

**First Nations Student Engagement in Secondary School:
Enhancing Student Success in a Northern Eeyou Community**

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Studies

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Abstract

This study investigated engagement and disengagement factors for high school students in a northern Eeyou community using a mixed methods participatory approach. A quantitative survey, administered to a stratified sample of 60 students (representing 17% of the total population of 351), measured the presence of engagement factors previously identified in First Nations student engagement, drop-out, and school-leaving literature. Only descriptive statistics were used, as this part of the study was exploratory, determining the presence of these factors among the student population. Quantitative results showed a lack of cultural relevancy in the curriculum of the school, poor relationships between peers and between students and adults in the school, and a lack of perceived student empowerment. Qualitative methods were based in constructivist grounded theory and included interviews and focus groups with five students, seven school staff members, and eight members of the wider community. Qualitative data served to elaborate upon quantitative results and identified similarities and differences between Eeyou student engagement factors and mainstream student engagement factors. Qualitative results showed a lack of respectful and caring relationships in the school, areas for improvement in teaching approaches, problems with teachers' understanding and sensitivity towards Cree culture and language, curriculum issues related to culture, a lack of community involvement, and a need to improve the school's receptiveness to student needs and perspectives. The dissertation concludes with recommendations for enhancing student engagement by enhancing students' abilities to attend school and remain in school within the school studied. These recommendations may also be relevant for enhancing First Nations on-reserve student engagement in general. Recommendations

point to a need to increase the cultural content of the curriculum in authentic ways, increase students' sense of belonging in the school, provide a rigorous education program, and support the creation of positive relationships between peers and between students and teachers in the school. These changes can be made through changes to classroom and school practices. It is also recommended that an instrument to assess on-reserve high school student engagement be created, and that further research include both studies of the effects of in-school counseling and teacher absence on First Nations student engagement.

Acknowledgements

This work would not have been possible without the assistance and encouragement of so many. My supervisor, Dr. Constance Russell, has guided me through the entire program; I so appreciate your support, insight, and the knowledge you brought to my work. In addition, my committee members Dr. Alex Lawson, Dr. Paul Berger, and Dr. Merle Richards have been very generous in their time and feedback throughout the many versions of this dissertation. As well, Diana Mason ensured that I had forms and administrative matters taken care of. Thank you to all of you for facilitating the completion of this dissertation.

Thank you also to my family and friends who have encouraged me and supported me. I could not have done this work without you. Thanks especially to my mom, Susan, and my husband, Brian, for being my first draft editors, sounding boards, valued critics, and biggest supporters. I can't express how grateful I am to both of you for ensuring that I always had time and space to work when I needed it. Thanks also to my children Jacob, Noah, Aidan, and Amelia for being understanding when I had schoolwork to do and writing that had to get done. The four of you are my reasons for completing this dissertation.

Finally, thank you to the community of Chisasibi for allowing this research to take place and to the Cree School Board for supporting this project. I am grateful to all those who participated in this research, and for the encouragement that I received from various community members, especially from the Chief and Council. I count myself lucky to be a part of a community that is focused on positive change and innovative solutions, and that supports, with such enthusiasm, the education goals of its' members.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

It is not only imperative for Indian educators to insist on the incorporation of indigenous knowledge and praxis in schools but also to transform the institutional structures of schools themselves. In other words, in addition to the development of Native curricula, indigenous educators need to develop systems of analysis that help to theorize the ways in which power and domination inform the process and procedures of schooling. (Grande, 2004, p. 6)

Overview of study

This study examined, with mixed methods, the processes of schooling in a northern Eeyou¹ community in order to develop recommendations for enhancing student engagement within the community school as a way to increase the school completion rate of the school. Student engagement is seen as both the opposite of and the antidote to school leaving at the secondary level; dropping out is seen as “the ultimate act of disengagement” with school (Marks, 2000, p. 174). Following Fredericks et al. (2004) and Jimmerson et al. (2003) who conceptualized student engagement as a whole composed of three parts, I understand engagement to involve emotional, behavioural, and cognitive aspects. Emotional engagement is defined as a student’s emotional or affective connection to the school and the people in it; this mainly refers to a student’s sense of belonging within the school. Behavioural engagement is defined as the actions taken by students indicating an ability or want, or lack thereof, to be involved in the school as demonstrated by attendance, lateness, and early school leaving. Cognitive engagement is defined as the extent to which students are able to concentrate on or put effort into their academic work in school.

¹¹ The Eeyou are commonly referred to as the Cree of Northern Quebec, but we refer to ourselves as Eeyou, which loosely translates to “person” in English, or Eeyouch, “the people” in English.

Findings, for the most part, pointed to a need to increase the cultural content of the curriculum in authentic ways, implement ways to ensure that students felt cared for within the school so that they were able to feel a sense of belonging in the school, and a need to educate towards student self-determination both in the political sense and in the individual sense. Recommendations include suggestions for increasing engagement through changes to classroom and school practices, areas that warrant further research, and the need for an instrument to assess on-reserve high school student engagement.

A main goal of the research process was to utilize a methodology that respected and valued all members involved in the process, ensured that the research was consistent with the goals and aspirations of the community involved, ensured respect for participants and the community involved, and worked from a political standpoint of placing importance upon social justice and self-determination in both the personal and political sense. Community members were involved in the determination of research questions (Chapter 2) and participants continued to be involved in determining data collection, analysis, and interpretation throughout all phases of these processes. Those who do research with First Nations people must work conscientiously and critically in concert with the goals of social justice and self-determination (Graveline, 2003; G. Smith, 2000; L. Smith, 1999); my use of a respectful and participatory process aimed to meet these goals. More details on my overall methodological approach can be found in Chapter 2.

This research was a project not only in information gathering, but also in visioning, and determining ideals. In consultation with community members and the school involved, I determined that the study would use a mixed methods design taking a

quantitative approach (a survey) and a qualitative approach (interview and focus groups) that was informed by constructivist grounded theory.² The survey was designed to elicit a broad view of retention and school-leaving factors among students within the school (see Chapter 5 for survey methodology), while interviews and focus groups were designed to deepen this broad view by seeking rich details from students, teachers, administrators, and members of the wider community such as parents, Elders, school-leavers, and graduates of the community school (see Chapter 6 for qualitative methodology). All the data gathered utilizing both methods was used to inform and develop a full picture of student engagement factors within the community high school.

In our community, approximately 3 out of 100 students graduate from secondary five within five years (CPGP, 2004). This includes all students in a cohort who began secondary 1³ together, but does not include those who dropped out in elementary school, which would make the statistics even more disturbing. Over 67% of our students drop out between secondary 1 and secondary 5.⁴ Most of these students have dropped out by the end of secondary 3. In addition, even for those who persist in school, student absenteeism is high.

²A main attraction of grounded theory is the de-emphasis on literature review before data collection. Although “a substantive, thorough, sophisticated literature review is [often seen] as the precondition for doing substantive, thorough, sophisticated research” (Boote & Beile, 2005, p. 3), I argue that, within the context of this research, approaching literature review in this way is undesirable and may have negatively influenced the research process. A large amount of education-related literature, especially literature concerning First Nations education, was consulted and utilized in the conception of this study, but reviewing literature in specific areas would have worked against the emergent approach sought, and thus, the literature review in Chapter 4 was led by themes that emerged from data collection and analysis. One exception was the literature reviewed for the purposes of creating the student survey for in-school retention factors; this literature is outlined in the description of survey items found in Appendix D. More details on this process can be found in Chapter 6.

³ Secondary 1 is the same as grade 7 in other provincial jurisdictions. In Quebec, secondary level education normally ends with the completion of secondary 5, or grade 11.

⁴ Data from an analysis of 1992-1998 student data. Source: Consultations Pédagogique GP. (2004). Chisasibi Persistence Handout. Cree School Board, Chisasibi, Quebec.

I began this research as a former teacher, who has spoken to many school staff members over the years who are discouraged and dismayed by a perceived lack of engagement of students. A further impetus came from community meetings where performance within the school was discussed; a number of community members voiced the concern that the situation within the school may be a result of the social and socio-economic situation outside of the school, in the wider community. It was my view that our community school system had to be examined and assessed to determine its ability to serve our children and thereby our community, as one instrument that could contribute to a positive future. Success of our system can be measured in its ability to meet the needs of our children and through them, the needs of our community, not only now but in the future. Like Finn (1989), I define dropping out of school as a “developmental process” that “may have begun years before” (p. 118) and therefore any attempts to ameliorate the school leaving statistics must be based in an assessment of the engagement of the students in the school.

I entered the research process with the hope that it would be conducted respectfully, and it was my intention that the outcome be an expression of concern for my community, our children, and our future. The research process led to recommendations for this community’s school for enhancing engagement by creating a more comfortable and comforting schooling experience and by offering resources to encourage our children to reach their full potential. The remainder of this chapter provides a description of the setting, further rationale for the research and statement of questions, an outline of research phases and process, access and entry considerations, parameters for the research project, ethical considerations, and anticipated implications.

Setting

Chisasibi is an Eeyou community in Northern Quebec with an approximate population of 4,000. Most community members are of Eeyou ancestry, with most non-Eeyou residents being transient workers for either the local school board or the local health and social services board. This is a community affected by its colonial history which includes the fur trade beginning in the late 17th century, missionary incursions shortly thereafter, and more recently, from the early 1970s, hydro development with the James Bay Project. As a result of the hydro development, over 30 years ago, the community was relocated from Fort George Island to its present location. This move, in addition to the flooding of vast areas of land for hydro development, has led to intense communal psychological and social trauma. There exists a widespread feeling in the community that changes associated with the hydro development, the relocation of the community, and the residential school experience are at the root of our many social problems that exist today.

The school at the heart of this study serves approximately 1,000 students from pre-kindergarten to secondary 5; there were, at the time of data collection, 351 students in the secondary school. The school is a part of the Cree School Board, which was created in 1975 under the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement; it is a provincial school board funded by both the federal and provincial governments. The creation of the Cree School Board in 1975 allowed Eeyouch to take over much of the control of the education of their children from Indian Affairs. In the Cree School Board, Eeyou children are given the opportunity to learn in their mother tongue (Cree) up to the end of grade two, and then to switch to either French or English; the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement effectively exempts Cree beneficiaries of the Agreement from Bill 101,

allowing us to choose the language of instruction for our children. The Cree School Board has also been instrumental in developing curriculum, allowing for the teaching of Eeyou culture and Eeyou language as subjects through to the end of secondary, and for Eeyou content components to be added to social studies programs.

Still, even with Eeyou control, retention and graduation rates for secondary students are not ideal. An analysis of student data for the whole board from 1991 to 1998 showed a graduation rate of only 11.2% (CPGP, 2003). In comparison, the Quebec provincial graduation rate in 1998 was 82.2% (Statistics Canada, 2005). For Chisasibi, using data from 1992 to 1998 and looking at cohorts representing students beginning secondary 1 together, the dropout rate for our community school was 67.3% by secondary 5 (CPGP, 2004). It is estimated that only 3 students out of 100 will graduate from secondary 5 within five years of entering secondary school (CPGP, 2004).

Research questions and rationale

In Canada, only 32% of on-reserve First Nations students graduate from high school, a number which reflects only those students who began school in the graduating year and not the entire cohort that entered grade one (AFN, 2005; INAC, 2002). The urgent situation of Aboriginal youth within the Canadian education system calls for immediate attention. The Minister's Working Group (INAC, 2002) has suggested that First Nations gain control of their education systems in terms of jurisdiction, infrastructure, and funding, which they foresee will ameliorate the dire situation of Aboriginal youth. My doctoral research goes a step farther, in looking at a school and a community within a school board which is already under a First Nation's control as a

consequence of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, and yet still shows poor retention and graduation rates for its students, as indicated above.

This study focused on the potential amelioration of this situation by investigating ways of increasing engagement amongst Northern First Nations students with the main focus on high school students. Inquiry was aimed at providing rich descriptions of a number of possibilities for feasible, supportive, and culturally consistent modifications that can be made within the formal education system. The entire investigation culminated in recommendations for the community of initiatives that may allow us to (re)create a school system, or enhance our current system, so that it is more consistent with the needs of our children and our community. These community-based recommendations could be the basis for an educational system that is more reflective of and part of our community and, ultimately, more supportive of our children. In addition, the findings led to recommendations for the development of a secondary student engagement survey for on-reserve First Nations students, a broader literature review focused on student engagement in general and First Nations students' schooling, and areas that need further research.

In order to investigate Eeyou education alternatives that might lead to increased success through engagement, I asked the following two main research questions:

- Why is this system unsuccessful for a large number of students?
- What are community members' perspectives on what would constitute a more successful system?

In answering these questions, the issues explored included factors encouraging school leaving and school success among our children; enhancing cultural consistency with exploration of traditional ways of educating; looking at other First Nations education

systems; and the worldview and knowledge we wish to develop amongst our youth in order to prepare them for their future and the future of our community.

- Main questions and sub questions:**
- **Why is this system successful for some but unsuccessful for a large number of students?**
 - Factors encouraging school leaving/retention?
 - How is student identity constructed in relation to experience within the school?
 - Engagement indicators, risk factors, protective factors?
 - **What are the community's perspectives on what would constitute a more successful system?**
 - Factors encouraging school success?
 - Enhancing cultural consistency? What does traditional education look like? What is education for self-determination?
 - What do successful models serving First Nations student look like?
 - What is feasible for us? What needs to change? How would changes be implemented?

Figure 1: Main Questions and Sub-Questions

The research questions stemmed from the findings of my master's research (Pashagumskum, 2005), which explicated the ways in which my community is not comfortable with the formal education system we currently use to educate our children. This discomfort is multidimensional and stems from our historical experiences with formal education (in the form of residential school and Indian Affairs day school), and current cultural dissonance between the community culture and the school culture. Community members felt that this discomfort plays a key role in the low graduation rates among our children, and that our children would experience higher levels of success in a

school that worked *for* our community, *with* our community, and as an integral *part* of our community

Therefore, the next step was to continue research with the aim of investigating different possibilities for formally educating our children. This investigation further entailed questioning the reasons for using the schooling system in its current form. This necessitated an investigation into the norms (Scott, 2001) that have informed the creation of our formal education system. It became apparent that our current system is very likely informed by the norms of the previous regime, namely residential school and Indian Affairs day school models. The residential and day school models are based in behaviourism and assimilationism (Fournier & Crey, 1997). These modes of thought are evident in our highly stratified administration model, teacher-centred transmission modes of teaching, behaviourist curricula, and distance kept between the community and the school (Pashagumskum, 2005).

Residential schools were an arena where the dominant society's assertions of power were played out and attempts were made to assimilate First Nations Peoples. The residential school system was imposed by the state in partnership with the church and using Indian prisons in the U.S. as a model (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Many residential schools used "isolation... brainwashing... relentless labour and routine" to enforce obedience (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 56). Whole generations of children grew up in situations where "expressions of Aboriginal culture and individuality were harshly punished" (p. 57). The goal of assimilation informed the functionality of the residential school system and the implementation of Indian Affairs day schools.

What effects have the modern view of education and the colonial education system played out in residential schools and Indian Affairs day schools had on our contemporary Eeyou formal education system? Perhaps, as a Nation, we have adopted standards for schooling our students that are incompatible with our community? It is plausible that the creation of the Cree School Board was informed by the norms of the education system of the previous regime. Barakett and Cleghorn (2000) speak of the norms of an organization as being the ideas of “what constitutes appropriate behaviour” (p. 47). Perhaps the system as it stands was adopted without a thorough interrogation to determine how well it fit our children and our purposes?

Not only does it appear that the structure of our system works against true self-determination, but the curriculum, including the hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1968), also works against individual, and thereby, societal self-determination. The day-to-day experience within our schools, as in other Canadian public schools, has been informed by those same theories that informed imperialism and colonial constructs (Henderson, 2000). L. Smith (1999) outlines the way in which a “process of systematic fragmentation” has been “the consequence of imperialism” (p. 28) with its roots in the European Enlightenment. The Enlightenment agenda is evidenced in the widely-used ‘transmission model’ of teaching and learning with its base in behaviourism, rote learning, and the reductionist search for truth in discrete parts. What has been termed the “North American fetish for method” (Macedo & Araújo Freire, 1998, p. x) and the “capitalist ‘banking model’ of education” (p. ix) can be seen in our reliance on education programs that stress the importance of learning course content over the process involved, and our constant search as teachers for better strategies to make children learn what we want them to learn.

The educational agenda behind this is functional, meaning that it works from a belief that education is “influence exercised” (Durkheim, 1956, p. 28) for the “establishment of social order” (Durkheim, 1950, p. 97). But I question whose social order we have established and whose social order we are maintaining with our community’s schooling system? Functionalism is the immediate family member of assimilationism.

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

In my experience, this conception of teaching and learning is evident among many within our school system who feel that our students should be compared to students of the dominant culture in the south. This leads to deficit thinking in terms of assessing, teaching and interacting with students. Cummins (1986, 2004) defines a deficit view of educating minority students as assuming that barriers to learning reside within the students themselves and that minority students must change to become more like members of the dominant society in order to succeed. Cummins (1986) asserts, however, that, contrary to such deficit thinking, “minority students will succeed educationally to the extent that the patterns of interaction in school reverse those that prevail in the society at large” (p. 24). According to Indigenous education experts like Cajete (1994, 2000a, 2000b), reductionist teaching and stratified education models are not compatible with Aboriginal student success and the development of Aboriginal youth as full, positively

contributing community members. This is consistent with a model Cummins' (1986) advocates that:

emphasizes the development of higher level cognitive skills rather than just factual recall, and meaningful language use by students rather than correction of surface forms. Language use and development are consciously integrated with all curricular content rather than taught as isolated subjects, and tasks are presented to students in ways that generate intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation. In short, pedagogical approaches that empower students encourage them to assume greater control over setting their own learning goals and to collaborate actively with each other in achieving these goals. (p. 29)

As well as investigating our reasons for using the model currently in place in our schools, my investigation focused on possibilities for creating a more comfortable formal education system. I use the word “comfortable” to describe a school system which is “strengthening (morally, spiritually, or physically), sustaining, encouraging, reassuring” and “affording or conveying consolation... such as to obviate hardship... and promote content” (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, p. 457). In short, “comfortable,” for me, points to a potential to support students in their emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical growth within an environment that they perceive as having a positive influence on their development and in which they feel content. In being so supportive, the environment can enhance the ability to be engaged and minimize barriers to engagement.

This part of my study entailed examining the ways in which the school and the community are dissonant and ways in which the school can work more closely with the

community, examining community members' views about ideal ways to educate our children and the goals associated with schooling, as well as looking at traditional ways of educating children (Cajete, 1994, 2000a, 2000b) and comparing these with what happens currently within the school. It also entailed investigating what we currently do that does work to encourage student success and what we currently do to discourage student success.

I attempted to include as many voices as possible from as many stakeholder groups as possible; students, parents, teachers, administrators, guidance staff, and Elders, among others, were asked to contribute to the project as participants. All who wished to be heard in our community were heard and included in the study.

Research phases

The following outlines the different phases of the research process. As outlined below, this was a mixed methods study of a sequential form (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003), meaning the quantitative survey was administered before most of the interviews and focus groups. That being said, the quantitative data did not provide a basis for collection of qualitative data, but instead analysis was done in a way characteristic of a parallel mixed methods form whereby “two types of data are collected and analyzed” (Mertens, 2005, p. 292), each complementing the other and contributing to the larger picture sought by the entire process.

Phase 1:	Survey administration
Phase 2:	Interviews with students, school staff, parents, other members of the wider community
Phase 3:	Analysis of survey and interview data followed by presentation of analysis from survey and from interviews to student focus group
Phase 4:	Re-analysis and re-interpretation of data based on responses of Phase 3 focus group responses
Phase 5:	Further literature review in response to issues enlightened by both quantitative and qualitative data analysis
Phase 6:	Final interpretation and writing of dissertation

Figure 2: Research Phases

There was some overlap between Phase 1 and 2, because of my own schedule and the schedules of participants. The entire data collection process took approximately ten months. I began after Lakehead University's ethical review board approved the study and participant approvals were secured. Collection of data began in June of 2007 and continued through to May 2009. Data analysis continued to the end of December 2009, and I began writing the first draft of this dissertation in January 2010. Because of a number of personal circumstances (familial and medical), there were some lags in the data collection and analysis and writing phases as well as a very significant gap between when the first draft of the dissertation was ready and when I was able to enter the final phases of the dissertation process. This delay has not impacted the timeliness of my dissertation; alas, the schooling situation in the community remains pretty much the same

as when I first collected the data and wrote the first draft of the dissertation, even if I wished for the sake of my community that it be otherwise.

Access/Entry

All potential participants were given an explanation of the research goals and process, how data would be collected and analyzed, and how data and research findings would be used. They were informed of their right to leave the study at any time with no risk to themselves, that there were no foreseen risks, and that they had the right to confidentiality and anonymity if desired. Potential participants were also informed of the ethical considerations specific to Lakehead University, including the data storage policy. For students and others who were under the age of 18, parental consent was sought for participation in the study as well as consent from the students themselves. Cover letters detailing this information for potential participants and consent letters can be found in Appendix A.

As a member of this community, a former teacher, and a former consultant for the school board, I did have access to the community and the community's school. This access, however, made it absolutely necessary that informed consent include ensuring that participants knew that this research was being carried out for the purposes of my dissertation and not in any professional capacity. As well, it was important to recognize that access did not automatically mean that I had permission to do this research; indeed, access had to be, and was, negotiated with the School Committee, which is the governing body of the school, the administration of the school, and the Band Council as representatives of the community. Letters outlining the research process and consent forms for the School Committee and the Band Council can be found in Appendix B. As

well, I presented a summary of the proposed research and the goals of this research on the local radio station.

Ethical considerations

Recruitment procedures. It was especially important that recruitment procedures be non-coercive, which might have been a danger in a small community where most in the community are bound or connected in some way. I ensured that all prospective participants were informed orally and in writing that they were not obligated in any way to participate in this study.

Harm and potential risk. Checking transcriptions, analysis, and the final report with participants constituted part of the process of minimizing risk for participants. I did not foresee any risks, myself, but discussed perceived risks with participants in case they perceived risks that were not apparent to me. There were no perceived risks expressed by participants either.

Deception. There was no intentional deception involved in the design of the study. I ensured to the best of my abilities that all community members were aware of my research, especially in the case of observations within the school or at community meetings.

Benefits. This was an exercise in hearing the voices of those who wished to be heard within a respectful process; that alone proved beneficial. As well, there is also potential benefit if the end product of this journey is the improvement of our educational situation if the recommendations that are made for the community and the school are implemented.

Informed consent. An explanation of the research was given orally and in writing to the band, the school, and participants of the study. As noted earlier, a cover letter and consent form was distributed, the content of which included: an assurance of voluntary participation; the right to withdraw without penalty; that there were no foreseen risks but that this matter was open for discussion; that requests for anonymity and confidentiality were accommodated and respected; that data will be stored securely at Lakehead University for 7 years; that the final report on the research will be available to all participants and the community involved and will also be available in the library at Lakehead University. Please see Appendices A, B, and C for letters, consent forms, and the research presentation document.

Storage of data. Data will be stored for 7 years in a secure storage area in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University following the submission of this dissertation.

Proposal review. The research proposal was reviewed by my dissertation committee before being reviewed by the research ethics board of Lakehead University. No substantial changes were made as the study proceeded and therefore no further ethics review was required.

Dissemination of research results. Copies of the dissertation will be available in the library of Lakehead University. Each participant who desires will also be given a copy of the dissertation. Copies of the dissertation will also be made available at the school library, at the band office, and at the school board office. There will be a public presentation of the results to the community after this dissertation is accepted, and the

results may be more widely disseminated through academic journals or conference presentations.

Tri-Council tutorial. Please see the attached certificate of workshop completion in Appendix G.

Implications

This research is meant to be of use to the community directly involved, but may also be useful to other Northern Aboriginal communities and Nations across the Canadian North. Although there exists much literature on Aboriginal education (see Chapters 2 and 3), there is little research into engagement of First Nations students in First Nations communities. There is some literature and research specific to urban schools (e.g., Haig-Brown et al., 1997; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2000, 2003); this dissertation adds a Northern First Nations community perspective to such southern and urban-oriented literature.

The scope of significance extends beyond student engagement to topics integral to the success of Aboriginal education in general, such as community and parent involvement, cultural dissonance, cultural continuity between community and school, supporting children at risk, and enhancing student resilience. The study also addresses issues surrounding bilingual education and late immersion, in particular where First Nations students are concerned.

Further significance of this study lies in its methodological approach. When research is done within Indigenous communities, it is important that the research be supportive of the community's goals and wishes, respectful of the community ways of working, and praxis-oriented so that the research leads to action towards a purpose of

ameliorating social injustices (G. Smith, 2000; L. Smith, 1999; Weber-Pillwax, 2001).

This study was done in this way by being participatory and by being respectful of community wishes, goals, and dreams.

Chapter 2

Methodological Concerns

This study was of a mixed methods design (Creswell, 2005), with both a quantitative phase (see Chapter 4) and a qualitative phase (see Chapter 5). The qualitative data, in the form of interviews and focus groups, served to elaborate on data from the quantitative survey highlighting student perceptions of in-school retention and school-leaving factors. The design took on what Cresswell (2005) terms a triangulation design where qualitative data was used to expand upon, and bring depth to, quantitative results. The two types of data gathered were analyzed and interpreted so that they each informed the other in order to provide a detailed picture of schooling issues within this community. The mixed methods approach allowed findings to be arrived at through more than one type of method (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

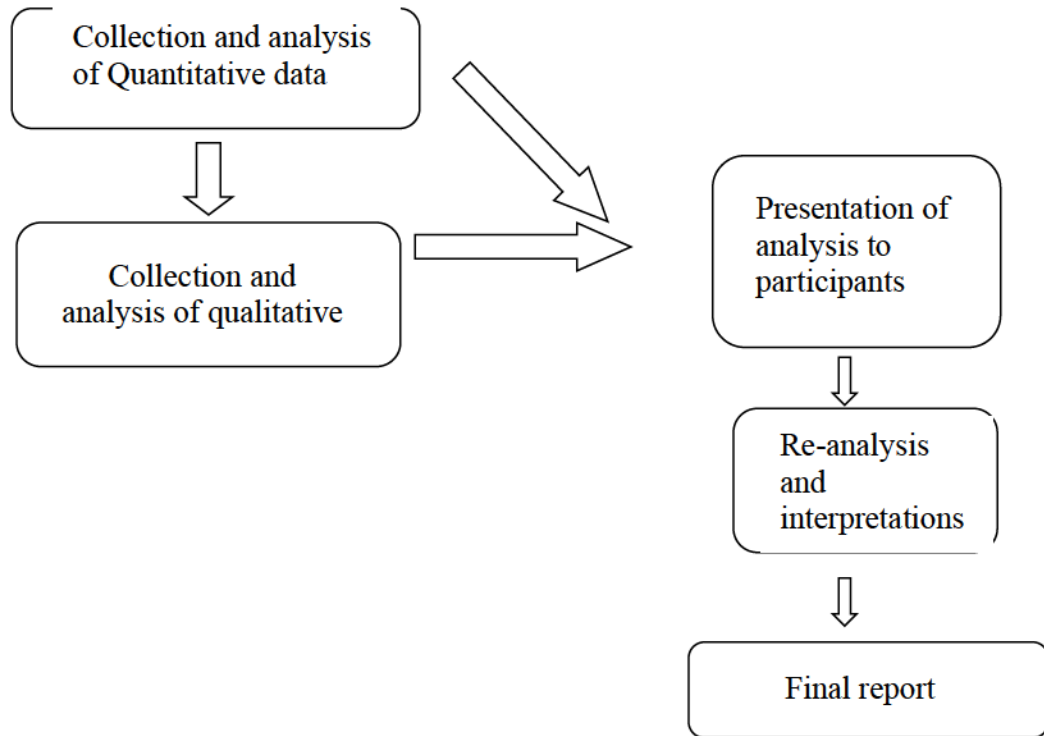


Figure 3: Overview of Data Collection and Analysis

The mixed methods approach was chosen in consultation with community members and the school, who wished to see as many students as possible reflected in this study. Therefore a further rationale for this approach was the need to obtain a broad view of student perceptions regarding school leaving and retention factors and deepen this broad view through qualitative interviewing and focus groups of students, teachers, administrators, and other members of the wider community. The entire process ultimately led to a series of recommendations to enhance the school system.

According to Mertens (2005), mixed methods studies can be based in a transformative/emancipatory paradigm, which she differentiates from the pragmatic paradigm more common to mixed methods research. She states that mixed methods research in the transformative/emancipatory paradigm is political and works towards

initiating positive social change and focuses on “underrepresented populations and values” (p. 279), whereas mixed methods research in the pragmatic paradigm does not necessarily aim towards social or political change. I situate my dissertation research squarely in the transformative/emancipatory paradigm of mixed methods because it gives voice to members of an Indigenous community, but also because it clearly has a social change aim with its focus on community development through education in support of self-determination in both the personal and the political sense.

My research is bound by politics, history, place, and culture. It is also deeply personal as I am a community member and mother of children who attended our community school; this is research informed by a deep commitment to community and family, and based in a deep concern for my own children and other children of my community. Furthermore, this is research that, being so informed, is respectful of all participants and their right to participate in the entire process.

This chapter outlines my conception of a respectful and caring methodology and what this means for doing education research. I begin by situating myself in relation to doing research, move on to a discussion of Indigenous research as political and decolonizing,⁵ and stress the importance of approaching research in a pragmatic way, being open to using any methodologies and methods that will best suit the purpose of the research and the participants involved.

⁵ Decolonizing does not mean sending the settler population home and disbanding all mainstream institutions. Decolonizing means understanding how we were and continue to be colonized and how we can work against continued colonization by defining ourselves and our institutions so that they support our cultures, traditions, language, and are consistent with our value systems.

Situating myself

The decisions that I make about researching and teaching, and the way in which I perform these acts, all stem from my own situatedness. I am an Eeyou educator and a mother. This defines what I do, who I am, where I belong, where my allegiance lies, why I do what I do, the way in which I do what I do, and my responsibility to do what I do. I am spiritually, emotionally, and mentally tied to the vocations of teacher and researcher.

I focus my work on our community schooling system out of concern for my own children and other children within my community. I am also concerned for our future and the health of our community. We use a schooling system as one way of educating our children. Schooling is, however, a Eurocentric concept and can be a form of cognitive imperialism (Battiste, 2000; Graveline, 2003; Hampton, 1999; Laenui, 2000).

My research engages with our school system because of my conviction that changes must be made. My motivation for researching lies in my belief that as Indigenous communities we must engage in deep critique of schooling models with their hierarchical structures and frequently used transmission modes of teaching; these models have been colonial tools (Cajete, 1994; Grande, 2004).⁶ Furthermore, schooling as a model of education can encourage passivity and conformity, and an acceptance of oppression (hooks, 1994), which are contrary to goals of self-determination.⁷

⁶ The system is colonial in that it is assimilationist. Grande (2004) posits that education of Indigenous people of North America is assimilationist working to “de-Indianize” Native children (p. 11). This colonization is carried out as western constructs are forced upon us. From this point of view, we must remain open to the possibility that the government may enforce provincial education programs in order to intentionally or unintentionally facilitate an assimilation to mainstream society.

⁷ Self-determination, in this sense, does not mean separation from mainstream society by creating a separate political state and governance system. Being self-determining means understanding the ways that we have been colonized or oppressed so that we can make decisions about our future as Indigenous people. Self-determination can be individual or communal.

Fundamentally, my teaching and working with other learners is based on care, on building caring connections, and on building and strengthening our community. I believe that in order to heal from the pain caused by oppression and social ills and to deal with expressions of colonization operating in our daily lives, we must unite as a community in order to gain collective power and an understanding of ourselves as agents instead of victims. This strength and unity is based in an understanding of our place in the world and how we will preserve a place in the world with our identities as Eeyouch intact.

I identify with Indigenous academic scholars like G. Smith (2000) and Graveline (2003), with their Freireian emphasis on conscientization and transformative action and education as the practice of freedom. I understand the practice of freedom as an exercise of what Grande (2004) terms “Red pedagogy”:

when Indian educators... insist on the incorporation of indigenous knowledge and praxis in schools but also... transform the institutional structures of schools themselves. In other words, in addition to the development of Native curricula, indigenous educators need to develop systems of analysis that help theorize the ways in which power and domination inform the processes and procedures of schooling. (p. 6)

Red pedagogy means taking issue with such aspects of our education system as what is studied, how it is studied, and hierarchical relations between teacher and student and between student and student. In short, it means taking issue with the curriculum in the broadest definition of the term. As community members we need to figure out for ourselves what will be conducive to student success in schooling and how we will go about the implementation of these changes.

Taking a caring stance

Some do research in the liberal individualist stance, bent on the accumulation of knowledge for knowledge's sake, or so that knowledge may be used as a commodity bartered in exchange for personal place and prestige (Apple, 2001; L. Smith, 1999). There has been a long history of researchers entering Indigenous communities in order to “study” Indigenous people (L. Smith, 1999). Frequently, these researchers publish papers, win awards for *their* documentaries, increase *their* levels of funding, and gain positions within universities and colleges based on *their* research, with little or no gains for those researched (L. Smith, 1999). Many research relationships between researchers and Indigenous communities have not been reciprocal and, frequently, studies are done without prior approval of community members (L. Smith, 1999). Research done *on* Indigenous people and used to gain personal prestige constitutes theft. This theft is of knowledge, of words, of culture, and of traditions. This theft has commoditized Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous words, Indigenous cultures and traditions, and has therefore commoditized Indigenous people. This commoditization is an act of dehumanization.

In contrast, humanizing research is respectful and based in reciprocal relations between a researcher and the community at the heart of the research. Research is reciprocal when all involved gain from the venture. Research is respectful when all involved are consulted and participate in the process as full members; this means that research participants are not seen as mere “subjects” of research, but are given the opportunity to determine the extent of their involvement. The research that I am a part of within my community does not belong to me, nor does it in any way belong to an academic institution with which I am affiliated. A participant in a previous research

endeavour within this community spoke about the way we as Eeyou learn by sharing our stories (Pashagumskum, 2005). Consequently, I have come to think of research as a sharing of stories for learning. Thus, research is a communal experience and therefore is communally owned. As a sharing of story, research can be envisioned as a communal experience leading to social change, and an act of care.

Research that builds and maintains community⁸ with others can contribute to self-determination. As participants in the research process share stories, we can look together at our pasts and our community's past, collectively envisioning possibilities for our futures and our community's future, and come to know more about why we are the way we are as individuals and why we make the choices we make. In formulating this knowledge, we are able to build vision and engage in rigorous and grounded planning for our community's future. When a person does not know why he or she has made or makes the choices he or she makes, he or she is not a self-determining individual. I envision individual self-determination as linked to my community's being self-determining; if self-determining individuals are parts of a self-determining community in a mutually supportive and reciprocal relationship, then a process such as the research process advocated here can result in the transformation of colonial constructs, if individuals as integral parts of the community so choose.

My research, therefore, is an explicitly political act. Even when research is not explicit about its politics, it is an inherently political activity. According to L. Smith (1999):

⁸ In speaking of building and maintaining community I do not mean maintaining our physical community and our group integrity, but am referring to building and maintaining a *feeling* of community that aids in group action towards social change. I realize that community is a contentious issue as it can be used to exclude; exclusion is not an aim of this research process. Communal praxis-oriented practices are an aim.

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

Furthermore, Cherryholmes (1988) contends that:

interests, ideologies, and power arrangements are better camouflaged in some research findings than in others.... Interests, ideologies, and power are more likely to remain implicit in quantitative studies, because constitutive elements of phenomena are several steps further removed from theoretical inferences.... Simply stated, the problem of hidden practical commitments in theoretical findings varies in terms of explicitness/implicitness, but it should be noted, ethnographic studies do not always have the upper hand on this issue. (p. 82)

Because the research we do cannot be separated from our commitments, from history, from ideology, from power, it is political. We make political statements in deciding what research to do, how to go about researching, how to represent our research, and who benefits from our research. The following section discusses my understanding of research as political action.

Research as political action

One purpose of research is to build theory (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). This theory cannot be separated from politics, commitments, history, and ideology (Cherryholmes, 1998). Research that is used to create space to critique current practices can be used to disrupt those practices, change practices, and even change the structures

within which those practices take place. Therefore, how we do research, the politics, history, and commitments behind our research, all have consequences for theory and practice.

For example, scientific theory has been used in the acts of colonization throughout the world (L. Smith, 1999). It has been used to justify and uphold colonial actions and paternalistic attitudes. It has been used to “show” that Indigenous people are not able to be self-governing by “showing” that they are unable to think in ways necessary to govern their own lives (Gould, 1993; L. Smith, 1999). Theory has been used to reinforce injustice, unequal and oppressive power arrangements, and the maintenance of the normalizing forces of a colonial society. Examples include imperialistic research during the European enlightenment that “determined” that Indigenous people were sub-human (L. Smith, 1999) and, more recently, research conducted during the 1980s “proving” that cranial shape was an indicator of lower intelligence levels in Indigenous people compared to Caucasians (Common & Frost, 1994). Such research practices are informed by a political agenda explicitly or implicitly geared to maintaining the subordinate position of Indigenous people within colonial society.

Obviously, these are cases where research has *problematized* Indigenous people simply because they are Indigenous. Therefore, as a First Nations researcher I understand that I must be wary of the way in which a research “problem” is defined. The concept of “problem” must be situated away from the people involved in the research and instead must take issue with the systems we wish to investigate.

Furthermore, a refusal to problematize Indigenous peoples is important as an answer to the assimilationist tendencies of the mainstream education system. Faced with

a mainstream curriculum and school structure, Indigenous students are forced to question their own worth, and thus become “problems” as a result of their cultural difference. By refusing to situate the problem within ourselves and our cultures, Indigenous education researchers assert that assimilation does not support our survival, much less act in a way conducive to our self-determination (Archibald, 1999; Battiste, 2000; Cajete, 2000a; Corbiere, 2000; Little Bear, 2000; Rozon, 2001). In taking issue with a system, we name the ways in which it is damaging and either re-create it, or change it so that it is freeing, decolonizing, and an expression of self-determination.

Decolonization as emancipation

Having equated decolonizing with freeing, I feel that I must now take issue with the concept of “emancipation” where research is concerned, because of the power relationship that may be construed between researcher and subject when an emancipatory agenda is enacted. Research seen as emancipatory (e.g., Schram, 2003) can be problematic if it is conceived and performed as something done *to* Indigenous people instead of something done *with* or *by* Indigenous people, despite any good intentions the researcher may have. There is the danger that Indigenous people will be treated as the passive recipients of emancipation: “this is what I am going to do/have done/am doing to these people.” Furthermore, the labeling of research as emancipatory privileges the researcher as emancipator and brings up questions about the subjects’ choice to be “emancipated.” In performing “emancipatory” research we must be careful not to do so within the liberal individualist paradigm already taken issue with in this chapter.

Still, research can be mutually empowering to both the researcher and the other participants. Therefore, when I am using words like “emancipatory,” or “liberatory,” or “freeing” in this research, I do not understand these concepts as inflicted upon other people, but as collective processes where participation is shared equally. Such processes can be empowering for participants in the sense that Lather (1991) uses the concept:

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

Similarly, Cherryholmes (1988) expresses his idea of freedom by telling us that although “power structures will seemingly always be around... they can be made more explicit, criticized, justified, and rearranged,” (p. 98) and that:

The possibility of such understanding brings with it the promise of increased freedom and power, increased freedom from existing social structures, and more power to create our societies and schools rather than the other way around. (p. 149)

Therefore, well-conducted research as a process of decolonization is freeing in that it can allow us to understand the structures that bind and define us, and in understanding these structures, we can recreate or remake them.

Refusing to essentialize

I also must make clear that my methodology is tied to place and is situation-specific. I am thus not advocating for a *universal* Indigenous methodology. Just as there are a multitude of Indigenous cultures, so are there multiple ways of conducting research with Indigenous people. Assuming the existence of *an* Indigenous methodology would

play into essentialist views that all Indigenous peoples are exactly alike in culture, traditions, and aspirations. Indigenous researchers such as Wilson (2001), L. Smith (1999), and Weber-Pillwax (2001) have argued that research methodology and methods must be determined by the desires of the community involved and take into account the comfort and integrity of the community involved.

Consequently, methodology and research designs must be situation-specific and subjective if they are to be of any benefit to participants or populations. Weber-Pillwax (2001) expresses similar sentiments:

How to describe a methodology as Indigenous is somewhat problematic for me, and I think that perhaps this is not the best way to formulate the issue. Any methodology will suit my purposes in research if it permits a fluidity that can encompass any social or cultural context that I choose to work in without breaking the boundaries of personal integrity. I use the practices and principles of methods and methodologies that seem to fit with and balance my own ways of being and looking at the world. I try to ensure that there will be no conflict between my ways of being and doing if I should decide to do research with a particular methodology or method.

(p. 172)

Like Weber-Pillwax, I take from mainstream academic methodologies those aspects that will be beneficial to the research I do with my community.

Some may see this utilizing of mainstream academic strategies from the point of view that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde, 1979).

However, if liberatory education research is a move towards increased freedom and power

(Cherryholmes, 1988), like Freire (1985), I view the ability to *choose* which of the dominant culture's strategies to be used as an aspect of liberation:

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

For this study, I have chosen to use a mixed methods approach, which some may perceive as incongruent given the demonization of quantitative methods in some qualitative research circles (Westmarland, 2001). I included a student survey to answer questions and gather data that the community members who were consulted requested. The use of qualitative methods influenced by grounded theory answer other questions and is consistent with my own situation, context, and the comfort of all participants. (See Chapters 4 and 5 for further methodological discussion).

Conclusion

This research was meant to support the creation of a more comfortable and supportive school system for my community by making recommendations for enhancing student engagement in our current system. This purpose stems from concern for my own children and other children in my community, as well as for the ability of the school to contribute to community well-being. Having outlined my conception of research as respectful in this chapter, the following chapter will further situate this research by providing a historical overview of First Nations schooling within what is now known as Canada.

Chapter 3

Historical overview

To further situate this study, the following chapter provides a brief history of the schooling of First Nations children in what is now known as Canada. It is important to note right at the outset that while education is something that was and is common to all First Nations and a valued institution, schooling is a European construct and was historically imposed as a colonial tool upon First Nations.

Early attempts at schooling by religious orders

In the early 1600s schooling was seen by the Jesuits and Recollets as a way to Christianize and *civilize* Indigenous peoples in North America (Dickason, 1997; McCue, 2006; Miller, 2006). During the 1620s and 1630s the two groups experimented with sending children to France to learn the French way of life, hoping the victims would be impressed by French culture and technology enough to come back to their own people and convince their peoples of the glories of France, and the advantages of becoming French (Dickason, 1997). The Recollets, Jesuits, and Ursulines in New France at this time also began to experiment with schools for Native children. These schools were largely unsuccessful in their goals (Dickason, 1997; Miller, 2006).

Neither day schools, nor boarding schools worked out at first, perhaps because the curriculum the French thought appropriate had little relevance to the Amerindian way of life. Another problem was the reluctance of the parents to part with their children, particularly for boarding school. Not only was French discipline foreign to the Amerindian way, but the diet

and general regime all too often affected the children's health, to the point of death in some cases. (Dickason, 1997, p. 139)

Not only was schooling an unpleasant experience for First Nations children and parents, but it was also not seen as necessary on the part of First Nations peoples (Dickason, 1997). The religious orders misconstrued First Nations peoples and their needs:

The view that Amerindians were 'simple savages' in an uninformed state of nature waiting to be molded by a civilizing hand was proving to be wide of the mark. (p. 139)

In fact, early attempts at schooling "failed abysmally, thanks to the autonomy that First Nations still enjoyed and Europeans' economic and military dependence on natives" (Miller, 2006, ¶1). The religious orders may not have been greatly supported by France in their educational projects as France would have been more interested in maintaining First Nations peoples as military allies and assets in the fur trade. During this time of European imperial expansion, Indigenous peoples of the Americas played essential parts in European bids for dominance in North America (Faries & Pashagumskum, 2002).

Schooling under the British colonial regime

European attempts to school Indigenous peoples of North America became more organized during the 1700s and 1800s. Between 1763 and 1830 the Imperial government gave the military responsibility for the education of Native peoples (Frideres, 1993; McCue, 2006). During this time minimal attention was paid to education, with religious groups running a few schools (McCue, 2006).

In 1830, the British government passed legislation that transferred responsibility for Native education to the colonial governments (Frideres, 1993; McCue, 2006). Although education was no longer under military control, but under a civil arm of the colonial government, there were no great innovations made. Common discourse surrounding the fate of Indigenous peoples at the time purported that Native people were “a dying race” that should either be assimilated or isolated from Euro-Americans for their own good; First Nations people were either savages who needed to be civilized through assimilation or Noble Savages who needed protection from the evils of the civilized world.

With this in mind, the responsibility for education was left to the missionaries. Residential schools were jointly established by the colonies and religious orders, with a few schools being built on reserves. Schools were reliant upon donations from church groups (McCue, 2006) and funding from the colonial government. However, whether money truly came from the government is open to debate. According to Dickason (1997):

The funds for this program would come from the invested proceeds from the sale of lands acquired from the Amerindians... they would pay their own way into civilization. (p. 198)

Assimilationist schooling in British North America

In 1840, the British North America colonies united and Native education came under the responsibilities of a Department of Indian Affairs. Native education was still seen in terms of civilization: in 1847, Egerton Ryerson proposed “domestic education and religious instruction for the Indian for nothing can be done to improve and elevate his character and condition without religious feeling” (Canada, n.d., ¶ 3). With this sentiment

in mind, the Department of Indian Affairs began to concentrate on building schools for Native students between 1848 and 1851.

In 1850, public schools were also established in the colonies, but these were not for Native children (Canada, n.d.); Native children required special treatment. By the mid-1850s the government had its sights keenly focused on Native children; they were seen as the key to assimilating First Nations peoples (Canada, n.d.). Adults were beyond hope. Assimilation was so strongly advocated that the 1869 Act to Encourage the Gradual Civilization of the Indian stipulated enfranchisement as a condition for sending Indian children to public schools (Dickason, 1997).

In 1867, Native people became a legal responsibility of the Federal government under the British North America (BNA) Act; Section 91 asserted Crown jurisdiction over “Indians and lands reserved for Indians.” The BNA Act also stipulated that the provinces would be responsible for education, but because Native people were the responsibility of the federal government, education for all Native people was not in the realm of provincial responsibility. The federal government became responsible for Status Indians, while non-status, Inuit, and Métis came under provincial jurisdiction. Responsibility for the education of Status Indians was established somewhat more firmly with the 1876 consolidated Indian Act; Section 115 stated that the federal government would “provide for and make regulations with respect to standards for buildings, equipment, teaching, education, inspection” (Frideres, 1993, p. 173; Canada, n.d.).

In addition, there were educational commitments contained in many treaties made after 1871, mainly to the effect:

To maintain schools for instruction on the reserve and whenever the Indians of the reserve shall desire it or to make such provision as may from time to time be deemed advisable for the education of Indian children. (Frideres, 1993, p. 173)

Each party had its own reasons for including education as a provision in these treaties.

Both the federal government and plains nations wanted to include schooling provisions in the treaties of the 1870s and beyond, though for different reasons. Aboriginal leaders hoped Euro-Canadian schooling would enable their young to learn the skills of the newcomer society in order to make a successful transition to a world dominated by the strangers. Government desired schooling as a means of making First Nations economically self-sufficient, its underlying objective being a lessening of native dependency on the public purse. (Miller, 2006, ¶2)

Treaty stipulations, together with the Indian Act gave the Federal government a legal basis to arrange schooling for Native children with religious and provincial authorities (Frideres, 1993).

The establishment of residential schools

Between 1867 and 1945, measures to school Native children were dominated by a paternalistic ideology perpetuated by the religious orders that set up “quasi-educational institutions” bent on providing Native children with “useful practical knowledge and skills” (Frideres, 1993, p. 173). These institutions focused mainly on vocational, manual, and religious instruction (McCue, 2006). Native children were being prepared “for life on the lower fringes of the dominant society” (Dickason, 1997, p. 310). Still, the focus for

Native education was upon assimilation and eradication of “all traces of Native languages traditions and beliefs” (Frideres, 1993, p. 173). Miller (2006), who has done extensive research into the residential school experience, provides this description of the typical residential school daily experience:

Students’ days began early, usually with a bell that summoned them to dress and attend chapel. Breakfast, like all meals, was spartan, consumed hurriedly in a bleak refectory, and followed by three hours of classes or a like period of work. The late afternoon might see a short play period before supper. Evening recreation was limited, and bedtime was early. Weekends varied the routine by eliminating classes, but Sunday usually meant more time spent on religious observances. Until the 1950s holidays for many of the students meant periods of work and play at the school. Only in latter years did the schools routinely send children home for holidays.... The food was low in quantity and poor in quality; preparation did nothing to enhance its limited appeal. Clothing was universally detested: badly fitting, shabby, and, in the case of winter clothing, not adequate to support health. The pedagogical program, both academic and vocational, was deficient. Students had to cope with teachers who were usually ill-prepared and curricula and materials that derived from and reflected an alien culture.... Impatience and correction too often gave way to excessive corporal punishment. Almost universally, the way the schools operated prevented staff from providing the emotional nurturing that children needed. Sometimes the staff were sexual predators, and all too

often the emotional frigidity was made worse by the cultural denigration that missionaries inflicted on their charges. Native languages were forbidden in most operations of the school, aboriginal ways were disparaged, and the Euro-Canadian manner was constantly held out as superior. (¶ 5-7)

Very few schools were situated on reserves, as the government and religious orders focused mainly on residential schooling for Native children. Until 1945, a policy of “education in isolation” was followed (Frideres, 1993, p. 173); children needed to be isolated from their parents and communities in order for assimilation to be accomplished, and most residential schools were built in the country for this aim (Frideres, 1993; McCue, 2006; Miller, 2006).

Beginning with the establishment of three industrial schools on the prairies in 1883, the federal government and churches developed a system of residential schools stretching from Nova Scotia to the Arctic over the next half-century. Most of these schools were in the four western provinces and the territories but there were also significant numbers in northwestern Ontario, and, later, in Northern Quebec. Three of the four Atlantic provinces had no schools, apparently because government assumed that Natives there were sufficiently acculturated. (Miller, 2006, ¶3)

By 1900 there were 64 residential schools in Canada (McCue, 2006), with the number growing to 80 by 1930 (Miller, 2006).

Up until the 1950s, these schools ran on a half-day system, with students spending half a day in classes and half a day at work performing manual labour for school upkeep.

Ostensibly, manual labour was provided so that students would learn skills they needed to work as adults; in reality, the schools used students as cheap labour to run the schools (Miller, 2006).

Some have questioned parent motives for allowing their children to be taken away to residential schools. According to McCue (2006), “Native parents saw residential schools as necessary evils; necessary because many Natives saw Christianity as a new and positive force in their lives, or because they recognized the need for European skills; but evil because they removed children from their homes and family ties” (¶ 3). Roman Catholic, Anglican, United, and Presbyterian churches were rewarded with some money and land grants in exchange for schooling Native children (Frideres, 1993), but between the 1890s and the 1950s, the government placed most of the financial burden for running the schools on the churches who relied on member donations and child labour supplied by the students in the school (Miller, 2006). This contributed to impoverished conditions for students within schools. After the 1950s, with the country’s increasing affluence, there was an increase in funding for Native education and this led to an elimination of the half-day school system.

The residential school system was phased out slowly in the latter half of the 1900s. From 1945 on, there was a decline in residential school attendance (Frideres, 1993), with an official policy coming in 1969 to shut down the remaining residential schools (Miller, 2006). By 1987, there were only two residential schools left. In 1996, the Gordon Residential School, the last federal residential school, closed in Saskatchewan (Canada, n.d). The long history of residential schools resulted in much of the “family

breakdown, violence, and aimlessness” that is part of community life today (Miller, 2006, ¶ 9).

The establishment of on-reserve day schools

During the 1950s, elementary day schools were established in many communities, but there were very few communities with secondary schools (Frideres, 1993). These elementary day schools were still run mostly by religious orders with missionary teachers and a great emphasis on religious instruction (McCue, 2006). Hawthorn (1967) outlined an interesting problem with church involvement at this time:

We note that the greater the educational resources possessed by a church or the greater its investment in Indian education, the greater its anxiety to maintain the status quo. On the contrary, the faiths having the least material interest in Indian education are much more open to innovation.

(p. 61)

Curriculum was becoming a contentious issue: having been religious and vocational (geared toward manual labour), a move began in the 1930s to make curriculum within schools for Native children more like the provincial curriculum afforded to non-Native children.

In addition, 1940s statistics gathered on Native education showed poor performance of Native students, leading to a policy of integration (McCue, 2006; Miller, 2006). The Indian Act was revised in 1951 in an attempt to turn education and health over to the provinces. In the 1950s and 1960s the federal government began phasing out federal schools. Native children were to be accommodated in provincial schools with the federal government paying a per diem fee to provincial schools as tuition for Native

students. By 1960, there were 10,000 Native students attending off-reserve schools (McCue, 2006).

The expectation was that by removing Native students from the poorly staffed, inadequately equipped, heavily church-oriented day schools, assimilation would be accelerated and the performance of students improved. (McCue, 2006, ¶5)

Changes with the “Indian Control of Indian Education” movement

In response to assimilationist goals, during the 1960s and 1970s lobbying by Native groups intensified. In 1969, the infamous White Paper, the Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy (Canada, 1969), was issued. The government statement was seen by First Nations leaders as paternalistic and assimilationist. The National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) countered with the statement, *Indian Control of Indian Education*, which called for local control of education and recognition of Native parents’ responsibility for their own children.

The NIB statement was adopted by the Federal government in 1973 as official policy (Canada, 2004). The Federal government began transfer of control of education to the bands, developing guidelines, procedures, and a national funding formula. It was “a time when [Native groups] believed they would become active participants” (Frideres, 1993, p. 175). In 1980 there were over 100 band-operated schools, and by 1990, over 300 band-run schools were in operation (Frideres, 1993). Funding levels, however, were not remotely comparable to those of provincial schools (Dickason, 1997). There was minimal support for bilingual/bicultural education on the part of the government (Canadian Heritage, 2005).

First Nations schooling in the contemporary era

Many Native children complete elementary school in their own communities and then are bussed to neighbouring provincial schools for secondary school (Frideres, 1993): 38% of First Nations students who live on-reserve attend provincial schools (INAC, 2005). This switch from band to provincial schools proves detrimental to the success of many Native students. Students may have minimal knowledge of English or French, be social outsiders at the new high school, face “discrimination from teachers and other students,” and intense competition may be “psychologically uncomfortable” (Frideres, 1993, p. 179). In addition, encountering “racism [in these schools] results in a serious and permanent distortion of... self-image,” and leads to low marks and early school-leaving (p. 179).

The Minister’s National Working Group on Education has recommended that funding be provided so that First Nations can “begin immediately to construct new schools to ensure that First Nations students have the opportunity, like other students in Canada, to be educated in their own community” (INAC, 2002, p. 16). As things stand, there are still extreme inequalities between provincial education systems and on-reserve schooling systems. While 58% of youth on reserves have not completed secondary school (Laboucane, 2010), provincial schools still receive more than twice the per student funding that on-reserve schools receive. Despite the continuing poor results for on-reserve students, the increase in funding for on-reserve schools for the past ten years was only 19% compared with the 45% funding increase that the provincial school systems received (Laboucane, 2010).

The Cree School Board’s system, however, is a different case. While my community does share the same residential and Indian Affairs day school history as that

of other First Nations communities across the country, as a result of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement we were able to establish our own school board, the Cree School Board, in 1975. In 2006, it was estimated that the Cree School Board received enough funding to spend an average of \$22,528.00 per student (Simon Management Services, 2006), compared with the Canadian average spent per student of \$10,439.00 (Statistics Canada, 2009). The Cree School Board is able to modify curriculum, offer Cree Language and Culture classes, and adopt a school calendar that allows students to take both spring and fall traditional hunting breaks.

The Cree School Board was able to implement a governance model meant to allow voices of community members, especially parents, to be heard within the school system. The Board is governed by its Council of Commissioners, with one commissioner elected by each of the nine Cree communities in Eeyou Istchee to represent his or her community on the Council of Commissioners. There is also a Chairperson elected by the beneficiaries of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement within the nine communities. This person acts as Chair of the Council of Commissioners and speaks on behalf of them, communicating decisions and positions to the management of the Cree School Board. In addition to this regional council governing the board as a whole, there are local school committees meant to ensure that parents are given a voice in the governance of the local schools that their children attend. The members of these school committees are elected from the parents of children who are registered in the school, and are meant to form an advisory group to the school management involved in decision making surrounding hiring, local policy and school rule development, spending and local program development.

Over the past four decades, since its inception, the Cree School Board has implemented programming changes so that its curriculum differs from the basic provincial programming. Changes began in the early 1980s with the inclusion of Cree culture classes in the curriculum. These classes were usually taught within the school by local resource people who were not trained teachers, but recognized for their expertise and cultural knowledge. Shortly after, the Board was able to implement Cree language classes as part of the regular schooling program so that all children took some Cree language classes each year of school, during the regular schedule. These language classes were meant to develop literacy in Cree and to ensure that students continued to develop in their first language as they were schooled in either English or French immersion. In addition, the Cree School Board adopted a unique calendar that allowed for students to have a break from school in the spring to take part in the spring goose hunt, an important harvesting time in the communities of Eeyou Istchee.

To meet the need of having qualified teachers in its schools, the Cree School Board began to participate in teacher training programs. The first was attached to the University of Quebec in the early 1980s and prepared teachers to teach in both Cree and a second language. Later, the program was transferred to McGill University and by the early 1990s, it was possible for candidates to take a language teacher's specialization. Today, many teachers at the elementary level are of Eeyou descent, but the numbers of teachers at the secondary level still remain low. At the school where this study took place, there were four teachers at the time of research who were of First Nations descent and only two of these were Eeyou.

One of the major innovations of the Cree School Board over its first two decades in existence was the development of first language of instruction programming. The community of Chisasibi, in the early 1990s, lobbied the Cree School Board to develop and implement programming that would use Cree as the medium of instruction. This eventually effected change throughout the whole board so that all of its schools used Cree as the medium of instruction through to the end of Grade 3 by 1996 (Burnaby et al, 1998). This first language medium program was not unanimously supported within the Cree communities. In the early 1980s, Tanner (1981), in a study of parent attitudes towards first language medium education in the Cree communities found that parents feared that Cree as a language of instruction would have a deficit effect on the development of students' second language. This opposition to, and fear of, the program remained until it was finally discontinued in 2011. Students continued, however, to be offered Cree language subject classes through to the end of secondary.

Despite the changes highlighted above since the 1970s, the Cree School Board model is far from perfect, as evidenced in the dismal statistics referred to in Chapter 1. My study will show that the everyday experience of students in our school is affected not only by the consequences of a schooling history we share with First Nations across the country, but also by a lack of focus on the true needs of students. In many ways, the experience in my community school is disengaging, despite our best efforts. I hope we will come to terms with our less than ideal history and plot a new trajectory towards a positive and engaging schooling experience for our students that increases their ability to persist.

Chapter 4

Quantitative methods

This phase of the research process made use of a questionnaire to measure school-related factors broadly associated with First Nations student retention in my community school. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix C. It included items relating to students' perceptions of: teachers' understanding and sensitivity towards Cree culture; curriculum issues related to culture; community involvement; respectful and caring relationships within the school; schoolwork as interesting or uninteresting; the school's receptiveness to student needs and perspectives; teaching approaches; general attendance, school leaving and staying factors; and the purpose of going to school. These broad themes are explicated further below in the rationale for questionnaire content that explains inclusion of specific survey items.

A simple descriptive approach, defined as “a one-shot survey for the purposes of describing the characteristics of a sample at one point in time” (Mertens, 2005, p. 172), was employed. The survey was administered in a self-response manner in order to offer a high degree of “response anonymity” (p. 172). Following is an explanation of purpose and research questions, population, sampling, instrumentation, procedure and time frame, analysis procedures, validity and reliability concerns, assumptions, and limitations.

Purpose and research questions

The purpose of the survey was not to look for a causal relationship affecting factors thought to contribute to engagement,⁹ but rather to survey the student population for their perceptions on the presence of these factors, and, if these factors are present, the extent to which they are present within the school. The following research questions guided the development of the questionnaire:

- Are school-related factors contributing in positive and negative ways to student retention present within the student population of the community school?
- If present, to what extent are these factors present?

These questions are sub-questions to a main research question concerning why the school system is successful for some students and unsuccessful for others, as outlined in Chapter 1. The results of this survey comprised one aspect of the research process that ultimately led to a statement of recommendations for ways of enhancing engagement amongst students of the community school, thereby enhancing student success, an overall goal of this research.

School leaving and remaining in school are complex processes and an understanding of these processes must take into account both school-related and non-school-related factors (Ferguson et al., 2005). The survey phase of this research focused on school-related factors to leaving school and remaining in school. The results of the survey were enhanced by phase 2 qualitative interviews and focus groups with students in order to obtain a more complete picture of the factors that contribute to students' perceptions of reasons for staying in school and leaving school. Therefore, the survey

⁹ As discussed in Chapter 1 and further outlined in Chapter 2, student engagement is linked to student success and the ability to remain in school. It is for this reason that factors leading to remaining in school or leaving school were targeted in the student survey.

provided a general view of what is happening within the school, but was meant to serve as only one small part of a larger picture of the contributing factors and barriers to engagement within our community's school.

Population

The population targeted by the survey was the entire secondary school student body of 351 students. These students are mainly Cree mother tongue speakers, and they were in 21 different home-rooms from secondary 1 to secondary 5. These students, male and female, were split between two sectors: those completing secondary school in French and those completing in English. The sampling table in Appendix D provides the exact composition of the secondary school with respect to these characteristics.

Sampling procedure

In order to generalize to the population of the community school, a stratified random sample of 60 students out of 351 was drawn, representing approximately 17% of the population; these 60 students were asked to complete the survey. As noted, this school is composed not only of different grade levels, but also has a French and English sector, and within each sector there are different types of classes including work-oriented, individualized-learning-oriented, and academic-oriented classes. Dörnyei (2003) asserts that “a good sample is very similar to the target population in its most important general characteristics” (p. 71). Therefore, in order to best represent the population, stratified sampling was employed. Stratified sampling is defined as a “probability method that is superior to random sampling because it reduces sampling error” where a researcher first identifies strata and then selects a sufficient number of respondents to represent the population within each stratum (Walonick, 2004, p. 24).

In order to obtain a stratified sample, 17% of males and 17% of females were drawn from each of the 21 class lists and asked to take part in the survey. This ensured that the sample represented class types, language sectors, grade levels, and sex. There was one student in the drawn sample who refused to take part in the survey so another name from the same class list was drawn and that student was asked and agreed to take part. Survey demographics were compared with population demographics during analysis to ensure that the sample closely matched the population.

Consent was secured from those who completed the survey. In addition, parental consent was asked for those under the age of 18. It was planned that if a student, or his or her parent in the case of a person under the age of 18, did not give consent to complete the survey, another name on the class list would be drawn. As noted above, this occurred in only one instance.

Before sampling began, I met with school personnel who worked closely with students to explain the purpose of this study, why it was important to collect this data, and to explain how sampling was to be done. I also spoke on the local radio station to discuss the project, particularly the sampling procedure, the data collection procedure, and the time frame. A summary of the research proposal was offered during meetings with school personnel and made available to parents and other members of the community. These steps were taken to ensure that as many people as possible were aware of the study, and that when students were approached to take part in the study, they would have a good idea of what was involved.

Responses were anonymous and the list of students completing surveys remains confidential. Students were assigned numbers for identity purposes during coding of

information, and the numbers were not attached to names, only to individual surveys completed. Furthermore, students were asked to place their anonymous surveys in a filing box with a lock. I had sole access to the completed surveys.

Instrumentation

In designing the questionnaire, other instruments measuring student engagement and satisfaction were consulted, including the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy's High School Survey of Student Engagement 2005, the American College Testing Program's High School Student Opinion Survey (1999) and High School Student Needs Assessment Questionnaire (1989), and Alberta Education's (2004/2005) Grade 10 Student Questionnaire. This consultation was carried out in order to see different possibilities for formatting and laying out questions so that they are easily accessible to students. Further consultation on the design and content of the questionnaire was carried out with a group of secondary 5 students within the school to ensure that the questionnaire was accessible to this group of students and included items that were most likely to factor into engagement levels within the school (see validity and reliability section below).

There were two parts to the questionnaire. The first consisted of 3 items to obtain demographic data that was used to determine characteristics of the sample and compare the sample to the population. The second part of the survey contained 51 items that asked for student perceptions about factors affecting retention and engagement; in this part, questions were grouped according to topic (Dörnyei, 2003). Most of the items asked for response on Likert scales, some asked for "yes or no" answers, and some were open-ended asking for written elaborations from students. These open-ended questions were

placed at the end of the questionnaire, as recommended by Dörnyei (2003), so that respondents did not spend time on open-ended questions and sacrifice answering closed-ended response items. Following Dörnyei's (2003) advice, the questionnaire was under 6 pages in length and took less than a half hour to complete with most students finishing in approximately 25 minutes.

Some questions may have been “psychologically threatening” to students as they asked questions about socially desirable and socially undesirable behaviours. Following Mertens' (2005) suggestions, I included open-ended response items to ensure participants felt greater comfort in providing responses to items that they may more readily have responded to if allowed to give some sort of qualification or explanation. Students were reminded more than once that anonymity would be strictly guarded. I administered all surveys myself, sitting in the same room with students as they wrote their answers on the survey, one at a time, in a room provided by the school.

Rationale of questionnaire content

The overall intention of the survey was to measure student perceptions of school-related factors thought to contribute to the retention of First Nations students. I assumed here that retention is an indicator of school engagement: students who are happy, satisfied, and engaged within a school will stay in school (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2003). I define school success in terms of whether or not a school has met the engagement needs of its students, therefore I defined success as not only academic growth and achievement, but also personal growth and satisfaction with the school experience. In sum, student engagement, in the context of this study, means that the school has met the needs of students such that students themselves are satisfied with their

secondary school experience and drawn to the secondary school experience, and will therefore remain in school until graduation or until some other form of secondary completion is achieved. Items on the survey were included to reflect school-related factors contributing to retention of First Nations students in high school, however, some room was also left for non-school-related factors to be expressed in more open-ended response items.

Items on the survey were organized under main themes including: Cree culture, Cree history and Cree language in the curriculum; community involvement in the school; relationships in the school; student empowerment; boredom and types of schoolwork; support persons; thoughts about school leaving and ability to attend; and instrumentality. These broad themes reflect school-related factors elucidated mainly by literature on First Nations education and the success of First Nations students (for example, Hale, 2000; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 1998), and literature on student engagement in general (for example, Fredericks et al. 2004; Furguson et al. 2005), and are further described in the following sections that identify the reasons for including various items on the student survey.

Cree culture, Cree history and Cree language in the curriculum. Much of the literature concerning First Nations student engagement or school-leaving places great importance on respect for the cultural backgrounds of students in school both by teachers and by inclusion in the curriculum and environment (for example, Battiste, 2000; Hale, 2000; Klug & Whitfield, 2003; Poonwassie & Charter, 2001; Reyhner, 1992; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 1998). In response to this literature that indicates the essential importance of teacher sensitivity to the culture of their students, I included items 4 to 13

on the survey asking students to indicate their perceptions of teacher respect for Cree culture and their perceptions of the inclusion of Cree culture in the curriculum.

Community involvement in the school. Much of the research focuses on parental involvement as the key contributing factor for remaining in school (e.g., Epstein, 1992, 1993; Levine & Lezotte, 1995). Epstein (1992, 2003) asserts that nuclear family involvement in school can help students to realize both emotional and academic benefits. In terms of First Nations parents, Friedel (1999) found that low parent involvement in their children's high school experience can lead to higher school-leaving rates and lower academic performance. Other literature concerning support for students in First Nations settings sees not just parents, but the whole community, as having a role in supporting students in their schooling journey and the school itself. In literature concerning the benefits of community involvement, the involvement of the First Nations community where the school is located can lower school-leaving rates and heighten cultural consistency (Charters-Voght, 1999; Poonwassie & Charter, 2001; Tippecomic, 1999). Items 14 to 18 were included to elicit perceptions of parent and community involvement with the school.

Relationships in the school. Items 19 to 24 concerning student perceptions of their relationships with teachers and other adults in the school were included because relationships with teachers are an important aspect of student engagement with positive relationships positively affecting student engagement (for example, Crosnoe et al, 2004; Lee & Burkham, 2003; Osterman & Freese, 2000; Reyhner, 1992). Relationships between teachers and students can be a more powerful predictor of student engagement than either peer support or family support (Osterman & Freese, 2000), and students who

have positive perceptions of their relationships with teachers do better academically and have fewer discipline problems (Crosnoe et al, 2004). In addition, the role of caring teachers can be linked to the role of cultural relevancy for First Nations students; according to Hale (2002), caring teachers “adjust their teaching to fit the pupil’s cultural backgrounds” and “recognize the cultural heritage of students as a positive contribution to the class” (p. 97).

Items asking for information about general feelings of safety and relationships between peers in the school (items 25 to 29) were included because of the great effect that these types of relationships can have on decisions to leave or remain in school and on academic success. According to Broh (2002), students who are victimized by peers in early secondary school are more likely to leave school before completing secondary. In addition, both meaningful participation in school and grades are positively affected by positive and caring peer relationships (Broh, 2003; Jennings, 2003). Items in this section asked students for information about their general feeling of safety within the school, and experiences with teasing, gangs, and bullying.

Student empowerment. According to some engagement literature, when students are given opportunities to take part in decision-making processes within the school, they feel a sense of empowerment and this sense of empowerment heightens student engagement (Faircloth, 2009; Hardre & Reeve, 2003; Johnson, 2008; McNeely et al, 2002). Consistent with this literature, in items 30 to 40, students were asked about whether they took part in making school and class rules, were involved in choosing types of work to be done, had time to discuss topics that are important to them, and whether adults listen to them.

Boredom and schoolwork. In a study done more than a decade ago, but the only one I found that defined drop-out factors for First Nations students in Canada, Mackay and Myles (1999) assert that boredom in school is a significant factor in decisions to drop out among First Nations students. Items 41 to 46 asking students if they experience boredom in school were thus included in the survey along with open-ended response items asking students which types of schoolwork they do and do not enjoy doing, with the assumption that liking or not liking schoolwork plays a part in the levels of boredom felt. “Holistic approaches to pedagogy, curricula, and culture” (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2003, p. 122) and learning situations that promote active learning and student-centred teaching methods are thought to increase student engagement in school (Anderman, 2003; Johnson, 2008; Marks, 2000; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2003). It was assumed that student answers to open-ended response items could be used in conjunction with qualitative data from interviews to ascertain which types of learning situations are most conducive to the engagement of Eeyou students in my community’s school.

Support persons. In addition, the literature describes adult support persons within the school as playing an instrumental role in helping students to remain in school. Teacher support is especially important in that teachers who are perceived as supportive by students positively affect student engagement (Holt et al, 2008; Jennings, 2003; Murdock & Miller, 2003; Reeve et al, 2004; Woolley & Bowen, 2007). According to Woolley and Bowen (2007), “at risk-youth who reported the presence of supportive adults reported higher levels of school engagement which are predictors of school success” (p. 100), while Reyhner (1992) purports that counsellors who work with students and their parents can be a factor in drop-out prevention. Consistent with this

literature, students were asked questions (items 24 and 60) designed to elicit their perceptions of support from various sources including in-school support from school staff and out of school support from parents, other family, and other members of the community.

Thoughts about school-leaving and ability to attend. Students were also asked whether they have trouble coming to school following the findings in the literature. Yair (2000), for example, found that students are “alienated from instruction almost half of the time” because they are “preoccupied with external issues” (p. 247). Assuming that students could be preoccupied with “external issues” or by issues within the school, and that this could play into decisions to leave or remain in school, students were also asked, in items 55 to 58, whether they had thought about dropping out and if they had trouble coming to school. These questions were used to broaden the picture of school engagement.

Instrumentality. In addition, students were asked to respond to questions designed to identify whether a feeling of instrumentality (i.e. school was perceived as being useful) was present. Instrumentality is seen as an engagement factor (Van Ryzin et al, 2009; Walker & Greene, 2009) and occurs when students feel that schooling is going to meet their needs in terms of reaching goals for their futures. It was presumed that students would feel that the school would meet their needs if the academic program was seen to have high standards and if they felt that they were being prepared for their future. Engagement literature names low standards as a disengagement factor (e.g. Tyler & Boelter, 2008; Wentzel, 2002; Yair, 2000) with low expectations for student performance being “particularly debilitating for student achievement” (Wetzel, 2002, p. 298).

Conversely, high expectations of students can positively affect engagement (Anderman, 2003; Tyler & Boelter, 2008; Smerdon, 2002). Consequently, students were asked in items 47 to 54 and in item 59 if they have reasons to stay in school, and how they feel about the quality of their schooling experience and its ability to prepare them for a future.

Validity and reliability

Validity, according to Creswell (2005), “means that the individual’s scores from an instrument make sense, are meaningful, and enable you, as the researcher, to draw good conclusions from the sample you are studying to the population” (p. 162). Furthermore, according to Mertens (2005), the conventional definition of the validity of an instrument is “the extent to which it measures what it was intended to measure” (p. 352). In addition to utilizing stratified random sampling, the instrument itself was developed considering literature reviewed (Creswell, 2005, p. 161) and my previous research within the target population (Pashagumskum, 2005).

Piloting procedures were also a consideration. Following Dörnyei’s (2003) advice, initial piloting consisted of administering a draft of the questionnaire to three colleagues who provided feedback on content, format, and design and offered recommendations for a consecutive draft. Furthermore, utilizing a modified Delphi Technique based on Mertens’ (2005) outline where an expert panel is convened for consultation on survey design and content, a group of secondary 5 students were convened to provide feedback on the items and what was included in the draft of the questionnaire. In this way, the survey was developed in consultation with members of the target population (Creswell, 2005). The panel of secondary 5 students was asked to take the questionnaire, asking any questions needed as they took the survey. This is a method

advocated by Kelly, Burton, and Regan (1994) and Walonick (2004) to ascertain face validity. Any questions asked would have indicated items on the survey that needed to be clarified in some way. The panel was also asked for their input on the content of the survey and whether the open-ended questions were appropriate or should have closed-response options available. Most of the concerns with the panel targeted language use and the suitability of the language for students working in their second language in the school. The suggestions of this panel were used to create the final version of the survey. The secondary 5 panel was the final pilot.

Assuming that engagement is an indicator of the propensity to leave school or stay in school, a literature review concerning engagement factors for First Nations high school students in conjunction with concerns raised by my previous research in this community (Pashagumskum, 2005) was used to establish appropriate content for the questionnaire. The questionnaire was meant only to provide some insight into the prevalence of factors that are thought by other researchers to affect engagement of First Nations high school students.

Further considerations of construct validity necessarily took consequential validity into account. Consequential validity “refers to the social consequences of test interpretation and use” (Mertens, 2005, p. 357). According to Messick (1995), “validity judgments are value judgments” (p. 748):

It is simply not the case that values are being added to validity in this unified view. Rather, values are intrinsic to the meaning and outcomes of the testing and have always been. As opposed to adding values to validity as an adjunct or supplement, the unified view instead exposes the inherent

value aspects of score meaning and outcome to open examination and debate as an integral part of the validation process. (p. 748)

In consideration of consequential validity, it is important to reiterate the caring aim of this research and its being informed by goals of social justice and self-determination. In addition, quantitative data findings were considered indicators of perceptions and, as such, enhanced by findings from qualitative methods in the second phase of this research process.

The information gathered was ultimately meant to be used as a way to re-create or change the way the system engages with students, and not as a way to promote labeling of students:

the tendency to focus on specific individuals or categories of the population can create or reinforce negative stereotypes, placing undue attention on attributes or behaviour viewed officially as undesirable.

(Wotherspoon & Schissel, 1998, p. 128)

It would be counterproductive to “focus on changing the behaviours of individuals rather than addressing the social problems.... an individual can be labeled as dysfunctional and blamed for not recovering, while the underlying social problems are ignored”

(Poonwassie & Charter, 2001, p. 125). The information gathered about problems students deal with must be used in a way that allows the school to develop programming and measures for keeping these students in school, rather than for blaming students for a lack of success. A school should accommodate the needs of all students, including provisions for helping students to deal with their lives outside of school and relationships within school so that students are supported enough to concentrate on their education.

Procedure and time frame

Surveys were administered in May and June of 2007. After the sample was drawn, parents were contacted and provided with consent forms to sign if they agreed to allow their child to participate in the study. Once parental consent was obtained, students who were selected during sampling were collected by me from their classes and taken to an empty classroom for the time required to complete the survey. I presented each student respondent with an informed consent form, read the form to them, and when necessary, explained in alternate terminology the contents of the form, their rights, and what they were agreeing to if they signed. I also asked if they wished clarification and provided clarification as necessary.

Surveys were handed to the student after the consent forms were signed. I reminded students that they could ask for clarification at any time. I also reminded them not to write their names on the surveys as the surveys were to remain anonymous. Students were asked to hand their surveys to me when they were finished. I placed the surveys into a locked box immediately upon receiving them from students. Surveys were not kept in any particular order as this may have jeopardized confidentiality and anonymity.

Analysis procedures

Each questionnaire returned was given a number as its identification code (Dörnyei, 2003). Questionnaires were numbered sequentially from 1 to 60. All items on the questionnaire except for open-ended items were assigned a code and the responses to items were assigned numerical values (Dörnyei, 2003). The codebook with coding frame can be found in Appendix E. SPSS was used to create a data file and to analyze the data.

Data cleaning consisted of checking for data that were impossible (numbers off of scales for example), completing a second data file to check against the first and ensuring that all values were entered correctly, and making decisions about procedures for outliers (Cresswell, 2005; Dörnyei, 2003). In addition, when missing values created a problem for data analysis, it made sense in the case of this project to do a pairwise deletion, which “refers to the temporary deletion of a case from the analysis” (Dörnyei, 2003, p. 106).

Descriptive statistics defined the sample in order that the sample demographics could be compared to population demographics. Each item on the survey was analyzed separately using descriptive statistics in order to give totals in counts and percentages for responses to each item; this provided an indication of student perceptions of the presence of school-related contributing factors associated with First Nations student retention within James Bay Eeyou School.

Assumptions

In designing this survey, I relied heavily on engagement and non-engagement indicators for First Nations students as determined by literature pertaining to factors influencing First Nations students and dropping out. I further assumed that student engagement levels can inform our perceptions of reasons for school leaving and for staying in school. Assumptions additionally include that the sample represented the population, that the questionnaire was valid, and that the respondents answered items truthfully (Walonick, 2004).

Limitations

This survey questionnaire was conducted in English within a school where most students’ mother tongue is Cree. The decision to use English as the language of the

questionnaire was made because many students are more comfortable reading in English than reading in Cree. In addition, most students in the French sector read and understand English quite well. Cree could have been used orally to bridge gaps in understanding along with verbal explanations and reading of the questions. However, using English caused very few problems in survey administration.

An additional limitation was related to the fact that the sample did not include those of school age who were already school-leavers: the results of the survey may in some ways indicate reasons for lack of engagement which led to school leaving for those students who are no longer in school, but on its own cannot be said with confidence to represent disengagement factors for actual school leavers. Qualitative data collected in order to elucidate perceptions on engagement factors from school leavers, however, greatly increased the ability of the study to genuinely reflect perceptions concerning engagement factors amongst both students within the school system and those who were school-age but had left the school system.

Further limitations included those commonly held for survey questionnaires: participant fatigue, unanswered questions, misunderstood questions, and psychologically threatening questions may be factors that affected results obtained (Creswell, 2005).

Chapter 5

Qualitative methods

Because of the “thin” description afforded by quantitative methods (Dörnyei, 2003), and because of the possibility for rich data collection and the ability to follow wherever data lead in emergent qualitative research, it was important to me to use a qualitative approach in addition to quantitative data collection. The freedom of expression and exploration afforded by qualitative methods added detail to the picture of student perceptions obtained by the Phase 1 survey. The use of qualitative methods enlarged the scope of this project, addressing all of the research questions guiding this process, whereas the questionnaire was designed to give an indication of student perceptions of one small part of the entire picture.

While this study was not of a strict grounded theory design, it was influenced by grounded theory, particularly constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2002; Schram, 2003). It was also emergent and participatory. This chapter outlines the design elements that were adopted from constructivist grounded theory, and details the participatory, emergent research process including sampling, data collection procedures, and analysis and interpretation procedures.

The influence of grounded theory

A particularly attractive aspect of grounded theory is the way in which theory is “derived from and grounded in data” (Schram, 2003, p. 73). By exploring the social activity of schooling, this research focused primarily on processes of “activities and interactions among people” (Creswell, 2005, p. 405), which is characteristic of grounded

theory. In attempting to generate a theory to explain these processes, grounded theorists emphasize emergence of theory utilizing constant comparative data analysis (Charmaz, 2002, Creswell, 2005). In order for theory to be “grounded” in data, a thorough literature review is held off until data collection begins (Charmaz, 2002).

Holding off of a literature review in the case of research done with Indigenous communities has the advantage of allowing a researcher to minimize the effects of previously utilized or developed mainstream theories concerning Indigenous peoples which may be either racist or unsuited to an analysis of events and processes within the community involved. Undoubtedly, it is no longer acceptable for mainstream academic theories to be *applied* to Indigenous peoples. Traditionally, a formal literature review is carried out to document “a need for a proposed study” (Creswell, 2005, p. 79). In this way, a literature review with pre-defined topics can guide the direction of a research process, and the topics of information sought. With a grounded theory approach, as theory emerges from data (Glaser, 1992), the research process does not develop based on or in previous academic theories or findings.

Consistent with a grounded theory approach and with my views concerning the importance of placing views, thoughts, and ideas from my community above those which might be found in existing research literature, a thorough literature review was not completed to inform this phase of the research process. I cannot say, however, that the process was not influenced by existing literature, as my own views about doing research, and about First Nations education and the success of First Nations students were indeed informed by my previous readings of academic education-related literature for my earlier research (Pashagumskum, 2005), coursework, and comprehensive portfolio preparation.

Also consistent with a grounded theory approach, literature was reviewed in areas dictated by the themes that emerged from the analysis of data (Charmaz, 2002). In doing so, however, it was necessary to ensure that the literature was not used to “validate” participants’ voices in any way; it is vital to acknowledge that participants’ views, ideas, and feelings stand on their own and are valid in their own right. The aim of literature utilized in reporting findings and interpretations of the data is to add further insight and elaborate on information gleaned from the data. Literature thus added to the overall picture, but should not be seen as superior in any way to the words of participants themselves, especially given the colonizing history of research on indigenous peoples (L. Smith, 1999).

While I agree with the way that grounded theory treats literature review, I am uncomfortable with other aspects of grounded theory, particularly with what has been termed Glaser and Strauss’ objectivist form of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2002; Patton, 2002; Schram, 2003). Conceptions of grounded theory might be seen on a continuum from objectivist to constructivist. Objectivist grounded theorists strive for objectivity (Patton, 2002). They see themselves as “external authorit[ies]” intent on describing the “real world”: the researcher “assumes an external reality awaiting a discovery and [her/himself] an unbiased observer who records facts about it” (Charmaz, 2002, p. 677). For objectivists, like Strauss and Corbin (1998), it is assumed that it is possible to use techniques to control for bias and subjectivity. Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) approach prescribes strict techniques for coding and phases for identifying different types of codes in an attempt to minimize researcher bias in the research process. Their highly structured process developed out of their concern for rigor (Patton, 2002).

Glaser's (1992) approach to grounded theory is critical of Strauss and Corbin (1998) for being more concerned with analysis rules than with the emergence of theory, but his approach is itself critiqued by Charmaz (2002) who sees Glaser, Strauss, and Corbin all over-emphasizing "methodological technology" that can be allowed, in an attempt to delineate objective reality, to take precedence over a subject's meanings. In Charmaz's constructivist approach, she "counters what she sees as a descriptive emphasis on facts and acts ... with a more subjective emphasis on feelings, assumptions, and meaning making of study participants" (Schram, 2003, p. 73). Integral to her approach are constructive assumptions, including: "(a) multiple realities exist, (b) data reflect the researcher's and the research participants' mutual constructions, and (c) the researcher, however incompletely, enters and is affected by participants' worlds" (Charmaz, 2002, p. 678).

To these assumptions, I add that while the researcher is affected by participants, the participants are affected by the researcher, emphasizing again that we are all constructed in-relation. I also add that if constructions are mutual then the research process itself must be a mutual construction because of what Patton (2002) calls the "theory-method linkage" of grounded theory: "how you study the world determines what you learn about the world" (p. 125). A participatory approach, in my community, is a necessary part of a truly caring research process that works towards building community, social justice, and self-determination at the individual and societal level. Such a research process values participants when they afford participants the place, space, and opportunity to become as involved as they wish in the entire research process.

Graveline (2003) argues that a participatory process is consistent with developing feelings of community and supporting communal action; responsibility to others and support of others are articulated in the process and further developed through the process. Within such a research process, all participants work together towards a common goal, creating the process as they work towards this goal. G. Smith (2000) speaks of the way in which Maori community members are invested in their transformational process because of the emotional and spiritual pull of validating one's own culture and identity; their transformational process involved re-creating their schooling system. A participatory process that focuses on a community's self-change allows participants to become emotionally connected not only to each other, but to the process itself because it is both validating and geared towards authentic change. Through this connection comes commitment, thus action. The consequences of a participatory process that is informed by constructivist grounded theory are examined below in reference to data collection and analysis.

Sampling procedures and procedures for consent

Purposeful sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2005) was used so that participants would include: students; people who are of school-age, but are not in school; members of the school community such as teachers, administrators, and guidance staff; and members of the wider community such as parents, Elders, and other community members. I solicited volunteer participation in the study with announcements over the local radio station and in letters outlining the research process that were sent to staff members of the school. I began with interviewing 5 students, 5 members of the school

staff, and 5 community members, and also conducted a focus group with the students who were interviewed.

As there was more than one phase to data collection and analysis, “opportunistic sampling” beyond this first group of participants was necessary in order to “collect new information to best answer the research question” (Creswell, 2005, p. 206). This type of sampling was done when warranted by analysis that pointed to areas for further investigation, such as when it became necessary to delve deeper into conceptions of culturally consistent education and 2 more participants were added to the data collection process. Further, after the preliminary analysis was presented to the focus group, I added 5 more participants, interviewing 2 more members of the school staff and 3 more members of the wider community. In total, then 5 students, 7 members of the school community, and 8 members of the wider community were interviewed.

Procedures to ensure informed consent were followed as outlined in Chapter 1. This was done both in writing and verbally. Potential participants were given a summary of the intended project, informed of its purpose, the types of data to be collected and how these data would be collected, that there were no known risks to participation, that steps would be taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, and the ways in which the research results will be disseminated. For those under the age of 18, parental consent was secured in addition to participant consent. (Please see Appendix A for consent forms and letters to potential participants and parents of potential participants.)

Data collection procedures

If the process is to be truly participatory, the method of data collection should not be determined by the researcher alone. Instead, decisions about how data are to be collected should be made with all participants. This means that the research process is envisioned as flexible and open to accommodate the needs and wishes of participants and in consideration of what emerges from the data. As I did in my MEd thesis (Pashagumskum, 2005), I presented my preferences for data collection procedures as outlined below to the community and to school authorities, anticipating that they would be approved, changed, or vetoed by participants. Data collection thus depended on the emergent nature of the entire process, but no changes to my plan for data collection were asked for or suggested.

One-on-one interviews and focus group interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2005) were the primary modes of data collection. I used Creswell's (2005) definition of qualitative interviews as occurring "when researchers ask one or more participants general, open-ended questions and record their answers" (p. 214). One-on-one interviews with students, members of the school staff, and members of the wider community were analysed and this preliminary analysis was brought to a focus group made up of the 5 secondary students. The data from the focus group was analyzed leading to a re-analysis of data collected previously in order to finalize the findings. Figure 4 below shows the data collection process.

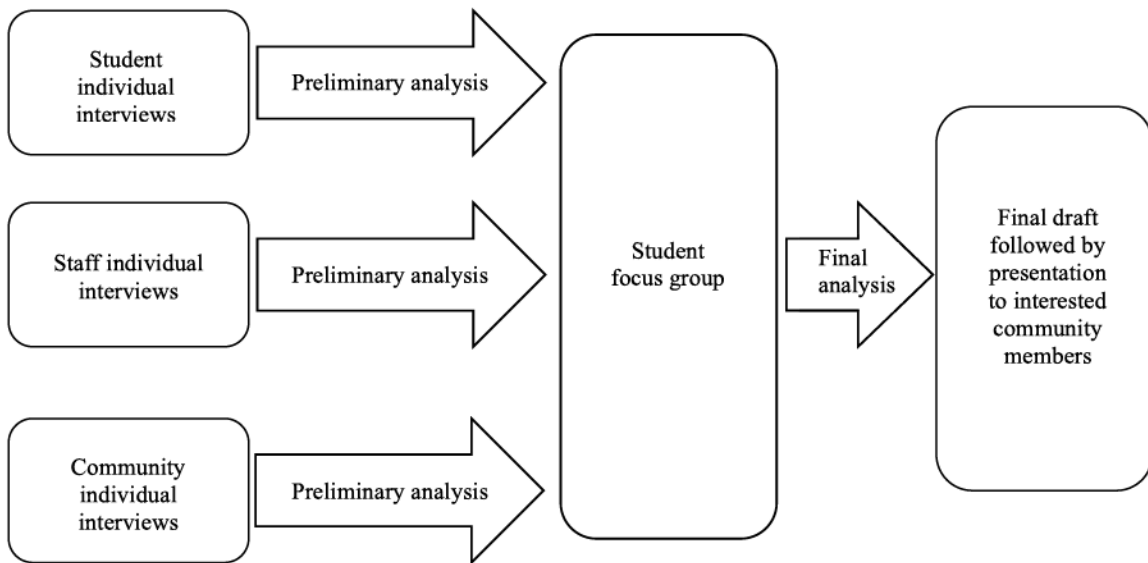


Figure 4: Data Collection and Analysis

While one-one-one interviews are ideal for collecting individual perspectives, focus group interviews “can be used to collect shared understanding from several individuals as well as to get views from specific people” (Creswell, 2005, p. 215). Given my theoretical inclinations and based on my previous experience conducting research with this community (Pashagumskum, 2005) and in the planning discussions with the community about this study, a focus group discussion for data collection was ideal as it provided opportunities for co-constructive meaning-making. In contrast, Charmaz (2002) as well as Glaser (1992) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) place great emphasis on individual interviews as forms of data collection.

The interviews and focus group were unstructured, although they were guided by issues raised by the questionnaire analysis and my own research questions as outlined at the beginning of this dissertation. Thus, the interviews and focus group were more like

discussions, where conversation flowed freely and participants' responses were not confined to an interview guide. Charmaz (2002) is concerned with the possibility of a researcher "forcing" data and therefore insists on a "focused" interview with an interview guide, although she does not insist on set interview questions. I, however, see the opposite problem: an interview guide can act as a tool for enforcing a researcher's agenda and therefore data will still be "forced." Indeed, I argue that we must let go of the idea of "forcing" data altogether – if we truly are creating conditions to co-construct meaning then we are all "forcing" data, whether we wish to or not. We come together with individual agendas in tow.

All that being said, I did choose to use an interview protocol, defined by Creswell (2005) as "a form designed by the researcher that contains instructions for the process of the interview questions to be asked, and a space to take notes" (p. 222). Instead of set questions, however, I had a list of topics that I wished to explore if participants brought up these topics in our discussion. The interview protocol also served as a reminder to discuss ethical considerations such as the protection of anonymity and other rights of participants, the purpose of the study, and give an overview of how data would be collected and used. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix G.

All interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded and downloaded to my computer for use with Atlas.ti (a program for qualitative data analysis as described below). The recordings were also transcribed and the transcriptions entered into Atlas.ti. In cases where a participant did not wish to be recorded (n=2), notes were taken, and these notes were considered data for analysis.

Open-ended responses from the questionnaire provided another source of qualitative data. These open-ended responses were developed to permit an exploration of “reasons for the close-ended responses and identify any comments people might have that are beyond the responses to the close-ended questions” (Creswell, 2005, p. 217). Open-ended response items on the questionnaires brought some added depth to the “thin” description afforded by quantitative data:

Although we cannot expect any soul-searching self-disclosure in responses, by permitting greater freedom of expression, open-format items can provide far greater “richness” than fully quantitative data. The open responses can offer graphic examples, illustrative quotes, and also lead us to identify issues not previously anticipated. Furthermore, sometimes we need open-ended items for the simple reason that we do not know the range of possible answers and therefore cannot provide pre-prepared response categories. (Dörnyei, 2003 p. 47)

Data analysis

Data analysis and interpretation was as participatory as possible, depending on the wishes of participants. I agree with Charmaz’s (2002) constructivist grounded theory view of data analysis as “as a construction that not only locates the data in time, place, culture and context, but also reflects the researcher’s thinking. Thus the sense that the researcher makes of the data does not inhere entirely within those data” (p. 677). Furthermore, in the constructivist grounded theory view, there is no “discovery” assuming an objective reality, but there can only be a “defining” of what is happening because of an assumption of multiple realities. I add to this constructivist view that,

because of the subjectivity of data analysis, and the way in which data analysis results in a story told from the analyst's perspective, ideally all participants are involved in data analysis and interpretation. It is only in taking such a participatory approach to sense-making that a product which represents all participants has the possibility of coming into being.

Participatory data analysis and interpretation is also about valuing the abilities and views of participants. Indeed, it is an issue of respect. This can best be understood using a Marxist definition of praxis when theory and action work closely together, each informing the other (marino, 1997), and conceptualizing "research as praxis" (Lather, 1991). As such, research leads to the collective construction of theory to be used for collective action against oppressive forces. Like Lather (1991), I believe that "[theory] must...be premised on a deep respect for the intellectual and political capacities of the dispossessed" (p. 55). We must see co-inquirers as qualified to know their own situations, qualified to develop theory about their own situations, and qualified to use this theory to determine goals and actions.

Data analysis and interpretation are always performed from a political stance. The aims of this research defined the political stance from which data were analysed. One aim was to support self-determination defined as understanding the ways mainstream constructs affect us so that we can make decisions about our future as an Indigenous community. Another aim was to take issue with such aspects of our education system as what is studied, how it is studied, hierarchical relations between teacher and student, between student and student, and whose worldview the system reflects.

Viewing analysis as an inherently biased activity is consistent with conceptions of critical discourse analysis (CDA) based in political action. According to Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000):

CDA advocates interventionism in the social practices it critically investigates....CDA should make proposals for change and suggest corrections to particular discourses. CDA thus openly professes strong commitments to change, empowerment, and practice-orientedness. (p. 449)

This description of analysis is consistent with my own views of the nature of analysis and the potential benefits of critically analysing data in order to create change.

Participatory data analysis means that, in accordance with wishes of participants, data may have to be re-analysed several times and changes may be made throughout the research process. Therefore, the line between data collection and analysis may be blurred and even eradicated at certain points as data are continually looked at by participants and re-visited in data collection sessions. In fact, grounded theory takes a constant comparison approach to data analysis where analysis is concurrent with data collection (Schram, 2003). Also in line with a grounded theory approach, the analysis highlighted areas for literature to be reviewed (Charmaz, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Participant engagement in data analysis during this study took place during the student focus group session when they were asked to give feedback on the preliminary data analysis and preliminary findings. Data analysis was then revisited with this feedback in mind before the final draft of findings was written.

Data analysis procedures

Much of the data consisted of word processor documents such as transcripts of digital audio files of interviews and the focus group and notes from interview protocol forms.

These documents were organized into the following computer files:

1. student data – containing interviews and focus group transcripts, open-ended responses from questionnaires, researcher notes
2. school employee data – containing interview transcripts, researcher notes
3. community member data – containing interview transcripts, researcher notes
4. personal data – research log containing memos to myself concerning data collection and analysis decisions

Copies of these files have been kept on a compact disc with a hard copy on paper.

I began all phases of qualitative analysis by reading through data to gain a “general sense of the material” and keeping notes as I went (Creswell, 2005, p. 236).

Analysis began with larger themes as they began to appear. These larger themes provided a framework for a thorough coding and categorizing of data. I used the coding process as described by Creswell (2005) to “make sense out of text data, divide it into text or image segments, label the segments with codes, examine the codes for overlap and redundancy, and collapse these codes into broad themes” (p. 237). Due to the size of this project and the complexity of the issues explored, the analysis process yielded a system of broad themes and sub-themes (Creswell, 2005).

I used computer analysis to “facilitate the process of storing, analyzing, and sorting data” (Creswell, 2005, p. 235). Atlas.ti is a Windows PC program:

which enables you to organize your text, graphic, audio, and visual data files, along with your coding, memos, and findings, into a project. Further

you can code, annotate, and compare segments of information. You can rapidly search, retrieve, and browse all data segments and notes relevant to an idea and importantly, build unique networks that allow you to connect visually selected passages, memos, and codes in a concept map. (Creswell, 2005, p. 235)

The program was chosen because I anticipated the necessity of working with and organizing a large amount of data. In addition to using Atlas.ti, I used Cresswell's (2005) suggestions for data analysis which include: using index cards to keep notes on emerging themes, colour coding transcripts, keeping two inch margins in transcripts for analysis notes, and using a journal to record memos to myself.

I completed preliminary analysis myself and then returned to participants with my analysis. The analysis was presented to participants as outlined above during a focus group session and I made clear that I was open to their input. There were no changes to the analysis necessary, but students took the opportunity to discuss and highlight issues that had arisen that were very important to them. Two such issues were the importance of their relationship with teachers and their experiences as victims of bullies or as bullies themselves. The analysis yielded areas for literature review, specifically in literature concerning student engagement. This literature review can be found in Chapter 6 of this dissertation and facilitated the development of interpretations and recommendations.

Conclusion

The qualitative procedures outlined in this chapter added to the quantitative procedures outlined in the preceding chapter, yielding a broad and detailed picture of issues related to engagement within our community school. In using a process which was

as participatory as possible, and being informed by such aspects of constructivist grounded theory as holding off a literature review and grounding theory in data, this research process not only produced valuable results and recommendations, but it was a positive experience for both the individuals and the community involved.

Chapter 6

Engagement: A Literature Review¹⁰

As stated in Chapter 2, the literature reviewed on engagement was guided by the codes and the themes that emerged from findings; these findings related to students' rejection or acceptance of the school system in our community and all centred around factors that either increase or decrease student engagement. The codes or themes that were determined through data analysis to be either contributors to, or detractors from, engagement were: respectful and caring relationships in the school; teaching approaches; teacher's understanding and sensitivity towards Cree culture and language; curriculum issues related to culture; community involvement; the school's receptiveness to student needs and perspectives; and personal ability to attend and persist in school. For the most part, for the participants in this study, engagement is predicted by a sense of belonging in school (termed as "affective engagement" in many studies). Findings also connect to academic engagement, which as noted below, the literature demonstrates, is intertwined with students' motivations in school and desire to persist.

Because engagement is such a broad topic, I placed certain parameters on this literature review. First, only literature published after January 1, 2000 was reviewed. Second, only peer-reviewed reports on empirical research were reviewed. Third, the codes and themes determined by the findings were used as topics relating to engagement

¹⁰ Engagement literature is also woven into the findings and discussion chapters (Chapters 8, 9, 10, and 11). Literature concerning First Nations education and the history of First Nations schooling has been explored in earlier chapters (Chapters 4, 5, and 6) as well as throughout the findings and discussion chapters.

in the search for relevant literature. Fourth, only those articles concerning engagement at the secondary level (here considered to be grades 7 to 12) were considered for review.

Most literature concerning engagement explores either affective engagement as illustrated by various aspects of students' sense of belonging within their schools, or academic engagement as illustrated by the amount of time and effort students put into their schoolwork. At the core of both types of engagement are relationships within the school and structures that provide the context for these relationships to play out. Accordingly, key issues in this literature are institutional climate related to student empowerment, academic standards, and discipline practices; relationships with peers and adults; teacher-related dimensions of engagement, including student-teacher relationships and teaching methods; student-related dimensions of engagement, including identity and self-esteem, and perceived instrumentality; and school characteristics including class and school size, type of programs offered, and extra-curricular activities. All of these have been shown in the literature to either detract from or encourage student bonding to school and/or motivation within school and thus impact the likelihood of school completion.

In the conclusion of this chapter, I offer a summary of findings from the literature reviewed that is relevant to the present study and also note which engagement variables found in the current study were not found in the existing educational research literature.

Institutional culture of the school

According to some, institutional culture has a limited effect on academic achievement amongst students (Brady, 2005), but a large effect on student engagement (Brady, 2005; Conchas, 2001). For low SES Latino students, school culture and

structures can mediate school engagement (Conchas, 2001). A supportive school environment affects engagement (Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Shernoff & Schmidt, 2008) by being based in mutual respect, fairness, positive communication, and by being non-competitive (Marks, 2000; Ryan & Patrick, 2001). The institutional culture of the school is discussed in the literature as made up of many components that have an effect on student engagement or belonging. These components mainly have to do with student empowerment (Hardre & Reeve, 2003; Johnson, 2008; McNeely et al., 2002; Raby & Domitrek, 2007; Ryan & Patrick, 2001), academic standards (Conchas, 2001; Ma, 2003; Marks, 2000; Ryan & Patrick, 2001), and discipline practices (Brady, 2005; Ma, 2003; McNeely et al., 2002; Pellerin, 2005; Raby & Domitrek, 2007).

Student empowerment. Students are empowered in school environments when they are given opportunities to take part in decision-making (Johnson, 2008; McNeely et al., 2002; Raby & Domitrek, 2007). Findings of Johnson (2008) and Raby and Domitrek (2007) offer an interesting comparison; students in the Johnson (2008) study “experienced high levels of engagement” when their voices were “heard through committees that manage school policy, budget, hiring, and public relations” (pp. 82-3), whereas Raby and Domitrek (2007) reported that students in their study “were made politically docile through their impotence as citizens who might engage with the rules that govern them” (p. 950) and, as a result, existed in a highly frustrated state within the school. Further, Johnson (2008) reported that the students of the school where their voices were heard “experienced high levels of engagement during all instructional methods and were more engaged in school than out of school” (p. 82).

Both Hardre and Reeve (2003) and McNeely et al. (2002) approached student empowerment from theoretical frameworks focused on student autonomy development. Hardre and Reeve used “Self-Determination Theory”¹¹ to create a motivational model to train teachers in student autonomy support techniques. Findings illustrate that support for student autonomy increases their senses of motivation and self-determination and was more powerful in affecting the choice to persist than academic performance. For Hardre and Reeve, the decision to drop out is not merely an academic decision but based more on self-motivation and perceived competence. While autonomy support nurtures “students’ needs for self-determination and competence,” Hardre and Reeve found that “when students perceived that these needs are being neglected or frustrated, then they become vulnerable to begin formulating dropout intention” (2003, p. 35). McNeely et al. reported similar findings. The middle and high school students in their study needed “steadily increasing opportunities for autonomy, support from adults, developmentally appropriate supervision and acceptance by peers” (p. 138). If these developmental needs were met, students’ connection to school increased.

Academic standards. Academic standards are variously spoken of in the literature as “academic rigor” (Conchas, 2001), “setting goals for academic performance” (Ryan & Patrick, p. 443), “high expectations” (Marks, 2000, p. 174), “academic press” (Ma, 2003, p. 340), and “academic achievement” (Brady, 2005, p. 308). Setting high expectations for students works hand in hand with positive relationships with peers and teachers to increase student engagement (Conchas, 2001; Marks, 2000; Ryan & Patrick; Tyler & Boelter, 2008; Wentzel, 2002; Yair, 2000). Ma (2003) found that in grade 6, academic

¹¹ Self-Determination Theory is concerned with the degree to which a person’s actions are self-motivated and encompasses both psychological needs and personality.

press, or how academically demanding the school is, is important to students' sense of belonging, but that this importance diminishes by grade 8 when the disciplinary climate becomes more important to the sense of belonging. Further, in order to maintain a sense of belonging, students must believe that their teachers and the school believe that it is important for all students to learn (Brady, 2005; Conchas, 2001; Ma, 2003; Marks, 2001; Shernoff and Schmidt, 2008). As well as being relevant, student work should be challenging and academically demanding in order to increase the likelihood of student engagement (Yair, 2000).

Discipline practices. The disciplinary climate can affect student belonging (Ma, 2003). Discipline practices are consistent with maintaining or encouraging student engagement when they are equally applied to all students (Brady, 2005). In a comparison of authoritative, authoritarian, and indifferent practices, Pellerin (2005) found that:

authoritative schools have the lowest levels of disengagement and indifferent schools the highest, while authoritarian schools have moderate levels of engagement.... Authoritative socialization is characterized by high demandingness (high standards for behavior and maturity, and firm enforcement of rules) and high responsiveness (warmth, open communication and respect for the developmental needs of the child. (p. 1160)

Schools with harsh discipline policies can make students feel less safe and lower their connection to school, but "school connectedness is lower in schools with difficult classroom management climates" (McNeely et al, 2002, p. 145). In addition, schools where students feel that they are disempowered are more likely to be places where

teachers and administrators focus on “petty policing” due to increased student resistance (Raby & Domitrek, 2007, p. 951). When, on the other hand, teachers focus on encouraging “self-management, and allow students to make decisions, the classroom management climate improves” (McNeely et al, 2002, p. 145).

Relationships with peers and adults

This section describes literature on the effect that relationships with peers and adults such as teachers and parents have on student engagement. For the most part, according to the literature, positive relationships, both with peers and with adults, support and enhance student engagement (Bond et al., 2007; Jennings, 2003; Ream & Rumberger, 2008; Van Ryzin et al, 2009; Yair, 2000).

Peer relationships. The literature concerning peers and engagement takes two different paths. Some of the literature outlines the role of engagement in the formation of positive relationships with peers, while some of the literature discusses the effect of different types of peer relationships on engagement. According to Ream and Rumberger (2008):

More engaged students appear to rise above the fray, taking critical steps towards the upside social capital scenario of finding friends who value education. The disengaged, however, are particularly susceptible to disaffected adolescent ideologies and orientations that can accelerate the formation of antischolastic identities and behaviours that lead them to drop out of school. (p. 126)

Ream and Rumberger also purport that extracurricular activities can be a way of encouraging students towards friendships that will be supportive of school completion. Ream and Rumberger's findings held for both Mexican American and white students.

Engagement is seen as a socializing agent that can help students to form friendships that support academic success (Brady, 2005; Ream & Rumberger, 2008). Given this, schools can ensure that engagement serves both a social function and "an important education function" by "facilitating resource-rich, school oriented friendship networks" (Ream & Rumberger, 2008, p. 125). For Van Ryzin et al. (2009), hope is a necessary ingredient in students' decisions to leave or stay in school, and they argue that hope is increased by peer support and engagement.

Peer support can also have very positive effects on meaningful participation in school and on grades (Jennings, 2003), and affects motivation if combined with other kinds of support such as the presence of empathetic teachers (Murdock & Miller, 2003). Vaquera (2009), in a study of Hispanic and white students, found that having a best friend can increase students' sense of belonging, but only if the best friend went to the same school. In Vaquera's study, ethnic origin is an important stratifier in studies of school belonging, as "Hispanic students are less likely to report having friends and to having their best friend at school" (p. 492).

On the negative side, peer pressure can harm engagement if peers have already dropped out or have begun to drop out of school (Ream & Rumberger, 2008) and peer pressure can have a negative effect on academic engagement if students spend too much time hanging out with peers and become preoccupied with things external to the classroom (Yair, 2000, p. 259). Furthermore, "poor social connectedness, being bullied

and having arguments with other students” in early secondary school can increase the “odds of depressive symptoms” and non-completion of school (Bond et al., 2007, p. 11).

Relationships with adults. Positive relationships with adults in and out of school can have beneficial effects on school belonging, and can increase school engagement (Holt et al., 2008; Jennings, 2003; Murdock and Miller, 2003; Reeve et al., 2004; Woolley and Bowen, 2007). Murdock and Miller (2003) found that the students who were most motivated were those who reported “above average teacher and parental support” (p. 395), and Jennings (2003) found that there was a significant, positive correlation between “MPS [meaningful participation in school] and caring adult relationships in school” (p. 48).

Woolley and Bowen (2007) found that increasing the number of supportive adults available to at-risk students could increase school engagement, while “students who experience poorer school engagement [had] lower levels of support from the adults in their surroundings” (p. 100). Further, Woolley and Bowen demonstrated that the presence of supportive adults could help to build resistance in at-risk students and students who are “members of historically discriminated minority groups” (pp. 100-101). Based on their study of a five-month mentoring program in school where adult school personnel mentored at-risk grade 9 students, Holt et al. (2008) suggest that at-risk students felt a stronger sense of belonging as a result of taking part in the mentoring program. These students had “significantly less decline during the first year of high school in perceived teacher support and decision making and were less likely to enter the discipline system” (p. 298).

Teacher-related dimensions

This section reviews literature on teacher-related dimensions of engagement by looking at the way that both student-teacher relationships and teaching methods affect engagement. Much of the literature finds that supportive and caring student-teacher relationships positively affect student engagement (Crosnoe et al., 2004; Faircloth, 2009; Murdock & Miller, 2003; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Van Ryzin et al., 2009; Walker & Greene, 2009). Likewise, teaching methods are suggested to enhance engagement, but only if those teaching methods are student-centred (Anderman, 2003; Johnson, 2008; Marks, 2000; Yair, 2000).

Student-teacher relationships. Much of the literature on student engagement relates to teacher-student relationships that have been shown to affect both motivation and sense of belonging in school (Faircloth, 2009; Murdock & Miller, 2003; Van Ryzin et al., 2009; Walker & Greene, 2009). Supportive and caring teachers who take an interest in students and create safe environments have been seen to play a role in encouraging both sense of belonging (Shernoff et al., 2003) and engagement (Van Ryzin et al., 2009). Supportive and caring student-teacher relationships lower discipline problems and increase academic achievement (Crosnoe et al., 2004; Ryan & Patrick, 2001), as well as provide a protective factor against youth participation in risky activities such as smoking, marijuana use, drinking alcohol in excess, violence with weapons, and sexual intercourse (Bond et al., 2007). Bond et al.'s findings suggest that "conventional connectedness to teachers can counterbalance negative influences of bonding to peers with non-conventional behavioral norms" (2007, p. 291).

Furthermore, according to Murdock and Miller (2003), teacher caring can ensure stronger student motivation, with teacher influence being "most likely cumulative from

one year to the next” (p. 393). In fact, Murdock and Miller found that student perceptions of teachers are reflected in the level of student motivation. Rumberger and Thomas (2000), however, reported contradictory findings about teacher-student relationships; dropout rates are lower in schools where *students* report the presence of high quality teachers, but are higher in schools where *principals* report the presence of high quality teachers. They write:

Although the findings appear contradictory, they may reveal different notions of high quality teachers as expressed by students and principals. In the eyes of students, good teachers may mean understanding and supportive teachers who can contribute to students staying in school, whereas in the eyes of principals, excellent teachers may reflect tough academic standards or strict disciplinary practices that contribute to some students quitting school. (pp. 55-56)

Lee and Burkam (2003) also found that when teacher-student relationships are positive, students are less likely to drop out of school, but that the effect also depends on school size and is only true if the school is smaller than 1500 students.

Teaching methods. Teaching methods are also seen to affect student engagement. While McFarland (2001) recommends using teacher-centred tasks to minimize opportunities for student resistance, most of the literature purports that more student-centred teaching methods will increase student engagement (Anderman, 2003; Johnson, 2008; Marks, 2000; Shernoff et al, 2003; Shernoff, 2008; Yair, 2000). Yair (2000) found that “students are alienated from instruction almost half the time” (p. 247), but that certain teaching methods can counter this alienation:

In relation to teacher-centered lectures, progressive instructional strategies and methods are better able to insulate students from alienating environments, whereas boring and non-relevant instruction allows external preoccupations to swamp students' attention, especially among Hispanic and African American students and those at risk of alienation from instruction. (p. 247)

Others define "progressive" strategies as more student-centred methods, especially collaborative learning techniques (Anderman, 2003; Johnson, 2008; Marks, 2000; Yair, 2000). For Johnson (2008), "low levels of student engagement may not be a 'student-problem' (e.g., lack of motivation) but may instead be a 'teacher-problem' (use of high proportions of passive instructional methods)" (p. 81). Some of the literature details rates of engagement for different types of teaching activities, with laboratories, work in groups, individual and group presentations, and discussions being the most engaging (Anderman, 2003; Yair, 2000). Lectures are the least engaging (Anderman, 2003; Johnson, 2008; Yair, 2000). There is some disagreement about the value of individual work on engagement; while Anderman (2003) found that individual work was highly engaging, Johnson (2008) found that collaborative or group work was more engaging and recommended using "lesser proportions of lecture and independent work to create a more engaging educational environment in general" (p. 81). The literature on engagement and teaching methods also stressed the importance of ensuring relevancy to students' lives in promoting engagement (Anderman, 2003; Faircloth, 2009; McFarland, 2001; Yair, 2000).

Yair (2000) further found that the more challenging the work for students, and the greater the academic expectations placed upon them, the more engaged they were with

instruction. The literature based on flow theory also emphasized students' perceptions of how challenging the tasks were; the level of challenge should be balanced with the students' skill levels in order to be highly engaging (Shernoff et al., 2003; Shernoff and Schmidt, 2008).

The literature based on self-determination theory also found increases in engagement when teachers:

Nurture inner motivational resources [such as student preferences and curiosities]; rely on informational, non-controlling language; promote value in uninteresting activities; and acknowledge and accept students' expressions of negative affect. (Reeve et al., 2004, p. 148)

Reeve et al. also found that teachers can be trained to use methods consistent with self-determination theory, as opposed to methods based in behaviourism such as extrinsic motivators like incentives and consequences, and that the use of such methods increases adolescent student engagement.

Student-related dimensions

Much of the engagement literature reviewed found that when students are provided with learning situations that allow them to develop their senses of identity, their sense of belonging in school increased as their self-esteem was raised (Broh, 2002; Faircloth, 2009; Ma, 2003). Likewise, some research finds that engagement is also increased when students see school as instrumental in obtaining future goals (Van Ryzin et al, 2009; Walker & Greene, 2009). This section considers such findings in literature on student-related dimensions of engagement.

Identity and self-esteem. The enabling of students to develop their sense of identity and keep their self-esteem intact is important to developing and maintaining a sense of belonging in a school (Broh, 2002; Faircloth, 2009; Ma, 2003). For example, Ma (2003) found that self-esteem is connected to sense of belonging with grade 6 and grade 8 students. Those students who had a higher sense of belonging also had higher levels of self-esteem:

students' attitude towards themselves is transferable to their attitude toward school. Students who had a greater feeling of worthiness appeared to feel more comfortable in their schools than did those students who felt less worth. (Ma, 2003, p. 346)

According to Broh (2002), there is a significant improvement in self-esteem for students in grades 10 and 12 who participate in sports. (More will be said about this in a later section on extracurricular activities.)

Faircloth (2009) found that schools can significantly contribute to students' sense of themselves if they are able to utilize learning to allow students to explore "[t]heir sense of self, of their own voice" (p. 342). Students in Faircloth's study experienced increased connection to their class "as a result of being able to 'speak' their identity" (p. 342):

Students' sense of connection and engagement in their classroom was supported while they participated in activities designed to encourage curricular connections with their identity and culture. (p. 321)

That being said, motivation and engagement might not be supported if "the individual and contextual perspective are discordant" (p. 343). In other words, if the school culture is not consistent with the student's culture, and there is no effort to make connections to

the student's culture, the student will have difficulty being motivated and engaged. Students were empowered by being able to connect to their own backgrounds and context and schools can increase engagement by helping students to learn in ways that allow them to explore and develop their own identities (Faircloth, 2009).

*Instrumentality.*¹² Students are more engaged and motivated when they believe that learning is useful to them. According to Van Ryzin et al. (2009), "those students who believe their environment to be more supportive of their needs tend to be more engaged in their learning" (p. 10). Similarly, Walker and Greene (2009) reported that the "adoption of mastery goals was predicted by perceived instrumentality, self-efficacy, and belonging, whereas cognitive engagement was predicted by belonging and instrumentality" (p. 463). Walker and Greene stressed the importance of teachers ensuring that students understand "why and how learning is personally relevant to their future" (2009, p. 469).

School Characteristics

Literature on engagement is also concerned with school characteristics. Reviewed in this section is literature on such school characteristics as class size, school size, types of programs offered, and the availability of extracurricular activities. For the most part, it appears from the literature that small class sizes and small school sizes positively affect student engagement (Finn et al, 2005; Lee & Burkham, 2003; McNeely et al, 2002), as does involvement in extracurricular activities (Broh, 2002; Ma, 2003; McNeely et al, 2002). There is very little research on types of programs (whether academic or vocational) and the findings from this research are contradictory.

¹² Instrumentality refers to a student's sense that persisting in school is a means to a goal they have set.

Class size. There is some disagreement in the literature about whether or not class size correlates with aspects of engagement. According to McNeely et al. (2002), class size is not associated with school connectedness, but Finn et al. (2005) found that small classes for the first three to four years of elementary school can increase the high school graduation rate. This was especially true for low SES students. Finn et al. theorized that the graduation rate increase was not particularly related to academic performance, but may be due to greater social and academic engagement amongst students who were part of smaller classes in early elementary. Both McNeely et al. (2002) and Rumberger and Thomas (2000) found that higher student-teacher ratios led to higher drop-out rates.

School size. As with class size, there is some disagreement in the literature about how school size affects engagement. According to McNeely et al. (2002) and Rumberger and Thomas (2000), larger schools have lower dropout rates. In contrast, Lee and Burkam (2003) found that in schools with a smaller school population (fewer than 1500 students), students are less likely to drop out. Likewise, McNeely et al. (2002) found that school size affects the students' connection to school with students in large schools feeling less connected to school.

Type of programs offered. There is very little research literature on the connections between student engagement and types of programs offered or courses offered to students. What exists is contradictory. While Lee and Burkam (2003) reported that when “schools offer mainly academic courses and few non-academic courses, students are less likely to drop out” (p. 353), Anderman (2003) reported that students are “more engaged in their non-academic subjects (i.e. computer science, art, and vocational education) than in their academic studies” (p. 171). Anderman further reported that while

students found their non-academic courses to be “more intrinsically motivating” (p. 171), they also found that their academic courses were “more intense (i.e. challenging and important)” (p. 171). Taking into consideration Walker and Greene’s (2009) finding that students were cognitively engaged when their perception of the instrumentality of a course was high, perhaps Anderman’s (2003) finding that academic courses are seen as more important can be taken to mean that academic courses are more cognitively engaging?

Extracurricular activities. Involvement in extracurricular activities has been shown to increase students’ sense of belonging to their school (Ma, 2003) and feelings of school connectedness (McNeely et al., 2002). As shown by Broh (2002), participation in extracurricular activities helps to strengthen relationships between various stakeholders: “students and parents, students and the school, parents and the school, and parents and parents” (p. 78). According to Ream and Rumberger (2008), “engagement in extracurricular activities tends to orient students toward the social capital upside” and counter the pull of peers towards less desirable social behaviour. In addition, participation in extracurricular activities “significantly improves self-esteem, locus of control, and time on homework” (Broh, 2002, p. 78). Extracurricular activities can also improve relationships with teachers by increasing time spent with teachers outside of class (Broh, 2002).

However, not all extracurricular activity involvement has a positive impact on schooling; Broh’s (2002) results show that “participation in some activities improves achievement, while participation in others diminishes achievement” (p. 69). While interscholastic sports were found to be beneficial both academically and socially for

students, intramural sport participation was negatively correlated with academic achievement as shown by math and reading scores. Participation in music groups, student council, drama clubs, or yearbook/journalism clubs can positively affect achievement as well. According to Broh, those extracurricular activities that have positive impacts share the common characteristics of “structure, adult supervision, and parental involvement” (p. 87).

Conclusion

The literature reviewed here paints a clear picture: there are many ways that the school can alter the way it interacts with students and the types of resources it offers students in order to increase engagement. For the most part, the thematic areas that developed from the analysis of findings were areas found in the school engagement literature. There were, however, some areas where my search for relevant literature to review did not prove fruitful. No literature was found on the effects that counseling services have on student engagement, nor the effects that substitute teachers and teacher absence have on engagement, nor on the effect of community involvement in schools on students engagement. These areas are highlighted in the recommendations in Chapter 12 as areas for further research.

Chapter 7

Introduction to findings and discussion on engagement and disengagement factors

In mainstream research the phenomenon of “dropping out” is commonly defined as an issue of individual failure.... Youth “fail,” either academically or socially, to make it through school. The problem exists not because of deficiencies in the schools but rather because of deficiencies in individuals and families. Youth who leave school are described as deviant, dysfunctional, or deficient because of individual, family, or community characteristics. Solutions reside on remediating or changing youth and families to better “fit in”. After all, most youth do succeed in school, suggesting evidence of the school as an effective institution. This body of research ignores the barriers institutions themselves create for youth. Another line of research on dropouts has turned a critical eye towards the role the school and structural barriers play in creating the problem. (Dehyle, 1992, ¶ 3)

The above quote is from an article outlining part of Dehyle’s (1992) longitudinal research study with Navajo and Ute youth. Dehyle problematized mainstream research and the way in which it can define problems as inherent to the makeup of First Nations people and peoples, specifically in defining reasons for school leaving among American Indian youth. Following Dehyle’s lead, I discuss in the following four chapters engagement and disengagement factors by elucidating reasons for Eeyou youth to remain in or leave school at the secondary level. As discussed in Chapter 1, I connect engagement to the decision to remain in or to leave school. Like Dehyle, I worry about focusing on the youth as the problem in the school leaving equation, and thus instead have attempted to focus on barriers within the school system itself and on barriers created by the wider social experience that youth face within the community. Through the findings outlined in the following three chapters, it becomes apparent that the decision to leave school is

frequently a decision that the school itself forces students into, either by unintentionally creating barriers to them staying in school or by unintentionally being unsupportive of their wishes to remain in school.

Overview of themes and chapters

As discussed in Chapter 2 outlining my overall methodology, it is important that research done in First Nations communities does not expect mainstream research findings to necessarily be relevant; nevertheless, use can be made of mainstream research findings if those findings are evaluated in light of the community situation. Chapters 8, 9, and 10 examine whether engagement factors and disengagement factors determined by research done elsewhere do indeed apply to our students and, if so, the extent to which these factors apply. The following three chapters combine the results of the student survey on school-related engagement or disengagement factors with results from the interviews and focus groups. The survey findings determined the presence and extent of already known factors, while the findings from the qualitative data established how important these factors are in decisions to remain or stay in school. Thus engagement and disengagement factors for students were determined through analysis of data from the quantitative survey of students in the secondary school in conjunction with an analysis of qualitative data from the student survey, interviews with students, parents, grandparents, school staff members, and other community members such as Elders, and the student focus group.

The student surveys generated data that have been encapsulated in nine main themes:

- Teachers' understanding and sensitivity towards Cree culture

- Curriculum issues related to culture
- Community involvement
- Respectful and caring relationships within the school
- Schoolwork as interesting or uninteresting
- The school's receptiveness to student needs and perspectives
- Teaching approaches
- General attendance, school leaving and staying factors
- Seeing a purpose to going to school

Survey data were analyzed as outlined in Chapter 4, and then re-examined and further interpreted in light of the analysis of qualitative data. When survey data were reconsidered in light of qualitative analysis results (as described in Chapter 5), it became apparent that it made more sense to collapse closely related themes into each other.

Therefore, to describe the perceptions of the presence of engagement and disengagement factors affecting students, results from both quantitative and qualitative data are presented and discussed together under the following seven main themes:

- Respectful and caring relationships in the school
- Teaching approaches
- Teachers' understanding and sensitivity towards Cree culture and language
- Curriculum issues related to culture
- Community involvement
- The school's receptiveness to student needs and perspectives
- Personal ability to attend/remain

I begin with the theme “respectful and caring relationships in the school” as it is the central theme around which all other themes pivot. This theme is presented in Chapter 8 by itself because of its central importance to the results of this study.

Chapter 9 describes and discusses findings concerning teaching approaches and curriculum issues pertaining to engagement, focusing on the themes “teaching approaches,” “teachers’ understanding and sensitivity towards Cree culture and language,” and “curriculum issues related to culture.” Chapter 10 describes and discusses findings on student needs being met within the school by elaborating on the themes “the school’s receptiveness to student needs and perspectives,” “personal ability to attend/remain,” and “community involvement” which includes parent and extended family involvement.

Chapter 11 presents findings and discussion concerning the creation of an alternative schooling experience that could be more conducive to student engagement. Through analysis it became apparent that, for the most part, increasing engagement is inextricably tied to increasing cultural consistency between the school and the community’s culture. Chapter 11 also focuses on enhancing the cultural experience as a way to enhance student ability to remain in school, reflecting on the findings concerning engagement and disengagement factors presented in Chapters 8 through 10.

The dissertation concludes in Chapter 12 with final thoughts and recommendations.

Chapter 8

Findings and discussion:

Respectful and caring relationships within the school

The results presented here concerning relationships within the school showed a lack of a sense of community within the school, fear amongst students, and the perception that un-affirming relationships exist amongst and between the adults in the school and students. The following section describes and discusses this lack of a sense of community in terms of students' sense of belonging, adults not working together, the relationships between students, and the relationships between students and adults in the school. Overall, it is apparent that students and other community members believe that, in terms of creating respectful and caring relationships within the school, the school must increase efforts to build relationships within the school, and if relationships within the school were improved, students would be more likely to stay in school.

A sense of belonging

Previous research indicated that parents and other community members perceive students as feeling a lack of support from our community's school leading to low self-esteem and a lack of a sense of belonging at school (Pashagumskum, 2005). Friedel (1999), speaking of First Nations students within an urban school, agrees that working on a child's self-image is important. In addition, Osterman and Freese (2000) have linked a sense of school membership to engagement, saying that unengaged students "perceive schools as uncaring environments" (p. 288) and that:

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

According to Osterman and Freese, in order to be engaged, students must feel a sense of belonging and “relatedness” (p. 289) to their school.

Students themselves named “not belonging” during the student focus group interview as a reason why they thought about dropping out; all of the students who took part in the focus group thought of leaving school at different times in secondary school. According to these students, if there were more extracurricular activities within the school, the school would be a more enjoyable place to be and this would help to create a sense of belonging. Students in the focus group said that there were “no activities” (participant 17) in the school.

Many students named sports activities as a way of creating a sense of community within the school, saying that there are not enough of these, but students also said that there were no arts-based extracurricular activities and that they would be interested in activities like art and photography clubs. Drama was named as an extracurricular activity that would be attractive to students: “You know what I always wanted? Drama” (participant 14). A former student who was a recent graduate also named drama as a way

of creating a sense of belonging. This person had been to a school in a city and had taken drama there:

When you take drama too. Your shyness. You're not so shy.... You're gonna see everybody participate. You are all going to know each other... you are going to fit in, you know? (participant 11)

It is clear that these students see extracurricular activities as a necessary factor in their sense of belonging within the school, and that they feel the school is lacking in this area. It is also clear that students want the school to be proactive and provide ways for them to increase their sense of belonging.

A lack of extracurricular activities was also seen as problematic by community members and school employees. For parents, after-school activities are seen as an integral part of the total school environment. Parents specifically named the school environment as a problem, saying they would like the school environment to be more “welcoming” (participants 4 and 6) and according to parents, if there were a well-developed extracurricular program running in the school, students would feel better about being in school. As one parent said,

To be more welcoming, not just go there to do the work. But put a little fun in it. I don't know how you'd do that. Activities. Are there any after school activities for the kids in the high school? (participant 4)

According to these parents, their children are bored much of the time in school, and they believe that extracurricular activities would help to create a more engaging school environment. Three students who completed the survey named boredom on open-ended questions that asked for reasons they might think of dropping out of school. This

boredom could be related to a lack of after-school activities and it could also be related to teaching approaches and learning situations, which are explored later in Chapter 9.

Literature related to extracurricular activities purports that participation in extracurricular activities can increase students' sense of belonging or connectedness to school (Ma, 2003; McNeely et al., 2002). One of the benefits of after-school activities is that the activities can create a space outside of the classroom where teachers and students can form positive relationships (Broh, 2002), increasing the students' sense of belonging to the school. Participation in extracurricular activities can also impact student achievement, although Broh (2002) cautions that while some types of activities positively affect student achievement, other types of activities can negatively affect student achievement; those that have a positive effect have certain characteristics in common such as "structure, adult supervision, and parental involvement" (p. 87). If the school can provide after-school activities with these characteristics, it is highly probable that there would be a positive effect on school engagement levels amongst students. In sum, extracurricular activities can be spaces created to encourage caring relationships between students and adults and also to help students feel that they are supported by the adults in their lives.

Staff members recognize that the social environment of the school is a problem. Their responses pointed to the idea that there is no sense of community within the school and that this is tied to students' lack of engagement; they argue that the school is not a comfortable place to be for students.

The home and school atmosphere or environment affects them in how they see the school... school environment or atmosphere that's the same thing.

Where they are they have to feel comfortable. They have to feel they

belong in that place. They belong in the school. And that's how they learn best. If they feel comfortable where they are. (participant 8)

One staff member did see extracurricular activities as a way to increase students' sense of belonging by increasing students' enjoyment in school and their ability to feel part of a school community, but most staff members were more concerned about adults not working together within the school and the effect that this had on the sense of community within the school, which will be discussed in the next section.

Relationships amongst staff members

Relationships amongst staff members, namely administration, teachers, and guidance staff, seem problematic within the school. One staff member's words are representative:

A couple of us one time said this is what we need, this is what we should do: an educational conference. I myself am not the only one that thinks of that. Maybe this is what we should – need – to do. And then we approached the administration. “Ok, go ahead. Set it up.” Wow. What a slap in the face. We wanted to hear, “Yes, we should do it. Let's work together. Let's have a meeting with so and so.” Not like, “Ok, set it up.” That was quite a slap in the face. It wasn't because we were thinking of the work we would have to do. That wasn't the positive response that we had expected, it was like a slap in the face. (participant 5)

It appears it is not only students who do not feel much of a sense of belonging, then, but also some staff. This is due partly to the general lack of a sense of community within the school.

Not only does the problem of adults within the school not working together exist, but some school staff members also realize that they are not working with parents and the wider community. As this school staff member says, not doing so is a problem because:

We need the help of everybody. Once they know that everybody's working together, you know. That will help too 'cause [the students will] know that everybody's looking out for them. (participant 5)

According to Ma (2003), teachers shape the climate of the school and the climate can either be one that affects engagement positively or negatively. Participant 5 in this study appears to understand that students need to feel that adults are working to support them, but that tensions amongst staff members might be working against this perception. The research literature on school climate usually focuses on academic pressure, discipline, or student empowerment (see Chapter 6), but the responses concerning relationships within the school point to a possibility that relationships between staff members also need to be brought into the student engagement equation. Student perceptions of community and parental involvement are discussed further in Chapter 10 as a part of the student's "personal ability to attend and remain in school."

Relationships between students

Students were also asked about safety issues in school in survey items about bullying, teasing, and gang-related problems. These issues are a part of the total make-up of the school's environment as caring or non-caring, and an expression of relationships as either caring or non-caring within the school. Furguson et al. (2005) found that youth who were school leavers or at risk of becoming school leavers cited a troubled school environment due to bullying and other forms of violence and connected this issue to

caring in general within the school. The inaction of the school in dealing with these issues moved these youth further along the path of disengagement from school.

Students interviewed cited bullying as a reason that they have thought about leaving school at certain times. During a focus group interview, students related that bullying is a major problem in the school, with all saying that they have felt fear at different times in the school, and all have been bullied at some point while in school. Much of the bullying takes place as verbal intimidation and put-downs, causing students to avoid school and eventually to leave school completely because they have missed so much of the academic work. Here is one excerpt from the focus group:

Participant 14: [speaking of student motivations to leave school]
[Students] miss so much. When I was pregnant. I was, like all, pregnant and then I heard a girl and her friends walk by. They said, “That’s not even her boyfriend’s kid.”

Sarah: That was bullying? [girl nods] Do a lot of people leave because they feel bullied?

Participant 14: Yes. [Others concur]

Students also voiced the fact that many students find a solution to being bullied by turning on other students:

I was bullied throughout school. I didn’t leave. I became a bully.

(participant 17)

Parents and other community members also said that bullying is a major issue within the school. One parent, when asked how she felt about the school in general,

called the school “horrible” because there were “too many bullies” within the school and she worried constantly about her son. Parents also concur with students that the bullying in the school is directly tied to school leaving: “Bullying is a problem too. Kids leave because of bullying” (participant 6). One parent told the story of her child’s experience being bullied and her attempts to intervene at the school. She spoke to the principal and the guidance department, but said that nothing was done to curtail the bullying. The problem escalated and she again spoke to the administrators, guidance staff, and the teachers of her child. She does not feel that the problem was ever dealt with and she feels that it was allowed to continue. According to this parent, there is no clear process to deal with bullying in the school, and she argued that there should be a process to bring about resolution and reconciliation.

Responses on the student survey were consistent with interview data citing bullying as a major problem. Alarming, as can be seen below, the rate for bullying within this school appears to be far higher than the Canadian national average, which is reported at somewhere between 11% and 17.8% (Craig & Harel, 2004); according to student survey responses, 47.4% of students in this school have been negatively affected by bullying. Responding to items about personal feelings of safety within the school, students responded in the following ways:

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
12.3	7.0	26.3	52.6

Table 1: Bullying Has Been a Problem for Me

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
12.3	12.3	35.1	40.4

Table 2: Teasing Has Been a Problem for Me

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
8.8	5.3	35.1	50.9

Table 3: Gangs Have Been a Problem for Me

In response to an item asking students whether they felt safe in school, only 21.1% of students said they always felt safe in school, while 47.4% of students said they felt safe only sometimes or never. In terms of feeling unsafe in school, 36.8% of students said they never felt unsafe in school, while the remaining 63.2% said they felt some degree of being unsafe within the school: 10.5% said always, 10.5% said most of the time, and 42.1% said sometimes.

Students for whom personal safety was a problem gave some of the following elaborations on their surveys as reasons that they might drop out of school or choose to be absent from school:

Getting beaten up and being picked on all the time. (survey respondent)

Because when someone says something to me from school...because someone was saying [malicious things] to me. (survey respondent)

Kids always bullying me and disturb me that why I don't go to school too much. (survey respondent)

Not many students took the time to provide qualitative responses on their surveys, so these open question survey responses must be given a great deal of importance as something that these students really want us to know about.

With the large percentage of students indicating that bullying, teasing, and gangs have been problems for them, and only 21.1% of students indicating that they always feel safe within the school, it is clear that there are significant worries about a lack of personal safety within the school because of other students. This fear affects not only their personal feelings of safety and comfort within the school, but also impacts their academic performance. For example, during a focus group interview session, students relayed that they are afraid of asking questions during class because they fear the reaction of other students. Community members recognize that students' fear of others prevents them from performing academically:

Kids who really wanted to learn don't have that opportunity in the Cree School Board system. It's because of jealousy from the other students, so they don't want to excel. They want to be part of the group. They give minimum effort.... I have a couple of nephews that were in that situation. It was sad to see them not excel, not be given the opportunity to excel. Just to make their passing marks. (participant 10)

Some school staff members argue that the school needs to help students to feel safer within school and tie this lack of safety to student disengagement:

The students need to feel like the school is a secure place to be.... Make them feel happy and secure like they are there to learn about things. Get along with everybody. (participant 5)

The literature on the effect of peer relationships with school engagement is clear; students who experience victimization in early secondary school are less likely to complete secondary school (Broh, 2002). Conversely, engagement and academic success might be

increased if the school takes on the role of helping students to form positive relationships with peers. Extracurricular activities have been shown to play a role in encouraging positive peer relationships (Broh, 2002). Furthermore, caring peer relationships have been shown to positively affect both grades and meaningful participation in school (Jennings, 2003). A concerted effort to help students interact in positive ways with each other would likely pay off in increased student engagement, academic performance, and school finishing. Sadly, however, much of the discomfort that students are experiencing within the school is a result not only of challenging peer interactions but also a result of poor relationships with teachers. The following section discusses student feelings of fear and insecurity as a result of their relationships with teachers.

Student-teacher relationships

Student engagement has also been linked to teacher-student relationships (e.g., Osterman & Freese, 2000; Reyhner, 1992). Research cited in Osterman and Freese (2000) indicates that teacher-student relationships are even more important than family or peer support in determining student engagement. Furthermore, “caring teachers showed consideration and understanding and had a relationship that extended beyond the boundaries of the classroom” (p. 294). Research on Aboriginal student drop-out rates shows that teachers who are perceived as caring can have an amelioratory effect on school leaving (Hale, 2002).

These views of teacher-student relationships were supported by participant responses during this study. A recent graduate said that the relationship with one of her teachers made a great difference to her motivation to stay and complete secondary school:

That's really important to have that connection with your teacher too. It's really good when it shows that they are interested in your education, that they really care for you to move up a grade to finish. I don't want teachers to teach you and then take off. (participant 11)

These students stressed that they must feel that their teachers believe in them if they are going to be motivated to attend school and do their work. During discussions with students, they always came back to their relationships with teachers; it was extremely important to them. According to students, more of them would stay in school "if the teachers were a little bit more involved in students. If they at least pretended that they cared" (participant 14).

Like students, school staff members and members of the wider community also view teacher-student relationships as an important factor in student success. Parents said that a relationship with a teacher could be a deciding factor in their children's decision to remain or leave school:

For the first three years that my son was going he was going to school because of the teachers. He liked his teachers the first three years that he went. (participant 4)

Similarly, most school staff members interviewed indicated that relationship-building between teachers and students was vital.

They have to interact with the kids. That's important. You can't just be there to teach and say, "Ok, this is what you're learning. Blah, blah, blah, okay, bye, see you." (participant 2)

There has to be the administration, and the teachers really have to have a strong relationship and participation with the students. (participant 8)

Clearly, the ideal relationship with a teacher extends beyond the transmission of academic knowledge to students. Students need to have a strong social-emotional connection to their teacher in order to feel comfortable and supported in attending and remaining in school.

Unfortunately, this social-emotional connection appears to be missing for many students. Survey items indicating school as a caring environment conducive to engagement focused mainly on perceptions of teacher-student relationships and teachers' caring. Nearly half of students feel that they have a good relationship with their teacher always, or most of the time, while a little more than half say they have a good relationship with their teacher only sometimes or never:

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
21.1	28.1	47.4	3.5

Table 4: I Have a Good Relationship With My Teacher

The items concerning the school as a caring environment also asked students to indicate whether they perceive other school staff members as caring, such as the guidance staff and the administrative staff. The following tables show the responses to these items:

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
29.8	15.8	38.6	15.8

Table 5: My Teachers Care About Me

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
22.8	19.3	42.1	15.8

Table 6: The Guidance Staff Cares About Me

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
28.1	15.8	29.8	24.6

Table 7: The Principal and Vice Principal Care About Me

As you can see, less than 50% of students believe that they are cared for always or some of the time by teachers, guidance staff, and administrators, while more than half of students believe that adults in the school care about them only sometimes or never. 45.6% of students believe that teachers care for them always or most of the time, 42.1% of students believe that guidance staff cares about them always or most of the time, and 43.9% of students believe that administrators care about them always or most of the time. These results are particularly important when coupled with the assertion made by students in interviews that feeling cared for within the school is extremely important to them and their engagement.

Interviews with students, school staff, and members of the wider community shed further light on student relationships with teachers. Unfortunately, most of the discussion about teacher-student relationships highlighted the fact that, for too many students, their relationships with their teachers are not consistently supportive or caring. Participant 11 spoke of having a very good relationship with only one teacher:

It was so hard. The math here was so hard, but when [teacher name] came along in secondary 5, it was different. Like he helped us. And some of the students there, they didn't care. And I really cared about my math. It was

something that I liked. And he really cared and that's something I didn't have before. And that's something that I never seen before.

The following subsections further explore the student-teacher relationship in terms of the need for students to feel they can trust teachers not to hurt them emotionally, the need for students to feel that their input is valued, the need for students to have individual time with teachers, and the effect that a high teacher turnover rate and teacher absence can have on the ability for students to build positive relationships with teachers.

Distrusting teachers. During interviews it became apparent that the bullying issue in the school extends beyond student-student relationships, and into the area of teacher-student relationships. Students speak of teachers using verbal put-downs:

Sarah: Are there a lot of conflicts between teachers and students?

Participant 14: Yes.

Participant 15: They are supposed to encourage us and they put us down.

Participant 14: You always feel good if a teacher says you are doing good.

Fear of teachers was also named as a factor in lack of academic success. For many participants, the fear of asking teachers for help when they needed it hampered the ability to succeed academically for many students and this, in turn, led to students leaving school. According to parents, students are not comfortable with the teachers and so will

not go to teachers with problems that they are having with their schoolwork. One parent spoke of a lack of trust in teachers:

He is scared to ask questions because teachers might say, "I already told you this" or afraid the teacher will embarrass him in front of the class.

(participant 7)

A school staff member said of students that, "They are afraid to talk to the teacher. You are not supposed to be afraid to talk to your teachers" (participant 2). Students consistently voiced in the interviews a fear of asking questions of their teachers because they were afraid of being ridiculed or put down. In response to an item asking whether teachers and students respect each other, only 29.8% of students said "always." The total of "sometimes" and "never" categories was very high at 49.2%. It should be noted, however, that only 8.8% of students said that they and their teachers "never" respect each other.

Nevertheless, 40.4% of students said that they only sometimes have a mutually respectful relationship with their teachers and during interviews many examples of inappropriate remarks made by teachers to students were given such as:

You are not going to pass anyway. Why do you bother reading?

(participant 1)

I was walking by one day and a teacher said, "You are a loser."

(participant 15)

These types of utterances are both inappropriate and potentially damaging to students' sense of self. Inappropriate and highly unprofessional remarks such as those above, and the fear of such remarks, certainly affects these students' desire to remain in school.

Within this school, then, there appears to be a serious rift between teachers and students; teachers and students must be brought together and caring relationships must be formed if the school expects student engagement and high school finishing numbers to increase. Research shows that students with positive views of their teachers do better in school, showing higher academic achievement and fewer disciplinary problems (Crosnoe et al., 2004). In small schools with populations of less than 1500, such as this school, students are less likely to drop out of school when student relationships with teachers are positive (Lee & Burkam, 2003). According to Murdock and Miller (2003), "the level of motivation students exhibit in the classroom reflects in part their perceptions of the teacher" (p. 396). Clearly student-teacher relationships is an engagement variable that must be addressed in this school, and if addressed, could bring about positive change in regards to students' schooling experience.

Showing respect for students. When asked what makes a good teacher, student responses centred around caring. They perceived caring teachers as those who wanted to spend time with students after school in academic or extracurricular activities and who interacted with students in friendly and concerned ways. Caring interaction was seen as showing respect for students. This meant having high standards in terms of academic performance.

Sarah: What about a good teacher? What's a good teacher?

Participant 17: [names a teacher]

- Sarah: Why is he good?
- Participant 15: He makes learning funner. Like, if we say something wrong, he still encourages us to try.
- Sarah: He doesn't give you the answer?
- Participant 15: No.
- Participant 16: He's funny.
- Sarah: And...?
- Participant 14: He's fun, not funny.
- Participant 15: You can be open with him.
- Participant 16: Him or her.
- Sarah: A good teacher is not someone who lets you get away with things? A good teacher is someone who wants you to take responsibility?
- Participants: All agree.

Much of the discussion around respecting students centred around valuing student abilities. Students spoke of seeing “a lot of low expectations” (participant 11) of students within the school, sometimes in terms of behaviour, but mostly in terms of academic ability. Parents did too:

[My child] was really bored too. Three years back, when the teacher, they had this test. Exam. History exam, I think. [My child] asked the teacher, “What kind of exam is this?” They had a crossword puzzle for an exam?

[My child] asked [the teacher], “Can you give us a real exam? A real test?” It was just kind of a free period. And stuff like that. (participant 4)

Many participants felt that the school provides a substandard education academically compared to urban schools in the south:

We weren’t really taught well. I don’t want to be mean, you know, but it’s just that [standards] weren’t as high as the education [in southern schools].
(participant 11)

Similarly, on the student survey, students were asked yes/no questions in regards to difficulty of schoolwork. The following table compares the response rates for these two questions:

	Yes	No	Invalid responses
School is easy	59.6%	35.1%	5.3%
School is hard	38.6%	54.4%	7.1%

Table 8: Difficulty of School Work

The invalid responses were responses that were left blank, and might be due to student difficulty with choosing either a “yes” or “no” response to the question. The near consistency in responses between the two items, however, shows us quite strongly that a high percentage of students – over half – believe that they are not being challenged academically. More survey responses to items concerning academic programming and preparation for the future are explored in Chapter 9 as findings related to motivation and the personal ability to attend or remain in school.

For graduates and students, low expectations were especially detrimental to their abilities to perform academically in their second language (either English or French). Some staff members acknowledge the low expectations of students and are very frustrated with it.

That is something we need to work on. We need to have the children to see that we want them to speak another language... then they'll respond to you and they'll try. Whereas if we just say, "Oh, they're not learning, I'll just do very easy work with them," what we are doing is blocking them from advancing, from advancing their language. Sometimes you'll hear teachers say, "They can't do this work, so I'm going to give them the work that they can do." What they are doing is they are not advancing them. They are just doing it the easy way but the students are not moving forward with the language. I know teachers who gave students advanced work. The first few weeks were hard. They told me it was hard, but after a couple of weeks, a month or so, it went very well. The students were responding. They were happy with the work and they like the challenge. I think every child should be challenged. They know when they are challenged and they want to show you they can do it. (participant 5)

Participants connect this lack of academic challenge in the school with poor performance. If standards, or academic expectations, were higher, it was felt that students would "perform better and push to work harder" (participant 11).

The findings concerning academic standards are particularly troubling given that "perceived teacher expectations" are a "significant predictor of students' academic

efficacy and [emotional, behavioral, and cognitive] engagement” (Singh et al., 2010, p.174). High expectations from teachers can encourage students to perform at their highest possible levels, whereas “teacher expectations for low performances can be particularly debilitating to student achievement” (Wentzel, 2002, p. 298).

Student empowerment/valuing student input. The perceived lack of respect for students extends beyond low expectations to lack of valuing of student input and lack of hearing student voice within the school. According to Wotherspoon and Schissel (2003), schools who are receptive to student needs and perspectives are more successful. The student survey asked students for information about the extent to which they are involved in decision-making within the school in terms of rules, what happens in their classroom, and the type of work they are assigned. The survey also asked for information on the hearing of student voice in class: whether they speak, whether they are given time to discuss issues important to them, and whether they are given time to discuss assignments and grades. These questions were included to indicate a valuing of student voice by the school and student ownership within the school as an indicator of engagement. Results for items relating to student input in decisions within the school are presented below:

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
12.3%	10.5%	35.1%	42.1%

Table 9: The Adults In This School Care About What I Think

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
0%	21.1%	52.6%	26.3%

Table 10: Teachers Ask My Opinion

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
3.5%	15.8%	38.6%	40.4%

Table 11: I Have Time To Discuss Things Important To Me In Class

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
8.8%	8.8%	29.8%	52.6%

Table 12: I Choose My Work In Class

Scores for “always” for each of the four items above were very low, while the “never” scores for items for valuing student input were consistently high; it appears from survey results that students feel very uninvolved in decision-making and that their opinions and thoughts matter very little at school. Secondary school can be seen as an important time for students to develop a sense of empowerment and an ability to give direction to their own lives and make changes in the world, but when interviewed, consistent with the survey results, students spoke of not having a voice within the school. At a time when students could be developing a strong sense of self and capacity, the secondary students admitted to feeling like they were being “treated like a kid” (participant 14) and not as the young adults and future leaders that they wish to be.

Seen in light of literature concerning autonomy support techniques (Hardre & Reeve, 2003), young people in this study would be better supported by the school if teachers worked with them towards building the ability to be self-determining and self-motivating; being empowered in this way could positively affect the choice to persist in school. For Hardre and Reeve (2003), such a way of working with young people is even more powerful than academic performance in a student’s decision to remain in or leave school.

In a related topic, discipline practices within the school are perceived to show a lack of respect for students and to be not remotely student-centred. Students showed frustration with the school rules and the way in which the rules were enforced.

Participant 18: Too many rules.

Participant 15: *They* [teachers] don't even follow the rules.

Students who answered the open-ended question about school rules on the survey showed the same frustration with the rules.

I don't like the school rules. (survey respondent)

The rule about hats and hoods, I don't like them. (survey respondent)

I like to wear my hat. (survey respondent)

Skool rules r so last year! Make new rules! (survey respondent)

I don't like it when I'm late and go to the detention. (survey respondent)

There to strict. (survey respondent)

Suspension I think that's how some students drop out of school (survey respondent)

I wish we could listen MP3s, Ipod's in classrooms. I don't care about cell phone's, I just wanna listen MP3. (survey respondent)

Allowing students to go to the washroom when they want to go. (survey respondent)

One student even listed "rules" along with "teachers" as a reason he or she had thought of dropping out. This should not be interpreted as students not liking rules in general. Some

students do understand that rules are a necessity; “I think that the school rules are fair because the students will just go k-os!” and “the school rules are fair enough” were also answers given to the open-ended question asking students if they had any comments about the rules. The survey item asking students if they think school rules are fair, most of the responses clustered around “most of the time” (24.6%) and “sometimes” (45.6%), while only 14% of students said that rules are “never” fair.

Perhaps the frustrations stem from a lack of student involvement in the formation of rules. In response to a survey item about the formation of rules, students showed that they feel they are involved very little in making up rules in the school. 71.9% of students who took the survey said they “never” helped make up the rules in the school and 61.4% of students said they “never” helped make up the rules in their classrooms. This lack of involvement in the creation of rules might be frustrating for students, even though students seem to recognize the necessity for rules and have opinions about rules; here, rules are things that are done *to* them, not *with* them.

Also frustrating to students is the seemingly arbitrary way in which rules are applied with the perception that some school staff members wield rules as weapons against students. A school staff member who students spoke of as being a person with whom they had a connected, mutually caring relationship, was particularly distressed by the arbitrary way in which rules could be applied within the school.

Even one student, he’s very bright, smart. I was surprised when he got kicked out. He came here. He told me. He asked if he could stay here. I asked him, “Why? You have a class.” I told him, “Why?” “I lost my pencil.” So that’s where they make mistakes, the teachers. It’s his job or

her job to teach these students. That's his responsibility, not to kick them out. (participant 1)

Students felt that rules were applied depending on teachers' desires to "power trip" (participant 14), and that, frequently, the discipline applied was unjust. Almost every participant interviewed was uncomfortable with the way in which discipline is handled in the school, in most instances because they view the handling of discipline as disrespectful and therefore uncaring of students.

The way in which a school handles discipline has been found in other studies to affect student engagement, motivation, and behaviour in class. The students in my study seem to be in a similar situation to the students in Raby and Domitrek's (2007) study where "students felt that they had little to say in how their lives were governed" and were "resigned to a structural environment they found oppressive" (p. 950); those students were frustrated and resistant and teachers and administrators were forced to focus on "petty policing" (p. 951). In schools with harsh discipline policies, students feel less safe (McNeely et al., 2002). Furthermore, in classes where classroom management is an issue, student feelings of school connectedness are lower (McNeely et al., 2002). In our school, the discipline system appears to be a factor in student disengagement.

Giving time and individual attention to students. For students in this study, feeling that they are given individual attention and time from teachers is equated with feeling cared for and is thus another engagement factor. When asked what makes a bad teacher, students most frequently spoke of teachers who seemed unwilling to help students achieve academically. Students perceived teachers who are unwilling to stay after school

for academic help or unwilling to give attention to student questions during class as non-ideal teachers.

But, like, with the other teachers they just want to get to it. They just want to get over and done with the subjects. They didn't really show. They don't have time for you. So you don't bother to ask them for help 'cause you already have that feeling that they don't want to help you.... I don't want teachers to teach you and then take off. And when you do ask them a question, they just push you away. And when you do want help, you don't want to ask for their help. They'll just say, "No, I don't have time."

(participant 11)

Although all students in the interviews and focus groups spoke about teachers who were not willing to give individual attention to students or to help explain when students did not understand, the surveys showed that the problem, although significant, is not universal. In answer to the survey question, "My teachers are available when I need help" (Figure 5), 64.9% of students said that their teacher was available always or most of the time. Only 35.1% of students felt that their teacher was available only sometimes or never. The results for the survey item, "I get individual help when I need it" (Figure 6) provides a different view, however, as 38.6% of students said that they get individual help when needed always or most of the time, 49.1% said they get it only sometimes, and 12.3% said they never get individual help.

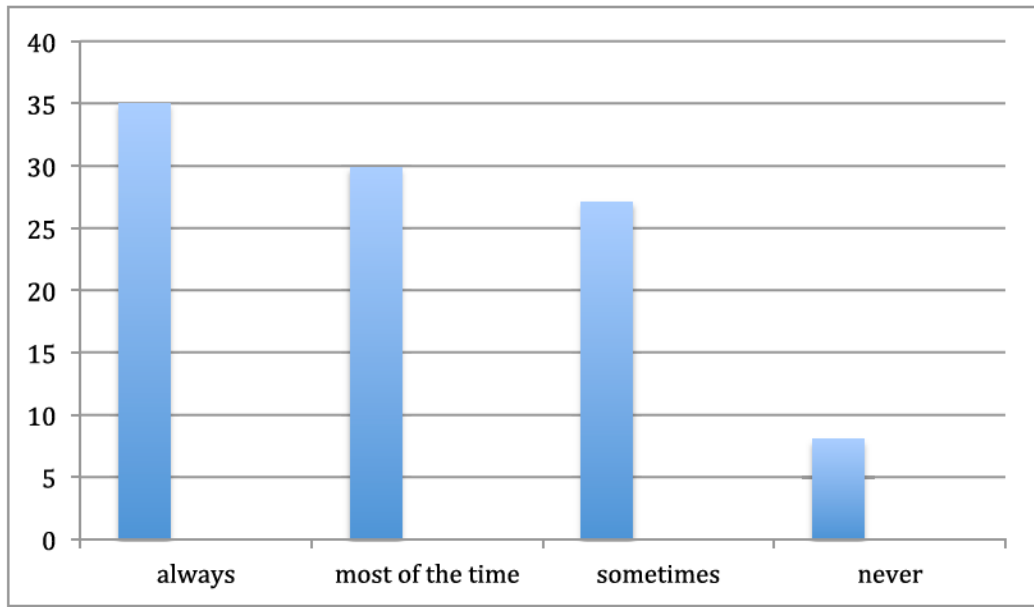


Figure 5: My Teachers Are Available When I Need Help

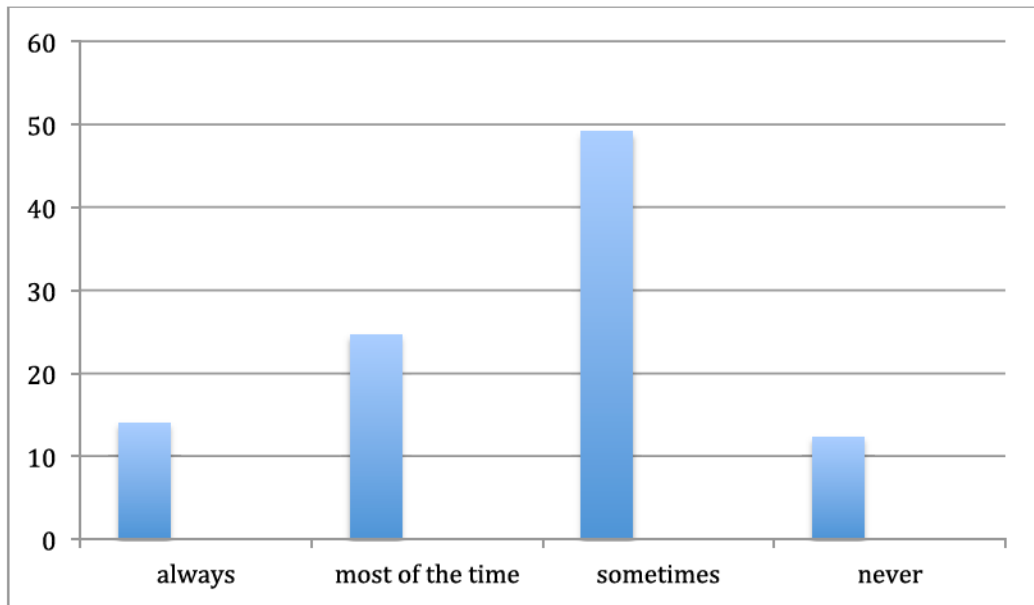


Figure 6: I Get Individual Help When I Need It

Despite the difference between the responses to the two survey items, it is nonetheless still safe to say that students require more individual help from teachers and they need

teachers to be more available to them. Coupled with the qualitative results, we can postulate that this extra attention would help students to feel more cared for. The discrepancy between the qualitative and quantitative data shows that although the issue of teachers giving individual attention and being willing to help students is not one which adversely affects all students, it is a very important issue to many students and one that they think about a great deal.

For students in this study, it appears that the time that a teacher takes in order to give individual attention to a student is seen as a caring act and interpreted as teacher caring; further, a teacher giving time to a student to help her or him achieve academically and pushing a student to achieve academically is not only seen as caring by students, but might also be seen as showing respect for students. Likewise, in Faircloth's (2009) study, students' relationship with the teacher affected their engagement and their ability to be successful; they particularly credited teacher support, interest, and care. Teacher support of students is an engagement factor in other studies as well (Van Ryzin et al., 2009; Walker & Green, 2009). If we take these studies into account, it is clear that the time and attention given to many students by teachers in my study is not enough to positively affect engagement and may even be negatively affecting student engagement.

Teacher turnover and teacher absence. Various participants report that teacher turnover has a great deal to do with the relationships between teachers and students and students' feeling cared for within the school. During a focus group session students spoke of teacher turnover being a problem within the school. It appears that turnover hinders the students' ability to build relationships with teachers, and it is probable that

relationship-building is very important to a student's ability to trust a teacher and feel that the teacher cares.

Parents also believe that teacher turnover is a disengagement factor:

My [child] repeated secondary 1. At the beginning was doing very well and then the teacher took maternity leave and they got a new teacher....

And sometimes some students, when they get to secondary 2, in secondary 2 they have a hard time to find teachers. Permanent teacher. That's where my [child] is – in secondary 2. I don't know how many times the teacher changed. It's hard. ... I think six times. Different teacher. And when they get to secondary 3, I guess they don't care anymore. (participant 1)

Students in the focus group believe that they have “wasted” a lot of time in school because they have had unqualified teachers as long-term substitutes and that these unqualified teachers were not able to provide adequate learning situations. Not only are students missing out academically because of teacher turnover, but perhaps more importantly, they are unable to become attached emotionally to teachers and, therefore, are not able to create trusting and caring relationships.

Similarly, teacher absence was shown to be a disengagement factor among students. Students do not feel that they receive adequate learning experiences from substitute teachers. A recent graduate spoke of how difficult it is to be successful academically under such circumstances:

And we didn't have a teacher. You know? Like, there was always someone different and we had substitutes all year. It was so bad. When you're like trying to, I don't know what to say, like trying to ...learn. But

you can't really learn when there are substitutes. 'Cause they talk about something else and they are not really there to help you. (participant 11)

Teacher absence was also seen as an issue affecting student engagement by parents:

[My child] always said that, "I don't want to go because of some teacher," or "I have a substitute. Our teachers are not there and the substitute doesn't do anything." We have that, eh? The teachers are hardly there. Well, they're not there 100%. (participant 4)

To sum up, students in my study described a need to spend sustained time with teachers in order to build positive relationships with teachers that are conducive to academic growth and to remaining in school. Again, this finding echoes other research findings concerning the effects of building positive relationships with teachers; we know that teacher support positively effects sense of belonging in school (e.g. Van Ryzin, 2009; Walker & Greene, 2009). Although there was no literature found specific to the effects of substitute teachers on engagement of secondary students, we can postulate that given the temporary nature of such a relationship, students might not be willing to invest effort into relationship-building with substitutes, and this decision would negatively affect engagement.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reported findings concerning various relationships in the school. My research shows that engagement factors relating to relationships within the school are important to the engagement of these First Nations students. Engagement factors relating to caring for students, teacher-student relationships, respectful relationships within the school, feelings of safety within the school, and valuing student

input and voice were all present in the qualitative data and positive relationships within the school are extremely important to student engagement and the decision to remain in school. Together, both the qualitative and the quantitative data show that the school has much work to do in order to improve relationships within the school and to make students feel cared for.

It is clear that a sense of community within the school based on positive relationships and activities conducive to community-building are integral to student feelings of belonging, support, and being cared for, and that a sense of belonging, feeling supported, and being cared for are positively related to student engagement. Furthermore, we can infer that we can increase the sense of community and build positive relationships by increasing the amount and variety of extracurricular activities, including students in decision-making, valuing student voice, and taking steps to create more caring and more respectful relationships amongst students and between students and adults within the school.

The next chapters will further discuss ways of increasing student sense of belonging and feelings of being cared for, and how important these are in the schooling experience. Chapter 9 will explore how teaching methods, learning situations, and curriculum decisions can show, or not show, students that they are cared for and belong within the school.

Chapter 9

Findings and discussion:

Connecting teaching approaches and curriculum decisions to caring

In this chapter, I present and discuss findings concerning teaching approaches and curriculum decisions made within the school that either support or do not support student engagement. The findings, as will be seen below, show a widespread perception that active, student-centered learning situations are not present in the school, and that the lack of such learning situations has a negative effect on student engagement and academic development. In addition, there exists a perception that curriculum decisions that are based on student needs and desires and that are implemented in authentic ways can help students to be more engaged in school. As in the previous chapter, the overarching theme of caring for students continues to be important. Showing students that we care for them entails enacting care by providing students with learning situations and appropriate curriculum that both personally sustains and strengthens them, and maximizes the potential for academic growth.

Teaching approaches and school work

This section discusses findings related to teaching approaches and the work that students do in class. Teaching methods, teaching in a second language environment, and teacher sensitivity to Cree culture can be opportunities for enacting care for students or, alternatively, for creating disengaging experiences for students.

Student boredom and teaching methods. In the student survey, I asked students how they feel about their schoolwork to broaden the picture of student engagement and

satisfaction within the school. I did so because according to Mackay and Myles (1999), boredom is a factor in school leaving among First Nations students. Thus, two items were included in the student survey asking for student levels of interest in, or boredom with, their schoolwork.

In response to a survey item about boredom, 7% of students said they were never bored in school, while 56.1% of students said they are bored sometimes. This “sometimes” response is understandable and possibly acceptable for adolescent high school students. What is less acceptable is the “most of the time” response at 26.3% and the “always” response at 10.5%. As mentioned in the previous chapter, students cited boredom both in the interviews and in open questions on the student survey as a reason that they might leave school, or think about leaving school. The issue of boredom as it relates to a feeling of community within the school has already been explored in Chapter 8. In this chapter, the academic reasons for boredom are further explicated through analysis of survey responses concerning teaching approaches as well as qualitative data.

According to Wotherspoon and Schissel (2003), “holistic approaches to pedagogy, curricula, and culture” (p. 122) and “learning situations that promote ‘active experimentation’, highlighting the value of direct experience more than abstract learning situations” (p. 122) are more likely to increase student engagement in school. Qualitative data from my study upholds this view. Various participants complained of inactive teaching taking place in the school. For example, one school staff member said,

We have teachers that just write, write, write, no interaction. You know, really boring.... I’ve heard students say, “It’s boring. It’s boring.” ‘Cause it really is boring. If they have a boring teacher that doesn’t interact with

them. Just sits there and who just hands things to them. Expects them to learn on their own. We have teachers like that. (participant 2)

And according to one parent:

They [the students] are not very active in school. With the one that doesn't go to school really, he says that he's bored and he can't read. He doesn't know how.... Maybe boredom. (participant 6)

Fill-in-the-blank worksheets were referred to most as a teaching method that was uninteresting and conducive to boredom: For example, in the survey item asking what kinds of schoolwork students did not like, this was a typical response: "paperwork, worksheets. All the time. It gets boring." According to one parent, fill-in-the blank type exercises are ineffective and create a barrier between the teacher and the student by not allowing for interaction time where teachers and students can build relationships:

Not just that you hand out a paper, worksheets, and you fill in the blanks.

Like talk more. Do more on the board.... Get them thinking, talking.

(participant 6)

A school staff member referred to fill-in-the-blank types of worksheets as "photocopying":

There's other teachers that do a lot of hands-on. And you are still learning.

Doesn't have to be photocopying all the time. That's what pisses me off sometimes, photocopying. (participant 2)

This over-dependence on fill-in-the-blank type exercises and other non-active approaches to teaching were seen as detrimental to student progress and learning. According to a school staff member, "that's what kills [learning]" (participant 2).

Students who responded to open questions on the survey about what types of work they enjoyed doing and students who were interviewed both described working in groups as a preferred way of learning.

I like to do group projects. (survey respondent)

I like doing math, fractions, and doing it with a group. I almost don't like all of my schoolwork. (survey respondent)

Some students alluded to feeling that the school was too focused on individuals doing solitary work. One student wrote on the survey, "Art class waste of time and can't talk, and if I do, detention."

When interviewed, students and other participants said that they would prefer a more collaborative learning experience to take place within the school. As above, they advocated group work or group projects:

Well, we didn't have a lot of group projects. That's what I noticed....

That's how it shows that you can work with other people. But here it's always individually. I think they lack that here. So, like group workshops.

Like teamwork. You know? (participant 11)

Staff members also saw a problem with a heavy focus on solitary learning experiences.

What I see is sitting at their desks. Writing, writing, writing, writing. By themselves. And textbook. (participant 9)

Parents were also concerned that students were doing too much individual work at their desks by themselves. For some participants, the individualized approach to learning within the school was not culturally consistent: children should be "working together

rather than in isolation. Life in Cree communities is more along these lines rather than the ‘me’ ideal” (participant 18).

While it appears that a more cooperative learning environment would be more comfortable for our students and thus, likely beneficial, this does not negate the importance of a teacher’s willingness to be available to students and to give one-on-one explanations (as discussed in the previous chapter). A focus on the individual remains important alongside an active, collaborative learning environment.

Learning situations that participants found more appealing were also investigated. Students not only want to engage with each other in learning, but also want to work on extended projects requiring depth of engagement. Again, holistic and cooperative learning situations are preferred. As one school staff member said,

When they did the projects in high school, for example, “Around the World In 80 Days.” They were presenting their bulletin boards. Or when they do science fair. [Students] seemed more alive and laughing. Whereas when they are in class they seem so stiff. (participant 2)

Project work and experimentation were also described as ideal learning experiences by many participants. As well, participants used the words ‘hands on’ many, many times to describe the type of work they think would be ideal for students in our school. For many, “hands on” described learning by doing, or learning by manipulating.

Participants connected a lack of hands on learning with student boredom, feeling that a deeper sense of engagement would come if hands on learning situations were employed that would allow students to enjoy learning more and to create deeper understandings of the knowledge they must acquire. Parents report that their children

enjoy learning more when they are actively involved in their learning and a holistic approach is taken to learning: as one participant said, students should be encouraged “not to compartmentalize stuff... but to look at the broader” (participant 13).

A school staff member saw that children were involved in these types of learning activities in the elementary school, but that such learning situations were rare in the secondary school:

Especially when they get into the first years in high school. The students are craving the activities that they miss in the elementary. They should be doing those activities in the classroom in their first years in high school. [It should not be] just going into the classroom and copying and reading and writing. (participant 5)

One participant even likened the experience in the secondary school to that experienced by past students of the residential and Indian Affairs day schools:

I don't know. I think we're so stuck in the, I don't know, if it was residential school or [Indian affairs day school] where it was all just sit in a straight line, in rows, not interacting. Not many teachers use centres. I remember one teacher used centres. The kids were learning. They got to pick. “I want to do math first. I want to do language arts. I want to do science.” And they checked off and then had no choice and said, “I have no choice. I have to do English.” It's a lot of work to start it off, but it's amazing how free the kids feel. It's hands on. They move around. Not just sitting in rows. The kids feel relaxed. (participant 2)

Notably, all participants see active, holistic, and collaborative learning situations as ideal for students.

These findings resonate with other studies that connect active, student-centred teaching methods with student engagement (e.g. Anderman, 2003; Johnson, 2008; Marks, 2000). McFarland (2001) was a rarity in the literature in finding that the use of teacher-centred tasks minimized student resistance; the vast majority of the other literature promoted more student-centred methods. For example, Anderman (2003) found that “perceived control and relevance of the activity” contributed to engagement, and that “where passive instructional formats were the norm, students were most engaged during collaborative learning” (p. 81). Similarly, Yair (2000) found that students are “preoccupied with external issues” like social experiences they have had or will be having outside of school almost half of their instructional time in traditional classrooms, but that,

progressive instructional strategies and methods are better able to insulate students from alienating environments, whereas boring and non-relevant instruction allows external preoccupations to swamp students’ attention, especially among Hispanic and African-American students and those at risk of alienation from instruction. (p. 247)

Yair (2000)’s findings may be seen as particularly salient for our own students; the poor academic and school finishing results amongst secondary students may point to a large degree to “alienation from instruction.” In fact, our school might be encouraging alienation by not utilizing a higher proportion of active, student-centred teaching methods.

Language of instruction. Various participants also believe that more attention needs to be paid to how students learn their second language. The responses of participants below show that there is concern that there are no initiatives to ensure a successful transition from the first language of instruction environment in the first cycle of elementary to the second language of instruction environment in grade three, and that this affects the ability of the students to achieve academically when they reach secondary.

The administration should organize a plan.... And the Cree teachers, even the non-native teachers who have been here for a few years now and know what's going on with the students, how they're doing, they can help them.

(participant 5)

Some believe that a lack of academic success can be attributed to passive teaching practices in both first and second languages:

[Learning is] supposed to be easily transferable Cree to English, Cree to French, but it's not 'cause we're not doing the job. Photocopying. That's what kills it. (participant 2)

For some, there is a perception that some teachers do not really understand what students have or have not learned nor how to help students be more comfortable with their second language, especially at the secondary level.

The problem too when they get into high school. Some of the students will sometimes talk to me, not just to me, but to the other Cree teachers. Some of them have said, "When you get into secondary they think that you have already mastered the English language and the French language. I still have not mastered it. I need help. I am not able to do this." Some

[teachers] will say, “Well you should have done that in elementary.”

(participant 5)

And sometimes it’s the teacher doesn’t understand the student. Up here (points to head). I know a student. She’s in [a program for students who require individualized programs]. She has a hard time. The teacher has a hard time with her. They don’t have a good relationship between them.

And this student doesn’t know how, I guess she doesn’t have the confidence to express herself in English or French. She’s in the French sector. She only speaks Cree. She doesn’t want to speak English or French. And we have to know why. We just don’t ignore it or say to her, try harder. We have to know why. Understand. (participant 1)

Responses also point to a need to accommodate differences in levels of acquisition of the second language amongst students:

Sometimes some are very strong. There are children that have very strong language skills. And then there are those that have weak language skills.

Those are the ones that need to be helped. (participant 3)

According to my participants, the secondary school seems unable to adequately deal with the second language needs of some of its students in terms of teaching methods, understandings of second language acquisition, or creating a level of comfort with the second language among students.

It may be that the way second language teaching is dealt with in the school further encourages student disengagement. Perhaps if the school was more effective in terms of second language acquisition and academic language ability in the second language, our

students would feel more successful and have better academic self-concept which, in turn, could assist greater engagement. According to Callahan (2005), English language learners in secondary schools in general are frequently provided with watered down content course instruction if a deficit approach is taken by teachers who believe that because they are second language learners, students are unable to handle the rich discourse facilitated by the subject matter in the content areas; yet what second language learners really require is enriched second language exposure in the content area that focuses on academic discourse and the development of academic vocabulary. It is possible that some in the school in this study take a deficit view of second language learners, viewing our students as not able to engage deeply in prescribed course content because they are second language learners; this may result in “diminished content coverage [by teachers] among [our] English learners relative to mainstream students” (Callahan, 2005, p. 322).

According to Callahan (2005), “Expecting high levels of performance even from students at the earliest English proficiency levels sets the precedent for academic development” (p. 322). It may be that teachers in the school are too focused on students acquiring a certain level of second language skills before they engage at a high level with content areas, when, in fact, the two goals can be met at the same time. Second language learners require:

Explicit instruction in the genre of academic English used in scientific reports, court documents, public information articles, and the like.

Exposure to domain-specific language facilitates content-area

understanding, bringing English learners to the academic forefront.

(Callahan, 2005, p. 323)

A failure to do so ensures that second language learners do not succeed as a result of not being exposed to much of the needed content, not because of limited proficiency in the second language (Callahan, 2005). This is an area that certainly warrants further study at our school.

Teachers' understanding and sensitivity towards Cree culture and Cree language.

Also important to students' sense of engagement are their perceptions of teachers' and the school's understanding of Cree culture and Cree language. In my master's research, I found that community members felt a lack of respect among teachers for students and for cultural differences that exist within our community's school (Pashagumskum, 2005).

The perception of disrespect for cultural differences remains an issue that must be addressed; respect for students and their cultural backgrounds is given great importance in much of the literature on Aboriginal education, including the need for teachers to be supportive of the Aboriginal culture of their students (e.g., Battiste, 2000; Hale, 2000; Klug & Whitfield, 2003; Poonwassie & Charter, 2001; Reyhner, 1992; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 1998). Twenty years ago, Gilliland (1992) recommended that:

Those who work with Aboriginal students provide a multicultural environment for all students, become familiar with their students' worldviews, value their students' background, identify and emphasize positive Aboriginal values.... and work with students' parents and community. (pp. 131-2)

Gilliland's recommendations remain important. It is clear in the literature that respect for students' culture and incorporation of culture into their school experience is vital to student success:

schools that report the greatest success in terms of retention and educational achievement among Aboriginal students tend to be those that incorporate indigenous orientations across the entire range of curricular subjects, school programming, and educational activities. (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 1998, p. 122)

In response to such literature indicating the high importance of teacher understanding and sensitivity to the First Nations culture of their students, I included items in the survey to measure student perception of teacher respect for culture, and perceptions of the inclusion of Cree culture in the curriculum.

The results of the student survey show that, for the most part, students perceive their teachers as thinking that Cree culture is important and as being interested in Cree culture. In answer to the item, "My teachers think Cree culture is important" (Figure 7), 63.2% of students said "yes," while 31.6% of students said "a little" and only 1.8% said "no." In answer to the item, "My teachers are interested in Cree ways of doing things" (Figure 8), 43.9% of students said "yes," while 43.9% of students said "a little" and only "8.8% of students said "no."

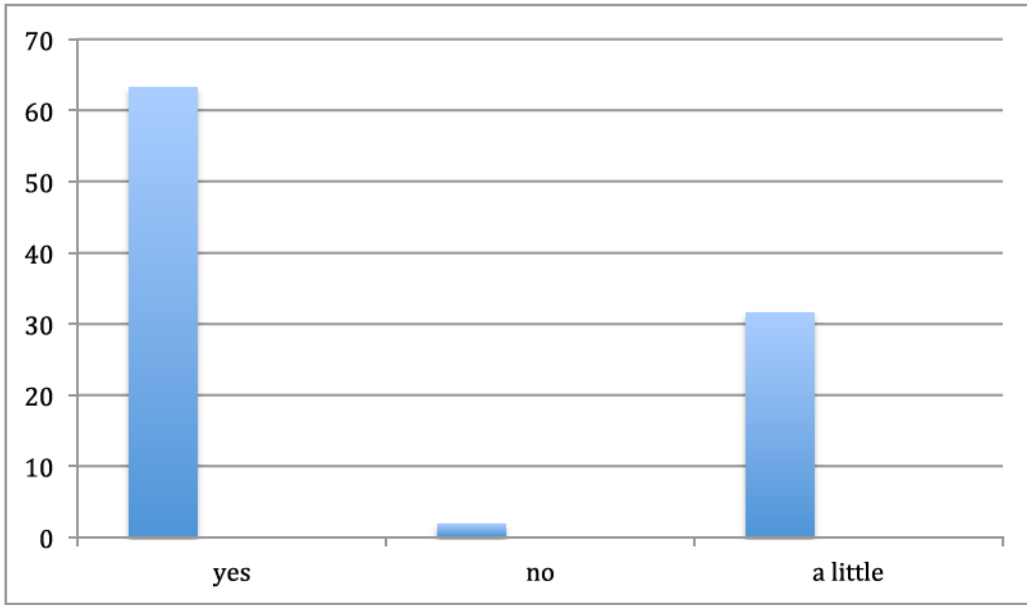


Figure 7: My Teachers Think Cree Culture Is Important

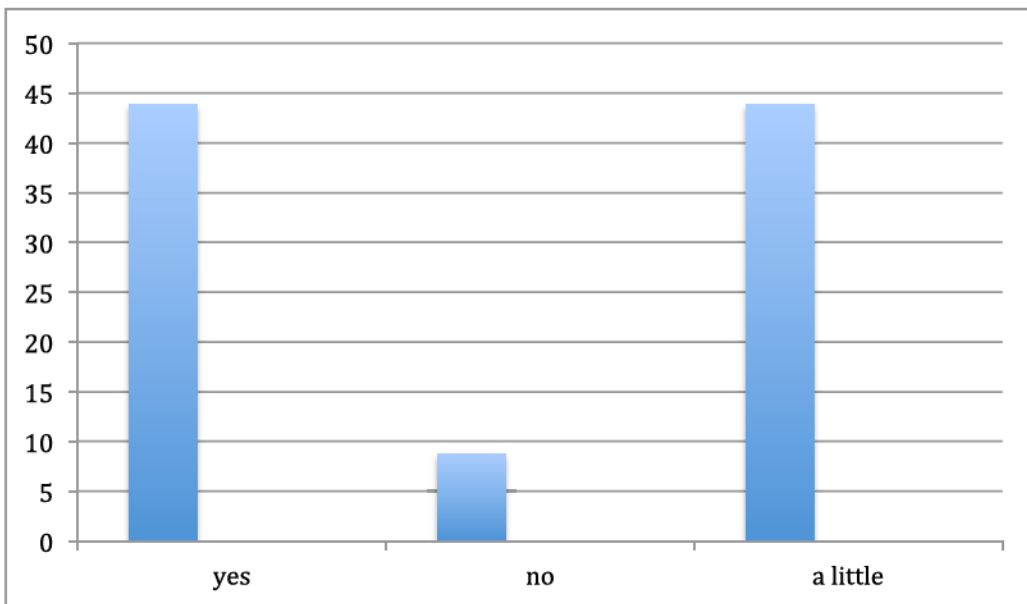


Figure 8: My Teachers Are Interested In Cree Ways of Doing Things

For the most part, then, students believe that their teachers are both interested in their culture and think that the community culture is important.

Interestingly, however, the results for incorporating Cree culture, language and history into the work that students do in their classes were more negative. On the student survey, students were asked to respond to questions about how much they were encouraged or given opportunities to learn about Cree culture, language, and history in class. The following tables summarize the responses for these items.

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
17.5%	21.2%	43.9%	17.5%

Table 13: My Teachers Encourage Me To Develop My Cree Culture Skills

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
22.8%	15.8%	42.1%	19.3%

Table 14: My Teachers Encourage Me To Develop My Cree Language Skills

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
12.3%	15.8%	40.4%	31.6%

Table 15: I Get Opportunities To Express Cree Culture In My Class Work

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
19.3%	21.1%	35.1%	24.6%

Table 16: I Get Opportunities To Learn About Cree History In Class

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
14.0%	19.3%	45.6%	21.1%

Table 17: I Get Opportunities to Learn About My Own Culture In Class

It seems that students are encouraged by their teachers, for the most part, to develop Cree culture and Cree language skills, but that they are not given a great deal of opportunity to do so. In other words it seems that this encouragement is not followed through with concrete actions that would give students opportunities to develop their Cree language and culture skills and historical knowledge: indeed, a large number of students say they “never” get opportunities to express Cree culture, learn about Cree culture, or learn about Cree history. These “never” results are perplexing in light of the fact that this school is a Eeyou controlled school, within a Cree controlled school board.

Do these results matter? The literature reviewed states that First Nations students must be given opportunities and encouraged to learn about their Nations and their cultures. Would such opportunities for learning be beneficial for Cree students in this particular community? Interpretation of the survey results must be further enhanced by qualitative data. The qualitative data in the next section suggests that giving students opportunities to learn about their own culture and history *are* important and that we should be paying attention to this issue.

Curriculum issues related to culture

According to parent, community member, school staff, and student participants, including Cree culture and language in the taught curriculum is important for students for many reasons, mostly tied to self-esteem and a sense of identity. A sense of identity is very important to participants; they very much want students to be given opportunities within the school to develop their sense of identity as Eeyouch. For these participants, learning Cree culture, Cree history, and Cree language are heritage rights. One parent brought Floyd Westerman’s words about First Nations youth to share and contemplate

during our interview; the words are testimony to the importance that must be given to the inclusion of culture and language in holistic ways within our school system:

They are our future... today we are fighting a great battle against the popular culture that surrounds them. It's a battle for their hearts and minds. We need to work to inspire them to embrace their own history and culture. Without them, we Indians have no future. (<http://www.anikutani.com/nativeamericanfacts/floydredecrow.html>, n.d.)

“And it’s true,” the parent said. “We are fighting a battle” (participant 4).

Participants are especially insistent that students should be taught “our own history in our curriculum” (participant 8). They argue that there is a need for students to focus not only on their own Nation’s history but also the history of other First Nations.

They should be proud of their history. They should be proud of who they are.... find their identities. (participant 4)

This has to be part of the curriculum. Because what are we teaching our students? We’re teaching them something else. They’re not learning about their own culture and history. (participant 8)

For students, the history taught within the secondary school does not have any relevance to their lives now: “History should also talk about present things in our community, present things...” (participant 14). One student voiced frustration with the history curriculum within the school: “I don’t like learning about the white man’s history” (survey respondent). For community member participants, the teaching of Cree and other First Nations history is important, and it appears that students would be more engaged if their schooling experience included more opportunities to learn about their own history,

especially if its relevance to the present is made clear. The teaching of history is further explored in Chapter 10 under “curricular changes that need to be made.”

Like history, Cree language is also tied to identity formation amongst our students. As one community member said, “Cree language is the foundation of our community” (participant 19). Perhaps the most important role for Cree language in our school is in its tie to self-esteem among students. Students who were interviewed spoke of the pride they felt in the first three years of elementary when they were in a Cree language of instruction program and emerged literate in their mother tongue. According to students who took part in a focus group interview, the immersion after grade 3 into a second language with limited support for first language literacy development led to a loss of skills in their first language. At the end of secondary, these students say that they are no longer literate in Cree and that they no longer have sufficient mother tongue proficiency of which to be proud; for these secondary students, proficiency in the first language is a factor in their self-esteem levels [student focus group notes].

According to Norris (2007), it is “thought that the process itself of learning an Aboriginal language may contribute to increased self-esteem and community well-being, as well as cultural continuity” (p. 19). Speaking of a Yup’ik first language immersion program with an ESL component, Hartley and Johnson (1995) insist Native language of instruction is “a vehicle for supporting and augmenting the native speaker’s sense of identity and self-esteem” (p. 572). Learning a First Nations language increases youth sense of self-esteem (Canadian Heritage, 2005), and lack of knowledge of a Native language can also have “predictive power” for youth suicide rates in First Nations

communities (Hallet, Chandler, & Lalonde, 2007, p. 392). Self-esteem is explored further in Chapter 10 as important to students' abilities to attend or remain in school.

Student responses to survey items concerning Cree language and culture also indicate a need to enhance support for Cree language and cultural experiences in schooling. Students feel that learning about Cree culture and Cree language is important (Figure 9), with 70% of students saying that it was very important to learn Cree language in school, and 23% of students feeling that it is somewhat important to learn Cree language in school. The remaining 7% indicated that learning Cree language in school was not very important or not important at all. The results for an item asking students to indicate whether they believe it is important to learn about Cree culture in school were similar (Figure 10). 71% of students said that learning about Cree culture is very important; for 23% learning about Cree culture is somewhat important; and only 6% of students indicated that learning about Cree culture is not very or not at all important.

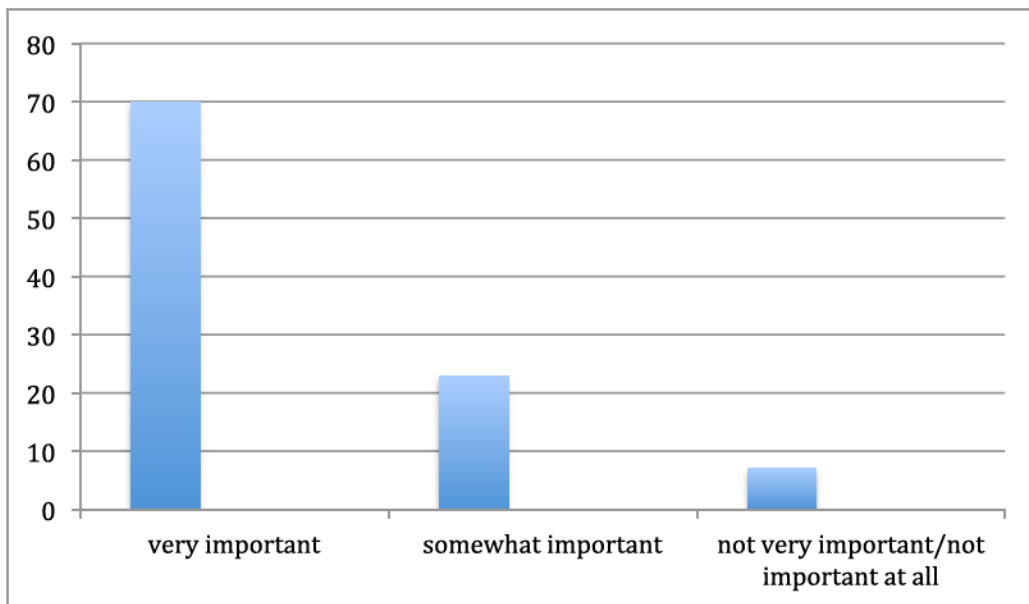


Figure 9: Learning Cree Language In School

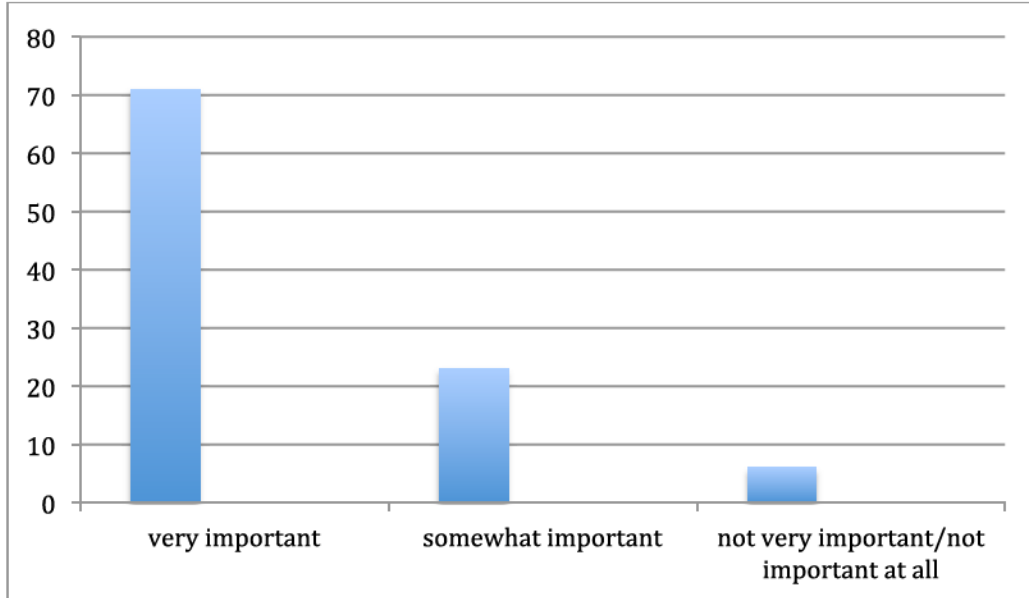


Figure 10: Learning About Cree Culture In School

Given the previous results that indicate a limited opportunity to explore and learn about Cree culture and language in secondary school, these results are quite troubling; students feel it is important to learn about culture and language, but are given little chance to do so. Students report that they do not have enough time during Cree culture and Cree language classes for substantive learning – “real learning” as they termed it [student focus group] – to take place. Currently, the Cree language and culture course is given 2 periods out of 36 in a 9-day cycle in the secondary school. In Chapter 10, I will further discuss how we might enhance cultural content and learning about culture and language as part of the changes that can be made to the schooling experience and the alternative programs that can be implemented.

While students and other participants believe that language and culture must be enhanced and that doing so would be conducive to more students remaining in school,

they are also adamant that active teaching methods and approaches to learning language and culture be employed. School staff members and students report that students lose their competency in terms of literacy in the Cree language as they move up through the grades to the end of secondary:

I've heard students in grade 4 saying, "I don't remember [my Cree]."

'Cause you don't have it often enough. "I don't remember the Cree that I'm learning the rest of the years." (participant 3)

When students spoke of losing their Cree literacy competency, they blamed not only lack of time for Cree language in the schedule, but the teaching methods employed in Cree language classrooms.

We were still doing "*beesum*"¹³ in grade 5. We should have been writing stories. I actually lost my Cree for a bit. All we did was crosswords and search-a-word. (participant 14)

According to participants, there is no substantive language arts program for students to use in secondary Cree Language classes; instead they are given reductive and simplistic fill-in-the-blank type exercises much of the time. As indicated previously, low standards are a disengagement factor highlighted in the literature (e.g., Tyler & Boelter, 2008; Wentzel, 2002; Yair, 2000). It appears that Cree language classes are yet another area where students are exposed to low expectations and limited academic pressure, and as a result, it is another factor in disengagement.

Further, a more active Cree language pedagogy was seen as learning the language in authentic ways.

¹³ A word meaning "sun," usually a sight word by the end of grade one.

That's where the language is. In the bush. And they see it and they can touch it.... They really want to learn how to build a shelter.... The Elders over there could teach them how to. So they could hear the language.

(participant 1)

One of the teachers who students said was a teacher with whom they had a good relationship and from whom they learned a great deal – “I just love it this year” (participant 14) – tries to promote authentic learning situations to develop their Cree language and literacy skills. One participant talked enthusiastically about the way this teacher gives students extended writing assignments to do in their Cree language periods. She reported that the teacher has them translate articles from newspapers or magazines, write poems, personal essays, and short stories (participant 4). The teacher also works on their reading comprehension using articles and stories written in Cree and asks students to respond to these (participant 1). Students especially enjoy the way that this teacher focuses on vocabulary building by showing them the roots of words and discussing the philosophical and imaginative ideas behind words and having them learn and use new vocabulary through experiential learning situations.

[This teacher] actually had to teach us from scratch.... translating. Talking about Eeyou iiyimuuwan.¹⁴ Discussing what words mean. (participant 14)

Like concerns about Cree language mentioned above, many of the participants did not believe that Cree culture was given enough time in the school schedule, and that Cree culture was not taught in an authentic way. Teaching Cree culture, particularly traditional activities, skills, and crafts, is artificial when done in a classroom; Cree culture is a

¹⁴ The Cree language

culture of the land, based on hunting and gathering, and can only authentically be taught out on the land and not in a classroom. Although there is a camp to use for Cree culture classes, it seems that the school lacks funds to “take them to the camp. No transportation. No money for that” (participant 1).

The way in which Cree language and culture is treated in terms of time and resources can be seen as indicative of the way that the school as a whole values Cree language and the teaching of cultural skills; if the teaching of Cree culture and Cree language are truly important, the school administration must demonstrate importance through action. The contradiction is clear. While students are told at school that it is desirable that they learn about their heritage, the school does not actually give students enough time or resources for authentic learning experiences in Cree culture and language; the rhetoric is not backed up by action. This begs the question, then, could we be increasing student insecurity by telling them on one hand to learn about their own culture and language while, on the other hand, not giving them the proper tools to do so?

Students’ self-concept (Singh et al., 2010) and attitude toward themselves affect school belonging (Ma & Klinger, 2000). Sense of connection and engagement can be enhanced by having students participate in activities “designed to encourage curriculum connections with their identity and culture” (Faircloth, 2009, p. 321). At a time when students are trying to forge their own identities, the school might not be giving them adequate learning experiences or a learning environment that would allow them to construct their identities as members of their wider Cree society. This could be another area where disengagement is encouraged. According to Faircloth (2009),

to the degree that the individual and contextual perspective are discordant, the fertile group of belonging may not be available to support student motivation and engagement. (p. 343)

A lack of valuing Cree language and culture within the school might simply reflect a lack of understanding of how important Cree language and culture is to students; recall that only 7% of students said it is not very important or not important at all to learn about Cree language, and only 6% said the same thing about Cree culture. For the vast majority of students, over 90%, learning about Cree language and Cree culture is important. Qualitative data indicates that there is indeed a lack of cultural understanding and sensitivity within the school:

Teachers and administrators are not able to understand or recognize the culture of the students. (participant 8)

They don't understand it's not white kids that they are teaching. They have to understand that these are Native students.... they have to understand where they are from. (participant 1)

As stated in the description of setting at the beginning of this work, at the time data were gathered, out of a total of 30 teachers in the secondary school, only four were First Nations teachers (3 of whom were from our community). For all students who took part in the focus group and some of the parents interviewed, it would make a positive difference to have more teachers who were from the community; they felt that teachers who are Cree would understand them better and that they would have better relationships with Cree teachers (student focus group: notes). There were no items on the student survey related to Aboriginal teachers as important to student success, but in the literature,

Aboriginal teachers are often seen as an aspect of the cultural responsiveness of a school (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 1998). Klug and Whitfield (2003) reported that cultural dissonance between non-Native teachers and students of American Indian descent greatly affected the success rate of American Indian students.

My earlier study of parental involvement within this community's school (Pashagumskum, 2005), however, noted that parents did not feel it was entirely necessary to have more teachers of Aboriginal descent in the school. More important to student success, according to participants in that study, was the relationship that teachers built with students; when students feel comfortable and supported within school, they are more successful. In fact, Wotherspoon and Schissel (2003) note that "the literature is not conclusive on the issue of whether Aboriginal teachers, in themselves, contribute to greater educational success among Aboriginal students" (p. 116). Nonetheless, according to students who took part in my focus group, teachers of Cree descent would increase their comfort in school (student focus group: notes). Still, students insisted that it is not enough for teachers simply to be Cree, they must also be caring people and show students that they care. Cultural respect and acceptance are inextricably tied to the role of caring teacher of any background. As Hale (2002) said,

Caring teachers are willing to learn about their students and adjust their teaching to fit the pupil's cultural backgrounds. Such teachers recognize the cultural heritage of students as a positive contribution to the class and not as another difficulty with which they must deal. (p. 97)

Conclusion

This chapter has detailed findings relating to teaching approaches as they relate to boredom, engagement, and learning, and findings relating to the taught curriculum in terms of learning about heritage and the importance of authentic learning experiences for Cree language and culture. Clearly, to show children that we care about them and that we value them and their abilities, as educators we should provide students with complex and social learning situations and give them opportunities to allow them to take part in decision-making processes. According to responses of participants, not working in such a learner-centred way can damage the relationship between teachers and students and the ability of students to be engaged with school. Students need to feel cared about in order to be engaged with their schooling; learner-centred approaches can show students that we, as educators, care enough about them to value their input into how learning takes place in the classroom and what they are learning.

Furthermore, in addition to teaching in ways that value students, we must create a schooling experience that concretely values what is important to them; we must show an understanding of their culture, and support their learning about their heritage in authentic ways. Teaching methods must be aligned with what is taught, and what is taught must be aligned with what will increase student comfort and sense of self. The goal of this alignment would be to consistently support students in their development academically as well as their development as Eeyou community members with a strong sense of independence, identity, self-concept and self-worth.

The next chapter continues the evaluation of how students are being supported by focusing on the school's receptiveness to student needs and perspectives, and the ability of students to attend and remain in school.

Chapter 10

Findings and discussion:

Student ability to attend and remain in school and the school's receptiveness to student needs and perspectives

This chapter details and discusses findings related to factors that hinder or help a student to attend and remain in school. An individual's ability to attend or remain in school is affected greatly by social issues facing the community, support persons available to the student, and student motivation as a learner. The effects of colonization are manifested in self-destructive behaviours within First Nations Communities; the way that a school chooses to engage with students can either amplify or mitigate these effects (Goulet, 2001). In addition, this chapter also discusses how the school responds to the needs of students and either works or does not work to enhance an individual's ability to attend and remain in school. On the whole, it appears that while the personal ability to attend and remain in school is challenged on many fronts, there are also many ways that the school could respond to meet student needs and enhance this ability to remain in school.

Personal ability to attend and remain in school

This section begins by presenting and discussing findings related to the various social issues that affect students and the ways that these factors affect engagement and disengagement.

Social issues. In my earlier study (Pashagumskum, 2005), I pointed to the possibility that there were social factors affecting student retention and performance in

school, including various types of abuses students experienced. Similarly, in this study, social issues encountered by families and students also appear to consistently affect students' ability to remain in and attend school. According to teacher, parent, and student participants, many students deal with issues in their home lives such as overcrowded housing, teenage pregnancy, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, gambling addiction, physical, verbal and sexual abuse, family break-up, and parental absence (emotional and/or physical).

The parents, some of them, have other problems, they can't deal with their kids. There's other issues in the family whether it's marital, gambling. The kids are pushed aside because they are preoccupied. With alcohol or going to [the bar in a nearby French community] or... kids are not the priority.

(participant 2)

Around the community, it's hard. All those problems. There's lots of problems. There's all the drinking in the families, the break-ups. There's a lot of break ups. It's hard on the kids. (participant 4)

Participants spoke of the way that these social issues affect students' opportunities to learn, especially their ability to attend school. Some students are unable to attend school regularly and eventually drop out because they fall behind and are unable to catch up:

It's hard on the kids. They have lack of...they don't want to go. They think about, "No, it's my fault. Why should I go?" It's hard for most families. (participant 4)

A lot of the times it's family issues when a student doesn't want to go to school. (participant 1)

Some participants pointed to the number of teenage pregnancies in the community as an issue that led to low attendance, falling behind, and often, eventually, school leaving.

I think that sometimes it's that the girls are expecting, and boys, their girlfriends are expecting. I know this one boy he is in secondary 5, his girlfriend had a baby, and I never seen him since then. I think that's why.... they both leave. Yeah. And some boyfriends are very supportive. They help their girlfriends. They babysit. Not all of them are like that. (participant 1)

[Pregnancy] keeps them away from school...some have families before they complete their secondary 5. And what happens is when they start families, that means they are off for a year. And they have to start all over again. (participant 8)

Pregnancy is not the only issue. For example, other students do not attend school because their friends have stopped attending school:

Some students leave because, I think, their friends are already out doing what is not good for them and they think it's cool. (participant 6)

There is a general feeling, then, that for many young people the pull of their peers is stronger than their motivation to stay in school, so when a peer leaves school, other students will leave to stay with their social group or because of peer pressure not to attend school.

Unhappiness and insecurity within the home also leads, in some cases, to acting out behaviourally within the school; participants spoke of students being unable to function within the school structure because of the way they were affected outside of the school by social issues:

Large percentage [are affected]. Considering the success rate of our kids. I've seen the problem kids. The problem kids that I've seen, it's always something in the home. Always something. Marital. Parents are separated.... The majority of kids that are seen [in the guidance department for discipline reasons], there is a problem in the home.

(participant 2)

It is possible that some of these students do not make an active choice to stay away from school in these situations, but the choice is made for them by the school. Students may be suspended from school when unhappiness and insecurity within the home leads to them acting out behaviourally within the school.

Even when students who face problems in the home manage to attend school regularly, participants reported that many are not able to attend to their learning and suffer academically because of this distraction.

If you want to teach something to a student, they have to have a clear mind. They cannot think when they know that someone at home is.... there's family break-ups that is one of the most devastating to a child, to young people. And they come to school and know that their parents are not stable. Maybe they are living with their mother or their father. That's a big, big distraction for them. They are lost. (participant 8)

Cause I know that a lot of youth go through a lot of things. Not just in school, but other stuff. And it's hard to focus on your education when there's stuff that's bothering you. (participant 11)

Yet, it appears that there is a lack of focus in the school on the out-of-school experiences of our young people. Staff members in this study spoke about the need to focus on students who are having problems outside of school in order to serve them better within the school, but their responses also highlighted that an almost oppositional relationship between the school and these students currently exists. They felt that if this relationship were changed to one of understanding rather than opposition, the school would be in a better position to serve its clientele:

Some students are being bad. We still have to understand why they are like that. We have to, we still have to teach them, accept them. We have to learn also from them. We have to know what's going on. (participant 1)

You have to know our kids. And what it's like in their home environment. Not all kids have a happy life at home. Or not all kids eat breakfast. Not all kids can afford new clothes. Teachers have to know our culture and what these kids go through. Some of the kids have problems at home. Like their parents are drinking. Or parents are down south. You know. They are affected when their parents are down south going to school or somebody lost a mother or the father died or single parent. You know, they have to know these kids. (participant 2)

Understanding the home lives and/or the out-of-school lives of students, especially those who are affected by the social issues outlined in this section, is important to participants.

Understanding, or misunderstanding, is seen to be tied to teachers being caring and the school itself as a caring environment (as discussed in Chapter 8). The ability, both at the individual and institutional levels, to understand student problems within the school and act on these understandings in positive ways can be a way of caring for students. Likewise, the inability to understand the problems that students deal with outside of school can be seen as not caring for students.

Like the students, parents in this study feel that as a community we are not connecting with our youth in a positive way, and that we could be doing more to engage young people in positive activities.

When they go home, sit in front of the tv. Play games. It's a real challenge for the youth. It's hard for them. There's nothing for them. Well, there is, but nobody has the time to do things for them. To really motivate them. To show them what's out there. (participant 4)

Among all participants, there is a feeling that we do not engage with youth or create positive experiences for troubled youth because we are not comfortable facing our social problems on more than a surface level:

We're afraid of the truth. We are afraid of what's going on in the community. These kids have been touched by all kinds of abuse. From family members to aunts, uncles, whatever. And I think that's something we have to start talking about. (participant 13)

It appears that the personal ability of students to attend and remain in school is partially determined by within-school factors but also out-of-school factors connected to the social issues in our community, and that both the school and the community have a role to play in working towards the amelioration of these problems. Some light may be shed on this situation by Yair (2000) who found that at-risk students are “more externally occupied” and therefore less engaged (p. 254): “students are alienated from instruction almost half the time and that when they are alienated, they tend to be preoccupied with external issues” (p. 247). This preoccupation with external issues can be considered a disengagement factor that may be affecting school success levels of our students. While Yair (2000) points out that student-centred instructional strategies can help to lessen the preoccupation with external issues and thereby heighten engagement, in our case, we cannot merely aim to distract students with school work for short periods of time, but instead need to heed the participants’ suggestion for healing or counseling within the school and for developing tools to help students deal with poor social situations outside of school. Helping students deal with various social issues is discussed further below in the section entitled “the school’s receptiveness to student needs and perspectives.”

While this section has discussed the social problems that students face in their daily lives that affect their ability to attend and remain in school, the following section relates findings concerning the support systems that students have that enhance their personal abilities to attend and remain in school.

Support. Students need to feel that there are adults in their lives who they can depend upon for emotional support and for encouragement to finish high school. The findings in this section show that for students who are in school, most of the support to

stay in school comes from their parents and extended family members. Findings also show that there is a perceived lack of effective support systems within the school that could mitigate school leaving.

They need support. Otherwise if nobody's there, then they're lost. I would have been lost younger. I was already skipping in grade 1. (participant 2)

The student survey included items asking students to indicate the availability of emotional support in the school and outside of the school by asking them to report whether or not they have people they can talk openly with about problems that arise in their lives. Students were asked to finish the statement, "When I am in trouble, or need to talk to someone, I go to my: ____" and they were given a list of possibilities from which to choose. Students were allowed to choose as many support persons as they wished from a list of: friend, parent, teacher, vice-principal, principal, guidance counselor, student affairs technician,¹⁵ or none of these. The chart below (Figure 11) shows the counts, as numbers of responses for each category, for each choice on the student surveys.

¹⁵ Student affairs technicians are members of the guidance department in Cree School Board schools. They sometimes take on a counseling role, but also help with following up on attendance issues and some discipline issues. They are referred to as S.A.T.s within the schools.

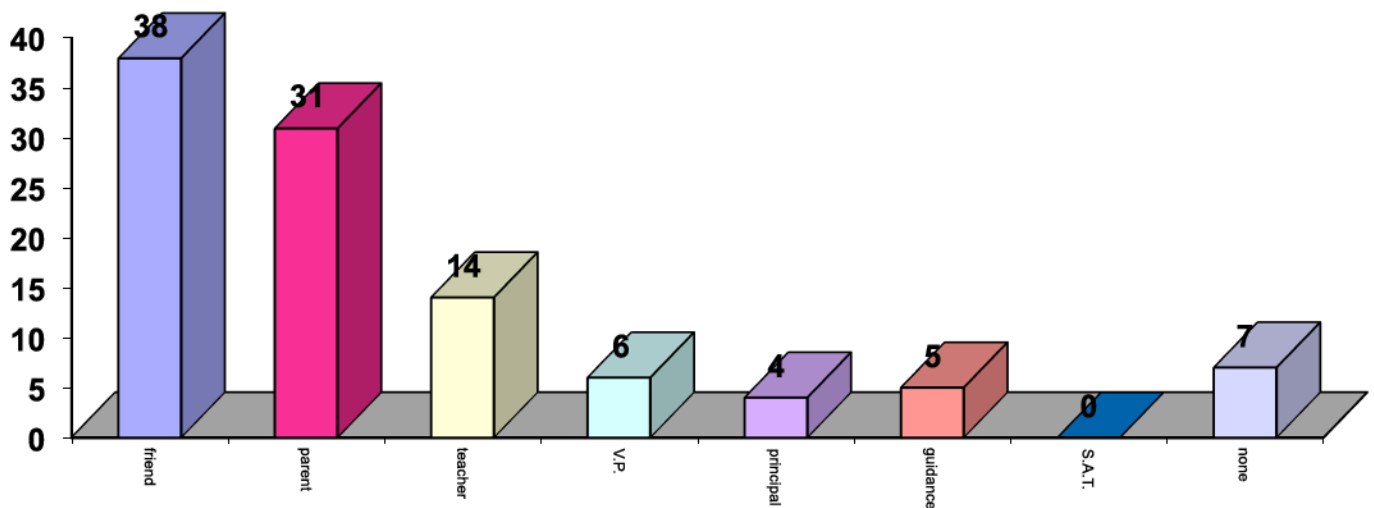


Figure 11: Chosen Support Persons

Students are more likely to choose friends and parents as support persons for problems bothering them, with teachers as a distant third choice. Students thus rely a great deal on out-of-school support to help them deal with problems that arise in their lives.

There wasn't a lot of people that would encourage you in the school.

There was only my mother that would push me to go to school. There wasn't anyone in the school that you could go to talk about stuff.

(participant 11)

It is interesting, given the intended role in the school, that no one chose the student affairs technician as a support person.

The survey also asked students specifically about support to remain in school.

Students were asked whether they had someone who supported their staying in school, to which students responded as outlined in Table 18 below:

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
61.4%	10.5%	17.5%	10.5%

Table 18: I Have People Who Support My Staying In School

Only a small percentage of students say that they do not have anyone who supports their remaining in school. The majority of students do have support for staying in school, and most of this support is coming from parents and extended family members like grandparents.

Like [my mother], she made me go every morning. And, like, if I had problems, like, I would talk to her about it. And sometimes I would want to give up... and she, like, showed me a vision of my life, like how, where I can be. You don't just have to stay here and work here; it's really important to have a high school diploma for any reason, so she really encouraged me not to give up... and, like, she would help me with my homework and whatever. If I don't really understand, it she would help me. (participant 11)

Likewise, qualitative responses to a survey item asking, "Would you please write some things that these people do to help you stay in school?" showed that most of the support for students is in the form of encouragement and other support activities within the home. Some examples of these survey item responses are:

They always tell to finish school to get a better education a brighter future.
(survey respondent)

Encouraging me to stay in school and be the first to finish high school in my family. (survey respondent)

Talkin, telling me to go to class. (survey respondent)

They encourage me by saying it or by trying to help my babysitting.

(survey respondent)

They talk to me and stuff. (survey respondent)

Help me with my homework. (survey respondent)

I have my parents to support me and saying “go to school and learn something”. (survey respondent)

They encourage me and even yell at me sometimes when I don’t listen.

(survey respondent)

They encourage me in school and make me see what holds me for the future. (survey respondent)

It appears, then, that most of the support that students are getting is coming from outside of the school, mostly in the home from parents and extended family members. This is consistent with my earlier finding that despite a perception of low parental involvement in school within this community, parents of children who are in school are in fact involved in their children’s education, just involved in less formal ways outside of the school building (Pashagumskum, 2005).

Not all students have parental support, however. Participants spoke of a lack of parental interest in their children’s education as a reason that some students leave school.

There’s some parents that are not interested.... There’s some parents that are not really invested in their kid’s education, kids who are marginalized, kids at-risk – those are the types. (participant 10)

Further, there is a low level of volunteer parent involvement within the school building and a reluctance to participate in school governance on the parent-school committee; at the time data were gathered, only two people accepted their nominations for the parent-school committee and were therefore acclaimed. For the remaining five seats, people had to be approached individually and convinced to join the committee.

They have a parent’s committee right? They do? But when we graduated I didn’t see a lot of people participating [in planning and preparation]. The only time is when there’s graduation [ceremony]. They [parents] should get more involved. (participant 11)

In response to an item on the survey asking about parent presence in the school, students responded as follows:

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
1.8%	8.8%	29.8%	59.6%

Table 19: Parents In School

Most students (59.6%) report that their parents are never in the school; this is consistent with participants’ view that there is a lack of parent presence in the school, especially in terms of volunteer activities. The lack of parent involvement within the school building was explored in my earlier study (Pashagumskum, 2005), and much of the parental absence from the school building results from discomfort with the ecology of the school and lack of knowledge about how to become involved.

Still, a large percentage of students believe that despite a lack of parental presence within the school, there is communication between their parents and their teachers:

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
10.5%	26.3%	47.4%	15.8%

Table 20: Parents And Teachers Talk

Only 15.8% of students say that their parents and teachers never speak with each other. Student perceptions of teachers and parents communicating with each other could be quite encouraging. However, staff participants speak of parents not coming into the school, and about a lack of communication existing between the school and parents.

Also, we need to communicate with the parents. There seems to be a lack of communication between the school and the community and the parents.

We need to bring that.... somehow, I don't know, we started having less and less meetings with parents. And then we didn't have them at all. And now when we want to have a meeting, only 10 or 12 show up. The agora used to be filled. It wasn't all the parents but you had 50 or 60. Even grandparents came who were concerned. I know a lot of them are young parents, but we still need to bring them back, to come in and have meetings with them. The school and the parents need to work together for the children. (participant 5)

Perhaps teachers and students have a different view of parent-teacher communication? Students may consider activities such as phone calls to be communication and be satisfied with that, while teachers may desire more in-person types of communication. Given the results, I wonder if there were more in-person meetings with parents, whether this would raise student engagement levels? Or would it be sufficient to increase communication like phone calls and letters to parents? In any case, as it stands now, it appears that it was not the communication between teachers and parents that made a

difference for students who remained in school, but the verbal encouragement received from parents, and actions like help with homework and babysitting.

As seen in participants' responses above, students who are in school and those who are graduates of the school reported that parental support is the main reason that they remained or still remain in school; it thus is safe to say that parental support can mitigate against school-leaving amongst Eeyou students. This support, however, does not necessarily have to be in the form of volunteer work inside the school, as most students defined parental support as activities like verbal encouragement and help with homework. It is important for our students to have emotional support, expectations, and encouragement from an adult figure in order to build the resilience necessary to remain in school until graduation. As noted, for participants of this study, such support came in the form of both parents and extended family members.

I think its resiliency on the kid's part. Like if something happened in their life. There's somebody in the home. Like, for me, it was my grandfather. I had a crappy life. There's got to be somebody there who is going to encourage them or remind them. Otherwise, if there's nobody there, you're just on your own path and you can't think to go on this path.

(participant 2)

To be successful in school they need strong family relationships. They need to build those skills to have strong relationships coming from the home. And they need to have a strong home environment. (participant 8)

It is in the support of extended family members, particularly grandparents, that the results of this study differ somewhat from mainstream research that focuses most on the

nuclear family as support for remaining in school (e.g., Epstein, 1992, 2003). In our context, efforts to enhance support for students, or evaluate availability of supports for students, it would be vital to include grandparents and other family members in student support initiatives.

Results of this study also differ from other education research in terms of the types of parent involvement activities deemed valuable. Education research into parent involvement typically considers involvement in school-based activities and in school governance (e.g. Epstein, 1992; Friedel, 1999; Levine & Lezotte, 1995). Research documenting low involvement rates of First Nations parents in their children's schooling has linked low parental involvement to high school-leaving rates and low academic performance (Friedel, 1999). Mainstream research on effective schools similarly connects parental involvement to student success and school success. For children of all grade levels, benefits of parental involvement are both academic and emotional (Epstein, 1992). When parental involvement is "a process of partnership, of shared views and actions toward shared goals," students benefit from the awareness that the family and the school are connected (Epstein, 2003, p. 361). Furthermore, these students reap the benefits specific to policy decisions that their parents have been involved in (Epstein, 2003). Parental involvement is also a common factor of "unusually effective schools" (Levine & Lezotte, 1995, p. 530). According to participants in my study, however, a parent's presence in school might help, but students who have remained in school report doing so because of outside-of-school support from parents, not within-school support. While more parent involvement in school governance could possibly mitigate in-school leaving

factors amongst our students, this was not named as a positive determining influence by those participants in my study who did remain in school.

On another note, for many participants, the involvement of the wider community in the school is seen to have a potentially positive effect on school success rates in our community. On the student survey, students were asked to respond to a series of items designed to solicit their perceptions of Elder and community involvement in the school, and the school’s involvement with the community. The following tables show student responses to these items.

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
14%	19.3%	50.9%	15.8%

Table 21: Elders In School

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
3.5%	3.5%	57.9%	35.1%

Table 22: Community Member Participation

Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
3.5%	12.3%	35.1%	45.6%

Table 23: Learning in Other Places In The Community

These results are difficult to interpret. While it seems that approximately half of the students see both community members and Elders in the school sometimes, 35% never see community members in the school and almost half never go to other places in the community for learning experiences. I would only be able to conclude that the school definitely involves the community in the learning experience, and that Elders and other

community members are invited into the school to be a part of the learning experience, if a large percentage of students (perhaps around 75%) had responded “Sometimes” to all three items.

This is of concern because First Nations community involvement in the schooling of its children has been found to be good for both the community and the students within the school; as Tippeconnic (1999) states, “when community involvement is high, the school becomes a focal point and is involved in the reconstitution of community life” (p. 45). Further, community involvement in schooling is linked to First Nations student success:

First Nations communities which value education and communicate this to community members and school staff appear to have higher success rates in graduating students. Their leaders, school boards and schools all work together to meet their students’ needs. (Poonwassie & Charter, 2001, p. 124, citing Mackay & Myles)

Similarly, a study involving the Upper Nicola Band found that “ideal education” involved the participation of all community members (Charters-Voght, 1999). In addition, community involvement enhances success by encouraging schools to focus not only on academics, but on the affective domain as well (Klug & Whitfield, 2003). Rehyner (1992) asserts that drop-out prevention needs to involve various community members, especially in the role of counselors who work with students and also work closely with parents. Similarly, from a mainstream perspective, Baizerman and Compton (1993) posit that a community needs to take responsibility for its youth, claiming “moral responsibility for its children, adolescents, and youth and act[ing] to support their healthy

development” (p. 17); dropout prevention requires more than parent involvement and therefore the wider community must be involved in “deeper socio-cultural and socioeconomic intervention” (p. 19).

The literature concerning adult support as an engagement factor mainly deals with teacher support. Teacher support has been shown to positively affect student engagement (e.g. Holt et al., 2008; Jennings, 2003; Murdock & Miller, 2003; Reeve et al., 2004; Woolley & Bowen, 2007). Students who feel supported by adults are more motivated (Murdock & Miller, 2003) and there is a positive correlation between caring adult relationships in the school and meaningful participation in school (Jennings, 2003). The findings of Woolley and Bowen (2007) are particularly salient considering the findings of the current study reported in the previous section concerning external preoccupations that may be interfering with student engagement; Woolley & Bowen (2007) reported that

supportive and caring adults build resilience in multiple risk-exposed youth. At-risk youths who reported the presence of supportive adults reported higher levels of school engagement, which are predictors of success in school. Such positive adult relationships appear to be most important for students who are at higher levels of risk, who are members of historically discriminated minority groups, and who are male. (pp. 100-101)

The finding that students in this study feel more supported by adults outside of the school than by adults within the school is of concern because it may point to a lack of support from adults within the school and a need for the school to focus more on ways of forming

supportive relationships with adults for students within the school as a way of increasing engagement.

Factors affecting the motivation to attend or remain in school

The previous section discussed the ways that support persons can help students to remain in and attend school at the secondary level. A part of the support that these persons provide is in providing motivation for students to remain in school. This section focuses on those in-school factors that can or do motivate students to remain in school, attend school, and work to excel academically. Discussed below is the need for students to see a purpose to going to school, in-school structural motivational factors, and out-of-school motivational factors. In order to be engaged, data show that students in this community must see a purpose to going to school, be motivated by attractors within the school, and/or be motivated by factors in their personal lives that give them a reason to attend and remain in school.

Seeing a purpose to remain in and attend school. Participants in my earlier study (Pashagumskum, 2005) indicated that the school is perceived as having low standards for academic requirements. Likewise, both Friedel (1999) in a study with urban Aboriginal parents, and Charters-Voght (1999) in a study done with the Upper Nicola Band, found that parents perceived their schools as having low expectations of, or low standards for, Aboriginal students. Mackay and Myles (1999) purport that Aboriginal students are frequently unprepared not only to leave home and live within a different culture, but that they also are unprepared academically.

The perception of school standards and the ability of the school to prepare them for a future affects student choices to perform academically and attend school. If

expectations were higher within the school, students would “perform better and push to work harder” (participant 11). Qualitative data showed a clear perception that the secondary school in our community has low academic standards for students: “I mean, seriously, we’ve been doing the same chapter for three months in one class” (participant 15). When students and recent graduates spoke of their experiences within the school, they consistently highlighted pervasive low expectations of students in terms of both behaviour and academic performance. For example, when a student in her graduating year wished to visit a university she was hoping to be accepted at, the student reported that the teacher replied, “Come on, [name of student], let’s go somewhere you can actually get into” (participant 14). Students want teachers to employ higher standards within the classroom in terms of schoolwork, and rate teachers as bad when they perceive them to be employing low academic standards, and good when they are perceived as employing high academic standards.

Items on the student survey asked students to indicate whether they have confidence in the academic program of the school; these were included both as an indication of student satisfaction with the school and to give an idea about whether students feel a sense of instrumentality in going to school, given instrumentality is seen in the literature as an engagement factor (Van Ryzin et al., 2009; Walker & Greene, 2009). Conceivably, students who have faith in and are satisfied with a school system will feel more positive about being in school and will be more engaged with their education. In answer to the item, “James Bay Eeyou School is preparing me for my future,” 71.9% of students responded “yes,” while 22.8% of students responded “no”; there was a non-response rate of 3.5% and an invalid response rate of 1.8%. The rates are similar for the

item, “James Bay Eeyou School is a good school.” To this item, 70.2% responded “yes,” while 26.3% responded “no,” with a non-response rate of 3.5%. Quantitative data show that a majority of students feel their school is a good school and that it is preparing them for the future.

The student survey results differ in some ways, however, from the qualitative results. Some of the interviewees indicated a perception that the school does not prepare students academically for further schooling. As an example: “And I don’t think that they teach you all the stuff to prepare you for college” (participant 11). This inconsistency between qualitative and quantitative results could simply be due to a desire among a minority of the student population to attend post-secondary institutions; it could be that students who want to further their schooling in post-secondary institutions do not believe they are prepared by the school, but that the majority of students do not wish to attend post-secondary institutions and therefore see the school as preparing them for the future.

Student responses to items eliciting perceptions of school expectations and difficulty of academic work are a little more consistent with the qualitative responses. While 42.1% of students believe that their school has high expectations of them, 40.4% of students do not (Figure 12).

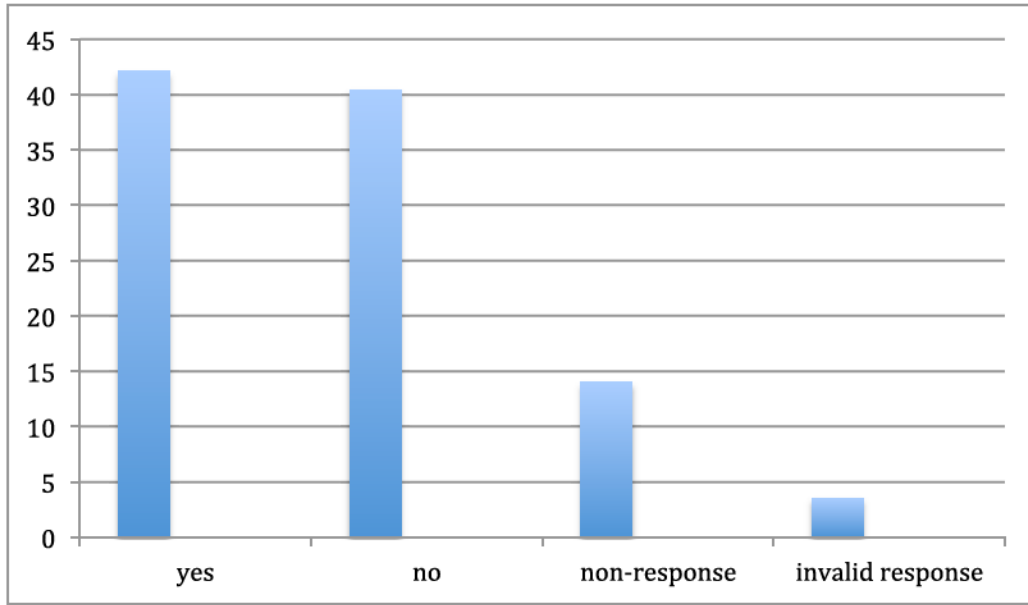


Figure 12: This School Has High Expectations Of Me

Items asking for student perception of school-work as challenging or school-work as easy, however, are inconsistent, and therefore cannot provide a strong indication of student feelings about the difficulty of school work. 63.2% of students believe that their schoolwork is challenging while 28.1 % of students believe that their schoolwork is not challenging. In contrast, 57.9% of students believe that their schoolwork is easy, while 31.6% of students believe that their schoolwork is not easy.

Yes	No	Non-response	Invalid response
63.2%	28.1%	0%	8.8%

Table 24: My Schoolwork Is Challenging

Yes	No	Non-response	Invalid response
57.9%	31.6%	0%	10.5%

Table 25: My Schoolwork Is Easy

Possible explanations for the inconsistency in results might include students being unclear about what constitutes a “good” school, what constitutes “challenging” or “easy” work, or simply participant fatigue as these questions were placed near the end of the questionnaire. It is also possible that students did not want to commit to an either/or response; the rate for non-response and invalid response to “yes” or “no” questions on the survey is much higher than that for the four-point scale items; students may have been uncomfortable with a binary response and the inclusion of indecisive response options such as “I don’t know” might have yielded more accurate results. Considering the “thin” description usually offered by quantitative data (Dörnyei, 2003), it is probably best to lean towards an assumption that the qualitative responses speak more to the actual perceptions of the situation.

In any case, it is safe to say that the school must hold high standards in terms of both academics and behaviour if they wish students to see a purpose in attending and remaining in school; high expectations of students are indeed an engagement factor among our student population. High expectations of students have been shown elsewhere to positively affect engagement (e.g., Anderman, 2003; Tyler & Boelter, 2008; Smerdon, 2002; Yair, 2000). Academic pressure and teacher expectations affect engagement. As Yair (2000) noted, “the greater the academic demand that students experience in class, the more likely they are to be engaged in instruction” (p. 260), and as Wentzel (2002) warned, “teacher expectations for low performances can be particularly debilitating for student achievement” (p. 298).

Students also are more likely to be motivated to remain in school if they have future goals that are tied to remaining in school. Parents feel that the school should “open

doors for them, give them ideas” (participant 4), and that, at present, it is not doing enough to show students what an education can do for their future. Similarly, school staff members understand that students must see schooling as an essential component to achieving future goals:

They have to know what they want and what their goals are or otherwise they will have not much of a purpose to be successful in school.

(participant 8)

Graduates who participated in my study similarly feel that being given clear information about how schooling could contribute to their future increased their motivation to remain in school:

She [my mother], like, showed me a vision of my life... so she really encouraged me not to give up. (participant 11)

For some of the graduates, the ability to further their studies in higher education was a strong motivation for remaining in, and graduating from, secondary school.

The student survey asked students whether they have reasons to stay in school in order to provide a broader picture of student motivations for remaining in school. Most students answered the item positively with 59.6% of students saying they “always” have reasons to stay in school, 14% saying “most of the time,” 15.8% saying “sometimes,” and only 8.8% saying “never.”

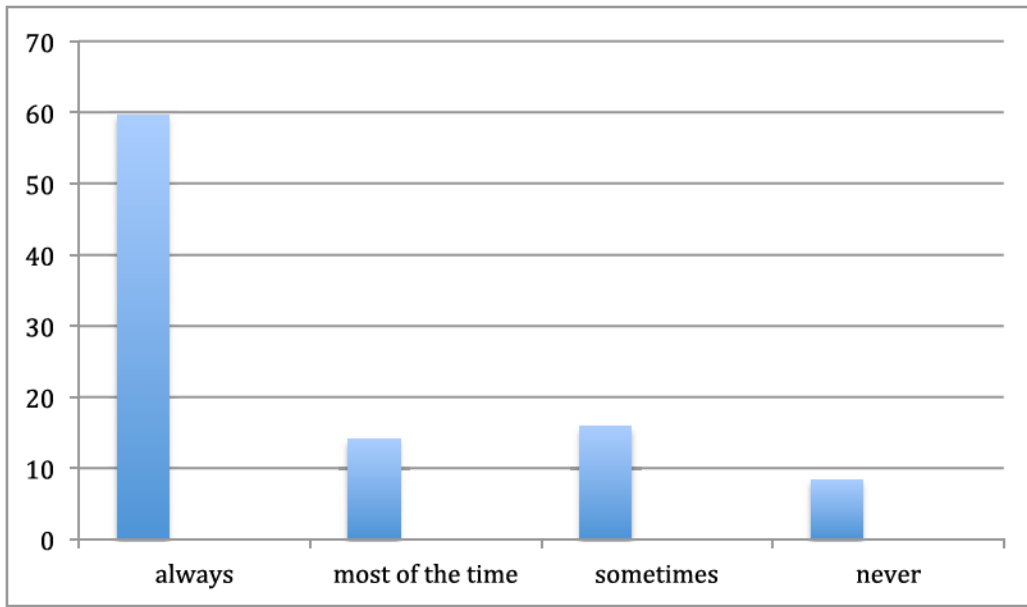


Figure 13: I Have Reasons To Stay In School

In answer to the accompanying open response prompt for having a reason to stay in school, “If yes, would you please list as many reasons as possible,” students for the most part gave reasons consistent with the ability to be employable in the future and to benefit their families in some way. Some examples of student responses to this item:

To get education and in the end I could support my family. (survey respondent)

I have to finish school because I could get a better education and a better job. (survey respondent)

Finish my school to have a job. (survey respondent)

I want to graduate, go to college, and it’s been always a dream for me to graduate. (survey respondent)

I have to learn stuff, that’s what my parents say! (survey respondent)

To obtain my diploma. (survey respondent)

Because I want to finish school I reason mook.¹⁶ (survey respondent)

These responses are consistent with the interview data presented below, showing that many students do want to graduate in order to receive some sort of economic benefit in the future, for themselves or their families. Interestingly, most of those who answered the open-ended response item on reasons for staying in school gave secondary completion as a reason in itself for attending school, not post-secondary aspirations as a reason for finishing secondary. This gives some weight to the conjecture I made above that most students feel the school is indeed preparing them for their future not because they wish to attend post-secondary institutions, but because they simply want to obtain a secondary school diploma.

One of the major motivations for finishing high school among girls was a desire to benefit their children. Some young mothers spoke of feeling that high school graduation was more important after they had their babies while still in high school:

My kids mostly.... I always wanted to finish high school.... I dropped out when I got pregnant.... My kids, it was more important to me [to finish high school]. (participant 14)

I need to have a career to support my child. (survey respondent)

These young women wanted to be positive role models for their children and also be able to provide financially for their children; they saw high school graduation as a means to these ends.

These findings are consistent with research exploring the importance of instrumentality to student engagement. Students are more motivated and therefore more

¹⁶ “mook” means “only” in English

engaged when they believe that their experience in school supports their needs (Van Ryzin et al., 2009), which could explain the determination of young mothers to finish school in order to provide a positive future for their children. The sense of instrumentality can also be affected by “teachers’ articulating, and students being able to understand, why and how learning is personally relevant to their future” (Walker & Greene, 2009, p. 469). The fact that most students were able to say that they “always” have reasons to stay in school coupled with the various reasons listed for staying in school shows that there is a sense of instrumentality amongst students in this school.

Extra-curricular motivations. Other students who took the student survey gave what might be more social reasons for staying in school such as:

Friends and math. (survey respondent)

Sports and to hang with my friends. (survey respondent)

I like playing sports and music. (survey respondent)

These responses are consistent with interview responses to my question about how we might encourage students to remain in school that highlighted the need for more extra-curricular activities to encourage students to remain in school:

More activities, sports, fieldtrips. Extra-curricular, after school.

(participant 6)

I always looked forward to, well, most of the time I never looked forward to going. Just wanted to finish. I would go and do the work and I went there sometimes for my friends. To be with friends. The activities like playing volleyball, those are the things I just felt like going for.

(participant 4)

Creating an environment that allowed students time and gave them opportunities to interact with each other in social, non-academic ways could create more motivation amongst students to attend and remain in school.

These findings are consistent with literature concerning the effect of extra-curricular activities on students. Extra-curricular activities have been shown to increase school connectedness (McNeely et al., 2002) and sense of belonging (Ma, 2003) and increase the amount of positive time students spend with teachers outside of class (Broh, 2002). Ensuring that students are provided with opportunities to take part in after-school activities would positively affect engagement, but Broh (2002) does offer some caveats, although based on research in mainstream schools: “results show that participation in some activities improves achievement, while participation in others diminishes achievement” (p. 69). According to Broh (2002), participation in music groups, student council, drama clubs, year book/journalism clubs, and interscholastic sports all positively affect achievement. As noted in the earlier discussion of extra-curricular activities in Chapter 8, Broh (2002) found that “structure, adult supervision and parental involvement” were common to all activities that were consistent with positive student outcomes.

Student empowerment linked to engagement. Findings also show that adult-student interactions, including teaching approaches, are linked to engagement through teaching towards independence. This graduate wished that she had been taught the importance of taking responsibility for her own education, saying that she was encouraged to rely too much on her teachers:

Well, responsibility. Like, once you go to college it's not like your teachers are going to go after you. You have to learn how to come to them. Like, if you're having trouble learning something, you go to them. You can't just wait for them to come to you... [Students] have to learn that here. (participant 11)

Taking into account the low expectations of students discussed earlier in this chapter and the student fear of approaching teachers discussed in Chapter 8, a conjecture might be made that students are often encouraged to be passive participants in the learning process. Being taught how to set goals and being encouraged to take responsibility for one's own education are connected to student empowerment, in that having students set goals and take responsibility should go hand in hand with a willingness to hear student voices and seriously take into account student ideas and wishes for their schooling.

Chapter 8 has already related results about student empowerment and the lack of student involvement in decision-making within the school. The hearing of student voice and the valuing of student input were linked to empowerment but also to motivation. According to this staff member, students are motivated to learn when they know that a teacher cares about what they have to say:

Caring. You have to listen. Pay attention to the student. Watch. That's how you know or see things from the student. From watching. From listening. Like this, if you hear a student asking a question. Right away you know that this student wants to learn. You don't kick them out. He or she wants to learn. Wants to know something. (participant 1)

A former student relayed similar thoughts:

I don't know, like when I would ask something. [Teachers] would be, like, "Why do you care?" That's what they do here, "Just get it over with so we could go home." (participant 11)

As detailed in Chapter 8, having their voices heard and knowing that adults care about what they think can show students that the adults in the school care about them; feeling cared about is an engagement factor for our students. In addition, feeling that one's own thoughts matter can empower students and the feeling of empowerment can become a reason in and of itself to go to school.

Student empowerment is an important factor in the engagement literature, and can be encouraged in various ways. In Johnson (2008), students took part in "committees that manage school policy, budget, hiring, and public relations" with the result that they felt a sense of autonomy and a "greater sense of agency" and school belonging (pp. 82 - 83). Similarly, McNeely et al. (2002) found that school connectedness was increased when students were given opportunities to self-manage and take part in decision-making processes through "steadily increasing opportunities for autonomy" (p. 138). In Faircloth (2009), students' sense of empowerment was heightened by a curriculum designed to provide opportunities for students to draw "from their backgrounds, families, and culture" (p. 342). Further, when students were provided with autonomy opportunities, Hardre and Reeve (2003) found they were more motivated and their sense of self-determination increased which was more powerful in positively affecting their choice to persist than academic performance. In our school perhaps we may garner similar engagement results as these studies if we conscientiously work to develop students' sense of autonomy and self-determination in order to empower students.

The school's receptiveness to student needs and perspectives

This section discusses the ways that the school does or does not respond to the issues that affect students including social problems, support systems, and motivation. As noted earlier, the personal ability of students to attend and remain in school can be greatly influenced by within-school engagement and disengagement factors, and it is apparent that both the school and the community have a role to play. This section deals with what the school does and does not do to increase students' ability to attend and remain in school, first by discussing the need to provide support services, then by discussing the types of support services needed by students, and finally by discussing different options for learning and class size as engagement factors.

The need for support services. Earlier in this chapter, under the sub-heading "social issues," it was shown that participants feel that there are issues falling under the umbrella term 'social problems' that are not dealt with adequately in our community; we must begin to deal with these problems in an open, active, and consistent way if we are ever to truly engage students in our school system. Following is an outline of findings showing types of services needed to support students not only in ameliorating the effects of social issues on their abilities to attend and remain in school, but also other supports that would positively affect their abilities to attend and remain in school.

Support services that would enhance student ability to attend and remain in school at the secondary level are mainly connected to helping students deal with social issues such as teenage pregnancy, abuse in the home, and unstable home environments. Consequently, the need for childcare within the school and enhanced counseling services are discussed first in this section. Later, I will detail support services that would increase

the ability to attend and remain in school related to academic performance such as tutoring, extra help, attention to special needs, and smaller class size.

Many participants named a school daycare as a way to help more students remain in school. As illustrated earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 9, having a baby while still in high school can provide a young mother with further motivation to finish secondary school. But, parenting can also make finishing secondary school exceedingly difficult when problems with childcare arise. Students reported that a daycare within the school would help young mothers stay in school, especially those who breastfeed, but also because young mothers could be with their children periodically throughout the day and not have to spend extended lengths of time away from them in order to meet school schedule requirements.

That [daycare] would have helped me a lot. It would help a lot of students.

If it was free too. It was really hard. I almost wanted to quit. (participant 14)

According to parents, we are not facing up to the realities of this community:

A daycare would be good. We've got to work with our reality. This is the reality. Encourage our kids to get an education, further their education.

(participant 13)

Responses of participants indicate that the school does not recognize or take into account our community's high teenage pregnancy rate; if this reality was not ignored but actually dealt with in a way that would help young parents to be close to their children while they went to school themselves, then more students would be given the opportunity to finish.

As well, according to participants, there should also be an increase in career, academic, and psychological counseling available to students to help enhance student ability to attend and remain in school. According to parent, student, graduate, and staff participants, students are not provided with enough academic and career counseling and are not helped to make decisions about schooling that will affect their desired futures.

There's a lack of counseling, guidance. (participant 8)

The guidance staff do not display themselves. (participant 7)

I know they had a guidance counselor and stuff like that but they are not really approachable. They just go there and sit there. Seems like they don't make the time. If anything is bothering you, maybe an exam or an assignment is too much or you want more information, there's the teacher, but it's usually the teacher. And they don't want to help you. So I'd say, like, have more people that could be there, make time for you. They should have, like, more than just the guidance counselors. (participant 11)

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, many students find it hard to continue attending school regularly and to remain in school because their home lives are unstable. Participants spoke of the need for the school to help students deal with various issues in their personal lives.

I'm sure that there are a lot of students that have problems in certain areas.

Even social problems. They need to talk to counselors. They need to implement really looking at students and their problems. (participant 4)

We need to set up a program where we have people who know how to deal with these kids. Sometimes they are very delicate issues. Because this

is one of the biggest problems we have in our community. These young people have to be stable to be able to learn in school. And I can see that the majority of them are not. They don't have stable homes because of things going on at home. And they can't learn in that kind of an environment. If we can set up some kind of counseling or healing, some kind of programs, as part of the school curriculum to be ongoing every year. And not just to be as a one-time thing or as a one-month thing.

(participant 8)

The findings outlined above imply that the school does not adequately help students develop the emotional resources and resiliency so that they are able to participate and continue in their schooling.

In addition to counseling to intervene with social issues that students deal with, there is also a need for support services connected to academic remediation. Many participants reported an absence of academic tutoring within the school for students who struggle with academic work or are having difficulty in a particular subject. More particularly, participants voiced the opinion that peer tutoring would help students keep caught up academically. This recent graduate, for example, would have been helped by the presence of peer tutors:

I think that they should have a tutoring service. To help you. Have time for you. A tutor can be good, like, if somebody's good in English, she could make a little schedule.... peer tutoring. (participant 11)

Peer tutors could provide a non-threatening, comfortable arena for students to receive aid with schoolwork.

When I talk to young people it comes across like a lecture, I don't care what I say, because I'm older than them, but when it's from their peers, it's an ordinary conversation to them. That's the difference. If I said the same thing that their peer said to them it would be completely different....

We need young people to be teaching young people. (participant 10)

Other participants believe that peer tutors would be able to understand or identify with academic problems students are having and therefore be in a better position than teachers to help fellow students with academic work:

Maybe other students can help. Those that really understand the concept.

Maybe those students can help the ones that are really having difficulty.

Maybe they'll understand it more with another student rather than with the teacher. (participant 8)

Peer tutoring within the school might realize more benefits than merely improving academic success. Chapter 8 spoke of the lack of community feelings within the school and the lack of positive relationships among those who inhabit the school daily; peer tutoring can be a community-building action conducive to, and symptomatic, of a positive and caring environment within a school by encouraging respectful relationships between students. Further, the act of peer tutoring can involve the building of leadership skills in students who act as tutors and can contribute to feelings of empowerment.

In the literature, peer-related belongingness in school can have a positive effect on engagement (Van Ryzin et al., 2009), and students whose friendship networks include other students who prioritize school are more likely to complete high school (Ream & Rumberger, 2008). Further, engagement in school can counter the pull of peers towards

less desirable social behaviour (Ream & Rumberger, 2008). However, peer relationships can also lower engagement if the relationships cause students to focus more on external preoccupations (Yair, 2000). The school can encourage positive friendship networks for students by providing opportunities for students to engage in mutually supportive ways such as peer tutoring sessions or in extra-curricular activities.

Participants were also concerned about the assistance available to students with learning disabilities, feeling that the services for students with special needs were not adequate for the number of students needing special service nor adequate to meet the various types of special needs within the school. Students who had received special services in elementary school appeared to no longer have access to such services when they reached secondary age.

What happens to those students that needed help in the elementary? They are left behind. They start falling into the cracks. They start skipping. They are afraid. They feel insecure. They feel that nobody's going to help me with my reading or math. (participant 5)

We don't have, like, those kids have shadows. When they get to secondary they don't have. We lose these kids. We lose them. (participant 9)

We need to put something in place for them to be successful, or to be transferred from one level to the next. Or else they tend to really, really be left behind and totally drop out. Even in elementary, they start dropping out. (participant 8)

Responses indicate that students with special needs do not receive the consistent services needed to attain success and that many students leave school because of this.

The lack of options in terms of course offerings was also seen as having an effect on student ability to attend and remain in school. Discussions surrounding options focused mainly on the lack of vocational training programs available to students.

Not all students are academically oriented. We know a lot of them, they are good artists. Or they can do a trade. We need to bring some of those... you know they used to have mechanics? What happened to that? No wonder we are missing some students who could have been mechanics or carpenters. Or even what happened to the typing? We have to, we can't say, all the kids can do academic work, no. Some are very good at doing trades, vocational. (participant 5)

Adding vocational training courses would provide students with a valuable alternative to the academic program.

They should be able to have their own choices of programs to meet their interests and their strengths. (participant 8)

For participants, vocational programs would allow a larger number of students to find satisfaction in their schooling and therefore be more motivated to remain in school until secondary completion is achieved.

There are competing findings in the literature concerning the effect of vocational programming on student engagement. For example, while according to Anderman (2003), students are “more engaged in their non-academic subjects (i.e. computer science, art and vocational education) than in their academic subjects” (p. 169), Lee and Burkham (2003) found that in “schools that offer mainly academic courses and few nonacademic courses, students are less likely to drop out” (p. 353). For Anderman (2003), it is

perceived relevance that is conducive to engagement. For our students, vocational course offerings might increase engagement levels, because, as discussed earlier, our students are more engaged when they see instrumental value; vocational education may provide this sense if students see the vocational courses as helpful to their future occupations.

Class size is seen as another factor that affects student motivation and ability to attend and remain in school. In particular, smaller class sizes were seen as a way to increase student motivation and ability to attend and remain. Reasons given for decreasing class size were the presence of students with special needs and their right to be integrated in the mainstream, and most frequently, the demands of second language acquisition and learning given the immersion environment.

I feel that especially when they get into the full immersion, the class should be smaller, like 14, because these children have to learn a second language. Especially in French. We don't hear French in the community. Even with English too. If we want them to really get into the second language we need to have smaller classrooms. Smaller class sizes.

(participant 5)

While participants in this study view smaller class sizes as conducive to engagement and academic success, there are varying findings in the literature concerning class size as it affects drop-out and connection to school. For McNeely et al. (2002), class size was not associated with connection to school, but for Rumberger and Thomas (2000), a higher student-teacher ratio did lead to larger dropout rates. Findings of Finn et al. (2005), however, might prove most relevant to our school as they found that small class sizes for

the first three to four years of elementary increased high school graduation rates, especially for low SES students due to greater social and academic engagement.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented and discussed findings relating to student ability to attend and remain in school. Central to the ability to attend and remain in school is the school's responsiveness to the engagement needs of students. In order to increase engagement, it is necessary for the school to meet student needs in a holistic way, that is, the school must see itself not only as responsible for the academic growth of the students it is mandated to serve, but also as responsible for their emotional well-being and resiliency. To do so, the school must increase counseling and healing services to students who are coping with serious problems outside of school. In addition, the school must respond to the reality of the community that teenage pregnancy levels are high; ways must be found to allow young parents to remain in school after their children are born. Further, not all students want to follow a purely academic program so vocational training programs must be implemented in response to their needs. As well, the needs of special needs learners must be met to allow them to remain in school. And finally, the reality that students learn in a second language must be recognized and accommodated by decreasing class size. If we are to see an increase in student engagement, the school must meet the needs of students in terms of support persons available, better support for learning, and the accommodation of different types of learners.

In the following chapter, Chapter 11, I continue the exploration of engagement factors by focusing on ways to increase engagement through enhancing cultural consistency.

Chapter 11

Findings and discussion:

Modifications to increase engagement

Participant responses concerning needed modifications to the school system to ensure a more engaging system mainly focus on the necessity of, and ways of enhancing, cultural consistency between the school and the community. Therefore, this chapter is devoted to findings and discussion dealing with ways of ensuring that Cree culture¹⁷ has an authentic place within the school system and the outcomes of such authentic placement. The discussion in this chapter returns to themes of culturally relevant curriculum and authentic curriculum and teaching methods that were discussed in earlier chapters, but re-examines data in terms of how creating a culturally relevant and consistent schooling experience can allow our children to build resiliency and become self-empowered as they find their place in the world. The chapter begins with ways to enhance cultural consistency and then focuses on the possible outcomes of such initiatives.

Ways to enhance cultural consistency

Authenticity. When participants speak about ways to enhance cultural consistency between the school and the community, many question the way in which Cree culture is approached in the school. In particular, they have concerns that cultural activities are taught within a classroom and see this as an artificial setting in which to learn about Cree

¹⁷ In discussion of culture, I rely on the standard definitions offered in the online Oxford Dictionaries as “the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively” (or more visible manifestations such as arts, tools, and technologies), and the “ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society” (or less visible elements such as values and beliefs and the outwardly visible manifestations of these). <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/culture> retrieved 21/09/2011

culture. Many prefer that children spend extended periods of time in the bush learning to perform traditional activities and to employ traditional technologies. Doing so is about more than simply learning a traditional technique but about absorbing the cultural meanings and deep knowledges embedded in these activities. Extended time in the bush gives students an authentic cultural experience by providing an authentic setting in which to learn about and practice traditional activities:

And I believe that we need to take our students more out on the land to see and experience the real way of how people lived. And the only way they're going to learn that is to be out there. To have that personal experience for themselves and to experience that. (participant 11)

Our ancestors lived out on the land and they survived. They had hardship. They were starving. I overheard an Elder one time on the radio. We're not teaching our kids what our ancestors went through. Because there was starvation, maybe in the years to come we are going to have that again, because today we are taking so much advantage of everything. And these children don't know what we had to go through, parents and grandparents. They have to be taught. They have to learn. 'Cause they take advantage of food. You can see it in the dump. (participant 5)

Participants, mainly school staff members and parents, also connect land-based experiences to linguistic maintenance. Many speak of Cree terms and ways of speaking being lost because learning these elements of the language is dependent upon experience in the bush; there are many words and ways of speaking about the environment that are not encountered in town. The importance of continuing efforts towards linguistic

maintenance are brought home by the words of one participant who speaks of the Cree language as “the foundation of our community” (participant 9). Another participant speaks of experience on the land as key to developing a particular kind of literacy:

Because we have literacy. Reading the world, reading the land. That’s a form of literacy. I think we need to expose our Cree youth more to that.
(participant 1)

Some adults lament the fact that they themselves had not learned to properly conduct themselves in terms of behaviours or rituals connected to hunting because they had not spent enough time in the bush themselves. A clear example is given by this participant:

Look at us. We got in shit a couple of springs ago when [an Elder] shot a bear ‘cause we were taking it in [to the teepee] backwards. “Take it in like a bear,” he said. That’s all he said. We didn’t know what he meant. You have to turn it around. Take the head in first. It’s a whole ceremony, eh?
There’s a whole process to those things. (participant 15)

Similarly, high standards for behaviour and learned skills are seen as a part of traditional learning and culturally appropriate:

When you talk about the so-called standards in education, I think that traditionally our people, the standards were high. By the time a child was twelve, fourteen, sixteen, they already had the skills to be able to go out by themselves on the land and survive. That’s why the standards were so high. It was necessary. (participant 1)

A major preoccupation with the lack of transmission of cultural values is seen in participant responses. The bush is seen as a place to expose children to deeper aspects of the culture. The following responses show various manifestations of concerns about the transmission of values:

Land-based programs... teach kids traditional and survival skills. We should do more than that. We should be teaching kids traditional family values, for example, while they are out on the land. (participant 3)

They learn the values when they are in the bush. They know. They know to respect. When an Elder is presenting, to pay attention, to listen, and to show respect. That's where their values are – in the bush. And when they're in the community, it's like they are not there. Because of their friends, TV, and video games, drugs, alcohol. (participant 2)

Helping and sharing. I noticed that our traditions, our traditional ways are slowly not passed. Like when you share your food with your relatives. Like caribou meat. You don't expect to be paid. That's what they do these days. Like, you give this meat to your relatives. You don't expect to be paid. In [another community], they do that. I was there for a funeral last year. And I was staying at my aunt's place. She asked to borrow forty dollars from me. She said her boyfriend's father killed a moose. And she said, "He gave us meat and we have to give him forty dollars back." And I said, "Why? Isn't he supposed to just give it to you? Isn't he his son?" And she said, "He needs money. Forty dollars." What happened to our traditional ways? Giving? Sharing? (participant 2)

Talk to your students about life, relationships, actually.... All those things!
[points to values on posters] (participant 9)

We have cocaine – 50 or 60 pushers. Where are the values there?

Apparently something's wrong. (participant 15)

And I think that our people, because of the way that they viewed the earth as living ... the earth is our mother. And having that worldview, they looked at each other in a different way. They respected each other more. Traditionally. And they worked with each other. And there was that feminine principle that's there. And that's spiritual, you know. So students need to learn that too. Our students. And we're not teaching them that.

(participant 1)

And there was respect that went with hunting. Respecting the animals.

They should be learning that. (participant 1)

These responses point to both a desire to increase aspects of surface culture in the curriculum such as traditional activities and use of technologies, but also to a desire to increase exposure to deeper, less tangible aspects of the culture such as values and beliefs. Culture is learned. Making the decision about how and when to include culture in curriculum is a matter of great importance. Behind these responses is a deep desire for children to have an authentic, rigorous, and meaningful schooling experience, but also a deep concern that a rift in the transmission of culture is developing which school can help repair.

Cultural dissonance has been explored extensively in education-related literature concerning Indigenous communities (e.g., Douglas, 1994; Marker, 2000; Perley, 1993; Reyhner, 1992). Many Indigenous educators challenge the mainstream education system as an imperialist tool to assimilate Indigenous people (e.g., Battiste, 2000; Grande, 2004; G. Smith, 2002). The education system is “the basis of Canadian cultural transmission” (Battiste, 2000, p. 193), and thereby an agent for mainstream social reproduction (G. Smith, 2000). In utilizing this foreign education system, we may be exposing our children to painful and damaging experiences, forcing them to question who they are daily. Reyhner (1992) outlines the way in which cultural messages from the school, when different from cultural messages given to children within the home, can damage a child’s “positive identity formation,” telling us that “if teachers give growing Native children messages that conflict with what Native parents show and tell their children, the conflicting messages will confuse the children and hurt the formation of strong self-concepts” (p. 4). Such cultural dissonance can lead to low self-esteem and depression in children (Reyhner, 1992). One participant in my study spoke specifically about cultural dissonance and the effects on students:

And one of the things I remember with my uncle.... I had asked him one question. Why is it I hear people always talk about students in the school saying the students are not learning? And he said, he gave me an answer, “In the schools,” he said, “there’s two ways of thinking. Two mindsets.” Something like that. That’s the answer he gave me. I guess that’s the Cree

way of thinking and then there's the Western. That's the reason he gave me. (participant 1)

According to some, culturally dissonant constructs such as schools are at the root of many problems within Indigenous communities. Cajete (2000a), for example, speaks of the *pingeh heh* concept in his Tewa culture as living, thinking, and working with a split head:

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

Little Bear (2000) describes dissonance as a "clash of worldviews:"

This clash of worldviews that is at the heart of many current difficulties.... It is also this clash that suppresses diversity in choices and denies Aboriginal people harmony in their daily lives. (pp. 84-85)

In addition, participant responses also pointed to a need to create space for more culturally appropriate written curriculum within the mainstream curriculum:

I guess there's a lot of things that we can do. Balance, you know, not just the history and culture and language. Balance both if we can. Maybe we can. (participant 9).

We have to convince somehow the MEQ [Ministry of Education of Quebec] or the government, that this is part of the culture. And we have to realize that this is. If they are going to realize the culture of the people,

they have to realize, they have to take into consideration that this is part of the learning, part of the process for any group of people. This is my dream. And then here again, this is where we would use the stories and the legends and the real life experience of the people who have been in that. I have experienced that. And this is where everything ties in: the language, the subject areas, the science, math. Everything is in there, and then we can [teach] all the competencies that have to be accomplished in the year or the month. They are in all those areas. (participant 11)

While participants see a need to create a curriculum that is more culturally relevant by increasing the amount and type of cultural experiences that students encounter in school, Cajete (2000) offers an important caveat to this kind of enterprise. He writes that as educators, parents, community members,

we have been through the Western educational system and have been conditioned to think in a certain way about education, life, ourselves, the environment, and Indigenous cultures. We have to reexamine that way of thinking. We have to do it honestly, even if it hurts. (p. 189)

And indeed, as the words of this participant indicate, we may be more affected by our past than we know:

I don't know, I think we're so stuck in the, I don't know if it was residential school or [Indian Affairs day school], where it was all just sit in a straight line, in rows, not interacting. (participant 2)

Participant responses such as that above clearly point to the need for a serious re-examination, a taking stock of our past, especially in regards to the effects of the

residential school system. We must do so in order to look critically at our present system, and envision future systems.

As discussed at the outset of this dissertation, many authors have outlined the widespread devastation to individuals and communities of residential schools, including cycles of various types of abuses, low self-esteem and self-efficacy (for two examples, see Fournier & Crey, 1997; Haig-Brown, 1988). Residential schools were blatant manifestations of colonial dominance and attempts to assimilate Indigenous peoples. They were places where “isolation... brainwashing... relentless labour and routine” were used to enforce obedience, compliance, and an acceptance of mainstream ways (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 56). Children grew up in situations where expressing themselves as Indigenous people was grounds for punishment. These children were deprived of their languages, their cultures, their traditions, and their ways of life. Furthermore, they were forcibly taken out of the lands and communities that were their homes, seriously damaging their identities, and their definitions of being. The fall-out has been enormous and terribly devastating to individuals, families, communities, and Nations. It is possible that, even though our school is Cree-controlled, the school system created in this community has been greatly influenced by the residential school experience because those who created the current Cree education system and those who work within the current Cree education system have been impacted by the residential school experience. The residential schools insidiously persist in haunting us.

Towards relevancy. Ensuring the cultural relevancy of the curriculum and pedagogy increases the authenticity of any endeavors to produce an alternative to the current system. Participants highlight ways of increasing the relevancy of

curriculum for Cree students by ensuring that learning is meaningful and relevant to their daily experiences in the community, and by acknowledging the damage done by colonial acts of the past. For participants, it is important that curriculum connects the daily life of the community and students' reality to what they learn in school.

You learned the knowledge when you were out on the land. You understood why you learned something. And because it had meaning for your life. You learned about the weather, about science, about the land, the meaning. The meaning of all that. It was related to your life. And I think that's why I am amazed at traditional people, our Elders. They remember what they learned. I think because it was somehow they know how that knowledge related to their own life. That's why they remembered.

(participant 1)

History should also talk about present things in our community, present things, more relevant to life now, but also part of the wider history.

(participant 16)

The effects of colonization. We still feel that in our communities, in our families, in our entities, because we don't value our culture, we don't value our traditions, we don't value our history. So to understand the effects of colonization I think you need to teach, to make them understand why things are the way they are. (participant 15)

I always say that you shouldn't just be teaching kids survival and tradition and their history and their past. Teach them what is happening in their

communities. What is happening in their communities while they are out there [on the land]. Just to get another perspective. (participant 3)

As discussed above concerning findings about learning on the land, or in the bush, experiential learning and learning through story is seen as an important aspect of culturally relevant curriculum:

And through experience. Through practice they learned. And when you talk about it. They used a lot of stories. (participant 1)

They learned through stories... they became more meaningful as you grow older. And I heard a man say that too, that you understand the story more as you get older. And I guess that it was part of the training. Part of the youth's training. Through story. Through legends also. Besides getting all the skills for survival. That was also in place for them traditionally.

(participant 1)

Just reflecting on my life, when I felt lost and lonely, when you are about 14, and if you don't have parents that ground you – 'cause both my parents were alcoholics. And for me I learned from [Elder]. What he did for me was give me a sense of my identity. And it gave me a sense of, um, belonging, you know, knowing my creation story.... We have Chakapaash, we have Nmess, we have Miishkinuu, we have all these different characters that should be benchmarks for our lives. And give us a way of looking at things. What we're going through. That's what he did for me. I stayed with him out there all year, and in the wintertime he

would tell me these legends, our oral history, and it gave me a sense of belonging. (participant 15)

Using storytelling as a technique for teaching has been shown to be successful elsewhere. McKeough et al. (2008) describe a “culturally appropriate oral storytelling instruction programme” (p. 148) that supports literacy development of First Nations youth and reflects the “cultural realities of Nakoda people” (p. 151) in order to support the ability of students to be academically successful within a Western school system. Likewise, MacLean and Wason-Ellam (2006), in a study investigating the use of storytelling in elementary and secondary school by First Nations and Métis teachers, found that storytelling not only affects academic development in a positive way, but also increases the cultural relevancy of curriculum for First Nations and Métis students and facilitates the development of caring and respectful relationships between students and teachers, an important engagement factor discussed in Chapter 8.

Towards a holistic curriculum. Part of creating a culturally sensitive system utilizing a culturally relevant curriculum is ensuring that the model is holistic; participants discussed the importance of learning in a way that allows students to experience the interconnectedness of Creation.

You know, how everything is connected. The tree of life. The mythologies. The symbolism of all those ceremonies. That is what it could teach the youth not to compartmentalize stuff like that, but to look at the broader. (participant 15)

There's unity in all the diversity. There's a common theme... There's no sense in compartmentalizing. (participant 15)

Participant rejection of compartmentalization is consistent with a rejection of the 'transmission model' (Cummins, 2004) of teaching and learning with its base in behaviourism, and the reductionist search for truth in discrete parts. Freire (1970) refers to the traditional conception of teaching and learning as "banking education," saying that this conception of teaching assumes a "dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely *in* the world, not *with* the world or with other" (p. 75). As noted at the outset of this dissertation, frequently in education, we subscribe to the "North American fetish for method" (Macedo & Araújo Freire, 1998, p. x) and the "capitalist 'banking model' of education" (p. ix), but for my participants, a more holistic view of teaching, learning, and curriculum seems to be desirable as the foundation for a more culturally sensitive curriculum.

For example, one participant returns again and again to ideas elucidating the nature of taking a holistic approach, and her various responses below most clearly articulate an approach to educational philosophy based in a First Nations worldview:

They had all that, you know. The medicine wheel. They had all those aspects. The spiritual, mental, emotional, physical. They were all in traditionally, they were all developed. (participant 1)

The other thing is in our language, we don't have gender. No he/she. We don't have that. We have animate and inanimate words. And there's, I guess, a philosophy, a thinking behind that, behind how our people viewed each other, I guess. I remember my own parents and when you think about

the traditional people that were raised out on the land, they were more, they worked with each other, the couple, men and women. One was not higher than the other one. It was only when I think religion came in that they had that where the man was in power and you had to listen to the man. I don't believe that (laughs). They are supposed to work with each other. (participant 1)

And the other word is *Aanischaau*. Elders use that when they talk about transmission of knowledge from generation to generation. The word somehow means our past, present, and future. But they thought differently, our people. (participant 1)

Further, the holistic view of language teaching seems central to the articulation of a culturally consistent curriculum. There is a certain philosophical or spiritual strength recognized in the Cree language:

Our languages are spiritual. I believe that.... I don't know why, why did they want us to lose our languages? I think it's because our languages have so much meaning. Spirituality is inherent, embedded in the language. For example when Elders, I've often heard Elders say, "Jiwijisjuumdinnowow." It's a word they use when they talk to a crowd. And I used to think of that word. I used to say, "What does it mean? What does that word really mean?" And the Elder told me what the word means is the Elder's saying, "I'm merely reminding you. What I am saying you already know. It is already within you." And to me that is spiritual.

Knowledge in the Elder is knowledge that you already know. That is already in you. (participant 1)

If you ask anybody today what is “indoooon”, they’ll say hunting, and that’s not it. There’s a whole worldview behind that. (participant 15)

Similar concerns are expressed by Cajete (1994) who says that if we fail to educate holistically, our children might receive the message that their intellectual development is of primary concern, thereby discouraging them from making connections or trying to understand the world holistically. In educating in a non-holistic way, we may discourage children from connecting to the world around them, and discourage them from connecting to other beings intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually (Cajete, 1994).

Also seen as integral to the realization of a culturally relevant curriculum is the inclusion of Elders and other community members in the schooling experience. Participants discuss involving Elders and community members in different ways. Some speak of the way that Elders and extended family were involved in traditional education:

And at the same time, your emotional side was, you know, that’s how you were supported through all of your immediate and extended family. When you talk about those four aspects [mental, physical, emotional, spiritual], that was in place for you also. (participant 1)

I did that for my girls [created an opportunity for them to learn during the first menstrual cycle rite of passage]. I made them stay with my late grandmother. She taught them that they are not supposed to touch water when they start. She didn’t let them do the dishes, touch the cold water. Wrap their cups in a white cloth for their use only. (participant 9)

Elders and extended family members are seen as necessary for this traditional teaching, including land-based teaching and other learning experiences:

Everything somehow comes into place. You are more close as families and you learn from everybody...helping students learn. You learn from everybody. Sometimes your uncle would teach you, would help you learn the skills you needed to learn to survive on the land. Or your aunts would take care of you and help you learn also. Grandparents certainly.

(participant 1)

When participants speak of community involvement in the school or support for the school, they see such involvement as motivating or enhancing of the schooling experience for students:

Adults other than parents or teachers to act as mentors to encourage students. Maybe what we could do is start a program... somebody that cares about education to encourage the kid to go to school and stuff like that. A mentor. (participant 3)

Students tend to be lazy and not motivated, but if they had something besides what is there in the classroom, if they had something out in the land, like with the Elders, Elders program, we have this Elders program.... Sometimes they take them somewhere else, like there's a group going to Cape Jones tomorrow that's leaving and I heard names, some of the students are going and their parents or relatives....We could have program within the school like that to catch more kids. Especially the ones, like, I

heard one of the names there... a child that doesn't fit in the school – he's going. (participant 5)

Bring different people [from different hunting territories]. People from the north side, south side, and inland. They all have different ways [of doing things]. They should try to set up a program. (participant 5)

Parents and Elders for example. And also the Church. The youth council. They don't come to the school. They should go in once in a while. (participant 8)

And also what we need to do in the high school is use our resources in the community. Bring the people who are working in the community, like the plumbers, especially for students who would like to do vocational. Bring those in. Those are good jobs as well. Just as well as the administration.

Without plumbers we'd be in trouble! (participant 7)

Participants see a special place for Elders within the schooling experience.

According to the participants below, Elders have special knowledge that should be shared with the youth as part of the schooling experience.

They [students] really want to learn how to build a shelter. I was thinking of asking [the Elders] first if they could build one where the Elders' camp is. The Elders over there could teach them how to. So they could hear the language. (participant 2)

But of course there should be some guidance, like Elders. (participant 3)

We need to get the Elders involved. We turn our back on them. They have knowledge. The ones that are respected Elders. Like [Elder]. He will tell you right away what needs to be done. What we can do. (participant 9)

Community involvement, whether it be in the form of Elders, parents, extended family members, or other members of the community, is seen as having a potentially positive effect on students' ability to attend and remain in school. But it also connects to increasing cultural consistency of the schooling system; extended family and Elder involvement are seen as integral to traditional ways of educating. In fact, it might be that such involvement in the formal schooling system would enhance the ability of students to remain in the system because the involvement would make the system more culturally consistent with our community's culture and therefore a more comfortable environment for students.

Outcomes of enhancing cultural consistency

According to many participants, if culture were integrated into schooling, it could increase student sense of self and student empowerment through spiritual and emotional healing, identify affirmation, the enabling of sense of belonging, and exposure to a decolonizing process.

These young people have to be stable to be able to learn in school. And I can see that the majority of them are not.... We can set up some kind of counseling or healing, some kind of programs, as part of the school curriculum. (participant 11)

I was thinking about the school and catching these kids at a young age and giving them a taste of their culture and who Mikuujuu is. And the star

systems. Cause when he left he made the sign of the big dipper in the snow. That's who was chasing. What is the symbology of all that? It's a very small part of creation. Even words like "Pikutiskwaau". That's awesome. We should teach it to the kids. The apology [for the residential school experience by the Canadian government] should be shown over and over. I cried. I felt that something had been validated. (participant 15)

We're the most resilient people. You have to look at history and fact that we're still here. I think there's ways that you can look at resiliency within people. In our community we had two residential schools. We're still dealing with it, but we are dealing with it. And I think we need to get to the kids. (participant 15)

Haig-Brown, et al. (1997) show, in a study of Joe Duquette High School in Saskatoon, that education as care can be seen as equivalent to education as healing for those in need, and in this way, a caring system can reach and aid those children who cannot be accommodated by schools because of their personal and social difficulties. A caring system gives space and time for children with less than ideal family situations or backgrounds to develop the personal resources to cope with the schooling experience and their lives outside of school as community members (Haig-Brown et al. 1997). This comforting and comfortable process is a process of becoming, meaning children develop into individuals connected through care to the world around them, and being so connected are able to understand their place in the world, their roles in creating their places in the world, and their collective ability to re-create their world and their own futures as self-determining individuals who are part of self-determining communities

(Cajete, 1994). It is this process of becoming connected and finding their place in the world that participants are intimating in their responses about the importance of storytelling, Cree language instruction, ceremony and ritual.

Participants speak of the need for identity to be affirmed and the positive effects that this identity affirmation would have on students' sense of self. Participant responses below are representative, and highlight the perception that identity affirmation would allow for the development of a sense of respect for others and other beings, allow young people to be proud of who they are, and offer positive options for youth to counter the pull of less socially desirable options.

We need two [Cree culture camps]. Maybe a boys' camp and a girls' camp. Instead of putting them together. They could learn how to survive out on the land, how to handle the tools. To make their own tools. They have to know how to be. Awareness. Be aware of who they are. Where they are coming from. I think this is the most important thing. For the child to know who they are, how their ancestors, grandparents lived. How they survived. That way they would know how to respect other people, how to respect other things. (participant 5)

There's a lot of gangs that they can be involved in and instead they should follow their culture. They should be proud of their history. They should be proud of who they are. That's a problem with this modern age stuff, but they need to learn. (participant 9)

That's why the youth form their own subcultures. Because they want that kind of schooling. (participant 1)

Exposure to and knowledge of legends are seen as especially identity affirming and enabling of a sense of belonging:

I think the legends are spiritual. This is where you got your spiritual meaning about your life. That's what I think. (participant 1)

Help them to find their places. So they could feel comfortable in spite of what they are going through in their home. There's a lot of messed up families or chaotic families. Young people having kids. No parenting skills, eh? Stuff like that. (participant 15)

Ceremonies and rites are also seen as important:

They had a traditional ceremony in January. What was it? They had men, young men. I just watched from far. I should have gone to see. They had some young men who were shooting caribou. It was like a ceremony. And some people had made cardboard caribou. I guess it would be like an initiation ceremony of some sort at one time. They had those. They had them at certain stages of your life. They had those ceremonies. Rites of passage. (participant 1)

And that's when he told me about what was done for the young men at puberty when their voice changed. That's when you take them out and you introduce them to the world. And it kind of changed my perspective....

Made me see things differently. We are just a small part of a bigger thing. (participant 15)

We went to sweatlodges. Sundances. Shake tents. I didn't force [the foster child placed with me]. I [just] said you have to come with me. I told him

the situation in his home. I said you have to hang with me. And the first sweatlodge he came with me, he just watched. Second time he was bringing in the rocks. Third time he came in for one round. Fourth time he asked for it [a sweat] and inside he released a lot of emotion in there that he kept bottled up. And it was projecting negatively. By not listening or getting into trouble, using drugs. (participant 15)

While we still have our Elders and people who know how. This was done or this was used. Even the sweatlodge. That's big, big medicine for anybody. It heals your spirit. Your mind. You know? So that you will be able to learn how you can help yourself. (participant 11)

That's why we have ceremonies at the camp.... Somebody told [us] that the youth are going to be coming around [to learn about ceremony]. We notice that. Young men or young women will be attracted and want to know more. We can start with those things for the youth. (participant 9)

As with ceremony and rite, participants see possibilities for the school to support their children socially and emotionally by giving opportunities for students to connect to the land in strengthening ways; connection to land is seen to having healing possibilities giving students tools and skills to use when they come back to the community in order to be positively contributing members of the community. The land itself is seen as an agent of healing.

The kids that are having all these social issues and social problems in the communities, they hardly spend any time on the land. Their parents don't

take them out for Goose Break, anything like that. Why don't we develop a program? (participant 3)

Alcohol and drug awareness while they are out on the land. Anything that makes the kids want to talk, you know? And bring out some of this stuff. Self-esteem or self-confidence workshops. We should do this out on the land. (participant 3)

Cajete (1994, 2000a) speaks of finding such a sense of belonging through the inclusion of culture in First Nations education as ensoulment, a process of helping a person find his or her place in the world. This place is found when "education is essentially communal, social activity" (Cajete, 2000b, p.20), and "an art of process, participation, and making connection" (Cajete, 1994, p. 24).

Some participants further equate traditional practices with anti-colonial action that would support student empowerment:

The resiliency can be done easily if you look at colonization. Everywhere people are going back to what makes them strong. Whatever floats your boat, you know. A spiritual foundation is key and whatever you choose as an individual is up to you. (participant 15)

Those are things that should be talked about 'cause there's this fog that we're coming out of. The fog of colonization and religion. The influences of that have been not so good in the past. We were told about our ways, that they were evil. (participant 15)

Find their identities. Get their identities back. I think we lost it with the residential school. That's where we're stuck. In between. Our parents

went. We had some effect too. It affected us too. Still affecting most people, I guess. And how we're being brought up. But I think we're slowly learning, getting back to our history and our culture. (participant 9)

Conclusion

The findings discussed in this chapter demonstrate a firm belief on the part of participants that we can create systems within our community that will give students the opportunity to deal with not only difficult personal histories but also the difficult histories of their communities. Grande (2004) calls this type of process red pedagogy:

A red pedagogy compels students to question... the processes of colonization. Furthermore, it asks how traditional indigenous knowledges can inform the project of decolonization. (p. 56)

As such,

it is about questioning and empowerment. In so doing, it defines a viable space for tradition, rather than working to "rupture" our connections to it.

(p. 176)

Grande's (2004) red pedagogy process is personal, communal, and political.

I posit that in being decolonizing and supportive of self-determination, such a school system can also be our answer back to the silencing from the residential school system that illegalized Indigenous languages and traditions. In so dealing with our past and our present, we may tell ourselves into the future. This is a concept of educating through caring connection to heal old wounds within a process that is past, present, and future-oriented.

Chapter 12

Recommendations and Conclusion

In this chapter I outline recommendations for improving engagement within the school studied. These recommendations are grounded in the central themes of the study that were reported and discussed in Chapters 7 to 11: the creation of respectful and caring relationships within the school; utilizing engaging teaching techniques; providing and capitalizing on students' sense of instrumentality; enhancing teachers' understanding and sensitivity towards Cree culture; ensuring Cree culture has a meaningful place in the curriculum; focusing on community, especially Elders' involvement; and enhancing students' personal ability to attend and persist in school. While these recommendations are specific to my community, I also make recommendations for improving engagement within First Nations school systems in general, mainly through the creation of a process to measure on-reserve student engagement and through further research.

Recommendations to improve student engagement within the school system studied

The following seven recommendations are specific to my community. This does not mean they would not be relevant in other communities, but that is for others to decide.

Recommendation 1: Focus on the creation and maintenance of respectful and caring relationships within the school.

Students' sense of belonging in the school is a central element of engagement. The school must work to increase a sense of belonging if it is to foster student

engagement. There are various ways of increasing sense of belonging amongst students by creating spaces for fostering respectful and caring relationships within the school amongst staff and students.

Affective bonds between teachers and students. Teacher-student relationships are as important, or more important, than family or peer support to student engagement (Crosnoe et al., 2004; Murdock & Miller, 2003; Osterman & Freese, 2000). It is important that teachers embrace the likelihood that their interactions with students can be a deciding factor in a student's decision to remain in or leave school. It is clear from the findings of this study that about half of the students do not feel cared about by the adults in the school environment. This is a major disengagement factor that must be remedied.

Relationships within the school can be positively reinforced by implementing strategies that encourage those within the school to work together in positive, community-building ways. Ensuring that extra-curricular activities are available to students can create a space for students to bond with teachers and their school, if these activities provide “structure, adult supervision, and parental involvement” (Broh, 2002, p. 87). Teachers can actively show caring for students by ensuring that they spend out-of-school time with students. Such time could include tutoring sessions after school, running clubs after school, ensuring that they are available to students outside of school hours in their classrooms, and ensuring that they provide adequate one-on-one time to students. The current lack of all of these within the school was found to be a disengagement factor.

The school should also find a way to decrease the reliance on substitute teachers. Students need to form bonds with teachers in order to remain engaged in school and are unable to do so with substitute teachers; students are loathe to invest time or energy in

forming a close relationship with a teacher who they view as temporary. Taking a measure like having permanent substitute teachers within the school would remedy the situation, as these teachers would both be available to fill in for teacher absences and be seen as permanent members of the school by the students. As well, it is necessary for the school to ensure that all teachers understand that their absences have a real and deleterious effect on student engagement.

Showing respect for student abilities by providing stimulating and challenging learning environments and activities can also show students that they are cared about. Perceived school and teacher expectations and standards have been shown to have an effect on student engagement with higher expectations and standards having a positive effect on student engagement (Singh et al., 2010; Wentzel, 2002; Yair, 2002). Participants in this study, especially students, felt that teachers employed low expectations of them, and thus, low academic expectations are a disengagement factor amongst these students.

A safe environment. Findings point to an urgent need to address issues of safety within the school; recall that a large number of students, 47.4%, which is more than twice the national average reported by Craig and Harel (2004), reported that bullying has been a problem for them. Anti-bullying strategies should be employed with the knowledge that a decrease in feelings of personal safety in the school will likely result in a decrease in school-leaving, and an increase in academic success (Broh, 2002; Jennings, 2003).

In addition, in schools where classroom management is an issue, student connection to school is lower (McNeely et al., 2002). The discipline system in this school as it connects to students' feelings of safety within the school is an engagement factor. A

focus on building and maintaining respectful and positive interactions between students would allow students to feel a greater sense of connectedness to their school.

Student empowerment. If the school is able to ensure that students feel respected within the school, then the school will be able to work in ways that help students to feel empowered within the school. This means ensuring that students are given opportunities to create the school and the classroom environments, and that students are given a chance to determine the types of learning situations they will engage in. Autonomy support techniques (Hardre & Reeve, 2003) can be utilized by teachers to help students become self-motivating and self-determining learners. The same study shows that working with students in this way can increase the likelihood that students will remain in school even more than their academic performance.

Students can also be given opportunities to help determine rules and classroom procedures. Raby and Domitrek (2007) found that when “students felt that they had little to say in how their lives were governed” they became “resigned to a structural environment they found oppressive” (p. 950). Such a disempowered atmosphere was found within our school and needs to be addressed.

Recommendation 2: Focus on engaging teaching approaches

Providing a collaborative and active learning environment is essential to establishing and maintaining student engagement. In addition, holistic and cooperative learning situations should be privileged within the school curriculum. Active and collaborative learning situations allow students to invest in themselves in their learning. Ensuring that such learning situations are as holistic as possible allows for attention to be

paid to the development of the whole child, mentally, spiritually, physically, and emotionally, and for the student to see how his or her learning fits into the wider world. In addition, such active and collaborative learning situations give students a sense of control over their academic work and heighten the sense of relevancy (Anderman, 2003).

In contrast, teacher-centred activities allow students to become disengaged (Yair, 2003). Lectures, fill-in-the-blank type exercises, and worksheets requiring little intellectual engagement on behalf of the student should be avoided. Using such disengaging pedagogies means that it is more likely that students will be preoccupied with outside influences and not engage fully with curriculum content (Yair, 2003).

Recommendation 3: Focus on providing and capitalizing on a sense of instrumentality

Based both on the findings of this study and literature on the effect that a sense of instrumentality has on the student propensity to persist in school, it is important that this school focus on its ability to both provide students with a sense of instrumentality and capitalize on the sense of instrumentality that many students already possess. According to Walker and Greene (2009), teachers can provide a sense of instrumentality by talking to students about what persistence in school can do for their futures, and Van Ryzin et al. (2009) found that students are more engaged when they feel the school will meet their needs. The findings of my study show that a sense of instrumentality is important to engagement and can be improved by: accommodating both students who wish to go on to post-secondary studies, and those who do not; focusing on second language development in the content areas; accommodating young parents; and addressing teacher absence.

Accommodating students with different academic needs. Findings of my study suggest that the type of program and services offered can affect a sense of instrumentality. Consequently, it is important that the school cater both to those students who wish a high school finishing certificate in order to enter the labour market after graduating, and those students who wish to be prepared for post-secondary studies.

The school can appeal to both groups. First, the school must implement a vocational education program that will allow non-academically oriented students to gain work experience and job skills alongside meeting graduation requirements. Findings also show that students must receive adequate counseling to show them what high school finishing can do for them.

Second, for more academically oriented students who wish to attend post-secondary studies, the school must provide a rigorous and challenging program with high expectations; this is the type of program that would allow students to believe that they are being prepared for their post-secondary studies and thus increase the sense of instrumentality felt.

Focus on second language learning in the content areas. For students in either orientation, the school can increase the sense of instrumentality by focusing on second language learning in the content areas. Findings suggest that teachers provide a less enriched experience for students in the content courses because they take a deficit view of their students' second language ability. According to Callahan (2005), content can be used to enrich the language learning experience and it is with this approach that second language learners will make the greatest strides. Otherwise, the opportunities of second language learners to be successful academically are limited.

Accommodate young parents. In addition, the school can cater to specific needs of students such as young parents who wish to stay in school. Young mothers in this study were particularly motivated to finish high school in order to realize benefits for their children later. This sense of instrumentality can be utilized. An in-school childcare service would allow these young parents to continue to attend school without worrying about childcare arrangements.

Address teacher absence and the need for substitute teachers. Finally, the number of substitute teachers students encounter in their schooling experience also affects the sense of instrumentality, in that students are frequently exposed to substitute teachers which interrupts the programs they are following and thereby limits the academic progress they are able to make in a particular year. Both students and parents find this frustrating and this affects their view of whether or not the school can provide them with a rigorous education. For this reason as well, it is important that the school explore ways to reduce teacher absence and decrease teacher turnover.

Recommendation 4: Focus on teachers' understanding and sensitivity towards Cree culture and language

Findings are clear that the perception that teachers understand and are sensitive to the culture and language of their students is an integral aspect of student engagement; indeed an understanding and sensitivity towards student culture is linked to the perception of caring and respect for students. These findings echo much of the literature on First Nations education insisting that teachers must be supportive of the culture of their students (Battiste, 2000; Hale, 2000; Klug & Whitfield, 2003; Poonwassie &

Charter, 2001; Reyhner, 1992; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 1998, for just a few examples). Given teachers are not being perceived as sensitive, the school must respond. It can take such actions as providing time and resources for non-Native teachers to learn about Cree culture and language, and it would be helpful for teachers to be given opportunities and incentives to study and learn about First Nations history in general, and Cree history, in particular.

Recommendation 5: Focus on curriculum issues related to culture

“Indigenous orientations” should be incorporated “across the entire range of curricular subjects, school programming, and educational activities” (Wotherspoon & Schissell, 1998, p. 122). It is necessary to ensure that Cree culture, language, and historical knowledge are incorporated throughout program content and classroom interactions from the beginning to the end of secondary school. This will ensure that students clearly feel that their culture, and therefore they themselves, are valued by teachers and the school as a whole. Steps should be taken to ensure that students are given access to learning experiences that will increase their knowledge about their own culture. Steps should also be taken to ensuring that students learn about the history of their community and their Nation in addition to the history of First Nations as a whole at all levels of schooling.

Recommendation 6: Focus on community involvement

This study’s findings clearly indicate that heightening community involvement in the school would increase students’ engagement level. Literature supports this finding.

Although not directly stated as an engagement factor by participants, it was certainly implied; low parent involvement in First Nations students' schooling has been linked to high school-leaving rates (Friedel, 1999), and according to Mackay and Myles (1999), when community leaders and schools concentrate on meeting the needs of students, the success rate of students can be increased.

Consequently, it is recommended that the school find ways to bring the community into the school and the school into the community. Some ways of doing this can work hand in hand with providing students with a sense of purpose for remaining in school, such as having skilled trades people and other professionals visit the school to talk to students about their careers. Given the cultural importance of having young people learn from Elders in this community, it would also be wise for the school to ensure that Elders are an integral part of the schooling experience. This could be done through an Elder's program that would provide space and time for students to spend with Elders listening to stories and learning about traditional activities both in formal and less formal interactions.

Recommendation 7: Focus on enhancing the personal ability to attend and remain in school

In order to persist in their secondary schooling, many students must build their resiliency. Findings highlighted ways that this resiliency can be increased, including having counseling services for students within the school, building healthy and supportive relationships within the school, and ensuring that students are provided with culturally responsive curricula that will help to strengthen their sense of self.

Findings were also firm in the fact that the personal ability to attend and remain in school can be strengthened by taking a healing approach to education. This means paying attention not only to the academic lives of students, but also the spiritual and emotional aspects of their lives. Findings provide some insight into how this might be done and suggest that incorporating rites of passage, legends, and ceremony into the formal schooling of students can provide students with experiences from which to build a positive self-image of their selves in relation to Creation; this too is part of fostering a sense of belonging for our students.

In creating such culturally consistent experiences for students within the school, students' sense of identity can be strengthened, and through the process, positive self-esteem can be built. Conceivably, such a schooling experience would have a positive effect on the ability to persist in schooling despite any difficulties in their personal lives or less-than-ideal experiences in the school. Such culturally consistent experiences would also be a part of student empowerment as they are given opportunities for positive identity formation.

Recommendations to improve engagement in First Nations education systems in general

The following three recommendations have potential to benefit my community, but are on a larger scale and would presumably be of wider benefit. These recommendations include: creation of a process to assess engagement among on-reserve First Nations students; initiation of a large scale literature review; and pursuit of areas where further research is needed.

Recommendation 8: Assessing engagement of on-reserve First Nations students

While there are many instruments currently in use for assessing engagement of high school age students such as the High School Survey of Student Engagement (Center for Evaluation and Educational Policy Indiana University School of Education, 2009), the Student School Engagement Survey (National Center for School Engagement, 2006), and the Alberta Education “TELL them FROM me” Student Survey (Alberta Education, 2010), there are no engagement measurement tools specific to on-reserve First Nations students. I argue that there is a need to develop such a measurement tool. The findings of this study can provide a basis for item identification, given findings about what constitute engagement factors amongst the students in my study differ slightly from those usually measured by mainstream diagnostic tools. For example, the findings indicate that for First Nations students, questions about cultural content in curricula, cultural sensitivity of teachers, and the inclusion of community members such as Elders in the everyday schooling experience would be engagement indicators that should be investigated by items in such a survey.

Following the literature reviews conducted by Fredericks et al. (2004) and Jimmerson et al. (2003), it is useful to conceptualize engagement as a measure of three subcategories of engagement: behavioural, emotional, and cognitive. Measurements of engagement for on-reserve First Nations students should therefore take a tri-partite approach. Behavioural engagement can be measured using school data such as attendance, school leaving, and homework completion rates, while cognitive engagement may make use of a student self-report technique such as that employed by Shernoff et al. (2003) which measured student engagement from the perspective of flow theory to

determine students' levels of cognitive absorption in their school work. Emotional engagement can be measured with a survey instrument, using items that assess whether students' attitudes are positive or negative towards their school, teachers, peers, and learning, with the added component of asking for information about cultural content in the curricula, cultural sensitivity of teachers, and the inclusion of Elders and other community members in the learning experience.

The survey should be piloted in a small number of schools to ascertain the appropriateness of survey items and their relevancy to engagement as a mitigator of drop-out, and then continued with a wider, perhaps nation-wide, study. This type of study could provide substantial insight into the causes of the poor high school completion rates of on-reserve students, and then allow for compensatory measures to be taken. Further, the effect of these compensatory measures could be assessed using the same diagnostic process. Widespread benefits could be realized not only at the individual student level, but also at the community, and national levels and, as such, could be a major step towards improving First Nations' schools in general.

Recommendation 9: A large scale literature review

Because there is now a plethora of literature on engagement, a large scale literature review needs to be done in the area alongside a large scale review of literature on the experience of First Nations high school students, in order to determine areas of intersection. This broader literature review was beyond the scope of this study and would not have been consistent with the grounded theory informed research process I undertook. This large scale literature review should be done as a part of the process of

developing the evaluation tool for on-reserve student engagement described in the previous recommendation. While there have been extensive literature reviews on the topic of engagement (e.g., Jimerson et al., 2003; and Fredericks et al., 2004), both are now 10 years old and neither intersected with the school leaving literature on First Nations students. Such a meta-review of these two literatures would provide a broad view and be useful to First Nations education authorities as well as those who are doing research in related areas.

Recommendation 10: Areas for further research

My recommendations for further research mainly relate to areas I found lacking as I sought out literature related to factors in engagement identified by our community. There was no literature found that connected counseling services in schools to engagement of First Nations; it is an important area given the findings of this study showed a real need for not only academic and career counseling, but also counseling to help students deal with painful personal realities outside of the school. There was also no literature found on the effect of substitute teachers and teacher absence on First Nations student engagement. This is also an area of study that would prove valuable to First Nations schools on reserves as we are frequently isolated from major centres and therefore do not have a large pool of qualified and available teachers easily on hand. This means that substitute teachers are frequently unqualified for these jobs and may not know how to effectively teach our students. In addition, the reasons for the rate of absenteeism among on-reserve teachers may be a fruitful area of research, especially if this research is connected to the ability of First Nations students to be engaged in school.

In addition, research into community involvement and its effect on engagement and persistence in school would greatly add to the literature on engagement of First Nations students, but also to the literature on student engagement in general. Research literature on this topic is also more than a decade old (e.g., Friedel, 1999; Mackay & Myles, 1999), and more recent results would be beneficial given the substantive changes that are likely in youth culture.

Finally, more research into the effect of first and second language programs on First Nations on-reserve students' engagement needs to be done. I found no literature produced within the past 10 years specific to this topic, although there was some theoretical literature found in the area of first language immersion programs and the importance of first language learning to identity formation. Literature that examines the effect of first and second language programming on First Nations student engagement would be beneficial to program planners involved in First Nations education and help parents and communities to make decisions about the types of programs their children will follow.

Conclusion

This study has shown that there are many disengagement factors at work in this school, including: a lack of positive relationships between student peers and between students and teachers; a lack of confidence in the school to prepare students for their futures; a curriculum that merely nods at cultural relevance but is not, in fact, culturally relevant; and a lack of structures in place to help students remain in school such as one-on-one time with teachers, counseling, healing initiatives, and childcare for young parents. As a result of these deficiencies, the large school-leaving rate can more aptly be

referred to as the “push-out” rather than “drop-out” rate, referring to “school factors that discourage students from continuing with their education” (Stearns & Glennie, 2006, p. 31). Serious attention needs to be paid to eliminating these barriers to school finishing.

My findings may be generalizable and provide insight into probable engagement and disengagement factors for First Nations on-reserve students across Canada. With the First Nations population increasing by 47% since 1996 compared to an 8% increase for the rest of Canada in the same period of time (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2010), and 58% of youth on reserves not having completed secondary school (Laboucane, 2010), compared with Canada’s drop-out rate of 8.1% in 2009/2010 (Human Resources and Development Canada, 2012), it is imperative that research-driven action be taken to decrease school leaving among the First Nations population. Further, as noted in my final recommendations, more research into First Nations engagement and school leaving factors may help to direct funding in ways that will have the greatest impact on this situation. Finding ways to precisely direct education funding is important, given that:

Provincial schools are paid more than double that of on reserve schools for student tuition. Over the past 10 years [for] these on-reserve schools: education funding increased 19 per cent, while in the same period provincial systems funding increased 45 per cent... which is on average \$2,000 less per student than provincial student funding. (Laboucane, 2010, ¶ 9)

My findings have also shown that there is a need to focus on school performance in attempts to improve high school finishing outcomes for First Nations students on

reserves. There are clearly many disengagement factors that the school must take ownership of and then eliminate. Schools must focus on how they meet the needs of their specific populations and acknowledge that the education model in use has not been meeting the needs of First Nations students attending on-reserve schools. The school in my study fails to meet the needs of our students in large part because it offers programming and an environment that is inconsistent with the culture of our community.

This critique is similar to that of such education theorists as Battiste (2000) and Grande (2004) who discuss the ways that schooling systems, being instruments of mainstream culture, can painfully inscribe their cultured stories upon their inmates (Grande, 2004). My main concern, as a member of a First Nations community, is the danger of not recognizing schooling systems as cultured systems, and furthermore, the danger of accepting these systems without any deep critique of the culturally and politically “defined way [they do their] business” (G. Smith, 2000). There is a necessity in critiquing school¹⁸ as an education vehicle if we wish to use a formal schooling system within our communities to support and maintain the “right to be indigenous” (Grande, 2004).¹⁹ It is time to contemplate possibilities for re-creating schooling models to increase student engagement by imbuing the systems with, and basing these systems on, the concept of community informed by the primacy of caring connectedness. A feeling of community can connect all those in a school to each other in powerful ways, and can connect the school to the wider community in a powerful way. The positive influence that expressions of care and community feelings within schools have on success in Indigenous

¹⁸ This view is informed by literature critical of schooling including Spring (1975), Illich (1971), Freire (1970), hooks (1994), and Gatto (2005).

¹⁹ Grande (2004) uses the term to mean “a right that embraces indigenous peoples’ language, culture, traditions, and spirituality, including the right to self-determination” (p. 29).

education is well documented (see Cajete, 1994; Hale, 2002; G. Smith, 2000; Tippeconic, 1999).

Although my community's school system is a long way from the residential school days and we are now in charge of our own school systems and design some of our own curriculum, the still drastically low retention and graduation rates of our students have made it apparent that all is not well and we must commit to deeper change initiatives.

Creating culturally relevant schooling experiences for our youth is not only important to success at the level of the individual in terms of increasing engagement levels to give the best chance at individual school success, or at the community level in terms of raising the capacity of young people to make meaningful contributions as members of their community, or even at the level of the Canadian nation in terms of increasing First Nations participation in the workforce. Creating culturally relevant schooling is important to cultural maintenance and thereby important globally to the success of our entire planet, to all of Creation, given the unique contributions that Indigenous cultures can make in this sphere:

There is a fire burning over the earth, taking with it plants and animals, ancient skills and visionary wisdom. At risk is a vast archive of knowledge and expertise, a catalogue of the imagination, an oral and written language composed of the memories of countless Elders and healers, warriors, farmers, fishermen, midwives, poets, and saints – in short, the artistic, intellectual, and spiritual expression of the full complexity and diversity of the human experience. Quelling this flame, this spreading inferno, and

rediscovering a new appreciation for the diversity of the human spirit as expressed by culture, is among the central challenges of our times. (Davis, 2009, p. 34)

We owe our youth a rich educational experience that will rigorously prepare them to truly meet this challenge.

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APPENDIX A

COVER LETTERS AND CONSENT FORMS FOR POTENTIAL

PARTICIPANTS

TO: Potential research participant

FROM: Sarah Pashagumskum

SUBJECT: Research study about alternative ways of educating in secondary

Hello,

I am currently working on my doctoral dissertation and would like you to participate in the research study. If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed by me at your convenience. We can determine a time together that will be convenient for you.

My research study is about finding alternative ways of educating students at the secondary level. I feel that you have valuable information to share concerning this topic. I would like to discuss:

- **Why is this system successful for some and unsuccessful for a large number of students?**
- **What factors encourage staying in school or leaving school?**
- **What would make our school more successful?**
- **What are Eeyou ways of educating?**
- **Any further insights you have to offer.**

Should you wish to participate in this study, please read the attached consent form, sign, and return it to me. Information about ethical procedures is outlined in the consent form.

Please feel free to contact me by phone at 819-855-2170, or by e-mail at sjpashag@lakeheadu.ca. You may also contact my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Constance Russell at 807-343-8049.

Thank you for your time and for considering participating in this study.

Sincerely,

Sarah Pashagumskum

Consent Form – interviews and/or focus groups

Title of the research project: Investigating Eeyou Education Alternatives

Description of the project: This research study will address issues relating to success of Eeyou students within the school of one Northern Cree community. Perspectives of students, parents, teachers, and other members of the school community and the wider community will be considered to develop recommendations for alternative ways of educating Eeyou secondary age children.

Purpose of the project: The study will ultimately provide the school and the community involved with recommendations for alternative ways of schooling at the high level which may increase success.

Survey: A survey of students within the school will determine student perceptions of the presence of in-school leaving and retention factors.

Interviews: Face-to-face interviews will be conducted with students, school leavers, members of the school staff, and members of the wider community. Participants will be asked whether they will give consent for the interview to be recorded; otherwise written notes will be taken.

Focus group sessions: Participants will also be invited to take part in focus group sessions.

Risk of Participating: There are no known risks to participation in this research project.

Withdrawal from the Research: Participation is voluntary. A participant may withdraw from the study at any time with no risk to him or herself.

Confidentiality & Data Storage: Participants are assured confidentiality. Measures taken to protect confidentiality include:

- The research study is consistent with Lakehead University's Ethics Procedures and the Guidelines for Research on Human Subjects
- Contributions will remain confidential and anonymous: pseudonyms will be used in transcriptions and in the final report.
- Data will be stored for seven years in a locked box and will then be destroyed. These are Lakehead's requirements for data storage.

Research Results: Research results will be shared in the following ways:

- A summary of the results in Cree and English will be sent to any participant who requests it
- A summary of the results in Cree and English will be given to the Cree School Board, the Band Council, and our community school
- A doctoral dissertation will be written for Lakehead University

- This doctoral dissertation will be available in the library at Lakehead, but will also be available in our community library
- There may be articles written about this research for publication and presentation at conferences.

Researcher Information: The research is being conducted by:

Sarah Pashagumskum, PhD Student, Faculty of Education
Lakehead University, 955 Oliver Road, Thunder Bay, Ontario, P7B 5E1
email: sjpashag@lakeheadu.ca tel: 819-855-2170

with supervisor:

Dr. Constance Russell, Faculty of Education
Lakehead University, 955 Oliver Road, Thunder Bay, Ontario, P7B 5E1
email: crussell@lakeheadu.ca tel: 807-343-8049 fax: 807-344-6807

I, _____, have been fully informed of the objectives of the project being conducted. I understand these objectives and consent to being interviewed for the project. I will be asked for permission to audiotape the interview, and I may agree or decline. I understand that steps will be undertaken to ensure that this interview will remain confidential. I also understand that, if I wish to withdraw from the study, I may do so without any repercussions.

Signature of the participant Date

TO: Potential research participant

FROM: Sarah Pashagumskum

SUBJECT: Survey about student experiences in the secondary school

Hello,

I am currently working on my doctoral dissertation and would like you to participate in the research study. If you agree to participate, you will take part in a survey of students of in the secondary school. We will book an appointment time and I will come to get you from you class so that you can complete the survey. You will be out of class for approximately half an hour.

My research study is about finding alternative ways of educating students at the secondary level. Your input would be very valuable to this research. The survey asks students for their opinions about the school deals with factors that encourage success among First Nations students.

The purpose of the project is to provide the school and the community with recommendations for different ways of schooling at the high school level. I hope that this research will help increase our students' success rates in the school.

If you agree to do the survey, please read the attached consent form, sign, and return it to me. Information about ethical procedures is outlined in the consent form.

Please feel free to contact me by phone at 819-855-2170, or by e-mail at sjpashag@lakeheadu.ca. You may also contact my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Constance Russell at 807-343-8049.

Thank you for your time and for considering participating in this study.

Sincerely,

Sarah Pashagumskum

Consent Form – Student consent for survey participation

Title of the research project: Investigating Eeyou Education Alternatives

Description of the project: This research study will address issues relating to success of Eeyou students within the school of one Northern Cree community. Perspectives of students, parents, teachers, and other members of the school community and the wider community will be considered to develop recommendations for alternative ways of educating Eeyou secondary age children.

Purpose of the project: The study will ultimately provide the school and the community involved with recommendations for alternative ways of schooling at the high level which may increase success.

Survey: A survey of students within the school will determine student perceptions of the presence of in-school leaving and retention factors.

Interviews: Face-to-face interviews will be conducted with students, school leavers, members of the school staff, and members of the wider community. Participants will be asked whether they will give consent for the interview to be recorded; otherwise written notes will be taken.

Focus group sessions: Participants will also be invited to take part in focus group sessions.

Risk of Participating: There are no known risks to participation in this research project.

Withdrawal from the Research: Participation is voluntary. A participant may withdraw from the study at any time with no risk to him or herself.

Confidentiality & Data Storage: Participants are assured confidentiality. Measures taken to protect confidentiality include:

- The research study is consistent with Lakehead University's Ethics Procedures and the Guidelines for Research on Human Subjects
- Contributions will remain confidential and anonymous: pseudonyms will be used in transcriptions and in the final report.
- Data will be stored for seven years in a locked box and will then be destroyed. These are Lakehead's requirements for data storage.

Research Results: Research results will be shared in the following ways:

- A summary of the results in Cree and English will be sent to any participant who requests it
- A summary of the results in Cree and English will be given to the Cree School Board, the Band Council, and our community school
- A doctoral dissertation will be written for Lakehead University

TO: Parent or guardian of potential research participant

FROM: Sarah Pashagumskum

SUBJECT: Survey about student experiences in the secondary school

Dear parent or guardian,

I am currently working on my doctoral dissertation and would like your child _____ to participate in the research study. If your child participates, he or she will take part in a survey of students of in the secondary school. We will book an appointment time and I will come to get him/her from class so that he/she can answer the survey. She/he will be out of class for approximately half an hour.

The research study is about finding alternative ways of educating students at the secondary level. Your child's input would be very valuable to this research. The survey asks students for their opinions about how the school deals with factors that encourage success among First Nations students.

The purpose of the project is to provide the school and the community with recommendations for different ways of schooling at the high school level. I hope that this research will help increase student success in the school.

If you agree that your child will be allowed to take part in the survey, please read the attached consent form and sign it. Information about ethical procedures is outlined in the consent form.

Please feel free to contact me by phone at 819-855-2170, or by e-mail at sjpashag@lakeheadu.ca. You may also contact my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Constance Russell at 807-343-8049.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Sarah Pashagumskum

Consent Form – parental consent for student participation in survey questionnaire

Title of the research project: Investigating Eeyou Education Alternatives

Description of the project: This research study will address issues relating to success of Eeyou students within the school of one Northern Cree community. Perspectives of students, parents, teachers, and other members of the school community and the wider community will be considered to develop recommendations for alternative ways of educating Eeyou secondary age children.

Purpose of the project: The study will ultimately provide the school and the community involved with recommendations for alternative ways of schooling at the high level which may increase success.

Survey: A survey of students within the school will determine student perceptions of the presence of in-school leaving and retention factors.

Interviews: Face-to-face interviews will be conducted with students, school leavers, members of the school staff, and members of the wider community. Participants will be asked whether they will give consent for the interview to be recorded; otherwise written notes will be taken.

Focus group sessions: Participants will also be invited to take part in focus group sessions.

Risk of Participating: There are no known risks to participation in this research project.

Withdrawal from the Research: Participation is voluntary. A participant may withdraw from the study at any time with no risk to him or herself.

Confidentiality & Data Storage: Participants are assured confidentiality. Measures taken to protect confidentiality include:

- The research study is consistent with Lakehead University's Ethics Procedures and the Guidelines for Research on Human Subjects
- Contributions will remain confidential and anonymous: pseudonyms will be used in transcriptions and in the final report.
- Data will be stored for seven years in a locked box and will then be destroyed. These are Lakehead's requirements for data storage.

Research Results: Research results will be shared in the following ways:

- A summary of the results in Cree and English will be sent to any participant who requests it
- A summary of the results in Cree and English will be given to the Cree School Board, the Band Council, and our community school

- A doctoral dissertation will be written for Lakehead University
- This doctoral dissertation will be available in the library at Lakehead, but will also be available in our community library
- There may be articles written about this research for publication and presentation at conferences.

Researcher Information: The research is being conducted by:

Sarah Pashagumskum, PhD Student, Faculty of Education
 Lakehead University, 955 Oliver Road, Thunder Bay, Ontario, P7B 5E1
 email: sjpashag@lakeheadu.ca tel: 819-855-2170

with supervisor:

Dr. Constance Russell, Faculty of Education
 Lakehead University, 955 Oliver Road, Thunder Bay, Ontario, P7B 5E1
 email: crussell@lakeheadu.ca tel: 807-343-8049 fax: 807-344-6807

I, _____, have been fully informed of the objectives of the project being conducted. I understand these objectives and consent to my child _____ taking part in the student survey for the project. I understand that my child's responses will remain anonymous. I also understand that if I wish to withdraw my child from the study, I may do so without any repercussions.

 Signature of the parent

 Date

TO: Parent/guardian of potential research participant

FROM: Sarah Pashagumskum

SUBJECT: Research study about alternative ways of educating in secondary

Hello,

I am currently working on my doctoral dissertation and would like your child _____ to participate in the research study. If you agree that your child will participate, he/she will be interviewed by me at his/her and your convenience. We can determine a time and a place together that will be convenient.

My research study is about finding alternative ways of educating students at the secondary level. I feel that your child has valuable information to share concerning this topic. I would like to discuss:

- **Why is this system successful for some and unsuccessful for a large number of students?**
- **What factors encourage staying in school or leaving school?**
- **What would make our school more successful?**
- **What are Eeyou ways of educating?**
- **Any further insights you have to offer.**

Should you wish your child to participate in this study, please read the attached consent form, sign, and return it to me. Information about ethical procedures is outlined in the consent form.

Please feel free to contact me by phone at 819-855-2170, or by e-mail at spashag@lakeheadu.ca. You may also contact my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Constance Russell at 807-343-8049.

Thank you for your time and for considering your child participating in this study.

Sincerely,

Sarah Pashagumskum

Consent Form – parental consent for student participation in interviews and/or focus groups

Title of the research project: Investigating Eeyou Education Alternatives

Description of the project: This research study will address issues relating to success of Eeyou students within the school of one Northern Cree community. Perspectives of students, parents, teachers, and other members of the school community and the wider community will be considered to develop recommendations for alternative ways of educating Eeyou secondary age children.

Purpose of the project: The study will ultimately provide the school and the community involved with recommendations for alternative ways of schooling at the high level which may increase success.

Survey: A survey of students within the school will determine student perceptions of the presence of in-school leaving and retention factors.

Interviews: Face-to-face interviews will be conducted with students, school leavers, members of the school staff, and members of the wider community. Participants will be asked whether they will give consent for the interview to be recorded; otherwise written notes will be taken.

Focus group sessions: Participants will also be invited to take part in focus group sessions.

Risk of Participating: There are no known risks to participation in this research project.

Withdrawal from the Research: Participation is voluntary. A participant may withdraw from the study at any time with no risk to him or herself.

Confidentiality & Data Storage: Participants are assured confidentiality. Measures taken to protect confidentiality include:

- The research study is consistent with Lakehead University's Ethics Procedures and the Guidelines for Research on Human Subjects
- Contributions will remain confidential and anonymous: pseudonyms will be used in transcriptions and in the final report.
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Research Results: Research results will be shared in the following ways:

- A summary of the results in Cree and English will be sent to any participant who requests it
- A summary of the results in Cree and English will be given to the Cree School Board, the Band Council, and our community school

- A doctoral dissertation will be written for Lakehead University
- This doctoral dissertation will be available in the library at Lakehead, but will also be available in our community library
- There may be articles written about this research for publication and presentation at conferences.

Researcher Information: The research is being conducted by:

Sarah Pashagumskum, PhD Student, Faculty of Education
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with supervisor:

Dr. Constance Russell, Faculty of Education
 Lakehead University, 955 Oliver Road, Thunder Bay, Ontario, P7B 5E1
 email: crussell@lakeheadu.ca tel: 807-343-8049 fax: 807-344-6807

I, _____, have been fully informed of the objectives of the project being conducted. I understand these objectives and consent to my child _____ taking part in the interviews and or focus groups for the project. I understand that my child's responses will remain anonymous. I also understand that if I wish to withdraw my child from the study, I may do so without any repercussions.

 Signature of the parent

 Date

Consent Form – student participation in interviews and/or focus groups

Title of the research project: Investigating Eeyou Education Alternatives

Description of the project: This research study will address issues relating to success of Eeyou students within the school of one Northern Cree community. Perspectives of students, parents, teachers, and other members of the school community and the wider community will be considered to develop recommendations for alternative ways of educating Eeyou secondary age children.

Purpose of the project: The study will ultimately provide the school and the community involved with recommendations for alternative ways of schooling at the high level which may increase success.

Survey: A survey of students within the school will determine student perceptions of the presence of in-school leaving and retention factors.

Interviews: Face-to-face interviews will be conducted with students, school leavers, members of the school staff, and members of the wider community. Participants will be asked whether they will give consent for the interview to be recorded; otherwise written notes will be taken.

Focus group sessions: Participants will also be invited to take part in focus group sessions.

Risk of Participating: There are no known risks to participation in this research project.

Withdrawal from the Research: Participation is voluntary. A participant may withdraw from the study at any time with no risk to him or herself.

Confidentiality & Data Storage: Participants are assured confidentiality. Measures taken to protect confidentiality include:

- The research study is consistent with Lakehead University’s Ethics Procedures and the Guidelines for Research on Human Subjects
- Contributions will remain confidential and anonymous: pseudonyms will be used in transcriptions and in the final report.
- Data will be stored for seven years in a locked box and will then be destroyed. These are Lakehead’s requirements for data storage.

Research Results: Research results will be shared in the following ways:

- A summary of the results in Cree and English will be sent to any participant who requests it
- A summary of the results in Cree and English will be given to the Cree School Board, the Band Council, and our community school

- A doctoral dissertation will be written for Lakehead University
- This doctoral dissertation will be available in the library at Lakehead, but will also be available in our community library
- There may be articles written about this research for publication and presentation at conferences.

Researcher Information: The research is being conducted by:

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Dr. Constance Russell, Faculty of Education
Lakehead University, 955 Oliver Road, Thunder Bay, Ontario, P7B 5E1
email: crussell@lakeheadu.ca tel: 807-343-8049 fax: 807-344-6807

I, _____, have been fully informed of the objectives of the project being conducted. I understand these objectives and consent to taking part in the interviews and or focus groups for the project. I understand that my responses will remain anonymous. I also understand that if I wish to withdraw from the study, I may do so without any repercussions.

Signature of the participant

Date

APPENDIX B

LETTERS AND CONSENT FORMS FOR BAND COUNCIL AND

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

TO: Band Council, Cree Nation of Chisasibi

FROM: Sarah Pashagumskum

SUBJECT: Research study about alternative ways of educating in secondary

I am currently working on my doctoral dissertation and would like your consent to do my research here in our community. The study is about finding alternative ways of educating students at the secondary level. As outlined in the presentation given about this project, I feel that this research could be valuable to both our school and our community as it aims to increase student success within James Bay Eeyou School.

I am now asking your permission to perform this research concerning James Bay Eeyou School. Permission entails:

- Giving me consent to work as a researcher within the school and the community
- Interviewing members of the community and the school community
- Interviewing students
- Asking students to complete a questionnaire about retention and school-leaving factors

Should you consent to this study, please read the attached consent form, sign, and return it to me. Information about ethical procedures is outlined in the consent form.

Please feel free to contact me by phone at 819-855-2170, or by e-mail at spashag@lakeheadu.ca. You may also contact my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Constance Russell at 807-343-8049.

Thank you for your time and for considering participating in this study.

Sincerely,

Sarah Pashagumskum

Consent Form – Cree Nation of Chisasibi

Title of the research project: Investigating Eeyou Education Alternatives

Description of the project: This research study will address issues relating to success of Eeyou students within the school of one Northern Cree community. Perspectives of students, parents, teachers, and other members of the school community and the wider community will be considered to develop recommendations for alternative ways of educating Eeyou secondary age children.

Purpose of the project: The study will ultimately provide the school and the community involved with recommendations for alternative ways of schooling at the high level which may increase success.

Survey: A survey of students within the school will determine student perceptions of the presence of in-school leaving and retention factors.

Interviews: Face-to-face interviews will be conducted with students, school leavers, members of the school staff, and members of the wider community. Participants will be asked whether they will give consent for the interview to be recorded; otherwise written notes will be taken.

Focus group sessions: Participants will also be invited to take part in focus group sessions.

Risk of Participating: There are no known risks to participation in this research project.

Withdrawal from the Research: Participation is voluntary. A participant may withdraw from the study at any time with no risk to him or herself.

Confidentiality & Data Storage: Participants are assured confidentiality. Measures taken to protect confidentiality include:

- The research study is consistent with Lakehead University's Ethics Procedures and the Guidelines for Research on Human Subjects
- Contributions will remain confidential and anonymous: pseudonyms will be used in transcriptions and in the final report.
- Data will be stored for seven years in a locked box and will then be destroyed. These are Lakehead's requirements for data storage.

Research Results: Research results will be shared in the following ways:

- A summary of the results in Cree and English will be sent to any participant who requests it
- A summary of the results in Cree and English will be given to the Cree School Board, the Band Council, and our community school
- A doctoral dissertation will be written for Lakehead University

- This doctoral dissertation will be available in the library at Lakehead, but will also be available in our community library
- There may be articles written about this research for publication and presentation at conferences.

Researcher Information: The research is being conducted by:

Sarah Pashagumskum, PhD Student, Faculty of Education
Lakehead University, 955 Oliver Road, Thunder Bay, Ontario, P7B 5E1
email: sjpashag@lakeheadu.ca tel: 819-855-2170

with supervisor:

Dr. Constance Russell, Faculty of Education
Lakehead University, 955 Oliver Road, Thunder Bay, Ontario, P7B 5E1
email: crussell@lakeheadu.ca tel: 807-343-8049 fax: 807-344-6807

The Band Council has been fully informed of the objectives of the project being conducted. We understand these objectives and consent to the project. We understand that survey and interview participant anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly guarded. We also understand that if the community wishes to withdraw from the study, it may do so without any repercussions and at any time.

Signing member for the Band Council

Date

TO: School Committee, James Bay Eeyou School

FROM: Sarah Pashagumskum

SUBJECT: Research study about alternative ways of educating in secondary

I am currently working on my doctoral dissertation and would like James Bay Eeyou School staff and students to participate in my research study. The study is about finding alternative ways of educating students at the secondary level. As outlined in the presentation given about this project, I feel that this research could be valuable to both our school and our community as it aims to increase student success within James Bay Eeyou School.

I am now asking your permission to perform this research concerning James Bay Eeyou School. Permission entails:

- Giving me consent to work as a researcher within the school
- Interviewing staff members
- Interviewing students
- Asking students to complete a questionnaire about retention and school-leaving factors
- Allowing me access to the class lists so that I can randomly sample students to provide a stratified random sample of participants in the questionnaire.

Should you wish James Bay Eeyou School participate in this study, please read the attached consent form, sign, and return it to me. Information about ethical procedures is outlined in the consent form.

Please feel free to contact me by phone at 819-855-2170, or by e-mail at spashag@lakeheadu.ca. You may also contact my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Constance Russell at 807-343-8049.

Thank you for your time and for considering participating in this study.

Sincerely,

Sarah Pashagumskum

Consent Form – School Committee, James Bay Eeyou School

Title of the research project: Investigating Eeyou Education Alternatives

Description of the project: This research study will address issues relating to success of Eeyou students within the school of one Northern Cree community. Perspectives of students, parents, teachers, and other members of the school community and the wider community will be considered to develop recommendations for alternative ways of educating Eeyou secondary age children.

Purpose of the project: The study will ultimately provide the school and the community involved with recommendations for alternative ways of schooling at the high level which may increase success.

Survey: A survey of students within the school will determine student perceptions of the presence of in-school leaving and retention factors.

Interviews: Face-to-face interviews will be conducted with students, school leavers, members of the school staff, and members of the wider community. Participants will be asked whether they will give consent for the interview to be recorded; otherwise written notes will be taken.

Focus group sessions: Participants will also be invited to take part in focus group sessions.

Risk of Participating: There are no known risks to participation in this research project.

Withdrawal from the Research: Participation is voluntary. A participant may withdraw from the study at any time with no risk to him or herself.

Confidentiality & Data Storage: Participants are assured confidentiality. Measures taken to protect confidentiality include:

- The research study is consistent with Lakehead University's Ethics Procedures and the Guidelines for Research on Human Subjects
- Contributions will remain confidential and anonymous: pseudonyms will be used in transcriptions and in the final report.
- Data will be stored for seven years in a locked box and will then be destroyed. These are Lakehead's requirements for data storage.

Research Results: Research results will be shared in the following ways:

- A summary of the results in Cree and English will be sent to any participant who requests it
- A summary of the results in Cree and English will be given to the Cree School Board, the Band Council, and our community school
- A doctoral dissertation will be written for Lakehead University

- This doctoral dissertation will be available in the library at Lakehead, but will also be available in our community library
- There may be articles written about this research for publication and presentation at conferences.

Researcher Information: The research is being conducted by:

Sarah Pashagumskum, PhD Student, Faculty of Education
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The School Committee has been fully informed of the objectives of the project being conducted. We understand these objectives and consent to the project. We understand that survey and interview participant anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly guarded. We also understand that if the school wishes to withdraw from the study, it may do so without any repercussions and at any time.

Signing member for James Bay Eeyou School

Date

APPENDIX C
STUDENT SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Section A:

Please answer the following questions about yourself. Remember that you will remain anonymous: no one will know that you provided this information.

1. I am in Secondary: 1 1(IPL) 2 3 16+ 4 5
2. I am in the: French Sector English Sector
3. I am: Male Female

Section B: These questions are asked because your opinions about your school are important. Your answers will be used to help make your school better.

These questions are about culture in your regular classroom, not in your Cree culture classroom. When answering think about whether Cree culture is used in the school, outside of the Cree culture classroom.

4. My teachers understand Cree Culture. Yes A little No
5. My teachers think Cree Culture is important. Yes A little No
6. My teachers are interested in Cree ways of doing things. Yes A little No

7. My teachers encourage me to develop my Cree culture skills.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
8. My teachers encourage me to develop my Cree language skills.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
9. I get opportunities to express Cree culture in my class work.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
10. I get opportunities to learn about Cree history in class	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
11. I get opportunities to learn about my own culture in class.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
12. It is important to learn the Cree language in school.	Very much <input type="checkbox"/>	Some <input type="checkbox"/>	Not very much <input type="checkbox"/>	Not at all <input type="checkbox"/>
13. It is important to learn about Cree culture in school.	Very much <input type="checkbox"/>	Some <input type="checkbox"/>	Not very much <input type="checkbox"/>	Not at all <input type="checkbox"/>

These questions are about community members being involved in your school:

14. I learn from elders within the school.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
15. Parents come into the school to help with learning or classroom activities.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
16. My parents and teachers talk with each other.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
17. Other community members come into the school to participate in classroom activities.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
18. My school work involves going to different places in the community.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>

These questions are about relationships in the school:

19. I feel like I have a good relationship with my teachers.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
20. I feel like my teachers and I respect each other.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
21. I feel like my teachers care about me.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
22. I feel like the guidance staff care about me.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
23. I feel like the administration (Principals and Vice-principals) care about me.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>

24. When I am in trouble, or need to talk to someone, I go to my: (check \checkmark as many as you like)

- Teacher Guidance counselor S.A.T. Principal
Vice-principal Parent Friend None of these

25. I feel safe in school.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
26. Teasing has been a problem for me.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
27. Gangs have created problems for me.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
28. Bullying has been a problem for me.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>

29. I feel unsafe in school.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
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These questions are about whether the school listens to you or asks your opinion:

30. I help to make up the rules in my school.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
31. I help to make up the rules in my classes.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
32. I think school rules are fair.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>

33. Would you like to say anything about school rules?

34. My teachers ask for my opinion in class.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
35. I choose what type of work I will do in class.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
36. I have time to discuss things in class that are important to me.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
37. I discuss my assignments with my teachers.	All <input type="checkbox"/>	Most <input type="checkbox"/>	Some <input type="checkbox"/>	None <input type="checkbox"/>
38. My teachers are available when I need help.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
39. I feel that the adults in this school care about what I think.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
40. I get individual help when I need it.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>

These questions are about what you think about your schoolwork:

41. I am bored with my school work.	Always <input type="checkbox"/>	Most of the time <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	Never <input type="checkbox"/>
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42. Can you tell me what kinds of school work you like doing?

43. Can you tell me what kinds of school work you do not like?

44. Can you tell me what subjects you like or do well in?

I like:

I do well in:

45. Can you tell me what subjects do you not like or don't do well in?

I don't like:

I don't do well in:

46. I find my school work interesting.

Always

Most of the time

Sometimes

Never

These questions are so that you can tell us how you feel about your school.

Circle either yes or no to show that you agree or disagree with the following statements:

47. Overall, I like my school.

Yes No

48. James Bay Eeyou School is preparing me for my future.

Yes No

49. School is easy here.

Yes No

50. School is hard here.

Yes No

51. My school has high expectations of me.

Yes No

52. James Bay Eeyou School is a good school.

Yes No

53. My school work is challenging.

Yes No

54. My school work is easy.

Yes No

These questions are about decisions to stay in school and decisions to leave school. Your answers will help come up with ways of helping students to stay in school.

55. I will be finishing high school.

Yes

Maybe

No

56. I think about dropping out.

Always

Most of the time

Sometimes

Never

If yes, would you please list some reasons you might drop out.

57. I have trouble coming to school. Always Most of the time Sometimes Never

If yes, would you please list some reasons that you might be absent?

58. I have trouble being on time. Always Most of the time Sometimes Never

If yes, would you please list some reasons that you might be late?

59. I have reasons to stay in school. Always Most of the time Sometimes Never

If yes, would you please list as many reasons as possible?

60. I have people who support my staying in school.

Always Most of the time Sometimes Never

If yes, would you please write some things that these people do to help you stay in school?

APPENDIX D

SAMPLING TABLE FOR STUDENT SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

SAMPLING TABLE FOR PHASE 1 – SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

homeroom	Description of class (level, sector)	Number of students	Number of girls	Number of girls needed for sample	Number of boys	Number of boys needed for sample
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
13						
14						
15						
16						
17						
18						
19						
20						
21						

APPENDIX E
CODE BOOK WITH CODING FRAME

item #	Variable	Description of variable	Variable type	Allowable values	Description of values	Data type
1	CLAS	Class type	Nominal	1-7	1=2, 2=IPL, 3=2, 4=3, 5=16+, 6=4, 7=5, 98=non response, 99=illegible/inappropriate	Demographic
2	SECT	Sector	Nominal	1,2	1=French, 2=English, 98=non response, 99=illegible/inappropriate	Demographic
3	GEND	Gender	Nominal	1,2	1=male, 2=female, 98=non response, 99=illegible/inappropriate	Demographic
4	UNDC	Teacher understands Cree	Ordinal	1-3	1=yes, 2=a little, 3=no, 98=non response, 99=illegible/inappropriate	Culture
5	CRIM	Teacher Cree important	Ordinal	1-3	1=yes, 2=a little, 3=no, 98=non response, 99=illegible/inappropriate	Culture
6	CRIN	Teacher interest Cree	Ordinal	1-3	1=yes, 2=a little, 3=no, 98=non response, 99=illegible/inappropriate	Culture
7	TENC	Teacher encourage Cree culture	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never 98=non response, 99=illegible/inappropriate	Culture
8	TENL	Teacher encourage Cree language	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never 98=non response, 99=illegible/inappropriate	Culture
9	CROP	Class opportunities Cree	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time,	Culture

					3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	
10	CRHI	Cree history opportunities	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Culture
11	CULT	Class opportunities culture	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Culture
12	CLIM	Cree language is important	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Culture
13	CCIM	Cree culture is important	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Culture
14	ELDS	Elders in school	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Community
15	PARS	Parents in school	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Community
16	PART	Parents and teachers talk	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the	Community

					time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	
17	COMM	Community member participation	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Community
18	PLAC	Places in the community	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Community
19	RELT	Relationship with teacher	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Relationships
20	RESP	Mutual respect	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Relationships
21	TEAC	Teachers care	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Relationships
22	GUID	Guidance staff cares	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Relationships
23	ADMI	Administration	Ordinal	1-4	1=always,	Relationships

		cares			2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	
24	TALK	Person to talk	Nominal	1-8	1=teacher,2=guidance counselor, 3=sat, 4=principal, 5=vp, 6=parent, 7=friend, 8=none, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Relationships
25	SAFE	Feeling safe	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Relationships
26	BULL	Bullying	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Relationships
27	TEAS	Teasing	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Relationships
28	GANG	Gang problems	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Relationships
29	UNSA	Feeling unsafe	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/	Relationships

					inappropriate	
30	SRUL	School rules	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Responsiveness to students
31	CRUL	Class rules	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Responsiveness to students
32	RULF	Rules are fair	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Responsiveness to students
33	OPEN QUESTION TO INCLUDE IN QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS				Responsiveness to students	
34	OPPI	Teacher asks for opinions	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Responsiveness to students
35	CHOI	Given choice in types of work	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Responsiveness to students
36	DISC	Time to discuss important things	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Responsiveness to students
37	ASSN	Discuss assignments with teachers	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes,	Responsiveness to students

					4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/inappropriate	
38	AVAI	Teachers are available	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/inappropriate	Responsiveness to students
39	ADCA	Adults in school care	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/inappropriate	Responsiveness to students
40	INDI	Individual help available	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/inappropriate	Responsiveness to students
41	BORE	Bored at school	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/inappropriate	School work
42	WLIK	Type of schoolwork liked	OPEN: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS			School work
43	WDIS	Type of schoolwork disliked	OPEN: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS			School work
44	SUBL	Subjects liked	DECISION TO BE MADE AFTER DATA COLLECTION			School work
45	SUBD	Subjects disliked	DECISION TO BE MADE AFTER DATA COLLECTION			School work
46	INTR	School is interesting	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/inappropriate	School work
47	EASY	School is easy	Nominal	1,2	1=yes, 2=no, 98=non	Feelings about school

					response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	
48	SLIK	Like school overall	Nominal	1,2	1=yes, 2=no, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Feelings about school
49	PREP	Preparation for future	Nominal	1,2	1=yes, 2=no, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Feelings about school
50	HARD	School is hard	Nominal	1,2	1=yes, 2=no, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Feelings about school
51	CHAL	School work is challenging	Nominal	1,2	1=yes, 2=no, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Feelings about school
52	GOOD	JBES is a good school	Nominal	1,2	1=yes, 2=no, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Feelings about school
53	HIGH	School has high expectations	Nominal	1,2	1=yes, 2=no, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Feelings about school
54	WEAS	School work is easy	Nominal	1,2	1=yes, 2=no, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Feelings about school
55	FINI	Will be finishing high school	Nominal	1-3	1=yes, 2=maybe, 3=no, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Decisions to leave or stay in school
56	DROP	Thought about dropping out	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/ inappropriate	Decisions to leave or stay in school
57	COME	Trouble coming to school	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes,	Decisions to leave or stay in school

					4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/inappropriate	
58	TIME	Trouble being on time	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/inappropriate	Decisions to leave or stay in school
59	REAS	Reasons to stay in school	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/inappropriate	Decisions to leave or stay in school
60	SUPP	Support for staying in school	Ordinal	1-4	1=always, 2=most of the time, 3=sometimes, 4=never, 98=non response, 99=illegible/inappropriate	Decisions to leave or stay in school

APPENDIX F
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview protocol

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewee(s):

Reminders: informed consent and consent forms, right to withdraw, anonymity and confidentiality, storage of data, request to record

Possible topics:

- Reasons to leave or stay in school
- What happens in the school to discourage leaving or staying?
- What happens outside of the school to discourage leaving or staying?
- Improving student experience
- Improving the school
- What constitutes success?
- Traditional education
- Culture in school
- What do we as a community want the school to do for our children?

Notes:

APPENDIX G

TRI-COUNCIL TUTORIAL COMPLETION CERTIFICATE

Certificate of Completion

This is to certify that

Sarah Pashagumskum

*has completed the Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics'
Introductory Tutorial for the
Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS)*

Issued On: March 19, 2007