Can the Assembly of First Nations Education Action Plan Succeed? Colonialism’s Effect on Traditional Knowledge in Two Communities

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements For the degree of Doctor of Education
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ABSTRACT

The study examined the potential opportunities and pitfalls of implementing traditional knowledge in two Nishnaabe-Aski communities in Northwestern Ontario. The investigation sought to answer the question: “How does the colonial legacy influence the will and capacity of two First Nations communities to implement the traditional knowledge aspect of the Assembly of First Nations’ Education Action Plan? The research identified areas of the culture that have been affected and how they might ultimately impact the will and capacity of the First Nations People to implement traditional knowledge into community curriculum. These factors included language, religion, residential schools and traditional beliefs, Elders and the preservation of traditional knowledge, leadership and community dilemmas, metastereotyping, renewing indigenous culture and government funding and poverty.

A merger of McLaughlin’s (1987) policy implementation analysis and issues taken from literature regarding difficulties associated with
McLaughlin (1987) suggests that policy implementation depends on will and local capacity. Research and supporting literature revealed the consequences of colonialism have altered the context and practices of the First Nations culture and by so doing, compromised their will and capacity to implement traditional education policies, a situation that must be linked to realization of the Education Action Plan’s goals.

The goal of the study was to assist policy makers, community leaders, and educators in recognizing the attitudes, social norms, and practices that are interwoven with post-colonial trust issues at the community level and to focus on the viability of preservation of First Nations heritage and culture.

The inquiry documented and analyzed, in a case study approach, the dynamics of colonialism on two First Nations communities. Interviews and questionnaires, utilized in communities, were based on a matrix that directed comments to areas associated with traditional knowledge, remnants of colonialism and areas of will and capacity. The focus of the inquires referred to curriculum content, funding, school and community structure, as well as traditional knowledge, communication, participation, and the role of members in shaping the community values and school curricula. In all, 32 people were formally interviewed including teachers, Elders, education council members, principals, and
community leaders. The study comprised 14 interviews and 17 questionnaires in Two Rivers, and 18 interviews and 8 questionnaires in Round Rock.

The study intended to establish whether colonialism would play out in the implementation of the traditional knowledge aspect of the Education Action Plan and if so, in what areas and in what manner. Through research, it was revealed that the Assembly of First Nations did not consider many of the difficulties existing in the First Nations communities. Consequently, the Education Action Plan objectives are likely unattainable due to factors resulting from the shameful legacy of colonialism’s cultural attack on the will and capacity of those communities who must implement the goals.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Ken and Christine Benson, who early on instilled in me a thirst for knowledge. More so, however, it is dedicated to my husband Ian, who made it possible for me to accomplish this substantial undertaking. From shouldering additional responsibilities through urging me on when the effort seemed truly overwhelming, to being a sounding board for ideas and frustrations, he remained (and still does) the stable and comforting influence of my life. It is certainly true we can see farther and clearer when others lift us up.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to thank my supervisor, Nina Bascia, for her conscientious and tireless guidance in making this thesis become a reality. In addition, I wish to recognize the members of the communities I researched and offer my sincere gratitude for their kindness, assistance and patience. I also want to acknowledge the contributions of my friends and fellow students, who encouraged, shared knowledge, assisted where possible, and chided when necessary. Last, but not least, special thanks to Julie Dotson whose careful editing was invaluable.
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CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

Background and Problem Focus

World cultures appear to be moving towards an amalgamation dominated by Western ideals. This mélange frequently fails to preserve the rich traditions of unique populations and creates a number of arenas in which minority populations attempt to secure their lifestyles, traditional beliefs, and cultural knowledge (de la Torre, 1996; Dirlik, 2006; Nakhid, 2002; Parker, 2006; Woodrum, 2002). The United Nations, understanding the crisis of these cultural conflicts, sought to reduce the impact of majority saturation on a global scale by setting up a subcommittee in 1994 that concerned itself with the protection of minority and indigenous civil liberties. Prior to this, each culture had dealt with the challenge of cultural attacks in isolation producing outcomes as numerous as the values and governments involved. Canada, like many other countries, at first sought to absorb minority indigenous populations through a variety of methods. More often than not, the education system was the primary mechanism (Apple, 1986, 1990; Ghosh, 2004; Mohan, 2007; Sharma, 2006; Sullivan, 1998), thus reducing the assimilationist campaign to definitions of acceptable knowledge and suitable curriculum (Collet, 2007; Cornbleth & Waugh,
Canada’s assimilationist strategy, practiced for decades, amounted to a “cultural blindness” that culminated in the *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy* of 1969, also known as the “White Paper” (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1969). Jean Chretien, then Honourable Minister of Indian Affairs, along with the Right Honourable Pierre Trudeau, Prime Minister, advocated a policy of equality and undifferentiated citizenship by proposing elimination of the Indian Act and dismantling Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1969). Fearing a destruction of their cultural heritage if their unique governing arrangements were withdrawn and the proposed policy’s total disregard of their ethnic distinction and unique cultural values, the indigenous peoples were finally motivated to action and shortly thereafter drafted a response, known as the “Red Paper.” This document, composed in 1970, clearly stated that the native inhabitants *did not* wish to be lost within Canada’s policy of a mosaic society, but rather wished to be recognized and respected in a climate of co-existence as the first inhabitants of this country: the First Nations (Cairns, 2000; Sigurdson, 1996).

**Aboriginal Independence**

The “Red Paper” response was drafted by the National Indian Brotherhood, a forerunner of the Assembly of First Nations, and
outlined the view that indigenous peoples must be allowed to live in peaceful co-existence, as citizens of Canada, but moreover as the *first* citizens of Canada: equal but separate. The document further outlined the need for self-government and control of indigenous education and lands. The clarity and detail of the Red Paper proved to be instrumental some twelve years later as a starting point for negotiating the Constitution Act of 1982-84. It also resulted in the federal government’s recognition and affirmation of existing indigenous treaty rights in its section 35. In 1983, the Assembly of First Nations further clarified its demands to a parliamentary committee struck to examine indigenous issues, the *1983 Special Committee on Indian Self-Government*, chaired by Keith Penner, Minister of Parliament. A resulting document, informally known as the Penner Report, made the following commitments to the aboriginal peoples of Canada at both federal and provincial levels by:

(a) Preserving and enhancing the cultural heritage of the aboriginal peoples of Canada, and (b) respecting the freedom of the aboriginal peoples of Canada to live within their heritage and to educate their children in their own languages, as well as official languages of Canada. The aboriginal peoples of Canada have the right to self-governing institutions that will meet the needs of their communities, subject to the nature, jurisdiction, and powers of those institutions, and to the financing arrangements relating thereto. Minutes and Proceedings of the Special Committee on Indian Self-Government, 1983 (Indian and Northern Affairs).
While neither the federal nor the provincial governments directly endorsed the approach of the Penner Report, the report provided groundwork for the preservation of the First Nations way of life, and in 1996, it was used as a reference point in the preparation of *The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* undertaken by the federal government. *The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (RCAP) set new standards for indigenous rights and recommended “recognition that aboriginal peoples have a right to fashion their own destiny and control their own governments, land, and resources . . . with an inherent right of self-government” (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). RCAP advocated implementation of an integrated and systematic culturally-based education curriculum to ground indigenous youth solidly in their ethnic identity and knowledge. In addition, the commission proposed conveying to the First Nations the authority to control what happens in the school system and throughout the various levels and ministries of government, thus giving them a broader and firmer base for educational progress (Dei & Karumanchery, 1999; Henry & Tator, 1994).

Through the RCAP and other proposed plans such as Bill C-34, the First Nations Jurisdiction over Education Act, it was expected that the indigenous societies would develop stronger characters along with the resources to grow intellectually, physically, emotionally, and
spiritually (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). On July 24, 2003, First Nations representatives, along with representatives of the federal and provincial governments, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining the elements of First Nations education jurisdiction and, in November 2005, the negotiators initialled the respective agreements (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2005). The next year (2006), Bill C-34, the First Nations Jurisdiction over Education Act was introduced in the House of Commons by the Honourable Jim Prentice, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Both the House of Commons and the Senate voted for the bill and it received Royal Assent on December 12, 2006 (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2006).

With the assent of Bill C-34, control of education became an undertaking for the First Nations people, a responsibility both exhilarating and intricately difficult since complexities in both funding and curriculum loomed large. While the decision to move toward the establishment and management of a community school schema based on traditional culture seems a solution, would the communities have the will or capacity to accomplish the task successfully? The resources and social capital to succeed as well as the impetus to complete the task are a few of the possible obstacles that must be considered. In addition, the effects of colonialism imposed on the indigenous populations may
have resulted in barriers that will impact the success of the venture. The commencement of culturally-based educational curricula was not attempted until 2005 when the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) in response to the Memorandum of Understanding proposed the Education Action Plan. The plan proposed: “Education that embodies and supports the strengthening of a First Nations’ identity through an emphasis on language, cultural, and traditional knowledge and the effective reincorporation of First Nations Elders and women in educating younger generations” (Assembly of First Nations, 2005, p 3). While it is a beginning, the 2005 Education Action Plan policy stresses many diverse educational requirements, and it is possible that a number of different interpretations will be found within it.

Currently the First Nations peoples have gained some legal control over education; however, the individual community has been left to determine the educational needs of its students. This discretion falls most often to the appointed Community Education Authority (CEA) or the classroom teacher, affording a broad spectrum of curricular choices (Assembly of First Nations, 2000; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2001). These choices will be influenced by the environment of the community, the beliefs and values of its citizens and the effects of colonialism on the culture. As well, the impetus or will to achieve, the
level of educational achievement desired by the members and the capacity or resources available will influence the undertaking.

The current state of First Nations education is unacceptable according to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and Statistics Canada. The 1996 Census found that approximately 60% of First Nations on-reserve residents, aged 20 to 24, had not completed high school or obtained an alternative diploma or certificate. In the 2006 Census, once again approximately 60% of First Nations on-reserve residents, aged 20 to 24, reported not completing high school (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2006; Statistics Canada, 2006). The results are similar for First Nations’ students attending off-reserve, provincial schools. Human development indicators are generally lower for First Nations citizens than for the general population in Canada according to the Office of Auditor General (Government of Canada, 2004). The First Nations people understand these challenges and allude to them in the preamble of the Education Action Plan:

. . . . First Nations in Canada are facing numerous challenges, . . . we risk perpetuating the unjust social and economic conditions of First Nations peoples for another generation. Under this scenario, rather than contributing to the social and economic fabric that makes up Canada or furthering the work of contemporary First Nations leaders working to resolve the long-standing challenges facing First Nations, the next generation may actually become more alienated and less able to participate in Canadian society. First Nations have cultural, socio-economic, and demographic characteristics that are distinct from the rest of the country.
Moreover, First Nations are building upon different societal institutions. . . Only First Nations can properly incorporate these differences into program and policy changes that would meet their needs (Assembly of First Nations, 2005).

The Education Action Plan mandates the inclusion of traditional knowledge in each reserve through the efforts of community women and Elders. The success of this endeavour depends on a number of factors and actors that are at once site-specific and universal.

Academics, government officials, and First Nations leadership bodies have become increasingly interested in the development of indigenous community schools and specifically the success of educational efforts in smaller communities. A study of the factors that could possibly influence the successful implementation of the Education Action Plan would add to current understanding. Many articles by educators and government officials call for fulfillment of RCAP and Bill C-34’s advocacy of indigenous rights to self-determination and education; few have examined the foundations that are required for implementation success.

There is little research on specific methods of incorporating indigenous knowledge into community curriculum and almost none concerning existent issues on reserves that might affect this implementation process or other school issues. The historically poor achievement rate of indigenous students in many areas of education suggests that the matter may be more complicated than curriculum
development and may well require examination of the dynamics existing within the smaller isolated communities.

Research Question

My study set out to examine the potential opportunities and pitfalls for implementing traditional knowledge in two Nishnaabe-Aski communities in Northwestern Ontario while considering the possible impact of colonialism on the will and capacity of the schools, their communities and members. My investigation sought to answer the question: “What dynamics may affect the implementation of the traditional knowledge aspect of the Education Action Plan in two First Nations communities and how does colonialism play out in this situation, particularly in light of will and capacity?” The research inquiry was two-pronged: 1) to examine, analyze and document, in a case study approach, the dynamics of colonialism’s impact on will and capacity in two First Nations’ communities and 2) determine how these conditions will affect the implementation of the traditional knowledge component of the Education Action Plan.

The Education Action Plan, proposed by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), intends to introduce culturally appropriate traditional knowledge curriculum into reserve school programs. In answering the research question, I needed to determine the current circumstances in the two communities regarding traditional knowledge and what, if any,
factors are influencing that knowledge. Examining the opinions and viewpoints of the community members would allow me to answer these questions.

My intent was to document the context into which the traditional knowledge component of the Education Plan would be implemented and to gain an understanding of the perspectives community members hold regarding the Education Action Plan’s traditional knowledge intent and goal. I was interested in documenting local events, courses of action and behaviours that would provide insight into the circumstances and existing character of the two communities. Simultaneously, I considered the effect colonialism might have on the will and capacity to implement the traditional knowledge aspect of the Education Action Plan and the achievement of the Plan’s projected outcomes. My goal was to assist policy makers, community leaders, and educators in recognizing the attitudes, social norms, and institutional practices that are interwoven with post-colonial trust issues at the micro level on reserves.

Since the school is a microcosm of society and education does not exist separate from the individuals it serves, I expected that greater societal factors would be present in the school as well as in the local environment (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). This allowed me to focus on the culture and social norms of the communities and their schools, as well
as the practices and patterns of behaviour of reserve members (Hamersley & Atkinson, 1983; Merriam, 1998). As with any social research, it was imperative to consider and analyze the cultural, religious, and historical forces as part of the study (Atleo, 1991). These forces were vital to the central focus of the research: how colonialism would impact the inclusion of traditional knowledge as an integral part of the school curriculum in light of community will and capacity. In addition, this research needed to consider future responses by members within the two communities.

Significance of the Study

This research study was noteworthy in three ways. First, the question I addressed is important to First Nations people undertaking the task of preserving heritage and culture for future generations. The fact that their knowledge and traditions have been overwhelmed by powerful Eurocentric values through colonialism makes examining their community schooling practices important in determining the viability of successfully preserving their culture. In general, this was a study of a minority group attempting to survive and sustain a unique identity alongside a postcolonial dominant society. The findings provided valuable insight by revealing the challenges that impacted the implementation of the Education Action Plan.
Second, the research focused on how small First Nations communities contend with social ills, government indifference, racial bias, external belief systems, and poverty on a local level. In 1998, The Human Development Index, used by the United Nations to examine per capita income, education levels and life expectancy for comparing world countries, ranked Canadian First Nations quality of life 63rd or Third World. Little has changed between 1998 and 2001 [the latest statistics available] except for a slight increase in per capita income (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2004). My study verified that while government leadership expounds concern and protection of First Nations peoples and their cultural beliefs, traditions and knowledge, the government’s actual safeguards seem highly lacking.

Third, it was the intent of this research to give voice to those involved in the daily challenge of First Nations school, community and government interactions by providing data that revealed the personal, political and cultural factors that affect people in their daily lives and community settings. Such data reaches beyond simple statistics and provides a foundation on which others might build a more thorough understanding of reserve life.

Limitations of the Study

The major focus of this study was to explore a small number of actual contexts in which the traditional knowledge aspect of the
Education Plan may be implemented and to gain an understanding of the perspectives and opinions community members might hold regarding traditional knowledge. Further, I sought to show how these viewpoints and attitudes might be influenced by colonialism’s affect on the will and capacity of the community members to shape and implement traditional knowledge curricula. While some portions of the study could apply to other reserve communities, it was not be possible to generalize all aspects of the research to a broader population (Merriam, 1998). Consequently, this study was limited to the specific set of circumstances within two small communities; however, some other communities may find benefit and relevance to their own state of affairs should their circumstances be similar.

This study had limitations. It was assumed that the community participants were stakeholders who possessed a sincere desire to offer input regarding existing school and community conditions. However, the participants’ responses may not have accurately represented the opinions of all members of the same community.

Conclusion

This chapter presents a general history of the First Nations culture and education in terms of policy and politics. Chapter Two, Review of Literature, establishes reference points and summaries regarding undertakings by other communities and associations as well
as a synthesis of ideas regarding preservation of indigenous culture.

Chapter Three provides the framework used to determine viability of the traditional knowledge aspect of the Education Action Plan in terms of *will* and *capacity* and examines how colonialism, manifested in will and capacity, might play out in policy implementation. Chapter Four describes the methodology used to determine the research application in terms of descriptions and practical assessment of events, courses of action and behaviours in the two communities. Chapter Five describes the data sources: Two Rivers and Round Rock. Chapter Six offers cross-case analysis of the two communities through use of the goals and objectives of the Education Action Plan in regards to traditional knowledge. Finally, Chapter Seven offers conclusions and implications.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

While there is much prescriptive literature advocating the preservation of traditional knowledge and its inclusion in community school curriculum, there is very little actual empirically-based literature that provides process, guidelines, or implementation examples. McCaskill (1987) exemplified this dilemma when he wrote:

Native perspective[s] regarding history, heritage, values and culture, . . . must encompass Native way education principles and methods, acknowledge and respect Native spirituality, and integrate Native language within the curriculum pp. 156, 174).

Eleven years after McCaskill made these comments, Moore (1998) wrote that the “First Nations people have not been consulted in the planning of their education and what is taught (and how it is taught) has little to do with their cultures and societies.” Smith-Mohamed (1998) found that “. . . the suppression of their [indigenous] culture has led to a high dropout rate, thus preventing the significant achievement of considerable numbers who may represent role models outside of academia” (p.247). Most telling were comments by Verna Kirkness, an indigenous Professor at the University of British Columbia, who stated:

Sadly, the policy of Indian Control of Education has not unfolded as expected. . . . [One factor is] our own peoples’ insecurity in taking control and failing to design an education that would be based on our culture, our way of life, and most important our world view. . . . We know all the right words: we
sound like experts, but we fall short when it comes to putting our rhetoric into action (Kirkness, 1998, p.11)

This review of the current literature confirms that Kirkness’ comments are still valid today. There are few documented attempts to include indigenous culture or indigenous knowledge in reserve curriculum with the exception of native language (Antone, 2000; Benay, 1988).

The first part of this chapter covers literary reviews concerning efforts to incorporate indigenous traditional knowledge into various North American reserve schools and describes the contradictory nature of the individual versus collective society. The second part of the chapter deals with the complexities associated with traditional knowledge and provides published details explaining why successful implementation examples are few.

Current Traditional Knowledge Curriculum Applications

There are many articles calling for the inclusion of Native values and knowledge in local curriculum; however, the lack of published results indicates few communities have undertaken the task. There is little academic research to review and even those documented accounts are imprecise and limited at best. Nonetheless, with diligence, I was able to retrieve some published examples of indigenous attempts to incorporate traditional knowledge into the reserve school curriculum. An explanation of the small number of examples may be somewhat rationalized by Turnbull, Roithstein-Fisch and Greenfield’s (2000) study
of contrasting value systems. The apparent dichotomy between indigenous collectivist philosophy and Western individualism may help clarify why few attempts have been made or documented and why First Nations students experience difficulty in Western structured schools.

Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch and Greenfield (2000) identify two contrasting value systems within humanity’s cultures and offer insights as to their dissimilarities. These are independence and interdependence, or individualism and collectivism.

Individualistic cultures stress self-reliance and personal achievement; collectivistic cultures focus more on developing and sustaining a stable mutually dependent group. These fundamental values help form notions of people’s rights and responsibilities, what roles they may take within societies, norms of communication and ideas of how to rear and educate children (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch & Greenfield, 2000, p. 3).

In Canada, the First Nations (collectivist) culture exists in relationship to the dominant, mainstream, Eurocentric (individualist) culture (Brant, 1990; Roberts, Kazarian & Boyington, 2008). Faitar (2006) suggests that students of a collectivist society taught in accordance with individualistic standards present a prescription for failure. This failure is due to conflicting cultural expectations between students and teachers. This situation is currently apparent in reserve schools where approximately 97% of teachers are non-indigenous (Statistics Canada, 2006). The conflicting cultural expectations may explain why almost 60% of indigenous students fail to graduate from
high school. It may also explain why some of the smaller communities in Northwestern Ontario have no students progressing beyond primary school (Indian and Northern Affairs, 2006). Supplementary reasons have been hypothesized. The Kamloops/Thompson School District (1998) report, *Improving School Success for First Nations Students*, states that First Nations students often have different interpretations concerning everyday events or average educational expectations (First Nations Education Study, School District No. 73). In addition to cultural conflicts, inadequate public school preparation, family poverty, and a lack of appreciation for education stemming from negative residential school experiences were cited as reasons for failure (BC Human Rights Commission Report, 2001; Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, 1996). Most notably, according to Mackay & Miles (1995), is the reality that most indigenous students in Northwestern Ontario must leave their communities to attend high school. This means moving hundreds of kilometers, boarding with an unfamiliar family, and attending a mainstream, individualist school. Such a transition is daunting for anyone, but is even more so for indigenous students experiencing contrasting value systems and new cultures. Mackay and Miles (1995) outline the difficulties as follows:

Ontario Native and non-Native educators . . . noted that the greatest factor affecting student boarders who drop out is home-sickness. . . . At this age, many of these students are not ready emotionally to be away from family and friends.
Faced with loneliness, homesickness, and an alien environment, these students often abandon an education which they feel will be of little use to them in their home communities. It may also support the contention that schools geared to culture, traditional knowledge and learning styles of the indigenous Canadians in native communities are necessary (p 170).

In 1998, Manitoba Ministry of Education began a review of indigenous education. That review culminated in the report, *Aboriginal Perspectives in Social Studies*, and identified curriculum needs for aboriginal students (Manitoba Ministry of Education, 1998). In 1999, Alberta followed suit with *Aboriginal Perspective on Education: A Vision of Cultural Context within the Framework of Social Studies* (Alberta Learning, 1999). These reports assert that parents and communities must clearly articulate expectations for students. They emphasize local resources should provide alternative education models and promote acceptable educational standards in accordance with aboriginal perspectives and beliefs (Cardinal, 1999). Again, the documents provided only prescriptive information and lacked empirical data.

British Columbia’s Human Rights Commission document *Barriers to Equal Education for Aboriginal Learners* (2001) incorporates an extensive review of current literature concerning indigenous learning difficulties. It concludes:

The research confirms that aboriginal learners are not benefiting from the public school system to the same degree as non-aboriginal learners. . . . . The reality is that five years after the production and dissemination of the *Report of the*
Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), and the identification of 44 recommendations . . . the gap [between] aboriginal and non-aboriginal learner levels grow wider (Mattson & Caffrey, 2001, p 53).

What follows are the few documented cases of self-determined curriculum within reserve schools. One of the first schools in North America to address the lack of indigenous culture in curriculum was the Rough Rock Demonstration School in Arizona. The school is located on the Rough Rock Reservation and is home to the Dene or Navajo people. In 1966, the school was given a grant to produce what the community members called the Materials Development Project. This was undertaken because

[m]any of us as parents, and our children, supposedly became well educated in the Anglo culture and society, at their schools, Colleges and Universities. Meanwhile, many of our children cannot speak or understand their native language [and] don’t know their clan. . . . Many of our young people drifted so far away from traditional beliefs and practices that they began to deny them. . . . They began to ridicule their people’s way of life—some even went so far as burning and destroying their family’s sacred items (Johnson, McCarty, Bia and Lynch, 1981, p.1-2).

What resulted was a sequenced curriculum outline of Navajo cultural studies for grades one through twelve developed by Elders and concerned parents in the community. The content, referred to as “culture-based curriculum,” used a series of questions as a foundation for content. Why was the curriculum needed? What was to be accomplished? How was it to be implemented? These questions were
used as a basis for community input into the curriculum (Johnson, McCarty, Bia & Lynch, 1981; McCarty and Bia, 2002). Their website (http://www.roughrock.bia.edu) indicates definite success with growth from one school to three schools. They state the purpose of their schooling is “to educate, enlighten, motivate, challenge, and assist in the proper cultural rearing of our Navajo children so they can be self-respecting, respectful of others, speak and practice their language and culture, and be totally functional in the Anglo society.” The school has successfully mixed Indigenous culture with Western curricula to produce self-assured individuals who are capable of success in both cultures.

Another example of success came about in 1970 when the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) threatened to close the Blue Quills residential school in Alberta which, instead, was taken over by the parents of its students. The school became the first indigenous-run school in Canada. Its unique socio-cultural and academic environment strives to promote a sense of pride in indigenous heritage and to reclaim indigenous traditional knowledge and practices. In 1996, it became the Blue Quills First Nations College and now offers advanced degrees (Desjardins, 1996)

*The Organization of Educational Services in Sparsely Populated Regions of Canada,* published by the Saskatchewan Indian Federated
College in 1989, detailed types of services available to rural indigenous reserves. It included the Abbotsford Model (also known as the Aboriginal Education Program), a planning strategy that presented flexible goal achievement paths for incorporating local culture within provincial schools that would meet community expectations. The model set four goals within a time-line of five years:

1) Increase the number of aboriginal students meeting expectations in reading
2) Increase school completion of aboriginal students
3) Increase cultural pride in aboriginal students
4) Increase a sense of belonging in aboriginal students

The program was developed outside of the school environment with members who act as lecturers and advisors to the school staff (Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, 1989).

In 1997, the Saskatchewan Department of Education created a guide to culturally-relevant indigenous curriculum. The resulting manual and implementation handbook provided a framework for schools seeking to develop a learning environment for at-risk indigenous and Métis students. Entitled *Building Communities of Hope*, it encompassed issues, challenges, policy goals, and strategies for school and community effectiveness. Stakeholder roles, guidelines for developing and evaluating plans, and sequential decision strategies were
included. The document described how a plan is critical to community schools because it enables schools to identify local issues and to respond in meaningful ways. It provided a process to bring stakeholders together to determine a shared vision, facilitate problem solving, and establish capacity building within the community (Saskatchewan Department of Education, 1997). An evaluation by the Department of Education in 2006 indicated varied results. Although improvement was shown in some academic areas, the “data suggests that the need for Community Schools, like all schools in general, to adopt a more fully inclusive orientation to cultural content and aboriginal knowledge remains a significant ongoing challenge” (p.66). In fact, the report indicated that Elders or others with traditional wisdom contributed to the classroom knowledge less than 10% of the time (Wotherspoon, Schissel, Evitts, Butler, Doherty, Young and Erhardt, 2006).

The Upper Nicola Band of British Columbia formulated its own education philosophy and school in 1990 and published results of its endeavour in the Canadian Journal of Native Education in 1999. The Upper Nicola Band’s philosophy, goals, and objectives were developed through five steps: 1) “experiencing” allowed a participant opportunity for input; 2) “publishing” offered participants an opportunity to explain ideas and concerns; 3) “processing” provided an opportunity to
internalize and evaluate information; 4) “generalizing” allowed for reflection of “truths;” and 5) “applying” referred to its use. Members expressed their views regarding the school and its goals through community meetings held over a three-day period. At the time, general questions, reminiscent of those posed in Rough Rock, were asked by band members to determine a core curriculum (Charters-Voght, 1999). The goals included developing a supportive community with good school relations, quality programs, and an efficient and qualified staff. “Quality programs” were defined as those that combine provincial core curriculum with indigenous knowledge of survival skills, crafts, and Okanogan mythologies. The report identified Elders and community members to teach the knowledge to students. While no actual curriculum guidelines or evaluations of successful implementation have been published, some outcomes were apparently accomplished as the report notes teachers “are seeing results in their students’ behaviour and in their own development as well” (Charters-Voght, 1999, p. 91)

The Akwesasne Science and Math Pilot Project, undertaken in an attempt to increase indigenous skills in these disciplines, was held as an example of successful curriculum introduced through traditional values in the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996). The project, designed to address the challenge Mohawk students face with Western science and math, used Mohawk cultural concepts as a basis
for the curriculum and combined both Mohawk and Western perspectives for interpreting the natural world (Henderson, 1996). The Mohawk culture constituted more than content; it helped determine process and methods (Restoule, 2000). The program was evaluated in 1991. The results showed that many students moved from the General or Basic 1 to the Advanced level in math and science; as a result they would be prepared for college or university (Castellano, Davis and Lahache, 2000).

On Manitoulin Island and the north shore of Lake Huron, traditional Ojibwa education is delivered in a “fractured” construct in eight First Nations communities (Pitawanakwat, 2001). In this model, Ojibwa traditional knowledge, with the exception of language, is not formally incorporated into the curriculum; rather the teachers invite Elders and traditional teachers to bring their knowledge into the classrooms at appropriate times. This is a similar format to that used by the Flying Dust First Nation in association with Meadow Lake School Division in Manitoba (Schmidt, Derocher, McCallum & McCallum, 2006). In this situation, resources and curricula content are pooled and made available to students in a variety of in- and after-school projects aimed at grounding their youth in Cree culture and traditional values.

Two other endeavours, the Dene Kede created for the Dene bands and the Innuqatigiit development curricula serving the Inuktitut in the
Northwest Territories, offer further examples of traditional knowledge inclusion. The Dene Kede curriculum consists of a set of learning expectations outlined in terms of the Dene culture. They are broadly categorized into four areas: the spiritual world, the land, other peoples, and the Dene themselves. Dene Kede curriculum, developed in consultation with Elders from the five Dene regions, advocates experiential learning.

Inuuqatigiit is a culture-based curriculum developed from the Inuit perspective and grounded in the belief that education should be community-based to maintain and enhance Inuit language and culture (Aboriginal and Culture Based Education, 2004). The programs appear to be working as 70% of indigenous parental responses indicated that their children enjoyed cultural and "on-the-land" activities offered through the school “always” or “most of the time” (Yellowknife Educational District Questionnaires, 2006).

Although there are few secondary schools solely for indigenous students, Joe Duquette High School in Saskatoon and Dennis Cromarty High School in Thunder Bay are two examples where the opportunity exists to combine culture with education in a personal and meaningful way. Students unable to attend indigenous schools, and using distance education facilities, or else attending provincial secondary schools or post-secondary institutions have found that the curricula reflects urban
realities, indicating cultural accommodation is still in early development (Kirkness, Bowman and Selkirk, 1992; LaFrance, 2000).

These reports comprise some of the few documented attempts to bring traditional knowledge into the curriculum of community schools. Other learning situations for indigenous students exist, but these are outside of the community school and not part of formal curriculum. They include various associations similar to the U’mista Cultural Society, incorporated in British Columbia in 1974 to ensure the survival of all aspects of cultural heritage of the Kwakwaka’wakw people (http://www.umista.org). Media venues, such as the Aboriginal Television Network or the Aboriginal Canada Portal internet site, provide a variety of learning opportunities (http://www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca; http://www.aptn.ca). Regardless of the level of education, the development of school curriculum unique to indigenous people and their culture is still in its infancy.

Complexities Regarding Traditional Knowledge

Examples of successful implementation of traditional knowledge curriculum are few. However, there are a number of published papers that contribute towards explaining why this deficiency exists. These papers tend to focus on issues associated with colonialism and its impact on First Nations people. The issues generally fall into three groupings. The first is school issues such as teachers, learning styles
and education schemas. Another deals with reserve issues such as funding, Elders, and special needs. The last consists of cultural issues including language, a definition of traditional knowledge and acceptance controversies.

Colonialism

Colonialism is broadly defined by Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (http://www.plato.stanford.edu), an on-line reference, as a nation’s sovereignty over land beyond its borders where indigenous populations are either dominated or displaced so that settler colonies can be established. In truth, according to Zontek (1996), it is far more, since conquered populations may have religious beliefs, language, cultural changes, as well as mobility rules forcefully imposed upon them. The term is also used to refer to actions employed to legitimize or promote domination. These actions are most often based on the misguided belief that the morals and values of the colonizer are superior to those of the indigenous population. Thomas (1994) sees colonialism as an undertaking comprised of social and political constructs existing, he believes, somewhere between the redundant and the practical. While much of colonialism can be regarded as a merger of shared thoughts, conventions, and bureaucratic outcomes, it was different for Canada’s First Nations. Here it was comprised of mainstream collective practices and cultural iterations that insisted non-European constructs were
inferior (Bhabha, 1994; De Leeuw, 2007; Razak, 2004). According to Said (1994), colonialism is manifested through “configurations of power” that maintain control through manipulation. He further adds that the civilized/uncivilized dichotomy regarding racial inequalities eventually gives rise to philosophies of domination and control. Césaire (1972) sees colonization as a course of action in which the indigenous people are objectified. This situation leads Europeans to categorize indigenous peoples and their lands as “public domain,” thereby integrating them into a matrix of laws that in time leads to monopolization of spaces and inhabitants and relegating weaker groups to less desirable locations (Shepard, 2008; Sibley, 1995). European colonialism has been used to suppress the First Nations’ traditional knowledge as a legitimate knowledge system. The current fragility of indigenous knowledge can be attributed to the forces of cultural genocide and colonial policy. These have been perpetuated over the last several centuries, beginning with the first contact by the French in the 15th century. The period between 1879 and 1986 saw the creation of reserves that restricted the mobility and independence of indigenous people, placing them in a system of submission (McKegney, 2006). The reserve system served to isolate and separate bands and clans while it maintained a reliance on governmental representatives and handouts. Eventually this dependency grew to control all aspects of indigenous life, even to the
point of banning First Nations languages, religious ceremonies, and traditional teachings. It separated families and ultimately assumed complete control of First Nations children’s education (Masco, 1995).

The establishment of residential schools, another aspect of colonialism, eradicated cultural knowledge and self-esteem (McKegney, 2006). The limited school opportunities available to First Nation bands, including those outside the residential school system, were based on Eurocentric educational practices that ignored or rejected outright the world views, languages and values of indigenous people (Simpson, 2001; Simpson, 2007). The result has been a gradual loss of cultural identifiers and the creation of widespread social and psychological upheaval in aboriginal communities (Antone, 2003).

According to Ryan (1996), the legacy of the former residential schools persists in being detrimental to the transmission of traditional knowledge. Furthermore, the North American indigenous culture continues to be threatened through the relentless maintenance of colonial infrastructure and colonial experiences (Simpson, 2001, 2004). The following sections reveal areas where colonialism has been documented as negatively influencing the First Nations’ culture.

**The Importance of Language**

Toulouse (2003) believes that “in order to become a fluent speaker of Ojibwa or any other language you must be in the environment. . .” (p.
unfortunately, the environments in which indigenous languages flourish are growing fewer. Prior to the arrival of the first settlers in the 15th century, more than 60 indigenous languages were spoken in Canada. In 1996, 21 were either totally extinct or nearly so (with less than 40 speakers), and 23 additional ones were seriously endangered due to the limited number of speakers (University of British Columbia, 1996). Using the 1991 census, Drapeau (1995) found that 50% of individuals identifying themselves as aboriginal Canadians indicated they did not understand any indigenous language. An additional 17% specified they understand a language but cannot speak it. These statistics suggest that unless serious effort is made to reverse this trend, indigenous people will not have the means to access the cultural and linguistic capital of their heritage (Blair, 1998).

This state of affairs developed in residential schools through the colonialistic attitude of English language superiority. Battiste (2000) refers to this situation as “linguistic imperialism and aboriginal oppression” and further asserts that English language dominance is perpetuated through agreements with various levels of government. Such agreements demand that bands who wish to assume control of their education must adopt provincial curricula as a minimum requirement. Battiste calls for indigenous knowledge and language to
be retained so that First Nations people can recover their culture and transform their nations.

Breinig (2006) describes the influence of the English language on her Haida band. Beginning in the early 1900s, a steady influx of English-speaking immigrants to Alaska brought about rapid economic and cultural changes. For survival, the Haida incorporated the English language into their daily lives and the Haida language moved toward extinction.

According to Hampton (1995), First Nations members understand the need for English to allow their children to participate fully in the economic life of their community and in Canadian society. Yet the adoption of English is not a trivial matter. Indigenous languages embody a value system of how a society should function. As Marie Battiste explains, “. . . [languages] provide the deep and lasting cognitive bonds that affect all aspects of aboriginal life. Through sharing a language, aboriginal people create a shared belief of how the world works and what constitutes proper action” (1998, p. 18). Consequently, the loss of language for indigenous people is extremely serious since it means a loss of their world view, identity, and concept of place because these are inextricably connected to their language (Gardner, 2000).

Kirkness (1998) poignantly states:

“What do you lose when you lose a language? The short answer is that you lose your culture. There is an
indexical relationship between language and culture. If you take language away from the culture, you take away its greetings, its curses, its praises, its laws, its literature, its songs, its riddles, its proverbs, its cures, its wisdom, its prayers. You are losing those things that essentially are the way of life, the way of thought, the way valuing, and a particular human reality (pg.94).

The Substance of Traditional Knowledge

The goal of including traditional knowledge in school curriculum is championed by First Nations academics and the Assembly of First Nations leaders alike. Yet, there is no clear understanding of what constitutes traditional knowledge. Opinions range from survival skills to morality tales and legends to creationist stories. Ball (2004) contends that education and training programs that offer pan-indigenous curriculum content are flawed because they fail to appreciate the heterogeneity of the over 605 different First Nations bands in Canada. Furthermore, a pan-indigenous curriculum does not recognize that each of the First Nations has its own history, language, dialect, culture, and social organization. So much of traditional knowledge is a part of the clan or band and the extent to which a community reflects that culture depends on the local context in which it exists (Ball, 2004; Ball and Simpkins, 2004; Goddard and Foster, 2002). The fact that indigenous traditional knowledge is not uniform across First Nations communities makes defining it within Eurocentric concepts impossible.
Traditional Knowledge Acceptance Difficulties

First Nations members do not always support the inclusion of traditional knowledge in the community school curriculum (Taiaiake, 1999). There are a number of conflicting opinions regarding its inclusion. Steinhauer notes that in her home community, the issue of cultural curricula and practice of traditional customs has both its opponents and advocates. She attributes the opposition to the lack of a “clear definition [of knowledge] coupled with an unrecognized devotion to colonial history” (1998, p.76). She believes that parents raised in residential schools have deeply inherent negative views toward traditional practices. Such practices were condemned by the Church and consequently parents believe that this knowledge does not belong in the school. Agbo’s (2004) findings are similar. In his study of Blue Pond, one group supported cultural knowledge in school while the other felt that the teachings were a waste of the students’ time. Rather than provide the students with knowledge of their past, many members believed that the emphasis should be on provincial curriculum subjects to prepare the children for the challenges of the future.

Teachers and Elders

Goddard and Foster (2002) and later Ball (2004) establish that in many instances classroom teachers and administrators in First Nations reserve schools do not share the cultural, linguistic, or socio-economic
backgrounds of their students. Most of the teachers are of Anglo-Saxon
descent and many are surplus teachers recruited from either the east
coast of Canada or large metropolitan areas. This external recruitment
approach generates a cultural disconnection between teachers and
community members since externally-recruited teachers may have little
comprehension of the isolated reserve life of their students or
understanding of their non-European-heritage values. Students
experience difficulties, as there is neither intrinsic nor extrinsic
motivation to learn content based overwhelmingly on white, middle-
class values. “For community members, schools were simply there, a
mandated institution to be endured [while] many educators [saw] their
role was as pedagogical missionaries” (Goddard & Foster, 2002, p.3).

In Agbo’s (2004) study, Blue Pond came to the conclusion that
indigenous language lessons were vital in order to retain community
culture, yet at the same time the band could not readily identify anyone
among them capable of teaching the language. According to Agbo, the
residents believed some of the demise of their culture could be traced to
Euro-Canadian teachers who they felt were both uninformed about
indigenous culture and unwilling to learn about it. According to Ball
(2004), children reproduce the culture of the adults around them.
Therefore, the need to have First Nations teachers and Elders in the
classroom would appear essential to maintain indigenous cultural
connections with the community. Additionally, the school curricula must be Eurocentric neutral, but more preferably, it should maintain and revitalize the First Nations culture and way of life (Ball, 2004).

An Elder who assumes the task of modeling and teaching traditional wisdom and culture in the classroom may circumvent conflicting cultural ideologies and ensure that the band’s world view “is clearly understood . . . and . . . that their culture has value in modern times as it did in the past” (Ball, 2004, p. 454). Traditionally Elders are teachers, historians, and storytellers. They are people to whom individuals go for advice and guidance (Hermes, 1997), so it would appear a logical step that Elders bring this function into the classroom setting. However, Elders have customarily imparted knowledge on a one-to-one basis only, taking a person’s physical, mental and surrounding circumstances into consideration. This method of wisdom transference is not consistent with the role of classroom lecturer.

Ball and Simpkin’s (2004) study of First Nations early childhood education sought to understand what indigenous knowledge means in the evolving contexts of First Nations communities. They examined the indigenous processes of knowing in both a traditional and modern sense, and how indigenous knowledge becomes integrated into early childhood care and development programs. Furthermore, Ball and Simpkin (2004) explored how the incorporation of indigenous knowledge
in community programs impacts cultural identities for individual members and the community as a whole. They found that “[s]ome Elders feel uncomfortable instructing children they are not related to, as they do not want to be seen as interfering” (p. 489). They described the Elders’ lack of clarity about their role in relation to students as well as the difficult rituals associated with “establishing and maintaining a relationship with Elders, which takes much time and patience” (p. 489). This seems to preclude a ‘guest lecturer’ style of instruction. An Elder takes many years to acquire unique knowledge sets and these are shared only when seekers are capable of accepting the knowledge (Ball, 2004; Pitawanakat, 2001; Stiegelbauer, 1996). Elders must be asked or invited to share their knowledge but the correct request procedure is not always obvious. As well, it is not always possible to have an Elder available when knowledge is required or circumstances or curricula necessitate it. Toulouse (2001) described such a situation on the Sagamok First Nations reserve. When parents and the local education council decided that Elders must be included in school activities, they instructed the teachers to extend an invitation to the Elders. The teachers, whether indigenous or not, hesitated because they were unsure of the protocol to use for the invitation. The teachers also found the lesson plans too regimented and segmented to allow Elders to contribute and felt the lesson plans needed to be more fluid if Elders
were to be used as a resource. This illustrates some of the challenges and inconsistencies between indigenous cultural norms and Western teaching practices and highlights some of the difficulties in having Elders come into the classrooms to impart knowledge.

**Conflicting Schemas and Learning Styles**

Conflicting schemas and learning styles are a factor of success for many indigenous students in Western system schools. Ryan (1992b) explained how dissonant cultural understandings contributed to deculturation in his study of indigenous nursing students. He concluded that the “inquisitorial” paradigm of Western education conflicts with and replaces unique native modes of communication, creating a loss of culture and identity. Cooke-Dallin, Rosborough and Underwood (2000) depicted traditional indigenous knowledge as having a long range focus in a way that Western teaching did not. Pitawanakat (2001) described indigenous assumptions about learning as “rooted in oral traditions . . . holistic, student-centered, experiential and contain[ing] both formal and informal elements” (p. 3). She explained how distinctive this concept is in the context of Western mainstream education: “Traditional educational approaches are profoundly different from those of the mainstream educational system. . . .[which] is linear, objective, and based on rationality. Emphasis is placed almost entirely on intellectual development to the detriment of other dimensions of
man” (p. 6). This seems to be the fundamental difficulty of incorporating traditional knowledge into classroom practice; the two systems of learning are incompatible.

Tsuji (2000) identified timing as another challenge: “An educational system that begins in September one year and extends to June the next year is an entirely non-native construct” (p. 158). He believes that a modified school year, conforming to indigenous events, would allow First Nations students the opportunity to contextualize the learning process through participation in traditional activities guided by the rhythm of the seasons. Specific legends and ceremonies can only be discussed or performed during certain seasons or at particular times of the year and do not correspond to the typical school year. Certain traditions, such as the harvest of Canada geese, can only be performed in the spring. This is an important event with both religious and cultural significance as a celebration of life and the survival of the family through another harsh winter (Butterfield, 1983; Tafoya, 1995).

Equally important is the cultural learning style. Winzer and Mazurek (1998) claim that children's learning and thinking processes are deeply embedded in their own cultures. Consequently, difficulties in classroom interactions and learning arise when there is a mismatch between a child's culture and the culture of the teacher. This could give rise to a situation ripe for failure. Winzer and Mazurek maintain that
cultural socialization influences how students mediate, negotiate, and respond to curriculum materials, instructional strategies, learning tasks, and communication patterns in the classroom. Kanu’s research (2002) found that indigenous students learn through stories, observation and imitation, visual sensory modes and scaffolding. However, while oral instructional methods such as storytelling are important cultural approaches to learning for indigenous students, the verbal saturation that characterizes much of school instruction, especially instruction that is fast-paced and delivered in a distinct language, is not conducive to academic success. This finding is consistent with Haig-Brown, Regnier, Archibald and Hodgson-Smith’s (1997) observation of non-indigenous teachers and their indigenous students. Their research is presented in their book entitled *Making the Spirit Dance Within: Joe Duquette High School and an Aboriginal Community*.

**Funding Issues**

Many indigenous academics call for control of school funding as well as that of curriculum content. They believe that unless monies are used as the community sees fit, educational goals are not likely to be achieved. Kirkness (1985), one of the first to bring this issue to academic light, noted that although First Nations leaders are now involved in managing indigenous schools, they lack the power to control
and exercise discretion due to inadequate and restrictive funding. Burns (1998) echoed this sentiment, calling the government maintenance of legal and financial responsibilities for First Nations education “invalid.” According to Burns, self-determination of indigenous education must be viewed in terms of tuition agreements where First Nations people are seen as equal partners in the funding process, not solely as administrators of transferred funds. Battiste (1998) identified funding dilemmas as the reason language and knowledge are not more prevalent in curriculum. This is the result of the Federal government, while seemingly in favour of community control of education, stipulating that funding be provided only when First Nations communities accept provincial curricula.

Inadequacy of funding is another issue. In 2004, Dr. Emily Faries, Chief Negotiator between Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) and the Canadian government, commented: “Currently our schools are struggling to maintain education programs and services without adequate funding, without adequate curriculum materials, and without access to second level services such as specialists and consultants.” The consequences of such funding deficiencies on a local level are described by Toulouse (2003): “We go to our principals to request funds . . . [and] . . . their first response is that there is a ‘lack of money.’ Then
we must resort to photocopying [or using] . . . other . . . inferior materials” (p.84).

Dr. Faries’ comment regarding specialists addresses another problem in the schools: that of inadequate consideration paid to special needs students. In his study of five Manitoba indigenous communities, Hull (1995) discussed the need for identification of and assistance to special needs students. The study revealed problems in the development, monitoring, and operation of special education programs that leave students without adequate assistance and consequently unable to achieve academic success. Along this same line, Goodman and Rife (1996) described how the widespread problem of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) among First Nations members creates problems within the communities and schools. This situation is confirmed in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People 1996. In their report *First Nations Children with Special Needs*, Rogers and Rowell (2007) established that 12% of indigenous students have one or more disabilities with an additional 15% displaying emotional or behavioural problems. Their study found “very few programs nationally that meet the requirements of First Nations children with special needs and a disparity in the levels of service provided nationally and territorially, limiting the ability of First Nations to meet the requirements of children with special needs” (Rogers and Rowell, 2007, Appendix IV, p.3).
The current economic constraints, an absence of policy and clear guidelines are major causes of the indigenous people’s lack of special needs assistance (Rogers and Rowell, 2007). Without the funds or a central service to coordinate various governmental agencies, the community school has become the service delivery mode of choice for students with special needs (Paquette and Smith, 2004), placing additional stress on the school staff. The First Nations government has gone so far as to create manuals for identifying and coping with special needs students in the classroom (More, 1999). The severity of the problem is outlined in the Special Education Programs report for 2005-2006 (First Nations Regional Managing Organization, 2005-2006). Within the 127 schools assessed, 25% of the students enrolled are identified with special needs and of these, 85% have few to none of their needs met (First Nations Regional Managing Organization, 2006).

Conclusion

This chapter covered research on traditional knowledge applications and literature regarding the complexities associated implementation strategies that arise from a history of colonization. The literature concerning colonialism in First Nations community schools reveal problems in three areas: culture, community, and the school. Out of these areas, nine issues arise that may affect successful application and implementation of traditional knowledge curriculum.
Cultural issues are found to be language and a definition of knowledge and acceptance conflicts. Community issues include Elders, funding and special needs. School issues are comprised of teachers, conflicting education schemas and learning styles. Specific studies regarding the successful integration of traditional knowledge and school curricula are limited and incomplete. However, the bank of literature regarding problems associated with curriculum implementation is adequate for a picture of the current situation to emerge.
CHAPTER THREE

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A merger of McLaughlin’s (1987) policy implementation analysis and concepts taken from literature regarding difficulties associated with traditional knowledge form the basis of my conceptual framework. The investigation completed by McLaughlin (1987) concerning policy implementation suggests that policy implementation depends on two broad factors: *will* and *local capacity*. The literature review revealed examples of the effects of colonialism on First Nations people that indicated *will* and *capacity* are compromised in the indigenous culture and consequently must be intricately linked to successful realization of the Education Action Plan’s goals and to this study’s framework. By revealing how colonialism has ultimately distorted the resolve and wounded the strength of will for generations of First Nations people, the conceptual scaffolding was constructed to tie McLaughlin’s analysis to the Education Action Plan’s outcomes. Literature demonstrates colonialism has left the indigenous populations with a myriad of ills as well as modest resources and reduced opportunities with which to change their circumstances. The impact of these colonial dynamics on capacity and will created the foundation for my thesis.

Researchers use McLaughlin’s analysis of policy to explain dilemmas associated with implementation and to challenge the links
between policymaking and policy implementation. This study extends these concepts to embrace dynamics associated with commitment and impetus, both of which reveal the implementers opinion of the policy.

According to Smit (2005), grass roots understanding, acceptance and commitment to policy is crucial to policy success since it is at this bottom rank that implementation takes place. The current post-colonialist conditions will not allow traditional knowledge, outlined in the Education Action Plan, to be applied “onto a blank slate”; rather its implementation will be shaped by the residual effects of colonialism (Hartshorne, 1999; Smith, 1999). Implementation is likely to encounter problems that can only be understood in light of a deeper analysis of the background and history of the First Nations people. This analysis must consider the impact of colonialism on both the capacity and will of indigenous communities to embark upon the necessary developmental activities to reintroduce traditional knowledge in school curriculum.

In the following text, an elaboration of McLaughlin’s study of policy and implementation is discussed and First Nations conditions that seem germane to the issues of capacity and will, as influenced by colonialism, are identified. Subsequent chapters use McLaughlin’s findings to analyze data obtained in my study. I have created a model to provide a visual clarification of the relationships that comprise the conceptual framework. The model is presented as concentric circles,
with all but colonialism encapsulated by an inner and outer ring. This demonstrates how colonialism and its consequences tightly restrain the will and capacity of First Nations people and how these, in turn, manipulate and limit influencing factors and opportunities available to the First Nations communities. Ultimately, successful implementation of the Education Action Plan will be controlled by the consequences and restrictions of the outer rings.

The original nine issues gleaned from the literature review have been distilled into seven factors that emerged from my research. These include: (1) language, (2) leadership and community dilemmas, (3) religious beliefs, (4) Elders, (5) renewing indigenous culture, (6) meta-stereotyping, and (7) government funding. Each of these issues will be elaborated on further into the chapter and an explanation of how they, in turn, could have consequences on the effective implementation of the Education Action Plan is presented.
Policy

McLaughlin’s (1987) investigation indicates that will and capacity are driving forces in policy implementation. While capacity can be addressed somewhat with monies and purchased expertise, will is less accommodating to policy. In fact, will reflects the implementer’s assessment of a policy; its lack could ultimately doom a policy while its manifestation can overcome tremendous obstacles. According to Yin (1981), in his research on new practices, will or impetus can be influenced by factors that serve to shift determination of desired initiatives away from institutions and bureaucracies and directly onto the implementing individuals or their communities, thereby influencing their compliance profoundly. Such factors as competing authority, contending priorities, and social-political pressures are far outside the range of policy and cannot be imposed or forced (Yin, 1981). In order to achieve policy completion, Sabatier and Mazmanian (1980) determined that supplementary resources are often necessary to gain cooperation at the grassroots level. However, these resources are often available only to those with power to acquire them and may not be based on the values and cultural perspectives of the implementers. Avruch, Black and Scimecca (1991), found that Western industrial values are most often used as a benchmark for measuring influence or acquiring power, thereby creating dissonance between cultures, races or even gender.
Often these empowerment concerns become the source and setting of political or micropolitical contests (Bascia, 1996a; Herr, 1999; Kolb, 1993; Peters, 1977).

**Capacity and Will**

According to Yin (1981), the achievement of policy initiatives results directly from a community’s or individual’s commitment to succeed in concert with a belief in the venture, empowerment to act and the impetus to do so. *Will* according to Yin,

> is the ability to choose among alternative courses of action and to act on the choice made, particularly when the action is directed toward a specific goal or governed by definite ideals and principles of conduct (1981, p. 23)

*Willed* behaviour, according to Encarta, an on-line encyclopaedia, contrasts with behaviour stemming from instinct or habit that does not involve a conscious choice among alternatives. *Will* is an aspect of behaviour that is manifested by: (1) the fixing of attention on relatively distant goals and relatively abstract standards and principles of conduct; (2) the weighing of alternative courses of action and the taking of deliberate action that seems best calculated to serve specific goals and principles; (3) the inhibition of impulses and habits that might distract attention from, or otherwise conflict with, a goal or principle; and (4) perseverance against obstacles and frustrations in pursuit of goals or adherence to principles. Common deficiencies that may lead to a failing of *will* include an absence of worthwhile goals for which to
strive or a lack of ideals and standards of conduct worth respecting; vacillating attention; inability to resist impulses or to break habits; and failure to decide among alternatives or to stick to a decision, once made (Encarta Encyclopaedia, http://www.encarta.msn).

Social capital is an intangible asset defined as broad social networks that achieve valuable mutual results through reciprocation and cooperation (Baron, Field & Schuller, 2000). In his article on social capital, Fukuyama (1999) concluded that one way a community becomes deficient of social capital is through constant governmental intervention. This intrusion undermines the habit and practice of cooperation, weakens the community’s impetus to achieve, and creates a dependency that fosters expectations of accommodation.

Capacity is a requirement of planning for future endeavours if organizations, communities, or individuals are to remain viable. According to Korte (2008), capacity planning drives growth and development towards goal achievement and helps to increase learning and adaptability. The fostering of knowledge processes supporting effective strategy implementation is often linked to growth and the capacity to improve one’s circumstances. McDonnell and Elmore (2003) continue this line of thought regarding goal achievement and viability by including the transference of money for investment as an aspect of capacity, especially when directed towards materials and intellectual or
human resources. On the community level, Berndt & Morrison, (1981) find that capacity is facilitated by skills for decision-making, assets with which to work and the power and resources to meet circumstances. The literature outlines four aspects related to capacity: (1) the ability to weigh courses of action, (2) resources, (3) infrastructure within the community and (4) a desire for change or vision. Without the capacity to appreciate opportunity or the resources to embrace it, little can be accomplished. McDonnell and Elmore (2003) and Healy, Hampshire and Ayers (2004) maintain that capacity extends beyond local levels to include institutional and governmental networks, both of which are often needed to enable communities to respond to social and economic change.

Bregendahl & Flora (2002) uncovered unique conflicts concerning capacity in relation to First Nations’ people. In indigenous cultures, members traditionally rely on the natural environment to guide practices and behaviours; these qualities are unique to their culture. The authors further discovered that indigenous people face many kinds of exclusions that reduce their capacity or social capital. These include living in remote areas with few services, having restricted financial resources due to the communal nature of their culture, and adhering to ethics that are not always valued by the dominant culture.
For some time now, Europeans and European Canadians in positions of authority have made decisions for the aboriginal peoples of North America that robbed them of the practice of self-determination. According to Ryan (1996), Europeans have little trust in the First Nations’ sense of social responsibility and informed intelligence and are not willing to leave First Nations to their own devices.

The extent to which First Nations’ civil development and way of life have become stunted can be demonstrated through the cultural losses that they have endured. Each forced dispossession leaves the indigenous communities fewer assets with which to muster change and growth. Colonialism’s effects have undermined the capacity of the First Nations people to implement change and affect cultural preservation, creating loss of will and capacity.

Seven factors emerged from the study that may be outcomes of colonialism’s impact on capacity and will. In the following section, I detail how these specific factors currently play out in two indigenous communities.

**Seven Influencing Factors of Colonialism**

**Capacity**

**Language**

Kirkness describes the importance of language to societies by saying “[it] is the principal means by which culture is accumulated,
shared and transmitted from one generation to another” (1998, p.94). Antone (2003) succinctly states that one’s heritage and culture is in one’s language. After European contact, indigenous children were forced into residential schools “which resulted in suppression of their language and culture . . . [in order to] evangelize, educate and assimilate First Nations peoples into dominant Euro-Canadian society . . . ” (Hanson and Hampton, 2000, p. 127). Only a very few children, who were concealed by their parents, escaped this compulsory education and the attempted extermination of their native language. That language loss created a profound rift in their culture as the ability to communicate between generations ceased.

Religious Beliefs and Residential Schools

Religion, an important part of the curricula of residential schools, was a driving force in the reduction of will and capacity to practice traditional wisdom. Residential schools were run by churches and missionaries with a mandate to educate the indigenous population and the intense desire to convert them to Christianity. In her paper on cultural values in school, Dr. Faith Maina (2003) provided insight into the experience by describing the missionary school she attended as a child in Kenya. “The missionaries viewed indigenous cultures as a hindrance to the spread of Christianity, so that the societal beliefs were discarded and replaced with ‘desirable’ Christian ones. In school the
children were repeatedly lectured that unless they became Christians they would ‘burn in hell’ (p. 8). A similar experience must have awaited First Nations people in Canada, where according to Segerholm & Neilsson (2003), residential schools practiced nothing less than cultural genocide and were responsible for the current state of indigenous capacity.

Much of the family violence, alcoholism, and suicidal behavior among First Nations citizens has originated either directly or indirectly from the abuse inflicted on students in the residential schools. . . . At least four generations of First Nations citizens attended the [residential] schools. The lasting effects of this have been so severe that psychologists deemed it necessary to coin the term ‘residential school syndrome’ . . . (Gagne, 1998, chap. 22).

Flanagan (2000) observed, “[r]eligion can also be a source of factionalism, with lines drawn between Christians and traditionalists” (p. 98). In her book Ceremony, Silko (1977) addressed the collision of native beliefs with Catholicism. According to her, Christianity separates the people from their traditional beliefs since Jesus would save only the individual soul: therefore, each person is encouraged to stand alone. Consequently, the Christian religion has served to crush the clan concept, leaving many communities deeply fragmented (Bird, 1993). A large number of the First Nations people no longer value traditional knowledge and do not wish to see it practiced in the communities. Many of those who still do follow its beliefs have lost the will to oppose
more powerful or more vocal Christian members in the community. It appears the First Nations capacity to continue the social and spiritual practices of their culture was seriously damaged and destabilized by the residual affect of residential schools and the religious teachings imposed upon the students there (Kirkness, 1998).

Elders and Traditional Knowledge

Because indigenous children who had attended residential schools no longer spoke the language of their ancestors, many Elders were unable to pass their age-old knowledge to the younger generations. Moreover, residential school teachings insisted that Elders possessed evil, sacrilegious knowledge and because of those teachings, today knowledgeable Elders in many communities perform traditional rites and ceremonies away from the reserve to avoid conflict with Christian band members. This situation will be discussed in later chapters. The interruption of the historic transfer of traditional wisdom by Christian members and residential school staff has left fewer indigenous people the opportunity to gain the knowledge required for Elder status. A combination of the reduction of wisdom transference as a result of language loss and criticism of traditional knowledge by Christian teachers resulted in fewer band members adhering to time-honored values and becoming Elders. This made the passing of Elders a truly significant event that left ever fewer First Nations members with the
capability of sharing learning narratives, performing rituals, or providing counsel to their communities (Antone, 2003).

The knowledge Elders possess may be transferred only at certain times and under specific circumstances. If no one requests knowledge at a particular time, no knowledge is offered (Butterfield, 1983; Tafoya, 1995; Tsuji, 2000). Stiegelbauer (1996) describes Elders as “emerg[ing] as the sum total of the experiences of life . . . a term of respect and recognition given people because of the life . . . lived and practiced. So that makes it even less in number of how many Elders we have” (p. 50). The generational break, resulting from the residential school experience, has created much uncertainty within bands as to who has Elder status or how one becomes an Elder. Stiegelbauer confirms this by simply stating, “The process of dislocation and fragmentation of First Nations cultures has resulted in. . . ‘half-Elders’. . . people who don’t have enough grounding in the traditional environment” (1996, p. 49). This is a substantial loss in terms of culture, philosophy, and identity.

Leadership and Community Dilemmas

Power Structures

Historically there were many chiefs within a band since few individuals have all of the qualities necessary for good leadership. The indigenous people understood this and either created councils of leaders or had no chiefs at all. (Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada, 1974). The
Europeans, however, wanted to negotiate with only one person and initiated the concept of one “Chief.” Creating one formal elected leader served to appease only the settler government and in reality, the structure of many chiefs has informally continued. While First Nations people do not entirely reject colonialism’s imposed leadership structure, a common pattern is for the communities to have two internal governments. One government is a traditional one consisting of hereditary Chiefs and Elders and the other, an elected band government that conforms to the Indian Act (Armitage, 1995). The hereditary Chiefs and council leaders are well-respected within the clan and often their children succeed them. This early structuring has left an informal network of dominant families within bands that has little to do with who is elected Chief, regularly resulting in a tug-of-war between the elected (formal) authority and influential (informal) authorities. In many communities, the influential or dominant family members are elected repeatedly into Chief and council positions, giving less powerful members little chance at leadership (Flanagan, 1999; Taiaiake, 1999). The desire by colonialists to give a European style of government to the indigenous bands has left a legacy of nepotism and intrigue as the need of families to maintain their status pits short-term gratification against long-term benefits (Smith, 1999; Cairn, 2000; Taiaiake, 1999).
Nepotism

The consequences of colonialism plus a convoluted administrative structure have ultimately led to a lack of social capital and aptitude available to reserve members. This has resulted in competition for and hoarding of the few resources that do exist. Strater Crowfoot of the SikSika Nation in Alberta is an example of a First Nations leader who has challenged this form of nepotistic behaviour within First Nations communities. He commented:

We need a paradigm shift in our thinking, away from the cynical defensive, dependent entitlement mindset that has been inculcated in us under the colonial Indian Act regime, and toward a more trusting, assertive, proactive, persevering, visionary, affirming, meritocratic, and inclusive orientation. If First Nations do not experience a more drastic shift in leadership and followship. . . our very future as First Nations will be jeopardized (Crowfoot, 1997, 323).

Currently, family ties often serve as support structures for indigenous individuals, creating a form of factionalism or familial entitlement that will be discussed in later chapters. These family ties, especially for the powerful members, become nepotistic regimes that reach deeply into the capacity of First Nations communities because they often deny opportunities to qualified individuals. Restricting opportunities or resources to only a few and denying those who could help boost the organizational capacity of the community has undermined and diminished the entire culture (Pointing & Voyageur, 2005).
Teachers

The ability to hire exceptional teachers is an obvious consequence of community capacity. The 2006 Canadian Census Data indicated that First Nations educators made up only 2.7% of the professional teaching population. Consequently, non-indigenous teachers, without understanding of the community or its culture, must provide the primary pedagogic influence in the reserve classrooms (Statistics Canada, 2006; Ball 2004; Goddard and Foster, 2002). In her article *Instilling Dreams: The Promise of Teacher Education*, Ambler described the experiences of native students on the Sisseton Wahpeton Reservation:

“... children don’t see people who look like them at the head of the classroom. ... Well-meaning teachers often don’t stay long enough to get to know the students. More than one-third leave each year. ... they feel overwhelmed by the problems and differences (1999, p. 6).

Disbursements within Communities

Due to the lack of assets and social capital within First Nations communities, employment with the various levels of government is one of the few sources of income. Those who have situated themselves into financial or budgetary control positions wield a great deal of power since disbursement of funds, for the most part, is left to band managers or Chief and council members. If these individuals wish to fund favoured causes or manipulate budgets, it is possible for specific families or
individuals to profit. Some members in these opportune positions have not been above immediate gratification for family members and have ignored potential clan benefits or community goals (Status of Women Canada, 2003).

A small yearly stipend, insufficient work, and limited opportunity for development appear to have provided fertile ground for discontent and frustration. Consequently, for those who have little and with few expectations of having more, the lure of funding manipulation is strong. To make matters worse, community members who leave reserves to obtain wider employment opportunities may well be penalized by the loss of government income or tax breaks (Aboriginal People and Taxation, 2008; Canada Revenue Agency, 2008). As a result, with few skills, most members have chosen to remain in the communities and accept the circumstances.

Addictions

Many First Nations members are confined to isolated reserves without meaningful work, cultural survival skills, or the comfort of their traditional wisdom. Miller-Cleary and Peacock (1998) stated that the disempowerment and destitution suffered in indigenous communities because of colonization has resulted in self-destructive behaviours, violence, and substance abuse. This situation was further clarified by Gagne, who stated:
The frustration and pain of being caught between two cultures was transmitted and . . . some Natives are drinking today because the habit has been passed on from one generation to the next. . . . Suicide, sexual abuse, alcoholism, and family violence are among the recognized effects of trauma experienced by First Nations citizens (1998, chap 22).

Alcoholism is rampant in many communities. Even when the community is “dry,” ways are found to obtain liquor. Not only is alcohol a problem, but drugs and gambling are as well. In addition, the psychological impact of these lifestyles has left lasting scars not only on the family of the addicted but the entire community. It is not difficult to see the colonialistic nature of this issue, and the circumstances that have facilitated and perpetuated it.

McLaughlin determined that will as well as capacity are necessary if success is to be obtained at the implementation level. The above examples provide insight into the effects colonialism has had on capacity. The following section illustrates the absence of will.

Will

Renewing Indigenous Culture

The impact of colonialism is so profound it has undermined the belief structure, way of life, and expectations of more than four generations of indigenous people. In an effort to escape the past, many younger residents leave the reserves in favour of urban centres. By doing so, they leave their heritage behind. For off-reserve members and
their children, the schooling received in mainstream educational institutions does not reflect the culture, the circumstances, or the socioeconomic conditions of their home communities (Castellano, Davis & Lahache, 2000). Communities that have supported their children’s off-reserve endeavors are often disappointed when their children either do not return home or they return as “strangers” (Grinder, 1999). Ball commented: “For so many years now we have sent our young people away for further education, and we are still waiting for them to come home” (2004, p. 458). In essence, a growing number of First Nations young with education and skills to offer in urban areas no longer have the desire or will to maintain a traditional lifestyle on the reserve. Consequently, they do not contribute positively to sociocultural recovery and capacity building of the community.

**Meta-Stereotyping: Trust and Respect**

As a result of the historic treatment of indigenous people by European settler societies, an “inside/outside” mentality has developed. The human character is such that we naturally form alliances or, as Brewer explained, “Attachment to groups must be understood within the context of the profoundly social nature of human beings as a species” (2007, pg 730). When dealing with a group’s identity in a minority/dominant social situation, vastly different dynamics come into play. The term *Meta-stereotyping* refers to an individual’s beliefs.
regarding how his or her group is viewed by those outside of it. According to Vorauer, Main, and O’Connell (1998), meta-stereotyping is different from self-stereotyping in that there is a relational component. Castelli, Zogmaister, Smith, and Arcuri (2004) confirmed that once a characteristic or exemplar is encoded into a group or individual, later encounters may unintentionally cue the retrieval of previous feelings and opinions and evoke beliefs that function as a basis for a collective emotion. Vorauer et al. (1998) theorized that negative preconceptions of one group by another dramatically affected the interactions of the groups. The very thought of being meta-stereotyped or the suspicion of being viewed unfavorably may be translated into negative feelings or derogative conduct towards others. For many First Nations people on reserve the will to change this behaviour and accept outside assistance for sustained community growth and support to reinstate traditional wisdom in the culture is absent or drastically diminished.

**Government Funding**

Most of the funding for small, isolated, indigenous communities comes from various levels of government. Very few entrepreneurs exist on these reserves because of the difficulty obtaining capital and the virtual impossibility of providing collateral due to the communal nature of assets within a band. This leaves individual members little to pledge as security. In addition, local nepotistic community governance has
often hindered more than it has helped. To alleviate this, Federal and Provincial governments have begun offering some business loans, but these must be justified, as is the case with any loan. Unfortunately, on small reserves there is often an inadequate customer base or profit margin to warrant loan consideration. This means most businesses are home-based and require little start-up, but without sufficient customers, these businesses rarely prosper (Ecotrust Canada, 2008; Sandberg, 2008). Unless indigenous businesses are close to other towns to provide additional revenue, or the reserve holds royalties on natural resources, monies for day-to-day activities come from government funding (Constitution Act, 1867, Sections 35 and 91).

Communities must justify and negotiate for government funding through head counts, welfare disclosures, and proposals for maintenance or expansion (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2008). Because of an unequal bargaining capacity with government agencies, small, poor communities have repeatedly lost in this process leaving them with substandard living conditions (Oxfam, 2006). Band members, while disparaging of these circumstances, have come to expect and rely on the financial support and seem to lack the impetus or commitment to change. The deficiency of will has perpetuated this type of enablement that maintains a dependency on government subsidies from basic necessities to special projects.
Conclusion

In creating my conceptual framework, I use colonialism and its consequential dynamics on the will and capacity of First Nations citizens as the lens through which the success or failure of the Education Action Plan can be assessed. These dynamics have been organized into seven factors that will have influence on this policy. The factors then create a paradigm with which to illustrate McLaughlin’s policy implementation investigation in terms of traditional knowledge in school curriculum.

This study demonstrates how the imposition of colonialism on First Nations people ultimately distorts their will and leaves them, in many instances, without the capacity or commitment to change their circumstances. The foundation of my thesis is established through using McLaughlin’s meta-analysis of policy to explain difficulties associated with implementation, especially in terms of the insidious disconnect colonialism has produced between policy makers and those who must put the policy into practice.
CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Overview

The basis of my investigation was formed from the question “How does the colonial legacy influence the will and capacity of two First Nations communities to implement the traditional knowledge aspect of the Education Action Plan?”

This research documented and analyzed, in a case study approach, the dynamics of colonialism on two First Nations communities and how the effect on their will and capacity could shape the implementation of the traditional knowledge component of the Education Action Plan. The Education Action Plan, proposed by the Assembly of First Nations is intended to introduce culturally appropriate traditional knowledge curriculum into reserve school programs through the teachings of women and Elders.

I chose to confine my study to Elders rather than women and Elders for two reasons. First, women can acquire the status of Elder so the point becomes one of semantics. There is no gender distinction to the term Elder according to Art Solomon, a Nishnaabe Elder:

So an elder is a very high quality of person and someone who never asked to be called an elder but is deserving of that title and of that respect, and it’s other people who recognize that person (as cited in S.M. Stiegelbauer, 1996).
Therefore, when I referred to Elders, I also referred to women if they had attained that position within the community. However, my second reason for concentrating on Elders was, as a result of colonialism, the loss of status indigenous women have experienced. Because of this, they have not been foremost players in decision making or the maintenance of the culture. The Assembly of First Nations Women’s Council addressed this problem during the AFN Special Chief’s Assembly on First Nations Government’s in 2005:

The AFN Women’s Council is deeply concerned that First Nations women are among the poorest in our communities and targets of discrimination, not only by the broader society but also by First Nations communities. That the policies and laws of Canada have actively oppressed First Nations women and diminished our traditional roles and responsibilities and compromised the respect for First Nations women in our communities (Assembly of First Nation, 2005).

This diminished role of women appeared to be present in the communities I studied and, for this reason, I felt they would not take an active part in delivering traditional knowledge curriculum.

The case study approach was selected as a research vehicle because, according to Yin (1999), the all-encompassing feature of a case study is its intense focus on a single phenomenon within its real-life context. In addition, he stated that “[t]he method is not troubled by the fact that the context contains innumerable variables—therefore leading to the following technical definition of case studies: [case studies are] research situations where the number of variables of interest far
outstrips the number of datapoints” (Yin 2003 p. 13). The need for the distinctive case study format arose out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena in such a way as to allow investigators to retain holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events (Yin, 2003). Because I wanted to understand the circumstances, environment, and opinions that exist in First Nations communities concerning traditional knowledge in the school, the case study was an appropriate technique.

This study was important in several ways. It investigated the phenomenon within a real-life context and established deliberate boundaries so that a sufficient understanding of colonialism’s dynamics at work in each of the communities was achieved. Further, it illustrated beliefs and behaviours of individuals and groups pertaining to the goal of the Education Action Plan to introduce traditional knowledge into the school curriculum. Since community schools, by definition, accommodate the needs, beliefs and values of their prime populations, it was expected that the schools would reflect the environments in which they exist. Therefore, it was concerning educational matters that I anticipated the tensions affecting the community would manifest.

My inquiry contains two case studies, each representing one community and its school. Attention is directed to the issues that highlighted or suggested factors that may contribute to the success or
failure of the Education Action Plan in light of colonialism. The two case studies focused on will and capacity as an outcome of colonialism and their possible ensuing impact upon the First Nations culture and traditional knowledge.

As these case studies illustrate, agreement concerning traditional knowledge implementation and acceptance is fraught with potential conflict at all levels, including at the grass roots level. According to Musgrove (1968), the school environment is similar to wider society, characterized by groups competing and collaborating, defining, and redefining boundaries while simultaneously demanding allegiance and conferring identity. This characterization places schooling in an inevitable arena of conflict, actual and latent, where goals are achieved through both legitimate and illegitimate forms of power (Ball, 1987). Bascia (1996b) found ethnic background and race can be areas of conflict within school settings. This is due to inclusion and exclusion that may align along racial stratification lines and result in unequal access to opportunities, resources, or status. Taking into consideration the factors at work within indigenous communities and their schools, such as culture, funding, race, language, religion, poverty and marginalization, this case study format seems a perfect instrument for evaluating the impact of colonialism on the will and capacity of community members.
Research Approach

Schooling is understandably an institution greatly impacted by the values encompassed within its society. Values are not universal, but differ according to circumstances of time, place, and culture (Spring, 1995). The values within the First Nations culture may have become distorted by colonialism and studying conditions in two communities could provide new knowledge regarding the dynamics associated with traditional knowledge. Therefore, the purpose of this investigation was to research and contribute new understanding regarding the traditional knowledge component of the Education Action Plan in two indigenous communities that might wish to implement the policy. The review of literature showed this could well be a difficult course of action. Existing research regarding the forces that shape indigenous education revealed a variety of complexities that must be addressed for successful implementation to occur.

The study was designed to encompass grades one through twelve. However, it was quickly apparent that few Northwestern Ontario First Nations communities have their own high school, leaving most education concluding with grade eight. After that, indigenous students essentially have only two choices. One choice is to leave their home community and travel to the Thunder Bay or Pelican Narrows indigenous high schools. The second choice is to use either the
Keewaytinook Internet High School (KiHS), or the Wahsa Radio High School (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1992). The first alternative means leaving one’s community at age thirteen or fourteen to travel alone to a distant city, a situation that presents a myriad of problems. Neither of the second alternatives, the KiHS nor the Wahsa Radio High School, adequately accommodates the indigenous learning style described below, nor do students find these self-study programs encourage or support their continuing education (Battiste and McLean, 2005; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008; Cruikshank, Bainer and Metcalf, 1999).

According to Rasmussen, Sherman, and Baydala (2004), First Nations individuals display unique learning and cognitive patterns as compared to Caucasians. More (1989) and later Ryan (1992a) found that the First Nations students’ visual spatial abilities are more developed than verbal skills. Ryan (1992a) further determined that aboriginal students are holistic learners, perceiving the world as a whole, as opposed to breaking the whole into pieces.

Using a Myers-Briggs type instrument to examine learning style preferences among Native American students, Nuby and Oxford (1998) found that they prefer learning facts and practical skills in a concrete and structured manner. Extroversion is also preferred, suggesting that indigenous students take pleasure in group-oriented learning that
involves discussions, interactions, and activities. This conflicts with the isolated, individual learning environment of the internet or radio approach.\(^1\)

The conflicting and arduous learning opportunities available for indigenous secondary education students, either isolation or alienation from their community and family, ultimately prove too great a barrier for most students. Perhaps this reveals much of the reason why formal studies usually end with primary school.

Early in the study, I found the difficulties associated with researching all fifty communities that comprise the Nishinaabe-Aski First Nations to be greater than I anticipated. Difficulties included extreme locations, poor travel conditions and isolationist attitudes as well as complicated and protracted visitation procedures. Numerous First Nations reserves are reached only by air or by winter roads over frozen lakes, making the logistics of travel a daunting challenge. In addition, most of the communities are extremely guarded concerning unfamiliar individuals entering, especially to conduct studies. To overcome this reluctance, an introduction by a member of standing as well as a clear, acceptable reason for the visit was necessary (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992). It was my good fortune to have indigenous

\(^1\) Ryan (1992) concluded that interactive learning is effective when coupled with verbal and analytical development skills. He suggested that contextualizing instruction and a collaborative learning approach are important in aboriginal learning.
acquaintances and contacts through my work, and they provided me with permission to visit a number of communities. These First Nations citizens were kind enough to speak for me during band councils and to arrange introductions to Chiefs. Nevertheless, the process took many weeks to complete and reduced the time line for research, ultimately restricting this study to the two communities that I considered most representational of Northwestern Ontario. Two Rivers and Round Rock were chosen for investigation because they seemed to be representational communities in terms of size (approximately 300), government funding, education level, and political structure (Statistics Canada, 2001). To investigate the universality of conditions, the study incorporated two communities that belonged to different Tribal Councils and distinct Treaty Areas. One community was rural, relatively isolated and often cut off by weather conditions, while the other was urban and more accessible by well-traveled, secondary roads. These reserves depicted the general conditions of indigenous communities in Northwestern Ontario and by using them as examples, an image of reserve experiences could be formed that allowed the study to concentrate on the similarities among Northwestern Ontario reserves while also uncovering distinctions.

The impetus for my study came from a report I had previously compiled for a reserve wishing to gain funding for a school expansion.
While interviewing the teachers regarding physical obstacles associated with the school, interpersonal, cultural, and social structure complexities emerged. This piqued my interest in the micropolitical and colonial aspects of the communities concerning their traditional knowledge.

The study was designed to consist of community visits and used formal and informal interviews, questionnaires, and observation. My rationale for using both interviews and questionnaires was based on finite meeting times due to weather and community commitments. By using questionnaires, I felt I could reach members who were unavailable when my visits occurred or whom I would not have time to interview while on the reserve. The questionnaires proved a useful device for gathering the community members’ opinions by giving them an opportunity to formulate their own replies and contribute at their leisure without perceived interviewer bias. Another obvious advantage of using questionnaires was that they provided data amenable to assessment through written responses (Munn & Drever, 1999). However, I found the questionnaires were not without their faults. Gillham (2007) recognized problems concerning question interpretations and respondents, literacy skills often provided poor data. This appeared to be the case with many of my questionnaires and I felt the need to
expand my interviews and increase my visits to gain a better understanding of the dynamics at work within the communities.

Interviews were conducted in both communities between 2002 and 2005 taking a total of two weeks in each community. These face-to-face interviews provided me with the highest response rates and maximized my research opportunities by allowing me to probe in-depth regarding opinions and viewpoints as circumstances changed or new information emerged.

The questionnaire and interview questions were developed from my conceptual framework of colonialism’s influence on the communities and their schools. The focus and intent of the data collection was based on a matrix that directed comments to areas associated with traditional knowledge, remnants of colonialism and areas of will and capacity. Different subgroups of respondents received different sets of questions that were chosen and worded specifically for that set (Preskil & Wentling, 1984). This allowed the groups to express opinions about phenomena from their specific viewpoint. The questions were coded so that the answers referred to a particular aspect of study and were then able to be categorized and assessed (Munger and Loyd, 1988). Inquiries associated with the interviews and questionnaires referred to curriculum content, funding, school and community structure, as well as traditional knowledge, communication, participation, and the role of
members in shaping the community values and school curricula. I
designed my questionnaires and interviews to determine influences
within the school and how they are shaped by external forces from the
community, the culture, and colonialism. In addition, I sought to
distinguish and document consequences of cultural conflicts, budgetary
restrictions, and established patterns of class structure, as well as
political and micropolitical intrigues both within the school and the
community. To accomplish this, I choose to include an assortment of
questions within my matrix questionnaire that would address these
conditions in a variety of ways. In all, 32 people were formally
interviewed. These included teachers, Elders, education council
members, principals, and community leaders. This study comprises 14
interviews and 17 questionnaires in Two Rivers, and 18 interviews and
8 questionnaires in Round Rock.

Procedures

I approached members of my participant communities first by
introductions through acquaintances, then by letter, or in some cases
telephone calls and letter, to the band Chiefs. I chose this approach
because I felt it demonstrated respect and formality, while providing the
community and school leaders with a hardcopy of the scheduled event.
Included in the original letter was an outline of expected activities and
procedures. I left the announcement of my appearance to the Chiefs
and principals and, upon my arrival, I distributed a package of letters to
the community participants expressing my appreciation and outlining
my visit. This sequence of events produced sufficient notice and
adequate information to achieve approval and compliance from the
participants. During my first visit to each community, I met with the
designated groups and distributed copies of their particular
questionnaire or their interview questions. Elders, teachers, and staff
were most open to our meeting and, in fact, some quite anticipated the
opportunity to talk with me. The guidance counselor in Round Rock
explained that my arrival was an exciting event in the school and I came
to understand this when school support staff also asked to be
interviewed.

I conducted informal discussions with the various participants
each time a visit to a community took place and, although these were
not taped, notes were taken. The unofficial and relaxed conversations
gave me insight into the various connections and hierarchies within the
communities. These included internal dynamics such as how the
community interacts with government agencies, how each community
interacts with its school and the school leader’s interaction with staff.

Formal interviews were taped for later transcription and each
interview lasted approximately two hours. Notes taken during the
interviews detailed both facial expressions and body language. Each
interviewee had received a question guide, but the format was open-ended to allow for easy conversation and spontaneous comments. This approach permitted adaptation of questions or further probing and proved indispensable as new data emerged in conversation that disclosed specific information on will or capacity, or other colonial influences existing in a particular school or community situation. By using a combination of interviews, observation, and questionnaires, the study created a triangulation of data that assumed influences in the schools and the communities could be documented.

The interviews were conducted in empty offices or classrooms after an initial adverse experience. In Round Rock, I was first given the staff break room for my interviews, but it soon became a thoroughfare for teachers, support staff and even some students and I found it highly unsuitable. This became obvious with the very first interviewee, a Caucasian teacher who responded in a guarded and terse manner. I assumed that the teacher was not entirely enthusiastic about participating; however, when the second interview began the same way, I realized the predicament. The second interviewee finally advised that we should move to an empty classroom where opinions would be more forthcoming. After that, all interviews were conducted behind closed doors in empty classrooms. When I re-interviewed the first teacher and received different responses from the first session, she informed me that
she was very uncomfortable during the first exchange and did not want “to cause trouble.” After moving to a more private room, her responses became very lengthy and informative. Subsequent interviews were extensive with candid opinions, both positive and negative unreservedly expressed. In Two Rivers, I requested an empty office to use for interviews and there were no problems relating to that arrangement.

I began the interviews by introducing myself and thanking the individual for participating. I asked if there were any uncertainties regarding the interview format or the questions. The main response at this time was seeking confirmation that the information would be kept confidential. I assured the interviewee it would. I then launched into a bit of small talk on the subject of classes and students and demonstrated the tape recorder that I would be using. Once I felt the individual was comfortable both with the situation and with me, I asked the first question on the interview guide. I had arranged the questions so that they began with innocuous responses about activities regarding traditional knowledge and its teachings and then progressed to more in-depth questions regarding formal and informal hierarchies and opinions and processes regarding traditional knowledge and life on the reserve. I hoped to achieve a connection with each participant during his or her interview that would reveal true feelings and opinions about day-to-day circumstances and uncover cultural areas touched by colonial
influences. I felt that a number of times this was achieved, especially with the non-indigenous teachers who seemed to view me as both a confidante and an external sounding board for minor grievances. Much to my gratification and surprise, some of the indigenous teachers also perceived the interview process as both an opportunity to teach me about their culture and its intricacies and as a means of voicing opinions regarding dilemmas and difficulties experienced within the school and community.

My interviews with the Elders were both rewarding and enlightening. It was a pleasure meeting these humble individuals and obtaining their forthright and sincere answers. Their responses helped convince me of the demanding task it would be to include traditional knowledge in the school curriculum. My interviews with the Elders lasted far longer than the prearranged two hours as we kept getting off task and delving into fascinating aspects of their knowledge.

Questionnaires were distributed to teachers, the Chief and Council (Two Rivers only) and the education advisory board members. These questionnaires contained many of the same matrix points as the interviews, but with a leadership perspective. After reading some of the returned questionnaires I realized that additional interviews, at least with the Chiefs and advisory board chairs of both communities, was necessary due to the abbreviated responses of the individuals. The
interviews touched on the same points, but allowed the participants the benefit of verbal replies, which were much more detailed and in-depth than their written responses.

Ethical Issues

Obviously, my perceptions of the communities were influenced by my insights and biases as well as by the predispositions and perceptions of those I interviewed. In addition, the fact that I am a female Caucasian outsider, may possibly have affected the participants’ responses and thus the data itself.

Participant concerns about being scrutinized and the small size of both reserves made it crucial to resolve the issues of confidentiality on which candid participation depended. Almost everyone in Round Rock or Two Rivers knew exactly when I arrived and whom I interviewed. Regardless of the community, there was much speculation over what the previous interviewee had revealed and many voiced fears that confidences would be shared with others. It appeared essential to all participants that their involvement in this research would not adversely affect their positions in the community. They were assured that while identities of the people interviewed may be public knowledge in their home community, participants quoted would not be identified in my thesis. I arranged the study to disguise the communities, making it impossible to know which reserves participated or who was quoted.
This was accomplished by renaming the communities, jostling gender, and referring to respondents only by number and generic title.

Throughout the time spent in the communities, cultural protocol was carefully followed, including presenting a bag of tobacco to all those interviewed. This established practice not only serves as an act of respect and appreciation but also binds an obligation, a simple act that sealed cooperation for the study.

Data Sources

Setting and Participants

The scope of the research matrix determined the choice of participants in each community. To ensure complete and clear understanding of the issues impacting both the school and its community, the study included teachers, principals, and education board members in each school. In addition, the Chief and Council and some Elders of each reserve were given either a questionnaire or interviewed or both. Supplementary interviews were conducted when it appeared that questionnaires alone did not convey a comprehensive understanding. Participants were given letters of permission to sign that clearly stated the reason for the data collection as well as the ultimate use of the material. Only those who gave written permission were included in the research. To guarantee accuracy, each interviewee received a transcription of their interview for editing along with a self-
addressed, stamped envelope for mailing. No transcripts were returned and no requests to make changes were received. The fact that no editing was returned gave me pause since I wondered if it was due to a hesitance to challenge a Caucasian doctoral researcher. However, I had to assume that the participants both read and understood the transcripts and agreed with the data.

Response and Dilemmas

Questionnaires were distributed to all teachers and to the principals in each of the respective communities. This sample consisted of seven individuals in one community and ten in the other. Seven completed questionnaires were returned from Two Rivers and three completed questionnaires of the ten distributed were returned from Round Rock. Questionnaires from the four education council members of Two Rivers and the five members of Round Rock were completed. I was unable to survey Elders in either Two Rivers or Round Rock, but did obtain interviews with three. As for the questionnaires of the Chief and Council, only Two Rivers returned all of their questionnaires distributed. Round Rock council members were unable to take time to meet for the distribution and so did not return any questionnaires. After a compilation and evaluation of the questionnaire data, it became apparent that one of the challenges to the research was the mistaken expectation that the study would receive fully usable data through
written responses. While individuals attempted to complete the questionnaires, their replies were truncated, terse, and dry. For the most part, the text medium appeared to be a barrier to communication as it appeared merged syntax and lexicon competencies were inadequate to express thoughts effectively. This is not to say that understanding or perception was missing; succinct views were expressed in dialogue, but actual grammar composition proved laborious to most of those distributed a questionnaire. This problem seems to have arisen from a context of culture coupled with poor education rather than lack of awareness. Consequently, the questionnaires were used only as confirmation of information that came through the rich narrative of the interviews.

Another concern was accurately observing and recording the body language of the participants. From my years of teaching indigenous students, I have developed a familiarity with the First Nations culture and an understanding of the social aspects and tribal customs, including that of body language. I am not a member of the First Nations and I realize my interpretation of body language shapes my perceptions of the data gained in the interviews. However, I feel my observations were an important aspect of the research since I was able to view the comments in the cultural context and observe the accompanying body language, thus ensuring a more complete understanding. This
approach was supported by Merriam (1998) who determined that body language, tone and inflections, as well as silences, add meaning to every exchange.

Analysis

The amount of research data obtained from participants through this study proved to be substantial in terms of transcripts, questionnaires, and notes. Trends and areas of interest were identified and eventually it was concluded that the data should be classified into seven areas for analysis. These include:

1) Language
2) Religious beliefs and residential schools
3) Elders and traditional knowledge
4) Leadership and Community Dilemmas
5) Renewing indigenous culture
6) Meta-stereotyping: Trust and Respect
7) Government Funding

These groupings are consistent with those of my conceptual framework and can be analyzed within its parameters.

Conclusion

The study matrix was constructed to obtain and analyze data on the context and environment existing in two indigenous communities where the Education Plan could be implemented. It was the intention of
the study to gain an understanding of possible implementation barriers or aids arising from colonialism’s potential impact on the will and capacity of reserve members. The study then considers this impact on the Education Action Plan’s goal of incorporating traditional knowledge into school curriculum. This research documented existing community dynamics and members’ attitudes to present insight into the circumstances and character of the two communities through the lens of colonialism’s impact on will and capacity. The study was able to triangulate data obtained from interviews, observation, and questionnaires in order to draw the conclusions discussed in Chapter Seven.
CHAPTER FIVE

CASE STUDIES

Two Rivers

Setting

Two Rivers is a somewhat isolated community with approximately 250 inhabitants. Connecting the community to a secondary paved road is a lone gravel road, but it is often closed by inclement weather, making the community inaccessible for days at a time. Situated in a treeless field, the reserve buildings all line a single dirt road and to a new visitor, the houses appear identical. There are few cars or trucks on the reserve, but a number of snow machines and quad runners rest in overgrown front yards. These neglected vehicles provide convenient lounging areas for an ever-present pack of dogs. In talking with the residents, I learn work is scarce. With the exception of one small home-based restaurant, there are no retail enterprises. Most members, if employed at all, must journey hours outside the reserve to the next nearest community.

Government statistics show that less than half of the reserve members have more than a grade eight education and this presents further difficulty in terms of employment (Statistics Canada, 2006). With no entertainment and one retail facility available, there is little to occupy community members’ time. According to one Elder, the
community pursuits centre on gossip, gambling, alcohol, and to a much lesser extent, drugs. One of the teachers also supports this: “One of the things that should be done here is for Children’s Aid to provide a parenting class. Most of these parents are off at the casinos or in town drinking and they don’t do anything with their children.” I note these topics are a keen part of the daily banter I encounter in the community. Catholicism is a major influence and few of the band members seem to adhere to traditional cultural practices or be familiar with the oral legends, ceremonies, or survival skills. It is more common to find community members watching satellite television or, since few own automobiles, finding rides for the long trip to casinos or the nearest retail stores.

**Education**

According to Statistics Canada (2007), Two Rivers, having no secondary school, is typical of most northwestern, aboriginal communities. Most communities must send their children to live in other cities if they wish to attend a structured high school. If they do not wish to leave the reserve, the alternative is to take part in some sort of distance education, such as KiHS or Wahsa Radio High School. Two Rivers is fortunate to have a provincial school in a town two hours away, allowing a busing arrangement that transports the students to school and back to their families at the end of each day. While this is a better
situation than in most communities, the long bus ride, weather and road conditions work against even the most dedicated students and their families.

There is no single school building in Two Rivers. Rather, classrooms are converted houses, with each grade as well as the principal’s office located in separate buildings. This segregation presents problems for teachers and students, since students who need to visit the office or use the library must walk alone between buildings in all types of weather. The teachers complain that once outside of the classroom, many students simply go home. In an effort to reduce this truancy, teachers tolerate a higher level of misbehaviour in order to keep children in a safe, supervised environment. Teachers comment that although the student-to-teacher ratio is reasonable, averaging 15 students, student behavioural problems make teaching difficult. The distance between classrooms leaves teachers isolated and unable to interact with or seek support from co-workers or the principal when the need arises.

The physical setting of the school is not the only difficulty. The interactive dynamics among educators, support staff, and the community is an additional challenge. Even in the short time spent on the reserve, I noted a palpable attitude of mistrust between the community members and the off-reserve staff. With the exception of a
native language teacher, teachers are entirely of Anglo-Saxon heritage and most are first year teachers. All of the teachers, as well as the principal, live off the reserve and travel from the nearest town. The principal and support staffs are indigenous, although not necessarily members of the Two Rivers community.

The students in the school experience problems that parallel those of the rest of the community. These include alcohol and drug problems, a range of disabilities and illnesses, and a general attitude of disaffection and indifference. In addition to the lack of an appropriate school building, the library consists of a few books donated by other communities. There is no audio-visual equipment and the few donated computers, having no software, go unused. Sadly, there is not even a suitable playground, simply an open field and a single soccer ball.

Religious and Traditional Beliefs

Data collected from the Chief and Council indicated that they believe some traditional content should be incorporated into the curriculum. However, they do not know how to accomplish the goal. To assist with this dilemma and to gain an understanding of the nature of this situation, I initiated a public meeting. It was my intention to hold discussions and explore the opinions community members held regarding traditional knowledge. My interest lay in determining what they believed constituted traditional knowledge and how it should be
included in the curriculum. Posters were made, flyers distributed and students were given notes to take home to families. Unfortunately, no one attended the meeting. This experience seemed to parallel the teacher’s and education council’s observations of a general apathy by parents and community members and appeared to foretell additional problems within the band. For this study, it is a clue to the lack of capacity to make change or the will to do so. The Education Advisory Board Chair believes this attitude results from the residential school experience. It seems a mistrust of schools in general coupled with the opinion that education is a useless venture with few benefits is the legacy of this colonial chapter in history. A native language teacher supported the advisory board chair’s view by saying, “Many of these people had really bad experiences with school so they are kinda [sic] scared of school and I think the white teachers.” Another teacher commented, “There is no reinforcement from the parents because I think there is some type of animosity about the school for whatever reason. When we have parents’ day or parent-teacher interviews—it’s really quiet around here.”

Two Rivers is a devout Catholic community with no indication of valuing traditional beliefs. It appears the historic conflict between the Church and traditional culture is one of the prime reasons only token efforts have been made to include native language and a few stories as
part of the curriculum. Traditional cultural observances and proceedings also appeared to be absent from the daily events of the community, suggesting that missionary contact and residential schooling firmly instilled Christian teachings. It appears that this aspect of colonialism has made traditional customs and cultural wisdom offensive to many First Nations people. Clearly, this is the case in Two Rivers, where the school teaches Catholic liturgy and the principal states: “This is a Catholic community and many do not want traditional knowledge taught because of possible conflicts.”

The population includes many deeply religious members who firmly object to traditional wisdom. These individuals represent the conflict described by the principal. While this contradicts the expressed views of the Chief and Council, no directive has reached the principal to make changes. The principal concluded, “No one has come and told me to change things. We have a native language teacher and that seems to be good enough.” A native language teacher is allotted only one half hour per day with the students of each grade to reintroduce the traditional Ojibwa/Cree language of the community.

**Power Structures**

Two Rivers has a few families who seem to control events and provide informal leadership within the community and school. These families alternate the elected positions and occupy the few jobs available
on the reserve. Other band members are careful not to antagonize these families for fear of repercussion. The native language teacher, a community member, discusses this situation:

People that are important in the community are respected in the school. Like the Chief’s wife. She cleans the school. She gets paid a lot to do that, but she doesn’t do a very good job. If you say something to her—well, you just wouldn’t. I don’t know if it helps or hinders—that’s just the way it is. In the classroom the children know their place—I mean their place in the community—and it comes back into the classroom. Yeah, the children know whose kid is whose.

It is very clear within the school that the support and maintenance staff affect much of the day-to-day activities. During an interview with a teacher, he mentioned just such a situation and the problems it caused. “. . . [O]ne of the secretaries is a big deal in the community, so she kinda [sic] runs the place.” A second teacher referred to the same scenario: “It’s pretty obvious that one of the secretaries here gets preferential treatment because her family is a big deal in the community.” The consequence of having this individual working in the school was clarified by two other teachers. They related that this secretary listened to everything that went on in the school and reported to community members immediately. By doing so, she undermined the efforts of the teachers, principal and education council. The principal is obviously resigned to the situation. “This year the secretaries and student teachers [all indigenous] went on staff
development. It was just decided and it seemed the easiest way. Some of the secretaries here are very powerful and seem to get their way.” I began to wonder if this secretary had in fact notified the band members that attendance at my community meeting would not be tolerated. I would not be surprised as she is a member of a powerful, devoutly Catholic family who would be less than enthusiastic over traditional knowledge competing with religious doctrine.

These powerful families appear to be the basis of many problems within the community. They are repeatedly elected or appointed to positions of official authority, and so community control is never far from their influence. While serving in leadership positions, other band members say that these families often ensure that friends or relatives are appointed to political positions such as boards or committees. This is particularly evident in the appointments of the education advisory board. This group is responsible for shaping and implementing school policy as well as employment decisions. All of the teachers interviewed as well as the principal complained about the behaviour and lack of regulation on the part of the board members. The principal was quite outspoken in his opinion of the lethargic performance of the board:

We have no input in the policies and procedures; they are drawn up by the education advisory board. [Policies] are in place, but they are not followed. Especially when certain people choose not to follow them. They haven’t been approved in two years. There aren’t enough teachers to
make changes and the education board doesn’t really know what is going on.

A teacher who has been at the school for over three years added:

I know the education budget is not spent on education. The education [board] members have meetings in restaurants and charge it to the school or they take trips to [a distant city] and charge the mileage to the school. No one says anything because that’s just the way it is.

Another teacher contributed, “Get this! Everybody got professional development this year except the teachers! Even the education authority [sic] went for professional development in [a distant city]!”

A third teacher described how the informal authority in the community supersedes the formal authority within the school. “I think the principal and teachers are afraid of the community. People that are important in the community are respected in the school.”

Funding and Disbursements

Another chronic issue that affects the school is a lack of funding. Educators reported that monies needed to address school issues are sadly deficient. Two Rivers is seriously in need of learning materials. Lacking any reasonable school budget, teachers must purchase supplies for the classroom using their own income. A teacher complained:

There is nothing [for supplies]. . . . there isn’t any money it seems. We don’t get a chance to order supplies—the education council and principal do it. How do they know what we need? There is only one computer for the students and that has no software so it’s unusable. There is no Phys Ed; I bought a soccer ball for the kids. Did you
see the library? It’s the shelf in the office with about 12 books on it!

Another teacher, who has chosen to leave the community because of the hardships of teaching, explained his viewpoint:

We need everything! Even what we have is unusable. We need calculators for the grade six through eight students to use. Whoever bought [the ones we have] bought ones that are just too advanced for the students to use. They just don’t understand them. We have desks, but they are high school desks. There is no place to put books so we have to keep them in a cupboard on the side. There is not enough of anything. We don’t even have proper textbooks. I get a book and copy it for the students.

The principal confirmed the deficient funding and provided some reasons for the shortfall.

We do not have enough money. There is never enough. Even though the money is given to the community to be used for the school, sometimes the band council uses it for something else or the education advisory uses it as well. They will often have meetings at restaurants or something like that.

When such spending was mentioned to an education advisory member, it is justified in the following manner. “They’ve got a pretty tough job. They have a lot of pressures and they don’t get paid for what they do. If they get their expenses and a few rewards . . . no one speaks up.”

Teachers

The gap between the background and life experiences of the teachers and those of the students is obvious. This disparity is rooted in a lack of indigenous teachers that makes external recruiting a
necessity. While the rest of the province often benefits from a teacher surplus (Gervais and Thony, 2001), it is not easy to find individuals who are willing to leave friends, family and cultural familiarities for isolated communities. According to the education advisory chairperson, most teachers stay less than two years. The principal confirmed this and described recruiting problems: “It is very difficult to recruit people. Most don’t want to come to an isolated area and those that do, don’t have the skills or experience. We advertise all over the country and still get very few responses. Many of our teachers come from the East.”

The high attrition rate can be attributed to a number of factors. The teachers talked openly of a sense of detachment between the school and the community. They also revealed personal feelings of exclusion and discrimination. They described conflicts concerning race and culture and feelings of separation as insurmountable obstacles that lead to either internalizing the situation or finding new employment elsewhere. The principal was frank about the dynamics that take place in the community and school:

We have a very good teacher, but she is leaving because of all the problems and politics that are going on in the school and the school with the community . . . There are some problems between the white and native staff. They don’t share information [and] the white teachers seem to band together. I am not from this community, like most of our teachers so, I think, the school is somewhat set apart. Because we are not from here, we are kind of outsiders. This is a very small community: everyone knows everyone else and those that are not from this community have more difficulty.
Another teacher supported this viewpoint: “There is little rapport among the staff. We get along, but there aren’t any real friendships here. There is a real problem between cultures here.” The teacher, who is leaving, explained her decision: “The school itself is not always accepting of white teachers and I feel that goes for the community as well. It’s like school or education is a white man’s thing so it isn’t regarded in the community.” One non-native teacher narrated the story of her experience in the community and illustrated the extent of the cultural divide:

I married a man from the community and as soon as did that, everything changed. They said, ‘Now you are one of us.’ Until then, I didn’t feel part of the community. I don’t really feel part of the school community. Both the school and the community do not support non-native teachers. We feel we [non-native] are not fairly treated. They are very biased here. Everybody got professional development except the teachers. Most of the teachers are white and the rest of the staff is native. Even the education council got professional development.

Some subtleties of the situation were described by another teacher when discussing school closures: “The teachers are the last ones to know anything around here. Just this year we’ve had closures[that] were just arbitrary. You know they could at least call us instead of making us drive [two hours] out here to find that there was no school. I think the school is closed more than it is open.” Making the arduous drive on a poorly-plowed gravel road to find the school
closed is exasperating; however, according to the teaching staff, this occurred at least five times during the past school year.

Two Rivers administrators complain that the teachers who do seek employment there often lack experience and ability. Repeated encounters with less-skilled teachers reduce community respect and consideration for non-indigenous teachers still further. In defense of the teachers, it would seem extremely difficult to maintain competency and enthusiasm where exclusion from the ebb and flow of community life is the norm. More than one of the teachers disclosed how the lack of morale and rapport among the staff ultimately affected teaching and curriculum, especially concerning cultural awareness. The chasm has grown so wide that one teacher believes that no cultural or traditional knowledge should be dealt with in the school at all.

The educators were adamant that traditional knowledge is not their responsibility and that class time cannot be allocated to its teachings. One teacher made the following adamant statement concerning this situation: “We don’t teach any traditional knowledge in the school; we teach the Ontario curriculum!” Another teacher emphasized the point: “We have a native language teacher, and she teaches some stuff in her class. She does a good job and there doesn’t need to be any more.” While Two Rivers may seek its own curriculum content, the community definitely desires that their children succeed.
Consequently, the school adheres to provincial curricular standards as well as certification requirements for the non-indigenous teachers they hire. While this satisfies the need for a standardized education, it does nothing for the cultural and ethnic enrichment of the students. The non-indigenous teachers have no knowledge of the culture, its traditions, or beliefs and expressed little inclination to learn it. One teacher explained. “I don’t know anything about the culture or its traditions. Maybe someone could come in and discuss it. I think it should be during recess or something like that.” Surprisingly, this was not an isolated opinion among the non-indigenous staff or even the principal. While many felt that there might be some merit in providing traditional knowledge to students, they were of the opinion it was certainly not their job to do so. In addition, they believed culture or traditional knowledge lessons should not obstruct their teaching of the Ontario curricula nor should any provincial material be deleted to accommodate its inclusion. Understandably, educators would not be expected to undertake teaching material with which they are unfamiliar, yet considering the circumstances of their employment and the mandate of First Nations community schools, it was surprising that they were not more open minded and accommodating.
Social Dilemmas

School activities and lessons are greatly challenged by the special needs of students in the classroom. The teachers were unanimous in their frustration concerning the lack of assistance available to the children on the reserve. Many teachers say that this burden contributes to stress and attrition in First Nations’ schools. Students’ learning disabilities (most often described as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome or Attention Deficit Disorder), as well as a host of physical ailments, influence the success of the entire classroom experience.

Students’ minor physical problems such as vision or hearing impairments are seldom addressed. It is theoretically left to the parents to manage, but naiveté or apathy on the part of many parents requires the school to intervene. Since there are no physicians on the reserve, seeking medical help is often an impossible task for a family with no transportation. Therefore, physicians are occasionally brought in to save the parents a drive to the nearest clinic, but the benefits of this are not always discernible. The chair of the education advisory related:

We brought in a doctor a few years ago and it cost us thousands. What can a doctor tell in that little time? A nervous little child seen in that short of time won’t give you a good idea of why that child is acting that way! There could be many reasons, and not necessarily learning disorders. Then the services they need are not even available in [nearest town]; we have to go all the way to [a distant city] and that is an amazing cost!
One of the teachers explained how difficult it is to manage special needs children in the classroom especially when the nearest help (staff or teacher) is housed across an open yard:

We have many problems when it comes to special needs. I know we have FAS [Fetal Alcohol Syndrome] students here, but the last time we had a physician in . . . was two years ago and just because a student was labeled, didn’t mean anything was done about it. The students are in the classroom and we handle them. They take up so much time! I have a student who is in [a higher grade] and can’t read or write so when we have a test I have to sit and read the test to the student and write his reply while trying to watch the other students while they write the test.

Frustration with this situation was expressed by another teacher. “We know these students have lots of problems but nothing is done . . . they are just in the classroom with everyone else and that is almost impossible to deal with. Many times we just seem to be baby-sitting.”

It is demanding to teach a child with physical or learning disabilities. However, to do so with little or no assistance and few resources would discourage the most dedicated teachers.

Elders and Traditional Knowledge

The Elders of the First Nations communities retain the traditional knowledge for the clan and convey it to future generations. This presents a dilemma in Two Rivers because there appears to be no formal Elder status acknowledgement. When a meeting with Elders in the community was requested, there was a discussion concerning with who should be invited. Once decisions were made, even the designated
Elders were unsure of their status: “I don’t know how one becomes an Elder. I consider myself one because I will sit down with anyone who wants to ask me about what I know and how I can help them. To me that’s . . . how an Elder should act.” The uncertainty regarding Elder status may explain why traditional knowledge is not well-established in this community and members are not accessing the information the Elders have. As Elder One expressed it:

I don’t think many young people here realize the kinds of excellent resources these people are. . . . That knowledge is just going to sit there. It’s unfortunate, but that’s just the way it is right now.

By tradition, the Elders instruct only when information or advice is requested and so it is difficult for them to become lecturers in the Westernized regimented classroom. This fact was mentioned to an Elder and the reply conveyed how awkward the task might be:

You’ll see it [teaching] in other areas, like when there’s a traditional gathering, a Pow Wow. The Elders are there and in that area you can seek spirituality with the Elders. But to focus on education with the Elders, it’s a different environment . . . You get the sense that you are the educator. I give you my blessing and we’ll perform a ceremony but you’re the teacher. It’s hard to bring my knowledge right into the classroom—we just haven’t been able to do that yet, to see the importance of it (Elder One).

It also appears that at present, there is no specific body of knowledge designated as traditional wisdom. According to the Elders, similarities exist between simply Nishnaabe communities, but much of
traditional knowledge is specific to a clan or band. It cannot be said that the traditional knowledge is universal.

**Language**

The language used to pass wisdom and legends varies between communities as idioms of the main dialects create certain subtleties and nuances that present very different connotations. In northwestern Ontario, there are three main dialects of Ojibwa and a number of acceptable spellings of *Nishnaabe*, which means the “original men.” Regardless of the dialect, the students have meager opportunities to practice their language skills since their time with the native language teacher is limited to one half hour each day. Sadly, there are no native language books in the library to supplement their language development.

**Round Rock**

**Setting**

Round Rock, with approximately 300 people, is larger than most Northwestern Ontario reserves. It is a pleasant, tree-covered community with paved roads and personalized houses, a sharp contrast from the usual cookie-cutter residences that characterize most other reserves. The houses have yards that are generally tidy and well-maintained, some even enclosed by neat picket fences. As with many other First Nations communities, visitors are greeted by the proverbial
dog pack that follows new arrivals until something of greater interest garners their attention. Round Rock’s sizeable pack of dogs seemingly prefers to hang around the school and even darts inside at times.

There are few enterprises on reserve, possibly due to its somewhat isolated location, but the proximity of other towns provides easy access to retail stores. The businesses that do occupy the reserve are small general stores and restaurants.

Education is limited with only 13% of the residents having more than a grade eight education (Statistics Canada, 2006). Yet, because of Round Rock’s nearness to larger non-indigenous towns, an urban atmosphere prevails. Many of the residents own automobiles that allow them to work away from the community and to access off-reserve amenities. Community members admit to some social problems, but insist that they are not disproportionate to other communities, indigenous or non-indigenous, in the area.

**Education**

Round Rock is unique in that it does have a secondary school on reserve. The 10-year-old school, occupying a central position on the reserve, contains both primary and secondary grades. This is a convenient arrangement for the sharing of resources that include excellent gym and playground facilities. There are two principals (one for the primary grades and one for the secondary grades), but all other
support staff and services are shared. All grades have access to a large number of classroom computers and software. However, frequent maintenance of the equipment is inconvenient and costly since a company from a neighbouring town must carry out repairs. The high school staff is comprised entirely of non-indigenous teachers while the primary grades have both indigenous and non-indigenous teachers with the greater portion indigenous. Relationships within the school appear to be harmonious as confirmed by a majority of the staff. All of the non-indigenous teachers and two of the indigenous teachers live off the reserve and make a lengthy drive to work from nearby towns. This is not difficult as the provincial roads are paved and well-maintained, but it does extend the workday.

The school staff acknowledged some alcohol and drug problems among the students but felt it was no more prevalent than in any other Ontario school. Nevertheless, problems associated with social or special needs challenges do impact the classroom since there are no school or community services to provide support.

Both the primary and secondary school principals try to assist the resurgence of traditional knowledge by holding cultural events and encouraging field trips. However, there is no formal attempt to bring traditional knowledge and culture into the curriculum. In order to gain a greater understanding of the community dynamics regarding
traditional knowledge, I attempted to meet with the Chief and Council, but I was told there was no convenient time to discuss possible curriculum content.

When I interviewed Elders and teachers about incorporating traditional knowledge into the core curriculum, their reply was twofold. First, they voiced uncertainty regarding what to include and, second, they speculated if the knowledge would be acceptable to the community. According to the principal, teaching traditional knowledge is governed by ritual, time, and need. These factors are not easily incorporated into the provincial segmented lesson plans. The principal explained that, historically, traditions and beliefs were demonstrated or role-played at the appropriate time, creating a culture of visual learners who must be shown and then allowed to attempt the exercise. Suffering the consequences was an outcome of not paying attention to the lesson. One indigenous teacher explained it this way:

From what I’ve heard, like from people in the past, the Elders. They said they would show you how to do something once and if you made a mistake then it’s your problem. Then, because resources were so hard [to obtain] and so scarce that your family starved or something happened. The message I got was to learn to do something the first time because there is no second chance. When I was growing up, I was always told, “listen!” “Pay attention!” The reason we had to listen to older people is because they were trying to tell us something. There was a reason; there was always a reason behind everything, but they never told what it was; they wanted you to figure it out yourself.
This Nishnaabe style of learning contrasts dramatically with the Western format of segmented, rote teaching that is used in provincial schools. One of the principals clarified the incongruity of learning styles:

When we were small and . . . out on the trap line. . . little was known that teaching and learning was going on at the same time. . . . So there was always teaching and there was always learning. It’s not like the Western system where today’s lesson is this; and you go about teaching your lesson. The Nishnaabe way is it happened without you knowing. So it [Western style of teaching] kind of breaks that kind of a flow of education, that flow of learning.

Another teacher helped to explain this idea:

In the Western school, you are expected to raise your hand to ask questions, to always, constantly ask questions. The Nishnaabe way, or a community meeting way, you just listen, you don’t interrupt them. You just wait until they are done. It’s not the way you’re taught in Teachers College, but with the students that I have, it’s a natural thing.

A principal described the traditional learning of the First Nations children like this:

Anything you do, everything you see, you are living it. That’s how you picked it up: learning by observation. This is why the Nishnaabe student has so many problems in adapting. Anyway, you think, ok, it’s been a good fifty years; they should be used to the system. No! It’s like . . . inbred! You still have that system still somewhere in your conscious.

In addition to contravening the historical one-on-one method of instruction, teaching traditional knowledge in school curriculum would likely require a great deal of effort and organization since no one Elder has all of the knowledge. Rather, individuals feel a calling to specialize,
somewhat like being chosen for particular areas of concern. An Elder clarified:

... you can’t just say ‘I’m going to be a medicine man.’ I do my praying, I do my offering and that’s probably as far as I go. . . . You dream and you go by it. The dreams help. . . . You may not perform everything. You may not do the sweats. There’s people who do the sweat lodge and those that perform the shaking ceremony. There are those who do counseling. They [Elders] do certain ceremonies or situations.

Two teachers emphasized that traditional knowledge is provided or shared by Elders only at appropriate times. One of the teachers, a community member, explained, “We do not do stories because . . . most of the time the stories are legends and legends, in our beliefs, are told only in the winter. They can be told only in the winter. If I was [sic] to tell traditional stories (at some other time) a frog would suck me.” A non-indigenous teacher verbalized this concept of time and purpose when I asked about actually writing traditional knowledge into the curriculum:

I don’t think that the culture works that way. Kind of dwelling outside my area of expertise here, but I’ve been working at this for several years now. . . . But it’s not something that you can say at all times, because of the way the seasons change and the way that things move. I can’t say that on October 28th it will be the time for me to have a storyteller come in and share myths and legends with the kids, because it may not be the time. It’s not a linear cycle that I can say this is when it will be that time. I just know that when the leaves are off the tree and the snow is on the ground, then it’s acceptable to ask someone to tell stories.
Whether or not traditional information can be modified for inclusion into the curriculum is one challenge. Another is finding time in the school day. Most of the non-indigenous teachers I interviewed considered the curriculum already compressed and believed no additional time could be allotted to further studies. The provincial curriculum is followed even though The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples sanctions First Nations schools’ use of any curricular structure deemed beneficial and appropriate. However, if students want to continue their education upon graduation and government funding to schools is to continue, then some compromise must be made to follow standardized guidelines. Round Rock does follow the Ontario curriculum, especially in the secondary grades.

When asked if it would be possible to include some cultural knowledge into the curriculum mix, I found that the school does endorse some traditional knowledge activities, such as wild rice harvesting. However, the non-indigenous teachers do not always support the time spent away from provincial curriculum. One teacher expressed the following opinion:

. . . we’ve developed some local courses that incorporate basic skills. I’m not prepared to throw in a bunch of lunar cycles just because it fits something. I’m a very traditional teacher so I work with textbooks. . . . direct instruction, projects. . . . We took the students rice picking. We had another teacher here who really resented the time spent away from class for this activity.
The principal also mentioned this teacher’s lack of support: “She said that it [a traditional activity] wasn’t in the Ontario curriculum and couldn’t count toward the teaching days. Well, she got so burned out she left at Christmas.”

Religious and Traditional Beliefs

While Catholicism is the dominant religion, other faiths such as Pentecostal Christianity and Jehovah’s Witness are also present. In addition, a new respect for traditional cultural wisdom and for the Elders who preserve the knowledge has emerged. To support this traditional reawakening and in an effort to maintain the band’s heritage, traditional ceremonies are held in a recently-erected cultural centre or roundhouse. It is constructed, however, away from the community in order to avoid confrontation with religious and influential individuals who consider traditional beliefs sacrilegious. A teacher explained.

There’s no doubt the Catholic Church interfered and drove cultural teaching underground . . . things traditionally done differently . . .[such as] ceremonies, are now taking place at night. Traditionally they didn’t take place at night. You know it still happens here. A lot of communities are like that, those that are strongly religious.

This new-found sense of identity was revealed in comments from a current teacher:

Years ago the government said it [native culture and language] was against the law, it was banned. After so many years we fought against it and began reviving the things that were outlawed: ceremonies, Pow Wows. . . etc. . . .
There appeared to be conflicts between the Western organized religions and those who follow traditional wisdom. This seems to be a result of colonialism and residential schooling, which taught that all except Christian religions were heathen. Today community members with strong Christian beliefs object to the resurgence of traditional values and this rift has created factioning within the band. On a few occasions, I observed some aggravation regarding this situation. A principal of Round Rock attributed the impact of colonialism and conflicting viewpoints as the reason why no traditional knowledge exists in the curriculum:

I believe there are probably at least two factions within the community. One that would feel that it’s important to have traditional knowledge in the school, carried out, played out everyday across the grades. Then there is an equal-sized component in the community who says, ‘No!’...they want to push it aside and embrace other belief systems. They don’t feel there is any compatibility between the two and it’s either one or the other. It is not that they want us to teach Catholicism, but because there’s that split, it’s not supported. If the community was one hundred percent behind it, we would have it.

An indigenous teacher also held this view: “...if we were to begin formal classes in that [traditional beliefs], well those [Catholic] families would yank their kids right out of school and then the arguments would start!” For the most part, the groups co-exist in a delicate truce, a reality that is acknowledged by a number of community teachers and Elders.
Power Structures

The Chief and Council of Round Rock, elected for two-year terms, represent the formal authority regarding reserve administration. Day-to-day activities, such as reporting and bookkeeping, are handled by band managers, and education is overseen by a group of six appointed individuals known as the advisory board. The advisory board enacts and enforces school policy, oversees supply purchases, and hires or fires staff. Their word is not final, as a teacher explained: “If the Chief and council don’t like what they [board or school staff] have done, they’ll abolish it.”

As in Two Rivers, there seemed to be family power factions in Round Rock. According to school staff, three families within the community apparently influence community decisions and activities by manipulating public opinion and working to retain family members in positions of authority. Comments made by teachers, both indigenous and non-indigenous, indicated that it is not beneficial to place oneself in opposition to the desires of these families. They maintain family members in elected positions and dominate the few jobs available by using historic networks. In this manner, these families ultimately control the funds and resources allotted to the community. The families take their Catholic religion very seriously and consequently are not anxious to see traditional beliefs re-emerge. A teacher admitted she
keeps a “low profile” within the school even though there are activities she would like to attempt. “There are so many things I would like to do, that I really would like to try, but I’m reluctant . . . you don’t want to step on anyone’s toes. I mean you’ve got to take care of yourself in this world.” Another teacher tried to explain how this societal structure affects both the school and the community:

You have no clue what a school or a community on a reserve is about, because it’s certainly different. Oh, yeah, it’s its own little world; there’s [sic] rules that don’t apply outside of it. There’s a lot of stuff that’s going on; everybody knows what everybody else is doing and that presents a situation too.

A secondary school teacher was a bit clearer in her explanation:

Oh, sure, there is [an informal authority]. There’s always going to be. You would hope school is the one place that formal authority would level the playing field, but the reality is we try to do the best of our ability, but there’s always going to be that other playing field. Depending on who happens to be in power at a given time. Because this is a microcosm, it’s been magnified. These kids have been in school together since junior kindergarten and the pecking order is very well established. They know exactly where they stand in school and their family stands in the community.

Funding and Disbursements

Funding for the community is allocated by the federal government through various agencies. According to the principals, justifying monies requires bargaining and negotiating on the part of the band in a process that is both convoluted and extremely tedious. Budgets for the reserve must be substantiated each year by clarifying and documenting each
member’s status and then requesting the monies designated for that individual. Benefits are based not only on the number of full status band members that can be verified, but also on whether they reside on the reserve. School funding is included in the verification and each student is scrutinized. Monies are allocated not only in regards to status, but also according to the number of days a student actually attends class. This requires many hours of monitoring and reams of paperwork on the part of the school counselor. In the end, according to the counselor and many teachers, it becomes a game of justification through manipulation to obtain funds for the school. An education advisory board member shed light on how much the government affects the school when it requires such time-consuming procedures:

They [INAC] have a major impact. They rule our lives from the day we’re born until the day we die. They rule our lives. They don’t understand us. They never did! Our budget, it’s formula-based. That’s what we do every day. Substantiate the purpose for us continuing to receive dollars! Here, [indicates paperwork] it’s all the students, their band numbers, name of the student, date of birth and what their status is, whether it’s on or off reserve, what grade, their sex. . . [which parent] that child is registered under and should they be funded with this band. Then they count how many days the kid was in school! I hate this thing!

The struggle to manage within allotted budgets is often problematical. This complicated funding situation seems to result in a practice of redirecting designated monies from one venture to another, with outcomes that may not always be benign and altruistic. This
appears to be true of school allocations, as comments by school staff suggested that education funds are sometimes manipulated in this manner. The redirecting of monies sometimes leaves the school with unpaid bills and unable to purchase additional supplies. This situation ultimately results in teachers and students lacking the resources necessary for their day-to-day requirements.

A primary school teacher explained. “Our budget is very small so a lot of it [supplies] comes from home or garage sales. Our kids bring things from home, so we do find ways.” When I ask the primary school principal about funding, she described their pattern of funding.

We don’t control our own finances and it makes it difficult for us to control our expenditures. We may budget for certain things, but if the band chooses not to pay for it. . . . We make a decision to purchase, say phonic books and that is going to be $800.00. Our supplier says, ‘you know you guys don’t pay well; we’re not shipping those until you prepay.’ So they send us an invoice and we go over to the band office, hat in hand, to see if we can get a cheque. You end up waiting for things you shouldn’t have to wait for. Everything flows through the band office. But purchases and policies are only valid if the Chief and Council says it’s [sic] valid.

A teacher complained: “We really don’t have the supplies or resources. Like I say, a lot of the stuff is what I’ve collected or bought throughout the years. I really believe we are not getting the funds we need.” Another teacher voiced this same opinion.

Resources are another problem. We borrow supplies from other First Nation schools, pooling purchases to get the most for our money. Textbooks are a real problem. I order textbooks and the band doesn’t pay for them. They sit on
the bills. The next year I have to pay up front. I have a lot of my own resources but should the students have to rely on me to get textbooks? Some people in the community feel the textbooks should be free, but it doesn’t work like that. Two years ago, we went on a field trip and the band wouldn’t pay for it. It’s been really challenging.

The principal for the primary grades explained some of the reasons for poor funding.

Our funding is inadequate. Because we are not paid the same as the Provincial schools, due to formulas or something like that. The money goes to the band office and I think that many times people have dipped their hands into it and we lose out. Automatically we lose 10% of it for administrative costs. They have to handle it or whatever and we only start with about two-thirds of what provincial schools get for their children.

It appears that liberties are taken with funds intended for the school with little accounting for where the money is actually spent. The handling fee of 10% charged by the Chief and Council denies students and their teachers the supplies and learning materials needed to instruct properly.

Teachers

In addition to challenges of funding and curriculum content, another tension is the contingent of teachers. The Assembly of First Nations and the Round Rock advisory board expressed the desire to see the schools staffed only by indigenous teachers. This goal has not yet been achieved in the high school, but is well on its way to completion in the elementary school. All of the teachers in the high school are
certified by the province of Ontario. In the primary grades, only one of the six teachers (a Caucasian teacher) is provincially certified; two have received the Ontario Native Teacher Certification; and the rest have no formal experience but do speak the Ojibwa language. All of the high school teachers are Caucasian while the elementary school has one Caucasian teacher whose classroom is also situated in the high school area along with the other Caucasian teachers. I asked the education advisory board chair if it was preferable to have all indigenous staff, and he replied.

Oh definitely! The white teachers have a tendency to... well, their expectations are a little different from the native teachers. The white teachers, they want to see more work where the native teachers are a little bit different. They understand how the students learn more. And in terms of discipline, there’s a difference. In the white classrooms, you have to raise your hand to go to the bathroom; in the native classroom, that’s not the case. As long as the student doesn’t abuse the privilege, then they can come and go as they please.

What I assumed from the comments was that the indigenous teachers identify personally with the students and are more accommodating to their social mores and lifestyle. This led to questioning the non-indigenous teachers regarding feelings of preference for native teachers. The answer was a unanimous “yes.” The non-indigenous teachers ultimately disclosed feelings of discrimination. One teacher’s comments seemed to summarize everyone’s viewpoint:

Oh certainly at times, [I feel discrimination] for sure. But do I take it personally? No. I can’t; I have a job to do.
When they [the comments] are directed towards me, yeah, it hurts.

Another teacher discussed feelings of subtle favouritism:

I feel really uncomfortable with some of the staff members—there is a real rife between the elementary teachers (native) and the high school teachers (Caucasian). We have elementary teachers who are paid twice as much as high school teachers. They are not qualified. Those teachers are not educated.

One indigenous teacher commented, “I find the non-native teachers, they don’t have a say. . . I’m status, I live here, so I can speak, but they are reluctant because they’re outsiders.” He went on to say, “The parents blame the teachers. They say, ‘That’s why my kid is failing, because of the white teacher.’” The grade-five teacher continued the comments on the subject of parental feelings: “I think many parents feel threatened by the teachers because of the past [residential schools] or because past teachers have been condescending to them. Like, I know what is best for your child.”

The discussion concerning discrimination and culture evolved into further questions of respect from the community and the students for all of the teachers, regardless of ethnicity. A number of comments from the teachers, whether they were band members or not, provided evidence that teachers are not respected. Two indigenous teachers described several of their interactions with parents: “Some parents we try to connect with, they just won’t give us the time. Many times, we try
to talk to the parents and they just walk away! Sometimes the parents blame the teachers. They say, ‘I don’t like that teacher, that’s why my kid isn’t doing well’

The rift between school and community seems to be deeper than parental indifference. One teacher described how almost no one visited during a recent open house held by the school. She seemed to feel that the members view the school as a “place where the children have to go for six hours.” The reason for this lack of respect is not easily understood. However, teachers from both cultures seem to think the community views the school as “a white man’s institution,” a value system that the parents do not understand. Two indigenous teachers felt that the school/community relationship was slowly changing, but admitted there are still some problems, while a non-indigenous teacher commented about this same situation: “There are times [when] . . . there is good rapport with the community [and] at different times there isn’t. In the past, parents didn’t feel welcome here, didn’t feel like coming in here, didn’t participate in here.” An indigenous teacher echoed this idea. “. . . [T]he school at one time was sort of isolated from the community and there was really no bridge to keep them together. But now there is. I feel the parents are more active now; I know I can feel it.” Whether this is the case or not, all teachers admitted that parental support and communication is almost nonexistent.
One possible contributing factor to the lack of a relationship between the community and the school is the reality that non-indigenous teachers seldom stay for more than a year or two. After gaining experience, they usually move on to employment in larger cities.

The salary in all reserve schools is notoriously parsimonious since the entire First Nations school system is funded differently than provincial schools. The Department of Indian Affairs funds the education for indigenous students while public and separate schools are funded by the individual province. The funds per student on reserve amounted to an average of $8400 per student in 2007-2008 with less amounts going to remote reserves (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2007). Ontario’s budget per student in 2007-2008 was $9,821 according to Minister of Finance (Statistics Canada). The reserve school, with its poor pay and somewhat onerous work conditions appears to be a place to acquire initial proficiency, as the secondary school principal makes clear.

. . .let’s be blunt about the matter. If a person has a degree, if they have a teacher’s certificate, they can walk out of here and go somewhere else and make more money. Many more opportunities exist than this community.

This type of learning environment seemingly uses students as human guinea pigs on whom new graduates try recently-acquired teaching strategies. While professional practice must be gained, teacher inexperiance is a constant at this school. The pool of teachers willing to
relocate to the somewhat isolated school is small. An education advisory board member spoke of advertising “everywhere” to obtain qualified teachers, indigenous or not, then resorting to “scraping the bottom of the barrel” to obtain staff. Another advisory board member explained:

. . . not even half of our teachers are native, but we have trouble recruiting both native and white teachers. We advertise in the paper and get almost no responses. We put our jobs in the national job bank too. A lot of the teachers we hire, the teachers we do get here, they’re here two years and then they’re gone. That’s usually because they want the experience. Then if there’s another school board that advertises, they’re gone. I know that’s because the salaries are certainly better than what we can provide.

The secondary school principal confirmed this observation:

It can be painfully difficult to get people in. This year we were supposed to have a maternity leave teacher return. She chose not to. We spent an entire summer posting [the job] and we could not find a qualified person to respond. We had unqualified people, but. . . basically we’ve brought in first year teachers, trained them, taught them how to teach, and then sent them on to other systems.

Recruitment is a problem, but so is attrition. Non-indigenous teachers described nepotism as another reason for leaving after a short time. A few said they observed patent differences among teacher’s salaries. A teacher commented on the discrepancies: “We have [indigenous] elementary teachers who are paid twice as much as [Caucasian] high school teachers.” Another teacher mentioned a situation that recently took place in the school.
The last principal came into some difficulty with some of the elementary teachers and I think a lot of that had to do with lack of training, lack of qualifications, despotism, pay scales. [The principal] was really upset cause [sic] these people are bringing in $2000.00 every week! Nobody deserves that! Like hello! He didn’t confront it, but he did some evaluations [and] some teachers were given letters to dismiss them. There was a lot of backlash . . . saying the process wasn’t right and then they throw in that whole native spin into it—we’re native teachers and therefore, we communicate the native way. The bottom line is they are overpaid, they’re not qualified, and they got there by nepotism. It’s really, really hard to go up against that. The teachers who got their notices are still here.

Another motivation for leaving that was offered was the lack of resources available to teachers. Teachers must make do with what the band council doles out to the school. They objected to the band council providing less than the total allotment that had been designated for the school by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and being driven to having students share textbooks and distributing photocopies in order to present lessons. Yet this is a common situation within the school.

Social Dilemmas

Resources for special needs students are also nonexistent, making the classroom environment for teachers extremely difficult. The school has identified many students with special needs that include Attention Deficit, Hyperactive Attention Deficit, and Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. In addition, some students are mentally challenged, or have physical disabilities such as auditory processing, hearing impairment, or poor
vision. Proper identification appeared to be the least of the problem, since there are no student support services within the school. The teachers maintained that 20% of students in every class have special needs of some sort that are being dealt with either poorly or not at all. “Integration not segregation,” is the philosophy of the school, but this lofty goal seems little more than a comfort statement, considering the minimal funding and lack of assistance. The two aides who do visit the primary classrooms appear to do no more than one-on-one baby-sitting. A primary school teacher explained how the teaching staff manages special needs: “... a lot of the faculty has to deal with them [special needs students] in the classroom. There’s no place to send them and especially in ... double grades it is very difficult.” Although student needs are identified through Child and Family Services (a benefit many First Nations communities do not have), this does not mean the students receive the professional help they require. In fact, because the funding is federal and the assistance provincial, the children often fall between the cracks and fail to receive support, either in or out of the school. The school counselor observed that there is constant bickering over responsibility for the problem. However, within the school, it becomes the band’s responsibility. One teacher explained the situation:

that’s another area that is really underfunded. The bulk of the money goes to salaries, so there isn’t a lot left over to reach students. I see a lot of communities just giving up. Within this school I haven’t seen a lot [of resources], but you
go thirty minutes north and they have everything; somehow they found ways to get the money. In [this community] it seems nothing is being done; special needs is really put off to the side.

The grade two teacher simply described the situation as a “pain in the neck,” with either a lack or an overlap of services from governmental agencies. These circumstances, matched with low pay, few resources, and discrimination suggest reasons why few teachers remain after one year.

**Elders and Traditional Knowledge**

I found it is difficult to determine who should be called ‘Elder’ within the community. Becoming an Elder is complex since both the community and the individual must recognize this status. An Elder I interviewed explained.

> I guess I am an Elder, but there are some functions I cannot do. I can’t go and name a child. I haven’t been given the gift. There are things that you are given. You dream these things and then other Elders tell you [it is true] and then you get the feeling; you feel that [it is true]. . . .Many times, I have been asked, ‘When do you become an Elder? It’s not because you get old or it’s not because you get to be a grandfather. You get to be an Elder when people respect you or give you that sort of respect that is due you.

> Even those designated as Elders do not garner much respect because of changing values and strong colonialist and religious interventions. The Elders complain about the loss of respect for themselves and the cultural knowledge they keep. Despite the renewed
interest in traditional knowledge, one Elder believes fewer individuals seek out Elder counsel and describes the disengagement with traditional knowledge:

We’re losing it because we aren’t practicing it. People are involved with too many things and the care is not being practiced. . . not just in this community, in all communities. . . . If it’s not alcohol, it’s casino or bingo . . . these things take over for earlier traditions and so the care is not there. The Elders have gone on [died] and so many teachings have gone on. The young people have ceased listening to the Elders. So much so they couldn’t be bothered with them.

As in Two Rivers, the Elders are hesitant to take their knowledge into the school because of the fluid nature of the information. In order for Elders to share their knowledge, it must be the appropriate time and preparation rituals should be held. These procedures and limitations discourage the invitation of Elders into the school.

Language

The teachers reported that formal lessons in the indigenous language are available only in grade nine for an hour a day. In the lower grades, most of the teachers are indigenous and speak Oji-Cree in the classroom. Since the students seldom speak their indigenous language at home, the teachers try to incorporate the language into daily lessons. In addition, an effort by some of the teachers and community members to preserve the community dialect is resulting in an indigenous dictionary for the reserve. This is important, they said, because small nuances in pronunciation or inflection can change the
meaning of a word or phrase. One teacher told of visiting a nearby community and being unable to understand the conversation fully. She explained the difficulty:

[The] dialects are such [that] I have a hard time with that. Ok, we do say things differently. We have a community here about twenty or thirty miles north and they say some things differently. Further west, closer to Manitoba . . . one word might mean . . . ‘sock’ to them and ‘pants’ for us. Now you go a little further south and east theirs is different [again]. Ok? The word for ‘go’ means ‘come’ for them.

According to the teacher, this situation was very confusing. The lack of a truly universal language is cited as one of the reasons there are so few indigenous textbooks available.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the case studies of Two Rivers and Round Rock. After reviewing the data, it is evident that both communities display dynamics that stem from the colonialism imposed upon First Nations people. These colonial dynamics have affected the will and capacity of the members in the areas outlined, and has ultimately been reflected in the quality of community life and education of the young. To clarify, the imposition of European values eradicated the traditional indigenous way of life, resulting in the loss of language and leaving a legacy of learning dysfunctions, meager resources and a lack of Elders to guide the community. Funding problems at all levels, cultural conflict, complex power structures, and religious variances further
reduce the will and capacity of the community. The existence of stereotyping and discrimination among teachers and community members, as well as a loss of respect for Elders, intensifies the disengagement. The complexity of these tensions and the dysfunctional means with which they are managed clearly reflect the inability of the communities to build social capital and maintain their cultural heritage. Presently, there is little to suggest that change is forthcoming. However, complete analysis of the disintegration of will and capacity within Two Rivers and Round Rock due to colonialism and its influence is presented in Chapter Six.
CHAPTER SIX
CROSS CASE ANALYSIS

Overview

As stated in Chapter One, there are numerous situations in which marginalized populations have, along with their culture and religion, been criticized and derided by the majority population. Literature has revealed examples of the effects of domination or colonialism on these societies that indicate these cultures are deeply compromised as a result. The introduction of the Education Action Plan by the Assembly of First Nations, along with a personal on-reserve experience discussed in Chapter Four, provided me the impetus to research how colonialism could play out in two Northwestern Ontario First Nations communities with respect to the will and capacity of communities to introduce culturally relevant content into school curricula. My research revealed that colonialism has reduced the will and capacity of the First Nations members in Two Rivers and Round Rock to respond and reenergize their societal values, traditions, and beliefs. Literature suggests that these conditions are present in other First Nations communities, jeopardizing the entire culture.

Chapter Five contextualized the imposition of colonialism and its resulting consequences on Two Rivers and Round Rock and suggested that at least these reserve communities and quite possibly others lack
the will, capacity, and resources to achieve such an optimistic goal as the realization of the traditional knowledge aspect of the Education Action Plan. These cases revealed the obstacles to be faced, at the grass roots level, in implementing such an ambitious undertaking. More clearly, they highlighted the complexities rooted in colonialism that have reduced the will and capacity of local communities to embrace the changes needed for cultural and economic growth.

The Assembly of First Nations made a number of assumptions about the development of traditional curriculum without appreciating the profound difficulties that exist within small communities. These difficulties have arisen from colonial policies and have often resulted in among other things, inexperienced and often ineffective leadership and a dependence on inconsistent governmental funding. According to Kirkness (1998), the Education Action Plan will be further encumbered by what she described as “pedagogic and social naiveté” (pg. 14) meaning the education and governance thus far available to Indigenous peoples has not been of their design or delivery. Consequently, they are not fully equipped to undertake significant implementation activities. Additionally, conflicting religious doctrines, cultural disconnect with traditional wisdom and Elders brought on by residential schooling and colonialism’s resulting aftermaths of social dilemmas and meta-stereotyping (Antone, 2003; Ryan, 1996; Simpson 2001), act to impede
the realization of the Education Action Plan’s traditional knowledge component and will ultimately obstruct its success.

McLaughlin’s (1987) analysis finds policy implementation essentially relies on two broad factors: local capacity and will. Capacity requires resources and abilities, while will necessitates determination and conviction. These are attributes that cannot be mandated or forced and, according to Yin (1981) reveal the stakeholders’ true opinion of a policy. The Two Rivers and Round Rock cases demonstrate dynamics, resulting from colonialism, that have greatly affected the capacity and will of the communities and may challenge the successful realization of traditional knowledge implementation. A systematic analysis of the seven dynamic factors disclosed by my research and their potential impact on the Education Action Plan follow, along with a subsequent assessment of the likelihood of overall success.

Language

Without the vital link to one’s heritage language, culture and traditions cannot be passed on, creating a loss of identity and making indigenous peoples more dependent on European society and assistance. Since much of traditional knowledge does not readily translate into English, even First Nations citizens who speak English cannot easily interpret the information. Blair (1998) stated that without language, indigenous children would eventually have no means of
accessing the cultural and linguistic capital of their heritage. The outcome of this profound loss means that regardless of the desire to learn the language or the need to acquire the information it can impart, the capacity to do so is gone.

It was obvious within both communities that the original language of the bands is in a state of decline. These findings are similar to those documented by Drapeau (1995) and the University of British Columbia (1995). Because the children of these communities are not learning their traditional languages at home, both schools have initiated native language studies. Two Rivers’ students, grades one to six, spend one half hour a day with a native language teacher. In Round Rock, the grade one to eight students have teachers who introduce and use the language, but formal instruction in the language is presented only in grade nine for one hour a day. This meager attempt at offering language lessons to the children is a beginning, but it is extremely unlikely that this is enough of an effort to rescue a language and produce fluent speakers. As the ability to communicate in one’s mother tongue is lost, so are the customs, lore and history of a culture. Without language the capacity to preserve one’s collective heritage and traditional knowledge declines, eventually making the effort of preservation so demanding that the will to continue is lost. My data shows this appears to have begun happening in Two Rivers where a minimal effort is devoted to native
language studies. Sadly, even the marginal amount of time that is allotted to language is resented by many of the non-indigenous teachers there.

Round Rock has chosen a trade-off concerning language. In order to place Oji-Cree-speaking individuals in the lower grades, they have compromised on the credentials of the teachers. In fact, with most texts and school materials written in English, according to provincial education standards, one wonders how effective the language contribution of these teachers is. Further, to apportion formal language lessons, an endeavour so crucial to cultural survival, to one hour a day, in grade nine only, seems inadequate (Collier, 1987; Moore and Zainuddin, 2003). Neither community has taken the proactive step of immersing the students in their heritage language, a fundamental move toward preserving traditional knowledge for future generations. It might be argued that the provincial curriculum imposed upon the reserve schools in return for funding does not allow additional time for language. However, if the community members truly felt the need to embark upon cultural preservation, time outside of school could be found to accommodate such an undertaking. Obviously, if the will to address this aspect of their cultural heritage is missing, the far more difficult task of implementing traditional knowledge could be suspect.
Religion, Residential Schools and Traditional Beliefs

An overt and seemingly insurmountable impediment to incorporating traditional teachings in school curriculum is the presence, owing to colonialism, of the Christian religion within the communities. Contact with European religious missionaries and the imposition of residential schools, has succeeded in making much of traditional customs and cultural knowledge objectionable to many First Nations people (Agbo, 2004; Steinhauer, 1998; Taiaiake, 1999). This transformation was accomplished through a variety of methods, the most effective of which was a residential school experience that imposed separation of indigenous children from their families and culture as well as forced daily instruction of liturgies and catechisms. In addition, the children received persistent lectures on the sinful aspects of traditional knowledge (Segerholm & Neilsson, 2003). Fanon (1967), in his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, described this approach as the imposition of settler values with such violence and intensity that the colonized find their very culture under attack, distorting or destroying their connection to their traditional beliefs. The education received in residential schools, supported by practices of cruelty and mistreatment, undermined any sense of indigenous cultural integrity (Antone, 2003; Grant, 1996; Hesch, 1995; Stevenson, 1991). Further, it generated a loss of cultural identifiers that eventually led to widespread social and
psychological upheaval. Despite the fact that residential schools no longer exist, according to Ball (2004) and Kirkness (1998a), the experience has left the survivors emotionally-damaged and unable to form personal attachments; to this day, the negative impacts on self-concept, parenting, social cohesion, and intergenerational transmission of language and culture remain.

My study revealed that many of these residential school issues exist in the First Nations communities I researched, many of which are detailed here. I noted that fervent Christian members often became angry when discussions regarding traditional knowledge curriculum were held. Unfortunately, these passionate individuals also held both informal and authorized power within the community and it became obvious that members of lesser status, advocating traditional knowledge teachings, were incapable of confronting them without peer disapproval. This combination of religion and power provides an effective barrier against the introduction of traditional teachings and leaves many communities deeply fragmented (Bird, 1993, Flanagan, 1999; Kirkness, 1998a).

Two Rivers is operating with a separate school curriculum that does not recognize other beliefs. The principal of Two Rivers School predicts that as long as Catholic liturgy is taught in the school, there is no room for traditional knowledge.
Round Rock’s view of traditional wisdom is not quite as negative. The Elders confirm that although Catholicism has the largest number of followers, there is tolerance for traditional knowledge. In fact, traditional ceremonies are once more performed in a Round House, albeit away from the community in order to avoid individuals who, like those in Two Rivers, consider such ceremonies sacrilegious.

The principal of Round Rock identified Christianity’s religious teachings as the central reason no traditional knowledge exists in the curriculum and why some parents do not wish to see it incorporated. According to her, bringing traditional knowledge into the open and overtly teaching it in the schools would create dangerous controversy. This appears to be a situation the Round Rock community wishes to avoid and to accomplish this, it has established an uneasy peace; factions agree to ignore rival activities as long as the current balance is not disrupted. This may be why Round Rock officials refused time for a civic meeting regarding curriculum issues, or why, in Two Rivers, the community meeting failed to attract participants. Although traditional knowledge is sanctioned in the Education Action Plan, these communities choose to leave well enough alone, lacking the will to confront established paradigms regardless of the opportunities to preserve their rich heritage.
Elders and Traditional Knowledge

Religious doctrine and Western values resulting from colonialism have usurped the influence of the Elders to the point where no clear stable influence or authority exists within the bands. Elected officials are not always benevolent and Elders often are disregarded and ignored. I found, as did Ball and Simpkin (2004), that community Elders complain of losing the respect and recognition due them and their traditional knowledge. In interviews, Elders reported that many of the younger clan members no longer value them or appreciate their wisdom. They feel a slow erosion of indigenous values into Western standards and twenty-first-century viewpoints is occurring.

In the indigenous culture, not all wisdom and ceremonies rest with a specific person or group, and knowledge may be passed only when the proper time arises (Ball, 2004; Pitawanakat, 2001; Stiegelbauer, 1996). Therefore, to follow the Education Action Plan’s proposal of using Elders and establishing a program of study for traditional knowledge, with lesson plans and outcomes, would be virtually impossible. The material is far too fluid to conform to standardization (Toulouse, 2001), making the provincial education format of segmented and planned lessons used currently in First Nation schools incompatible and unsuited to the one-on-one approach of
traditional teachings (Cooke-Dallin, Rosborough & Underwood, 2000; Ryan, 1992a; Pitawanakat, 2001; Tsuji, 2000).

For reasons stemming from colonialism’s activities, communities lack sufficient Elders to convey traditional knowledge, thereby reducing even further the possibility of implementing traditional knowledge into the school setting. As Elders pass on, there are fewer Elders to transfer the expertise required to become an Elder allowing fewer individuals to achieve Elder status. Additionally, the capacity and will to become an Elder diminish since there appears to be a declining desire or will to retain traditional values by younger generations. In Two Rivers and Round Rock, few Elders recognize their status and fewer still are recognized by their community (Stiegelbauer, 1996).

Leadership and Community Dilemmas

*Patronage and Nepotism*

The few jobs and resources available to reserves, coupled with government control over First Nations funding, have created an environment of competition and factionalism within the communities when opportunities arise to access funds or employment. Round Rock and Two Rivers are rife with power dynamics of both internal and external origin (Armitage, 1995). These include not only government officials overseeing funding and elected administrators’ daily management, but also powerful families whose influence extends to all
areas of community affairs. In the two communities I researched, members of these families are repeatedly re-elected to formal authority positions from which they control activities and events for the whole band. Even if not currently in official authority positions, they engender constant battles for control of both resources and supervision of the community (Flanagan, 1999; Taiaiake, 1999). This familial entitlement or “[f]actionalism in aboriginal politics operates on a small scale and in an informal way, involving competition between kin groups and friendship networks. This . . . often involves a high degree of patronage and nepotism as winning factions take advantage of the majority position” (Flanagan, 1999, p.99). Two Rivers and Round Rock proved vivid examples of this situation and demonstrated that the leadership there is not always benign. Complaints were expressed by all school staff and even by Elders in both communities regarding selfish purchases and self-serving practices by those in power, demonstrating that reserve administrators do not always have the good of the people foremost in their minds (Smith, 1999; Cairn, 2000; Crowfoot, 1997; Pointing & Voyageur, 2005). It appears that some community members relinquish long-term goals and live in the moment, abdicating the will or ability to anticipate or plan for their personal future or that of their people. Should these powerful individuals not wish to see traditional
knowledge introduced into the school curriculum, as is the case in Two Rivers and Round Rock, it will not happen.

*Disbursements within Communities*

Controlling funds becomes another facet of factionalism that “. . . in an aboriginal community includes . . . property rights—nepotistic hiring practices, misuse of expense accounts, denial of housing or welfare, reassignment of land or timber, and so on” (Flanagan, 1999, p.99). Charging a handling fee to distribute funds designated for the school and using monies meant for school supplies to wine and dine are just a few of the stories regarding funding irregularities in Two Rivers and Round Rock. These incidents illustrate yet another factor that could affect policy success and further exemplify the impact of colonialism on the First Nations culture. The inability to control one’s destiny or financial security has bred a self-preservationist and instant-gratification attitude among some individuals in First Nations communities, causing them to opt for immediate self-serving goals by manipulating circumstances. The capacity to view the larger picture for benefit of the community or people is missing along with the will to anticipate or prepare for the future. Obviously, if funds are routinely misappropriated, the capacity to implement the Education Action Plan, as well as the will or conviction to do so, must be questioned.
Teachers

While many of the teachers I interviewed voiced satisfaction with their jobs, there seemed to be underlying conflicts concerning culture as well as differing opinions regarding the importance of curriculum inclusive of traditional knowledge. All of the teachers were adamant about adhering to provincial curriculum, even though they recognized the nature of the community school and the First Nations’ right to determine curriculum. Most teachers also agreed that some traditional knowledge could be included in lessons, but they had neither the desire nor the inclination to assist in the task. This is consistent with the finding of Agbo (2004) and Ball (2004) in their studies of indigenous communities.

The majority of educators in both communities are non-indigenous and completing their first year of teaching. This study revealed that these first-time teachers were willing to tolerate low pay and difficult working conditions that included poor facilities, little support, and classroom control issues with special needs students in the short term, in order to gain teaching experience. This scenario appears common to most First Nations schools; however, statistics to support these statements are scarce. Argan (2006) of the Western Catholic Reporter discovered:
there is no data on teachers who teach on reserves. What is their average level of experience? What is the turnover rate? How many teachers are Aboriginal? Anecdotal evidence suggests that on-reserve teachers are white kids typically fresh out of university who leave as soon as they are able (p. 4)

This is not to say that teacher quality is unsatisfactory, although that opinion was frequently expressed by principals and education advisory members in both schools. Rather, a greater area of concern was recruitment difficulties and the attrition rate after hire. The difficulty of recruiting teachers, indigenous or otherwise, arises from at least three factors: the lack of amenities, an exclusionary atmosphere, and isolation. It is apparent that the employment experience offers little to outsiders except teaching practice. Two Rivers, a more isolated community, with its poor school facilities, has more difficulty than Round Rock in recruiting and maintaining employees. However, staffing challenges occur in both communities and are a constant source of concern for the local education councils who hire new teachers.

The dilemma of recruitment and attrition due to poor wages and feelings of exclusion is understandable. Similarly, many teachers also indicated their lack of commitment to the school because of poor working conditions. This includes a lack of essential resources and assistance with special needs students. Teachers are often unable to teach basic skills owing to a shortage of textbooks and assignment materials. A situation also observed by Faries (2004) and Toulouse
In addition, the tensions that accompany special needs students in the classroom have created an environment that is both demanding and exhausting. These immediate and palpable classroom dilemmas often leave teachers too worn out to remain in such a challenging environment. With such a high attrition rate, teachers are not likely to provide assistance with any continuity to Elders attempting to teach traditional knowledge in the classroom. Thus, attrition persists and the capacity of the reserves to attract teachers continues to be impacted. This is a factor that will ultimately influence the ability of the communities to successfully implement the Education Action Plan.

**Social Dilemmas**

General lack of funding and specific monies to deal with special needs students are aspects of colonialism that continue to haunt the communities. Of greater significance is the reason special needs students are more numerous in reserve schools than in provincial schools. This can be traced directly to substance abuse as an outcome of colonialism (Gagne, 1998; Miller-Cleary & Peacock, 1998).

Addicted individuals and their children create extraordinary problems for First Nations communities and their schools (Chansonneuve, 2007). Hull (1995) singles out undiagnosed or untreated substance abuse or FAS children as a major problem in
reserve schools, and Philip (2000) believes that some remote reserves have an incidence rate of 1 in 5 for substance abuse, thus creating a high number of special needs students. One generation of addicted, defeated individuals is more than likely to influence future generations, reducing the will or impetus to change because no other lifestyle is recognized or anticipated.

It is challenging to teach any child with special needs, but doing so in isolation while managing other students makes the task nearly impossible for the teachers of Two Rivers. Round Rock is slightly more prepared to handle special needs students. They do have two staff members identified as special education teachers, but their input appears minimal at best. These “teachers” have no credentials and work only with the youngest grades, providing little more than babysitting and periodic respite for teachers. Having uncertified individuals employed as qualified special education teachers demonstrates a lack of will on the part of the communities to deal directly and genuinely with the special needs students or to address the causes that perpetuate the problem. As long as teachers must deal with these students alone, upsetting daily lessons and exhausting teachers, there will be no additional effort expended for traditional knowledge.
**Meta-stereotyping**

During interviews, most of the non-indigenous teachers spoke of feeling alienated by the community and more than one revealed their inability to perform their teaching duties competently because of poor morale. They described conflicts concerning race and culture along with feelings of discrimination as noted by other First Nations researchers such as Brewer (2007) and Castelli, Zogmaister, Smith & Arcuri (2004). Even teachers, who have been employed by the schools for years, spoke of feeling excluded and regarded as an “outsider.”

Castelli et al. (2004) found that once a characteristic is encoded into a group or individual, later encounters may unintentionally cue the retrieval of beliefs that function as a basis for a collective emotion. These emotions could give rise to actions that may include avoiding the out-group members and if avoidance becomes impossible, hostility. Decades of colonialism and discrimination have left First Nations people with little will to overcome external meta-stereotyping and appear to have initiated a similar reaction towards non-indigenous people. Trust is a form of social capital. Without trust, risk taking and collective growth do not take place. Pointing and Voyageur (2005) described the realities of this situation:

> Whether it be individuals or institutions, trust is a fundamental building block in any community. There are many reasons why some First Nations communities have experienced a generalized sense of distrust. These include
the examples of the larger society, the residential school experience, the federal government’s betrayal of the spirit of the treaties, strategies of favoritism and of ‘divide and conquer” pursued by Indian agents, nepotism and abuse of power by some First Nations politicians, dysfunctional families, rumor, gossip and conditions of scarcity (p. 435).

Perhaps another reason such mistrust is perpetuated on the local level is the lack of permanence on the part of most of the non-indigenous teachers that are hired, exemplified in their “get in and get out quick” attitude. In Two Rivers and Round Rock, this has created and reinforced feelings of injustice and powerlessness and ultimately distrust and defensiveness on the part of band members toward non-indigenous individuals. Presently there is a lack of First Nations students attaining university teaching degrees and so non-indigenous teachers must fill the void (Statistics Canada, 2006). These non-indigenous teachers do not usually stay more than two years in the community. My research found that this is due, in part, to feelings of exclusion and discrimination. For this reason, Two Rivers and Round Rock have experienced a succession of new teachers. However, with existing attitudes and few resources to improve the teaching experience for recruits, the capacity to attract and keep teachers, indigenous or not, is beyond the bands capability. The will to break this vicious cycle has not transpired thus, reducing the quality of education for the students and impacting their cultural heritage by placing non-indigenous teachers in the classroom. In addition, without the
cooperation of qualified teachers in a cordial and respectful relationship to support the Elders, assist in preparing traditional knowledge curriculum, and incorporate the knowledge into the classroom schedule, implementation of the Education Action Plan will be seriously impeded.

Government Funding and Poverty

According to my research, the communities investigated were typical of most Northwestern Ontario reserves as well as those in other areas and provinces. Two Rivers and Round Rock displayed obvious examples of poverty and need. Since almost all of the monies available to the indigenous communities come from the various levels of government, funding for implementation of the Education Action Plan policy must as well. This will be a major obstacle for success. Historically, funding for First Nations communities and projects has been particularly parsimonious and the system for transferring monies flawed (AFN, 2007; First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, 2005; Libin, 2008). It is no less than astonishing to base an education policy on the improbable actions of bureaucracy. However, in the unlikely scenario that government funding materialized, creating the capacity to move forward with the Education Action Plan, other factors resulting from colonialism’s experience exist in the communities that are likely to prevent successful implementation.
Conclusion

The attempt to include traditional and cultural knowledge in the school curriculum by the Assembly of First Nations may be influenced by a number of tensions that are intense and complex in nature. Colonialism and post-colonialism (defined as the persistent involvement of provincial and federal governments) have weakened the motivation and will of the community members to even attempt, much less accomplish traditional knowledge implementation. The capacity to undertake the endeavour is also unlikely given the minimal funding and the misappropriation of what monies allocated to the communities. In addition, leadership issues and community conflicts present obstacles not easily overcome. To further complicate matters, tensions exist between indigenous teachers who are comfortable in the culture but lack education skills and non-indigenous, certified teachers with inadequate or antagonistic understandings of the First Nations culture and its traditional knowledge. At present, the non-indigenous teachers do not wish to cooperate in curriculum implementation and both groups (indigenous and non-indigenous) often retreat into distrust and stereotyping. This concept of “insiders vs. outsiders” appears to be an unfortunate remnant of colonialism’s actions and indicates that changes to the curricula, taught by non-indigenous teachers educated in the
methods and guidelines of provincial programs may be difficult to accomplish.

On the local level, a lack of will and capacity play out in other areas. Indigenous factions within the communities are unable to compromise on belief and religious issues. The power dynamics in both communities promote conflict over formal and informal authority, creating power issues detrimental to the bands. Further, debate over Elder status and dissonance over learning styles, scheduled lessons and the nature of traditional knowledge are present. These factors will certainly provide resistance to implementation.

The provincial curriculum imposed upon the reserve schools in return for funding, does not allow time for language. Yet, community members do not provide the time outside of school to accommodate this important facet of cultural preservation. As well, both Two Rivers and Round Rock display a lack of will to confront the established, restrictive structures of behaviour that have created a stalemate between traditional knowledge and Christianity. The impetus or will to change the existing circumstances is sadly absent in the communities, a shameful legacy of colonialism’s cultural attack.

The settler assimilation mentality that sought to eradicate the First Nations culture has resulted not only in fewer Elders to convey traditional knowledge but an identity crisis concerning the status of
Elder. The lack of Elders reduces the opportunity of implementing traditional knowledge into the school setting by first restricting the knowledge base and second reducing the number of teacher-guides. As Elders pass on, the capacity to acquire or teach the knowledge essential to attain Elder status becomes inadequate. Further, younger generations, immersed in Western culture, have demonstrated little will to retain or learn traditional values.

In general, Two Rivers and Round Rock members do not seem to have arrived at the capacity to establish long-term goals and consequently settle for immediate gratification. This situation has transpired due to the government approach of providing inconsistent funding. It seems that monies are forthcoming only during times of crisis or if complicated justification requirements are submitted (INAC, 2006). This state of affairs has resulted in the abdication of the will or ability of community members to anticipate or plan for opportunities and it puts the preparation and implementation of the Education Action Plan in jeopardy. The inability of Two Rivers and Round Rock to control their destinies or acquire financial security has given rise to a self-preservationist attitude that opts for immediate goals by manipulating circumstances and available finances. A deficiency in the ability to perceive long-term goals, benefiting the community and its people, displays a lack of will and capacity to foresee opportunities, prepare for
progress, or initiate action. Obviously, if funds are routinely manipulated, the capacity to implement the Education Action Plan, as well as the will or conviction to do so, must be questioned.

Many teachers indicated their lack of commitment to the school and its goals because of poor working conditions that included a shortage of crucial resources, difficulty with special needs students and feelings of discrimination. These factors will also have an impact on any implementation process associated with the Education Action Plan. The teachers must be committed to the new curriculum if it is to be successful and these factors would certainly affect any teacher’s enthusiasm for new initiatives.

Without trust (an aspect of social capital), risk taking, and collective growth will not take place. Decades of colonialism and discrimination have left First Nations people with a great deal of mistrust and suspicion regarding interactions with non-indigenous individuals and these types of misgivings would impinge on the achievement of the Education Action Plan on two fronts. First, the need for finances to support the enterprise would be compromised since funds must come from outside sources or government subsidies. Second, the mostly non-indigenous teachers must accept and assist the implementation in order for it to be successful. Yet, as affairs stand,
there is little will to initiate the teamwork required to obtain funding or bring the teachers on side.

My study intended to establish whether or not colonialism would play out in the implementation of the traditional knowledge aspect of the Education Action Plan and if so, in what areas and in what manner. In answer to this question, it is apparent that colonialism’s contribution to the obstacles that face the traditional knowledge component of the Education Action Plan is extensive and prevents any likelihood of the Plan’s successful implementation. My study revealed that the Assembly of First Nations did not consider many of the difficulties existing in the First Nations communities. Consequently, the Education Action Plan objectives are likely unattainable due to factors resulting from the shameful legacy of colonialism’s cultural attack on the will and capacity of those communities who must implement the goals.
CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the context of two First Nations communities into which the traditional knowledge component of the Education Action Plan would be implemented. To accomplish this task, the conceptual framework focused on McLaughlin’s meta-analysis of policy implementation. McLaughlin’s investigation demonstrated that success is impacted by the will and capacity of those responsible for effecting a policy’s application. I sought to determine if any tensions (or complexities) existed, as a result of colonialism, that might influence the will and capacity of the communities in the study to achieve the traditional knowledge goals the Education Action Plan.

Chapter One presented an historical overview of the First Nations and furnished details regarding legislation, political decisions, and significant events that result in the need to enact the Education Action Plan. This policy, authorized by the Assembly of First Nations, intended to preserve the rich traditions of the indigenous people through an education that strengthened the First Nations identity by incorporating cultural and traditional knowledge into reserve school curriculum.

Chapter Two provided the groundwork of literature for this study. It not only identified schools that have successfully incorporated First Nations cultural and traditional knowledge into curriculum, but also
examined why success has been meager. This chapter was divided into two sections. The first section contained the descriptions of successful applications of traditional knowledge and culture curriculum in First Nations schools throughout North America. The second part of the literature review provided insight into complexities associated with successful implementation of traditional knowledge into curriculum. Literature pertaining to these complexities was organized around nine main factors that provided the greatest barriers to implementation success.

These nine factors tended to focus on issues associated with colonialism and its impact on the First Nations people. The factors were categorized into three sets. Cultural issues are found to be language and a definition of knowledge and acceptance conflicts. Community issues include Elders, funding and special needs. School issues are comprised of teachers, conflicting education schemas and learning styles. The literature suggested that these complexities, as outcomes of colonialism, would influence the will and capacity of individuals in First Nations communities if they attempted to implement traditional knowledge. While the literature revealed few examples of successful school implementation, the bank of literature regarding difficulties associated with traditional knowledge implementation was adequate to form a framework on which to base this study.
The original nine issues were gleaned from literature and distilled into factors that were consistent with my research findings. These include: (1) language, (2) leadership and community dilemmas, (3) religious beliefs, (4) Elders, (5) renewing indigenous culture, (6) meta-stereotyping, and (7) government funding. Each of these issues was found to have an effect on the implementation of the Education Action Plan.

In creating the conceptual framework, colonialism and the consequential complexities gleaned from literature were used to illustrate McLaughlin’s investigation of policy implementation concerning traditional knowledge and the Education Action Plan. This study demonstrated how the imposition of colonialism on First Nations people ultimately distorted their life style and left them, in many instances, without the will, capacity, or commitment to alter their circumstances. McLaughlin’s investigation of policy explained difficulties associated with implementation and the links between policy makers and those who must put the policy into practice. Her meta-analysis provided the foundation on which my thesis was established. My study investigated, using interviews and questionnaires, how colonialism affected and shaped the actions and responses of various people in First Nations communities to the intended goals of the Education Action Plan and the re-establishment of traditional
knowledge in community schools. The two communities chosen, Two Rivers and Round Rock, exemplified the tensions and complexities associated with traditional knowledge and the residuals of colonialism. The 32 members interviewed in the two communities provided insightful data and new understandings concerning traditional knowledge and circumstances surrounding the lives of First Nations people on isolated reserves. The perspectives shared by these individuals offered the context for the study and presented new acuity regarding the influence of colonialism on traditional knowledge and the relationships, beliefs and behaviours of the community members. This study demonstrated that a close connection between colonialism and the will and capacity of the First Nations people exists. This has produced a severe cultural distortion and diminished First Nations people’s ability to provide direction for themselves. This fact will have a profound effect on the Education Action Plan implementation.

The Education Action Plan intends to rescue and reenergize the First Nations culture. Further, its goals are to foster individual self-esteem and pride in one’s ethnicity, a characteristic that is inextricably linked to group identity (Drapeau, 1995; Fishman, 1991). In order to accomplish this task, the setting into which the Plan will be implemented must be dynamic. My research determined that factors exist within the communities that will influence and in all likelihood
defeat this enterprise. These factors are outcomes of colonialism and include conflict of belief systems, reduced Elder authority, lack of uniformly-accepted traditional knowledge, meta-stereotyping, leadership and community dilemmas and a lack of resources.

Research Limitations and Significance

Clearly, there are limitations to the study. The study is restricted to two communities and additional research needs to be undertaken on other reserves. However, the findings do add to the knowledge of the resulting effects of colonialism. The significance of this study is contained in the research of the seven factors that have resulted in a disintegration or loss of will and capacity in remote communities.

The findings however, need to be interpreted with care since the results cannot be generalized to all First Nations communities. Nevertheless, a few suggestions on the possibility of success of the traditional knowledge component of the Education Action Plan in Northwestern Ontario can be garnered.

Recommendations for Implementation

The success of any policy depends on a clear identification of the goals to be accomplished as well as the instruments or means of achievement to be employed. The Education Action Plan is missing a most crucial element: the means of achievement. Although the plan provides general guidelines, the lack of concrete strategies precludes
their use as implementation procedures. What would happen if government funding was allocated and Elders did recognize and agree to their role in the policy implementation? This study finds that problems would still exist concerning the will and capacity to achieve success. A pressing dilemma is the intent of its makers to leave the interpretation and execution in the hands of the individual communities. This is a valid approach to policy implementation, known as ‘bottom-up,’ and while it is advocated by a number of educators, the tensions disclosed in this research indicate that little would be accomplished if this method were employed. Clune (1990) identified this concern by saying, “[t]he first and most policy-oriented question is how context mediates policy outcomes” (pg.257). Regardless of how the traditional knowledge component of the Education Action Plan is formulated, the schools, teachers and the communities will exercise an extraordinary amount of discretion regarding its implementation. The circumstances are such that the policy will be molded by the total environment, providing opportunity for what Clune (1990) refers to as “benign subversion.” In the communities I studied, these subversions are comprised of the seven factors uncovered by my research.

In order to build shared networks or negotiate for power and resources, there must not only be a sense of conviction, but assets and abilities. Unfortunately, communities like Two Rivers and Round Rock
have little of either. Further, colonialism has reduced the ability to cooperate with individuals outside of the community, creating cautious feelings toward anyone who is not a band member or at least a person of First Nations heritage. On the reserve, the concept of village has created a reliance on family first. In turn, this situation has generated factionalism and competition for the few resources and opportunities, creating more controversy and hindering cooperative efforts. In order to implement traditional knowledge successfully, the whole community must contribute; this requires working with outsiders and putting aside differences to create a consensus toward the policy goals.

My research revealed the three levels of government and a fourth informal authority network would complicate the implementation process. In addition, the conflicting viewpoints, belief structures, and meta-stereotyping at work within the communities have produced mistrust and anxiety. I found loyalties and alliances were fluid and allegiance and power seemed to ebb and flow along family, religious, elected, and historical networks.

The Assembly of First Nations has undertaken a task with ideals, while noble in theory, are unworkable in practice. Conditions in the communities, largely related to colonialism, will preclude achieving consensus regarding implementation of traditional knowledge and thereby prevent success of the Education Action Plan.
Recommendations for Further Research

This study was undertaken to ascertain the environment into which the traditional knowledge aspect of the Education Action Plan would be implemented. In addition, it sought to determine the impact colonialism might have on that setting, most notably in regard to the will and capacity of its citizens. After talking with the residents and reviewing the literature, this study found additional research is required. This includes a comprehensive review of the funding structure and equity of funding distribution in First Nations communities is necessary. A longitudinal study to verify the successful implementation of the Education Action Plan is recommended.

Conclusion

This study provided insight into the daily life of a reserve community and the impact of colonialism on the culture, character, will, and capacity of First Nations members to self-actualize and succeed. With the imposition of colonialism came the loss of the spirit of the people in many First Nations communities and an undermining of the will to become engaged in the potential enrichment and preservation of the indigenous culture. Rules and regulations forced on indigenous people by indifferent governments that sought to conquer and incorporate the First Nations people have left them with few resources
on which to build capacity and little power to control their destiny and preserve their history.

This investigation, framed by McLaughlin’s (1987) policy analysis, viewed successful policy implementation from colonialism’s impact on will and capacity. The study sought to establish whether or not colonialism plays out in the implementation of the traditional knowledge aspect of the Education Action Plan and if so, in what areas and in what manner. It is readily apparent that colonialism’s contribution to the many impediments that face the traditional knowledge component of the Education Action Plan is extensive and reduces the likelihood of the Plan’s successful implementation.
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June 3, 2004

Chief XXXXXXX
XXXXX First Nation
P.O. Box 100
XXXXX, ON

Dear XXXXXXXX,

I am a graduate student in the theory & Policy Studies in Education Department at OISE/UT and am currently planning a research project that will involve the schools of the First Nations communities in Northwestern Ontario.

The purpose of the study is to research various communities’ procedures and processes of instilling community curriculum, most notably the inclusion of community or traditional knowledge. Two communities will be chosen for the study that will include speaking to the Chief, Band Council, Education Council, Community members, Principal and Teachers.

The study involves the use of pre-interview questionnaires for the teachers and Principal in which the Staff are asked about their opinions, competencies, abilities and perceptions of including traditional knowledge into the curriculum. An interview will then follow to elaborate on the responses given. Questionnaires will also be distributed to the Chief, Band Council and Education Council members. It is hoped that a community meeting might be arranged to obtain opinions of the general public.

Those participating will be well informed about the nature of the study and their involvement, including the assurance that they may withdraw at any time. Participants will at no time be judged or evaluated on their comments and will not be identified within the thesis.

The information gathered will be kept in strict confidence and stored in a secure location. All information will be reported in such a way that the individual persons or schools or communities cannot be identified. All data collected will be used for the purpose of the D.Ed. thesis and perhaps for subsequent research articles. All raw data (audiotapes, transcripts or notes) will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study. It is understood that total confidential is not possible since the communities are small and many will be aware of the study, I can offer however, the reassurance that individual comments cannot be traced. This will be accomplished by removing all references to the individual, community, position held, grade, or gender.

Would it be possible to survey or interview you, the band and educational councils as well as the principal and teachers? This would take no more than 15 to 30 minutes for questionnaires, 20 to 40 minutes for interviews and one community meeting that would last approximately 2 hours. This would help my research tremendously.

If you agree, please sign the letter below and return it to me in the envelope provided. If you have any questions, please contact me at (807) 475-5750 or (807) 473-3718. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Nina Bascia at (416) 923-6641, ext. 2311. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and support. Please retain one copy of this letter for your records.

Sincerely,

Martha Spence
Appendix B

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto
252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M5S 1V6
Telephone: (416) 923-6641

April 3, 2004

Permission to use data from surveys and/or interviews

I ________________________________ (please print name) agree that the data and information obtained by Martha Spence through interviews, questionnaires or observation may be used for the purpose of doctoral research.

I realize that no names or distinguishing information will be used in the thesis that might allow identification of any single person, institution or community.

All information obtained for this research will be held in strictest confidence and no part will be used without the permission that I freely give by signing this form.

______________________________
(Signature)
Appendix C

Enclosure:

OUTLINE OF ACTIVITIES

1. Meeting the Chair of the Education Advisory Council

2. Meeting with Chief and Council to distribute questionnaires and informal opinion session.

3. Meeting with Education Advisory Council to distribute questionnaires and opinion session.


5. Community meeting to determine curriculum needs.

6. Make up interviews and collection of questionnaires.
Appendix D

Dear Participants,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research on school curriculum, community traditions, and knowledge. I am very grateful that you have agreed to be interviewed regarding your opinions and ideas.

I will be meeting with each of the teachers, principals and advisory chairs for one hour at some point in the next three days. I have obtained a schedule of your spare prep time and will be posting a list of times for interviews in the teachers’ lounge. If the arranged time is not convenient for you please let either me or the secretary know. I will be happy to meet whenever you are available.

The interview will take approximately one hour and will follow the questions outlined on the interview sheet. These interviews are informal, so please feel free to ask questions or offer information not necessarily covered in the hand out. The interviews will be taped and a copy of the transcript will be sent to you for editing.

I have been given space within the school to conduct the interviews, either in a room in the principal’s office or the staff lounge so if you need to speak with me, I can be found there. Thank you again for your assistance.

Marty Spence
Appendix E

Questionnaire for Teachers

1. How important is it to have the school offer indigenous knowledge?

2. If you feel it is necessary, in what format should the knowledge be taught? (Separate classes, incorporated into the course work, extracurricular activities)

3. As a teacher, could or would you rewrite lesson plans in order to accommodate the knowledge?

4. Would or could you teach the knowledge if provided with the content and outline?

5. Would or could you prepare the content and outline?

6. What do you feel should be included as “traditional knowledge”?

7. How do you feel the information should be presented? (Explain how you would create a lesson plan in this situation.)
8. Where and how do you feel the knowledge should be incorporated into the days schedule?

9. How much time should be allotted to indigenous knowledge per day? Per week? Why?

10. How do you feel personally about including indigenous knowledge into the curriculum?

11. Do you believe including the indigenous content will benefit the students? How or why?

12. Do you believe including the indigenous content will benefit the community? How or why?

13. Do you believe the indigenous content is a necessity or a luxury or somewhere in between? Why?
14. Is there any specific information that you believe should be included? Anything that you feel is very important to include?

15. If you feel indigenous knowledge should be included, is there any content that might be excluded in order to accommodate it?

16. Are you a member of the community or hired from outside? What has been your teaching experience in the school and community?
Appendix F

Questionnaire for the Band Council

Please answer as completely as possible

1) How satisfied are you with the quality of education your children are receiving in the school? What changes would you make, if any?

2) How satisfied are you with the amount of traditional and cultural knowledge available in the school? What changes, if any would you like to see happen?

3) What activities would you like to see funded in the school? Where and what changes would you make (if any)?

4) How are Educational Council members’ chosen?

5) What input did the Council have in the curriculum of the school? Do you feel you should have input? What do you believe your role is concerning the school curriculum?

6) How satisfied do you believe the community is with the school facilities? Why do you believe this?
7) How satisfied do you believe the community is with the curriculum? Why do you believe this?

8) Who do you feel should teach traditional knowledge and culture? Does it belong in the classroom? Why or why not?

9) Are there Elders teaching this knowledge now or are there Elders available to teach this knowledge in the future?

10) As Council members would you be able and available to teach the knowledge?

11) What other ways could the community as a whole pass on its history, culture and traditions? Is any being done?
Appendix G

Questionnaire for the Educational Advisory Board

1) Has the community indicated a need for traditional knowledge and culture to be incorporated into the curriculum? How do you know this?

2) What are some of the issues that have been discussed concerning traditional and cultural knowledge?

3) Who will/or has decided what content is included in the curriculum? Does it include traditional and cultural knowledge? How was this decided?

4) How is/or will be the knowledge and culture be incorporated into the classroom?

5) What other information or cultural, religious, geographical or traditional is/or will be included?

6) Who will/is teaching the information? Do you believe they will or are doing an adequate job in passing the information to the students? Why?

7) Are there currently other means of teaching traditional knowledge and culture to the children (outside of the school)? If so what are they and how successful do you believe it is?

8) Has there been controversy or do you expect controversy over what knowledge to include and how it is taught?

9) Is the Band Council involved the Educational Council activities? If the answer is yes, how are they involved?
10) How are learning difficulties and special needs students accommodated?

11) Do you have adequate funding to provide the necessary learning materials and environment?

12) Does anyone have an informal (not officially their job) say into the school curriculum and activities?

13) How do the Elders take an active role in the school?

14) As an Educational Council member could/would you teach traditional knowledge and culture to the students? Do you know anyone who could teach the information?

15) Do you have trouble with teacher recruitment and retention? Why or why not?
Appendix H

Interview Questions for Teachers

1) Is traditional knowledge and culture included in the curriculum? If so how is it taught? If there is no traditional knowledge, what do you believe should be included?

2) How would you approach inclusion of traditional knowledge and culture in the classroom and curriculum?

3) Did you or will you have input into the curriculum? In what manner was or will the traditional knowledge become parts of the curriculum?

4) What supplies are needed to adequately teach both the Ontario Provincial curriculum traditional knowledge? Do you have adequate resources or funding? Please explain.

5) How are special needs and learning challenges handled in the school?

6) What type of responses do parents make regarding students performance, attendance and behaviour?

7) Are you a member of the community? Do you feel a sense of belonging to the general community? Can you provide examples of the rapport?

8) Do you feel a part of the school community? Can you provide examples of the rapport?

9) Is there good rapport among the teachers and principal? The school and community?

10) Does an informal hierarchy exist within the school or among the staff? Does a hierarchy exist in the community as well? Why do you believe this? Does it hinder or help the teaching process, school supplies or administration? Can you provide examples?

11) Did you have professional development recently? If so what was offered?

12) How satisfied are you with your work situation? What would you keep and what would you change?
Appendix I

Interview Questions for Principal

1) Is the Ontario curriculum followed in the school or does the school have its own? What percentage of Ontario curriculum is taught versus community content curriculum?

2) How does the school interact with the community elders?

3) Does the school include traditional knowledge and culture in the curriculum and if so what types of lessons or lesson plans are used?

4) If there is no traditional knowledge and culture in the curriculum, are you planning to include it? How will it be incorporated and the content determined?

5) If there is no traditional culture and knowledge in the school what means are available to pass this information on?

6) Are there cultural differences among the teachers or between the teachers or the students? What benefits or problems does this present?

7) How satisfied are you with the quality of teachers within the school?

8) How easy or difficult is the recruiting process?

9) How does your school accommodate students with learning difficulties or special needs?

10) How adequate is the school budget for your needs?

11) What type of responses do parents make regarding student performance, attendance and behaviour?

12) What is the response by parents to school events?

13) How well do school policies and procedures fit into the school community? Did everyone have input into the policies and does everyone involved follow them?

14) Have the teachers participated in staff development recently? How were choices made as to who would receive development and what would be offered?

15) Is there good rapport among the teachers? Teachers and principal? School and community? Please give examples.

16) How strongly does the community feel about having traditional knowledge in the curriculum? Are Elders or community leaders ever invited to the school?
Appendix J

Interview Questions for Elders

1) How does a person become an Elder?

2) What are the duties of an Elder?

3) How are Elder duties performed?

4) Are you ever invited to the school to talk with the students or teachers?

5) Would you be able to teach your knowledge to the students in the school?

6) Has the respect for Elders changed in the community? How are you treated by the community?

7) Where or when are you most often asked for advice or knowledge?

8) What changes do you think should take place in the school? In the community?

9) How important do you feel Elders are to the culture? To the community?
Appendix K

Quick Permission Form

I give Martha Spence permission to use information, which I have made available to her both in questionnaires and interviews, for her research. I understand that the information will be used in such an anonymous manner that no distinctions can later be made as to the identity of the contributor or the community from which it came.

Signature:

Printed Name:

Additional follow up information might possibly be necessary in the future. If you would like to provide an address where you can be reached, it would be greatly appreciated. Please add the information below and feel comfortable that it will also be held in the strictest of confidence.

Thank you very much for the contribution you have made to my research—I really appreciate the time and effort you have taken to help me.
Appendix L

Cover Letter for Transcript Editing

November 30, 2005

Dear Participants:

First I wish to thank you for your involvement—I learned a great deal from you and went away with a clearer understanding of the achievements you have made and the future goals you have set for yourself. It was an honour to meet each and every one of you.

Please excuse the length of time it has taken to transcribe the interview, but in all I ended up with some twenty hours of tape and it took me quite awhile to turn that into a hard copy! I have enclosed a transcript of my interview with you. It is in general letterform because it was easier to type that way. Your comments are in bold italics while mine are in regular print. The first time you read this you will be struck by sentences left unfinished, interruptions and comments seemingly out of context. Don’t worry—that is how everyone talks and I have just transcribed our words exactly as said. In places I had difficulty catching words (even after listening four or five times) so if you can fill in those areas it would be appreciated.

After reading the transcriptions—if you have any changes to make or any additional comments to add—please feel free. I have enclosed an envelope to return the transcription and by simply returning it you will have again agreed that I can use the material as it is written. It is necessary to have the transcripts returned so that I can proceed with my dissertation research. Remember my paper will be written in such a way that no community or individual can be identified, not even by gender.

When this is finally done I will send you a copy of my paper—it will be some months though!

I have enclosed a small gift for you to thank you for your help and the kindness that was shown to me.

Sincerely,
Appendix M

Highlights of the Education Action Plan

FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION ACTION PLAN
MAY 31, 2005

VISION
The vision of a First Nations Education Action Plan is the development and implementation of sustainable education systems under the full control and jurisdiction of First Nations based on the recognition of inherent Aboriginal and treaty rights, and under international law.

THE DIRECTION FORWARD
First Nation peoples live and work in a knowledge-based society and economy that requires them to be adaptable and resilient lifelong learners. To prepare First Nations for the realities of the 21st century, fundamental changes to First Nations education must become a priority. This includes the recognition of First Nations jurisdiction over education at all levels: from Early Childhood Development (ECD) through to Post Secondary Education (PSE), including skills development and adult education. To do so means that the Government of Canada must commit to the funding of First Nations education to the degree that the educational gap is rapidly closed and educational outcomes meet and exceed those of the general Canadian population. This funding must take into account the unique factors affecting First Nation peoples including:

- Education that embodies and supports the strengthening of a First Nation’s identity through an emphasis on language, cultural and traditional knowledge, and the effective reincorporation of First Nation elders and women in educating younger generations;
- Adequate and sustainable investment in education as a key to the successful development of vibrant First Nations governments and economies; and
- A First Nations education infrastructure that meets the needs of First Nations peoples and communities on a lifelong learning continuum that includes ECD, K-12, PSE and all forms of skills development and adult learning.
These elements are premised on empowering First Nations communities to take control of their education. Where the AFN advocates for the recognition of First Nations jurisdiction over education at a national level, the negotiation of what this will mean must take place at the community and regional levels. Similarly, where the AFN lobbies nationally for the allocation of funds that are adequate and sustainable, how these funds are used by communities and regions must be determined at that level. First Nations education must be developed from the community up. In order to be meaningful and relevant, education solutions must be developed by communities. The AFN’s role involves supporting First Nation communities and regions through the coordination of national policy development initiatives, and by advocating on behalf of First Nations in the national context. Therefore, First Nations communities must be involved in key political processes, the development of funding and other administrative mechanisms, allocation methodologies, and the implementation of all policies relating to education.

First Nations communities must have the means to participate fully in the learning of their children by integrating the cultural, traditional, spiritual, physical, emotional and social well being of the learner in an holistic approach to education. This will ensure that First Nations education remains effective and relevant. Funding is needed to support the implementation of autonomous First Nations education systems over the next 3 years. By providing First Nations with the jurisdiction and funding to manage their own affairs, First Nation communities will be able to coordinate their efforts, learn from their challenges, and build upon successes.

As indicated in the AFN’s Pre-Budget Submission (2004), an immediate investment of at least $3.9 billion over five years is required in such areas as:
• The Band Operated Funding Formula (BOFF) to address areas of high need that are greatly under-funded in the present context;
• Cultural and languages programming for First Nations;
• Special Education to meet current shortfalls in the Federal Budget (2005);
• Capital, operations and maintenance for First Nations schools;
• Teacher salaries to account for the gap between teachers’ salaries in First Nations schools and those in provincial schools;
• PSE to address the enormous funding gap that has been created by the 2% INAC funding cap and a 400% increase in tuition since 1988;
• Support for the development of First Nation Institutions of Higher Learning that are
controlled by First Nations peoples; and
• The elimination of taxation on PSE assistance.

CONCLUSIONS
Unless the government immediately fulfils its responsibility to provide adequate and sustainable funding for education, health care and housing to First Nations, we risk perpetuating the unjust social and economic conditions of First Nations peoples for another generation. Under this scenario, rather than contributing to the social and economic fabric that makes up Canada or furthering the work of contemporary First Nations leaders working to resolve the longstanding challenges facing First Nations, the next generation may actually become more alienated and less able to participate in Canadian society.