How do you see these affecting their success and/or well-being in schools (if it does). If so, Above all, what are the biggest challenges Rainy River First Nations families of students are facing in schools today? What do you feel are the root causes of these challenges that they face? What are the effects? Please explain. (Prompt).

2. Do you feel that a significant amount of these effects we see in relation to indigenous success in schools is related to the family? Parenting? The family involvements with schools? (Prompt). Are there specific shortcomings in families today in relations to success in schools? in this light? What sort of shortcomings? Please explain.

3. In your opinion, how have the family dynamics in the Rainy River district (specifically the families which Rainy River First Nations students are children) compared to non-indigenous families? What sorts of trends have been found? Are they specific to these indigenous families? Or are they consistent with the challenges faced by a great amount of indigenous families? What are the specific realities found in Manitou Rapids in terms of families and family support in schooling?

4. (Discussing the scope of educational institutions surrounding Rainy River First Nations) Do you find specific differences in indigenous student success between families with more cultural affinity at home? With more family support towards education? Please explain (prompt)?

5. Do you find that families who have not graduated earlier generations from schools have trouble or difficulties supporting indigenous students?? Why might this be? What are some of the larger difficulties that you know of, which families face with students from Rainy River First Nations?(Probe)

6. Do you find that our Reserve's students have difficulties finding adequate role models? Why or why not? What are the trends found relative to this question- such as in and outside the family? (Probe)

7. How has family support changed/and or/been improved in the last 5 years in the Rainy River First Nations? (Probe)

(Discuss research findings, following tentative questions to be developed after research participant interviews and trends discovered)

Section D **Community**

1. Do you feel that indigenous students from RRFN face specific challenges in the community that may hinder success in educational success? If so, Above all, what are the biggest challenges today? What do you feel are the root causes of these challenges that they face? What are the effects? Please explain. (Prompt).

2. Do you feel that a significant amount of these effects we see in relation to indigenous success in schools is related to the reality in the communities? Solidarity? The administration or leaders themselves? (Prompt). Are there specific shortcomings in the community today in this light? What sort of shortcomings? Please explain.

3. In your opinion, how has the community of Rainy River First Nations compared to other such communities today on a larger scale? What sorts of trends have been found? Are they specific to this community? Region? Or are they consistent with the challenges faced by Canadian schools? What are the biggest community-based challenges hindering our youth from successfully completing high school?

4. Do you find specific differences in indigenous student success between culturally centered communities and those that do not reflect such a cultural affinity? What sort of differences? Why or why not might this be? Please explain.

5. Do you feel that RRFN, as community and as an administration, has trouble and challenges determining and directing how to support their students? What sort of challenges are not being met? What sort of challenges are being met? What sort of issues are keeping this from becoming a reality?

6. Do you find that our Reserve's students have difficulties with the community quality? How has this been voiced? Have such difficulties manifested in schools? How? Have they been voiced in the community and outside?

7. How has the community changed in the last 5 years for the better relevant to the students? In what way for the better? In what ways for the worse? How do you see this manifesting within and outside the community?

(Discuss research findings, following tentative questions to be developed after research participant interviews and trends discovered)

Section E **Retrospective and Conclusions**

1. Given your knowledge and experiences, what changes must be made in schools to better support indigenous students for educational success and graduation. What changes that have been made have been the most beneficial? What changes, if any, must students take on?

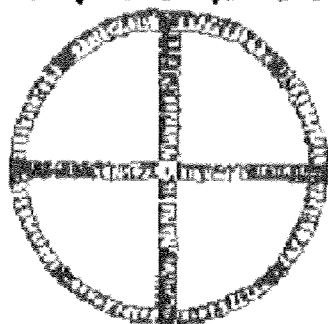
2. Given your knowledge and experiences, what changes must be made in families to better support indigenous students for educational success and graduation. What changes that have been made have been the most beneficial?

3. Given your knowledge and experiences, what changes must be made within the communities to better support indigenous students for educational success and graduation. What changes that have been made have been the most beneficial? How about the administration? The youth? (Probes).

4. Are there any other suggestions and insights that you may be able to offer in terms of specific needs and concerns faced by our students? Any suggestions that may better support their success in schools?

G-1 Research Participant/Key Informant Certificate of Involvement

CERTIFICATE OF INVOLVEMENT



First a. Last Name

*has hereby served as a sociology research participant
in Robert A. Horton's qualitative research study:*

*"Preparing the Seventh Generation: What Are the Educational
Needs and Concerns
of Students from Rainy River First Nations?"*

on the 6th day of January, 2008

Your involvement is appreciated!

G-2 Research Participant Thank You Letter

Dear:

Boozhoo!

I would like to formally thank you for your time and your decision to be a part of my research study interview. Your personal perspective and everything you shared during our discussion and interview proved to be very valuable and most appreciated. Gichi Miigwech!

As I mentioned in your introductory cover letter, your identity will remain confidential, as will any identifying information included in any granted interview. If you wish to receive a summary of the research findings following the completion of the research, you may e-mail me at bebaamoyaash@hotmail.com.

Included with this letter is a certificate of much appreciated involvement for you.

Again, thank you for your time and involvement.

In solidarity and sincerity,

Robert Animikii Horton

G-3Key Informant Thank You Letter

Dear:

Boozhoo!

I would like to formally thank you for your time and your decision to be a part of my research study interview. Your supplementary and administrative perspective and everything you shared during our discussion and interview proved to be very valuable and most appreciated. Gichi Miigwech!

As I mentioned in your introductory cover letter, if you requested it to be so, your identity will remain confidential, as will any identifying information included in any granted interview. If you wish to receive a summary of the research findings following the completion of the research, you may e-mail me at bebaamoyaash@hotmail.com.

Included with this letter is a certificate of much appreciated involvement for you.

Again, thank you for your time and involvement.

In solidarity and sincerity,

Robert Animikii Horton

G-4 Rainy River First Nations Thank You Letter

Dear Rainy River First Nations,

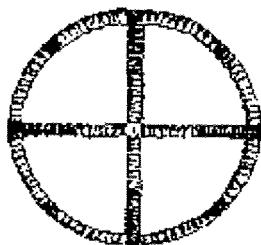
I would like to extend a warm thank you and a sentiment of appreciation to our Chief, Council, Administration, and Community for support in the development of my research study “Preparing the Seventh Generation: What are the Education Related Needs and Concerns of Students from Rainy River First Nations.” Your support has not only been greatly appreciated, but indescribably valuable. With research interviews completed, the coming months will be put towards analysis and development of this research study in partial completion of my graduate program at Lakehead University in the Department of Sociology. I will be in touch with our Chief and Council during the development of this research thesis study and they will be given a copy of the thesis upon completion, as well as a statement of summary based upon the findings.

Miigwech (Thank you) for your support, guidance, and continued inspiration!

In sincerity and solidarity,

Robert Animikii Horton
Rainy River First Nations

G-5 Flyer Stating Conclusion of Interviews for RRFN Community Newsletter



“Preparing the Seventh Generation”

**What Are the Education Related Needs and Concerns of Students
from Rainy River First Nations?**

UPDATE!!

Hello everyone!

I hope all is well as we move into another summer at Rainy River First Nations and Manitou Rapids! I am taking the time to inform the community that research interviews related to the study that was announced this past winter have concluded. Analysis and development of the finalized research study will be conducted in the months ahead. Formal results and the completed study will be made available to the Rainy River First Nations Chief and Council.

I would like to offer massive appreciation to our young people who chose to partake in the study, as well as administrators who chose to supplement the study to give our young people a voice in terms of directly expressing their education-related concerns, needs, perspectives, and ideas. Your time and perspectives were not only appreciated, but are greatly valued.

If anyone would like to know more information about the study, please contact Rob Horton via e-mail at [**r.horton.rrfn@gmail.com**](mailto:r.horton.rrfn@gmail.com)

Miigwech!!!

Lakehead University Statement of Ethical Approval



Office of Research

December 20, 2007

Tel (807) 343-8283
Fax (807) 346-7749

Mr. Robert Animikii Horton
Department of Sociology
Lakehead University
955 Oliver Road
Thunder Bay, Ontario P7B 5E1

Dear Mr. Horton:

Re: REB Project #: 046 07-08
Granting Agency name: N/A
Granting Agency Project #: N/A

On the recommendation of the Research Ethics Board, I am pleased to grant ethical approval to your research project entitled, "Preparing for the Seventh Generation: What Are the Educational Needs and Concerns of Students from Rainy River First Nations?".

Ethics approval is valid until **December 20, 2008**. Please submit a Request for Renewal form to the Office of Research by November 20, 2008 if your research involving human subjects will continue for longer than one year. A Final Report must be submitted promptly upon completion of the project. Research Ethics Board forms are available at:

<http://bit.lakeheadu.ca/~research/www/internalforms.htm>

During the course of the study, any modifications to the protocol or forms must not be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. You must promptly notify the REB of any adverse events that may occur.

Completed reports and correspondence may be directed to:

Research Ethics Board
c/o Office of Research
Lakehead University
955 Oliver Road
Thunder Bay, ON P7B 5E1
Fax: (807) 346-7749

Best wishes for a successful research project.

Sincerely,

Dr. Richard Maundrell
Chair, Research Ethics Board

/len

cc: Dr. Sharon Dale Stone, Supervisor, Sociology ✓
Faculty of Graduate Studies
Office of Research



I-1 Brief Research Participant Biographies

“Chuck”: Chuck is a 21 year old Anishinaabe male and band member of Rainy River First Nations who completed his grade twelve certification from Seven Generations Education Institute. After a year of being away, he moved back to the community after first grade and remained as an “on-reserve” student living at Manitou Rapids until successfully completing his grade twelve certification. He reflects many times on how his family’s connection to the culture and encouraging support from his family towards education has been beneficial towards his success. He has no children.

“Regina”: Regina is a 20 year old Anishinaabe female and band member of Rainy River First Nations. She is a mother who has not yet completed high school, a grade twelve certification, and is not enrolled in any secondary education program. From grade one until choosing to stop attending school at the end of grade eleven, she was an “on-reserve” student living at Manitou Rapids. She was placed in family service care at a young age and was taken in by another family at Manitou Rapids. Although she struggled with being a child “in care”, activities such as school sports is something she enjoyed that kept her going to school. From personal experience, she was very vocal about how drug and substance abuse affected her in a negative way.

“Samantha”: Samantha is a 22 year old Anishinaabe woman and band member of Rainy River First Nations with multiple children of her own. She has lived at Manitou Rapids for a majority of her life and has attended area schools until grade eight. She is enrolled at Seven Generations Education Institute to pursue her grade twelve certification, but has made little progress in the last few years because of the demands of motherhood. She spent time in her younger years as a child in family services, both with family and those who were not. Samantha was very vocal about the issues of drugs in the community and how substances has affected her and her family.

“Owen”: Owen is a 25 year old Anishinaabe man and band member of Rainy River First Nations. He has lived at Manitou Rapids for a majority of his life except when his parent separated and he moved away for three with one of his parents, but returned to the community. He is a non-high school graduate who stayed enrolled in school until the ninth grade at Fort Frances High school. He is not enrolled in any secondary programs. He currently works a job he enjoys and intends to someday return to for his grade twelve certification. He is very vocal about what he sees as minimizing culture in the community. He has no children.

“Joe”: Joe is a 25 year old Anishinaabe man, band member of Rainy River First Nations, and a non-high school graduate who is not enrolled in any programs. He was an “on-reserve” student from grade one and he remained in school until grade nine. He was placed in a number of foster homes at an early age which he remained in until his parents felt they could take him back as a child. He has children of his own and is very hopeful about future circumstances improving for his children.

“Jared”: Jared is an 18 year old Anishinaabe male and RRFN band member who was born and raised on the Manitou Rapids community. He has no children of his own and has been an “on-reserve” student from kindergarten to grade twelve. In grade twelve, he enrolled at Seven Generations Education Institute where he is currently working towards his grade twelve certification. His upbringing is one he describes as traumatic due to substance use in the family. He has expressed that his pride in his identity has suffered because of his surroundings in the community, sometimes feels that the “culture is lost”, and although he does not enjoy school, he knows that it will help to secure a job in the future.

I-2 Brief Key Informant Biographies

Brent Tookenay: Brent is the current Superintendant and Assistant to the Director of Education of the Rainy River District School Board in Ontario, Canada. His family is from Pick River and he is a member of Couchiching First Nation. He has worked closely with the Rainy River First Nations/Manitou Rapids community for a number of years. For three years, Tookenay served as Vice Principal at Fort Frances High School. He has also been involved with the Education Support Services Program at Seven Generations Education Institute where he was also an educator. In the past, Tookenay and RRFN Chief Jim Leonard served as Trustees on the Rainy River District School Board. He has earned a Bachelors of Science in Physical Education and Health Education from Bemidji State University, as well as his Masters Degree in Educational Administration from Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Marcel Medicine-Horton (Waabishkwaanakwut): For the past five years, Marcel served as the Education Counselor and Coordinator for Rainy River First Nations. He grew up on the Manitou Rapids community and is part of the Caribou Clan. He is beginning his fourth consecutive year as Seven Generations Education Institute Board President. For seven years, Marcel served on the OPP Police Force. He also worked for the Assembly of First Nations in Ottawa in the capacity of economic development and later the Minister's office of Parliament Hill. He works with Rainy River First Nations students, both on-reserve and off-reserve, at all levels from kindergarten to graduate school.

Laura Horton (Niizhgnebig): Laura has lived on the Manitou Rapids community for thirty years and is from the Bear Clan. She is currently the Director of Post-Secondary Education for Seven Generations Education Institute. As far back as she can remember, she has always been involved in education. In the past, Laura has served as a Special Education educator (and an Itinerary teacher) for the Rainy River District School Board and a guidance counsellor at the high school and Beaver Brae school in Kenora, Ontario. She taught at an intermediate school, served as a Principal, and served as the Director of Education for the Union of Ontario Indians. She is a proud member of the Three Fires Midiwewin Lodge.