ABORIGINAL STUDENT PERSISTENCE AND SUCCESS
IN ONTARIO COLLEGES

by

Christa Dawn Iacovino Hinds

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Leadership, Adult and Higher Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Christa Dawn Iacovino Hinds 2014
ABORIGINAL STUDENT PERSISTENCE AND SUCCESS
IN ONTARIO COLLEGES
Doctor of Philosophy 2014
Christa Dawn Iacovino Hinds
Graduate Department of Leadership, Adult and Higher Education
University of Toronto

Abstract

This study relies on a mixed method research approach with a focus on qualitative research including open-ended, semi-structured interviews at Aboriginal Resource Centres in three colleges in Ontario. Interviews were conducted with 31 participants engaged with Aboriginal Resource Centres, including Aboriginal students, staff and Elders. Participants spoke about their interactions with the Ontario college system including their positive and negative experiences. The research process is also informed by an in-depth analysis of various studies and reports regarding Aboriginal peoples, education and enrolment statistics from the 24 Ontario colleges. The overall data analysis and interpretation includes insight from all of these data sources.

The research is guided by a two-eyed seeing approach (Iwama, Marshall, Marshall, & Barlett, 2009) that respects a combination of Western and Aboriginal worldviews; however, a concerted effort has been made to honour Indigenous paradigms thus, at times, this minimizes the inclusion of traditional Euro-centric views and methodology. Nevertheless, parallels were drawn between Euro-centric student development and engagement theories and Indigenous paradigms to provide insight into how postsecondary institutions can support Aboriginal students and create a safe and welcoming environment on campus for all Aboriginal peoples.
An Ojibwe Anishinabe Elder recognized by her community provided guidance throughout the research process. She allies with students connecting them to traditional protocols and shares authentic Indigenous teachings. Further, to respect the place of Aboriginal voices, a collection of Elder reflections describes a vision for Aboriginal education, and specifically postsecondary education.

The conclusions drawn from the study suggest that many colleges in Canada, and Ontario, are helping Aboriginal students obtain a postsecondary credential. Colleges are creating a supportive and welcoming environment and Aboriginal Resource Centres are helping students connect with their communities, institutions and Aboriginal cultures. In spite of this success, many Aboriginal students do not reach postsecondary education. Many Aboriginal students are not engaging with these centres and Aboriginal peoples continue to experience racism on campus. The findings indicate that true collaboration and meaningful consultation with Aboriginal communities is needed to “Indigenize” the campuses.
Acknowledgements

The list of people to thank is almost too numerous to list. First, I thank my extended family that has understood over all the years (and credentials) when I have missed or cut short my appearance at family events because “I have to work on school”. Of course, I must acknowledge my incredible husband, Dean Hinds, because he provided unwavering support and encouragement. In his mind there was no question that I would complete this journey and his pride in me gave me the strength to endure.

I want to acknowledge my late grandmother Mary Heaton (née Maria Fezekas) who was one of my biggest cheerleaders who would ask for weekly updates and be genuinely interested in the small details of the process. I did it Gram!

Words cannot express my gratitude for Shelley Charles. Through this journey we have become family. Shelley, I have learned so much from you and the other kind Elders who guided me that it has changed me forever. I cannot see the world in the same way that I did before and I thank you for sharing your knowledge with me. Chi Meegwetch!

From an academic perspective, there have been many gentle souls who have provided guidance to help me reach this goal. They shared the lessons from their PhD journeys’ to ensure I would complete mine in a memorable and positive way. More specifically, my thesis supervisor, Dr. Charles Pascal, allowed me to stretch the confines of Euro-centric beliefs and honour Indigenous paradigms while I explored my own ancestry and tried to “Indigenize” my own thoughts.
I would like to thank my thesis committee members, Dr. Linda Muzzin and Dr. Tricia Seifert for their insights. They provided encouraging, timely and important feedback that kept me thinking critically and focused on my research.

My Humber family has been incredible. I could not have done this without you. Moreover, I need to recognize the support of Deb McCarthy who single-handedly redefines the very definition of support! You are amazing Deb.

My CCL colleagues, our name says it all. IT TAKES A COHORT. And a special thank you to Nancey Adamson, who embarked on this journey with me after we decided that our Masters degrees were not enough.

James Hamilton, you not only came through in time of need, but you offered critical support and interest in my entire journey that truly defines friendship.

Finally, I extend a warmest thank you to all the participants who shared their time, the experiences and their stories with me. Without your stories, my research would be incomplete. Your interest in participating demonstrates your courage, persistence, and respect for your traditional beliefs. Your words inspire me that we are on the right path to making a difference. I wish you well in your future successes because I have no doubt that you will all achieve your goals.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................................................................ iv

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND PERSONAL CONTEXT .......... 1

Background and Statement of the Problem .................................................................................................................. 4
  Accepting Responsibility .............................................................................................................................................. 10
Purpose of the Research ............................................................................................................................................... 13
Theoretical Framework of the Research ...................................................................................................................... 14
On A Personal Note .................................................................................................................................................. 16
  Coyote Goes to School .............................................................................................................................................. 21
A Note on Terminology ............................................................................................................................................... 24
My Approach to the Research .................................................................................................................................. 26
  Outline of the Thesis ................................................................................................................................................ 27

## CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ................................. 30

Creating Barriers .......................................................................................................................................................... 32
Canada’s Assimilationist History .................................................................................................................................. 36
Accountability in Canada .............................................................................................................................................. 40
Global Human Rights Policy ...................................................................................................................................... 49
United Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples ................................................................................................ 51
Access and Its Link to Racism .................................................................................................................................. 54
A Holistic View of Education ..................................................................................................................................... 59
Funding .............................................................................................................................................................................. 67
Treaty Rights ................................................................................................................................................................. 74
Self-Determination and Sovereignty .......................................................................................................................... 82
Summary ......................................................................................................................................................................... 87

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY ................................................. 89

Research Design and Methodology .............................................................................................................................. 92
Ethical Issues and Considerations ............................................................................................................................... 96
Interview Sites and Participant Selection .................................................................................................................. 99
Data Collection and Recording ................................................................................................................................... 104
Interview and Survey Questions ................................................................................................................................ 105
Establishing Credibility .............................................................................................................................................. 106
Interview Data Analysis ............................................................................................................................................ 107
Methodological Assumptions ..................................................................................................................................... 108
# Table of Contents

**CHAPTER FOUR: THE STORY BEHIND ABORIGINAL ENROLMENT STATISTICS IN ONTARIO COLLEGES** ................................................................. 111

- Aboriginal Student Enrolment in Ontario Colleges .......................................................... 113
- Interpretation with Caution .................................................................................................. 121
- Euro-centric Student Success Theories .............................................................................. 123
  - The College Access Mandate ....................................................................................... 125
  - Retention and Engagement Theories .......................................................................... 126
  - Organizational Design ................................................................................................. 129
  - A Holistic Yet Individualized Approach ...................................................................... 132

**CHAPTER FIVE: STUDENT AND STAFF EXPERIENCES IN THREE ONTARIO COLLEGES** ................................................................. 135

- Demographic Data .............................................................................................................. 135
- The Meanings of Student Success for Participants ............................................................ 138
- Reported Influences on Student Program Choice ............................................................... 143
- Centrality of Aboriginal Student Services ....................................................................... 146
- Frequency of Use .............................................................................................................. 154
- Advocacy and Building Community ............................................................................... 155
- Decolonization ................................................................................................................... 159
- Racism and the Aboriginal Student Experience ................................................................. 161
- Interview Analysis Summary ............................................................................................ 171

**CHAPTER SIX: INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORTS FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENTS** ................................................................. 174

- Changing Aboriginal Education Policy ............................................................................. 174
- Creating and Measuring Positive Impact .......................................................................... 181
- Frameworks for Aboriginal Student Success .................................................................... 185
- PSE Related Recommendations .......................................................................................... 197
  - Holistic Learning ........................................................................................................... 199
  - Funding .......................................................................................................................... 203
  - Role Modeling ................................................................................................................. 204
  - Community Through Indigenization ........................................................................... 205
  - Orientation and Transition ......................................................................................... 208
  - Access Pathways ........................................................................................................... 209
  - A Collaborative Approach ......................................................................................... 211
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER SEVEN: MOVING TOWARDS MORE ABORIGINAL STUDENT SUCCESS</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Reflections</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Considerations and Research</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elders' Reflections and Vision of Education</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKS CITED</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1 Acronyms .................................................................................................................. 26
Table 2 First Nation Students Enrolled in Grade 12 or Grade 13, Canada ............... 61
Table 3 Educational Attainment, Population Aged 25-64, Canada and Ontario ...... 64
Table 4 Comparative Information on Elementary and Secondary Education, 2000.. 66
Table 5 Educational Attainment, non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal Populations........... 112
Table 6 Lifetime Economic Benefits of Postsecondary Education .............................. 113
Table 7 Student and Aboriginal Enrolment in Ontario Colleges, Fall 2008-10 .... 115
Table 8 Aboriginal Student Enrolment Ranked by College, Fall 2010 ...................... 118
Table 9 Aboriginal Student Enrolment in Ontario Colleges, Fall 2010.................... 119
Table 10 Aboriginal Educational Attainment in Canada, 2011 ............................... 120
Table 11 Profile of Student Participants ............................................................................ 138

List of Figures

Figure 1. A Métis Ancestry is Born .................................................................................. 17
Figure 2. Historic Treaty-Making in Canada ................................................................. 78
List of Appendices

Appendix A Interview and Survey Questions .............................................................. 245
Appendix B Approval Letter for Other Ethics Boards ................................................. 247
Appendix C Contact Letter/Script .............................................................................. 249
Appendix D (a) Interview Recruitment Poster .......................................................... 251
Appendix D (b) Interview Recruitment Poster – Version Two ................................. 252
Appendix E Informed Consent Letter for Student Participants .............................. 253
Appendix F Informed Consent Letter for Elder/Staff Participants ............................. 256
Appendix G Feedback Letter to Elders ..................................................................... 259
Appendix H Feedback Letter to Participants on Research – Final Thesis ............. 261
CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION AND PERSONAL CONTEXT

Many observers have noted the relationship that underpins the interactions between Canada and the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island (North America).

Hundreds of years of colonization have taken their toll and resulted in what some call the “destruction of identities, languages and cultures of First Nations children” (Brant Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2008), the “extermination” of a people (Berger, 1995), a “cultural genocide” (Brade, Duncan, & Sokal, 2003; Thomas, 2010; Neu & Therrein, 2005) or “linguistic genocide“ (lehnhotonkwas & Maracle, 2002; Brant Castellano et al. 2008). Genocide is a powerful word, taken seriously upon recollection of Rwanda, Cambodia and the Holocaust. The United Nations (2010) has defined genocide as “the deliberate and systemic extermination of an ethnic, racial, religious or national group” (p. i). According to the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP, 1996), the process of colonization claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands Indigenous peoples in Canada. The RCAP (1996) states that an estimated Indigenous population of 500,000 in Canada plunged to 102,000 people between the time of first contact and the first census in 1871.

The ramifications that followed the systemic desecration of a cohort of people, including their culture, require decades to heal. In a presentation I attended with Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada (personal communication, April 6, 2011), I asked him if what happened in Canada, specifically the colonization of Indigenous peoples was in his opinion genocide. He referred me to the aforementioned United Nations definition and said the official stance of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission states that the Indian Residential
School system (IRS) in Canada is classified as genocide. This genocide has resulted in the First Peoples of Canada being subjected to Euro-centric imperialism that has manifested through cycles of low attainment levels of education, poverty and abuse (Mendelson, 2008; Berger, 1995). Centuries of pain have summoned the use of alcohol and drugs. Brant Castellano et al. (2008) suggest that the substance abuse, although it has come at disastrous costs, is an attempt to change the quality and experiences of life for Indigenous peoples. This history is not something Canada is proud to bear and consequently in 2008, Stephen Harper, the Prime Minister of Canada, issued a formal apology to Aboriginal peoples for the legacy of the IRS system.

Understanding the past is crucial to understanding the current context, and we must acknowledge this history has intentionally created barriers Aboriginal students are facing today. Colonization is not over and research suggests it is the root cause of many challenges in Aboriginal communities today (Lavallee & Poole, 2010). For students, hundreds of years of oppression preface their struggle for financial resources, role models, academic preparedness and against racism, discrimination and a devaluation of Indigenous pride (Hunt, Lalonde, & Rondeau, 2010).

First, this thesis begins with how the Canadian government systemically embarked upon enacting Lt. Richard Henry Pratt’s vision to kill the Indian in the child (Steckley & Cummins, 2008). I discuss how Canada failed to uphold treaty obligations to provide education to Aboriginal peoples (Carr-Stewart & Steeves, 2009; University of Toronto, 2009; National Indian Brotherhood, 1972; McDonald & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2010; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Carr-Stewart, 2006; Neu & Therrein, 2005). I examine the role Canada’s colleges should play given their mandate to provide accessible
education (Dennison & Gallagher, 1986), especially given the colleges’ perceived success at providing attainable postsecondary education (PSE) for Aboriginal students (Finnie, Childs, & Wismer, 2011).

This study makes a journey through the process of colonization, including the atrocities of the IRS system and Canadian legislation that was positioned to dehumanize the “Indian”; yet the research and the conclusion of this study focuses on solutions that are helping Aboriginal peoples succeed in postsecondary education. In honouring narrative and personal stories, I present to you a story Russell Noganosh told me during a chance meeting at Humber College Institute of Technology & Advanced Learning (personal communication, March 31, 2012). After hearing Russell’s story, I told him about my research and asked his permission to share his story. He agreed. Although Russell is now a renowned Aboriginal artist and talented traditional dancer, he has survived and overcome a gruesome past. On March 31, 2012, Russell’s visit to Humber marked a pleasant occasion but a glaze came over his eyes as he distanced himself from the present and revisited his childhood memories. He was separated from his family by the Canadian government and forced into a foster care situation that turned abusive. In this new home, his foster parent threatened his life at the mere age of nine. He wished so much to be out of the house that at the age of 14 he was hunting in the woods for his own food – a squirrel, a bird – anything was better than returning to his “home”. Eventually he left to find his brother, who was living in another foster home in a distant Canadian city, and Russell never returned to the abuse. This story was moving, emotionally
heart wrenching and important to retell. It brings a personal and individual perspective to the historical past and it demonstrates that the history I speak of is still alive in the present day. The impact is current and healing is ongoing.

I write to you in the second person and I use the first person for myself because you and I must be involved. I am honouring traditional Indigenous thought that envisions a connectedness to the person and always seeks to involve the community. This is a joined journey as we seek to bring solutions to a century’s old issue sparked by colonization.

**Background and Statement of the Problem**

I have already touched on the legacy of colonization in Canada, so I shall continue from an economic perspective. As countries firmly move into the information age which embraces human capital and knowledge based economies, there is discourse on an increasing need for qualified credentialed employees (Lennon, 2010). Norrie and Lennon (2011) posit, “at least two-thirds of all new jobs created between 2006 and 2016 will require some postsecondary education” and they are concerned that demand will outreach supply (p. 1). This concern is echoed by Miner (2010) who cautions that baby boomers are aging and as they begin to retire, the Canadian labour force will face a potential shortfall of qualified employees. Research suggests, or at least a Euro-centric perspective suggests (Miner, 2010; Norrie & Lennon, 2011), that one natural way to fill this void of credentialed workers is to look towards the current underrepresented groups in PSE and increase their participation.
The United Nations (UN) (2009) reports that education, a basic human right, is in the best interest of long-term financial investments for states. Further, the UN states that Indigenous peoples lack quality education that is “well resourced, culturally sensitive and respectful of heritage” (p. 4). Although the UN report supports education as a basic right and the challenges with Euro-centric education systems for Indigenous peoples, whether another colonized approach is the most appropriate way to address the issue may be questioned.

Norrie and Lennon (2011) do not specifically address who is defined as underrepresented in a combined university and college context; however, Finnie, Childs and Qiu (2012) name underrepresented students as those with disabilities, students from low-income families and single parent families, students from rural backgrounds and Aboriginal students. In reviewing the context for their report “Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework”, the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU, 2011) remarks that according to the 2006 census, the Aboriginal population has “surpassed the one-million mark” and Statistics Canada envisions a 16 percent increase in Ontario by 2017 (p. 7). A Statistics Canada National Household Survey (2013) identifies the median age of the Aboriginal population in 2011 as 28 years and the median age for the non-Aboriginal population as 40 years. In 2011, the number of self-identified Aboriginal peoples who completed the National Household Survey was 1,400,685 people or 4.3 percent of the total Canadian population whereas in the 2006 Census, Aboriginal people who completed the survey accounted for 3.8 percent of the population. More relevant to this study, Ontario reported the largest number of Aboriginal people or 21.5 percent of the total Aboriginal population in Canada. In other words, approximately 3 percent
of the people of Ontario are Aboriginal. Setting aside for the moment critiques related to self-identification, these numbers suggest the self-identified Aboriginal population is on the rise and that a large number of Aboriginal youth is currently engaged with the Euro-centric educational system, especially in Ontario.

The MTCU framework (2011) mentioned above also identifies significant gaps in unemployment rates and average annual incomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. According to MTCU,

in 2006 the unemployment rate for Aboriginal peoples aged 25 to 60 (13%) was over four times higher the rate for non-Aboriginal people (3%)...[and] the average Aboriginal person’s income in Ontario was $28,000, compared with $38,000 for the non-Aboriginal population. (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2011, p. 8)

Workforce participation rates of Aboriginal peoples and the non-Aboriginal people were outlined in a study released by Statistics Canada in 2011. According to Statistics Canada (2011), following the economic downturn in 2008, the employment gap between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workforce widened. Full-time employment rates for Aboriginal workers aged 25 to 54 years old suffered a 2.8 percent decline in 2009 and a further 4.9 percent decline in 2010. Comparatively, the non-Aboriginal workforce aged 25 to 54 years old experienced a 1.7 percent decline of full-time jobs in 2009 and a 0.8 percent rebound of full and part-time jobs in 2010. In 2010, the differential marks an 11.7 percent gap between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workforce, with participation rates of 75 percent and 86.7 percent respectively. The reasons for these employment gaps will be addressed in the literature review when I address the impact of colonization on Aboriginal peoples.
The statistics cited above start to demonstrate the longstanding trend of difference in socio-economic status and labour force participation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. This outlook is not favourable according to Drummond, Giroux, Pigott, and Stephenson (2012) who underscore the importance of PSE in economic well-being. The authors state that PSE must meet five critical objectives: “it must educate a growing share of the population, help equalize economic and social outcomes, provide an important component of lifelong learning, be an engine of innovation, and deliver quality education efficiently” (Drummond, Giroux, Pigott, & Stephenson, 2012, p. 33). The 2012 Drummond Report sounds similar to a previous report of the Auditor General of Canada (2004) that specifically addresses Aboriginal peoples; the Report claims, “education is critical to improving the social and economic strength of First Nations individuals and communities to a level enjoyed by other Canadians” (p. 3).

If only the solution to addressing the labour shortage were as simple as Miner (2010) states: increase the level of participation of the underrepresented groups. Changing low employment and educational attainment rates for Aboriginal peoples requires the hurdling of some major obstacles, including hundreds of years of suppression and dehumanization through colonization. As stated by Berger (1995), colonization has been a painful and dangerous process for the First Peoples of Canada:

like Indians everywhere in the New World, the Indian of the Northwest coast were defenseless against the diseases brought by the Europeans.... By 1890, the Indian population of the northwest coast which at mid-century had stood at about 50,000, was reduced to 10,000 many of who were enfeebled by disease. (p. 145)
In a paper summarizing the Kelowna Accord of 2004/05, Patterson (2006) outlines the drivers that led to discussions about “closing the education gap” between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal Canadians. She too translates the impact into real dollars where unemployment rates for Aboriginal people were 19.1 percent generally and 29 percent on-reserves, as compared to 7.4 percent for all Canadians. Aboriginal Canadians had a median employment income of $16,000. The median employment income for Canadian individuals was roughly $25,000. (p. 12)

According to Drummond et al. (2012), although Ontario’s economy is growing again despite the current global economic downturn, Aboriginal peoples continue to be excluded. The Drummond Report (2012) declares Aboriginal peoples are facing significant labour market challenges where the “unemployment rate for Aboriginal youth was 20.8 percent in 2010, up from 19.8 percent in 2008” (p. 278). These statistics correspond with those already presented by Statistics Canada demonstrating and validating a marked difference in socio-economic status between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations. This lends weight to the argument that specialized and targeted solutions for Aboriginal peoples are needed. The Drummond Report (2012) suggests government and postsecondary institutions, with the inclusion of Aboriginal leaders, need to develop “creative and innovative solutions at the heart of the higher education experience” (p. 35). The Drummond Report (2012) examines the state of financial affairs in Ontario, concluding that “improving the educational attainment is critical to improving social and economic outcome for First Nations people” and the authors call this investment long over-due (p. 210).
Consider the argument from a purely financial perspective, as did the Drummond Report and one might see the financial benefits of this investment for all Canadians. More specifically, closing the education gap would result in increased economic activity for Ontario and Canada as a whole. The Drummond Report (2012) references a 2009 study by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards suggesting that

the [Canadian] government’s fiscal position could improve by $116 billion as a result of $77 billion less in excess expenditures due to the Aboriginal population’s above average use of government programs such as health care, social services and the justice system, and $39 billion in increased tax revenue. (p. 210)

Sharpe and Aresenault (2010) highlight a best case scenario that suggests that closing the education gap for Aboriginal peoples by 2026 could lead to a $36.5 billion increase in Canada’s gross domestic product and a $11.6 billion improvement on the Canadian government’s balance sheet. These savings would come from correcting the “dismal conditions facing many Aboriginal communities” and redirecting the monies currently spent on family care, child services, crime prevention, incarceration and social housing (Sharpe & Aresenault, 2010, p. 24). In strictly financial discourse, Sharpe and Aresenault suggest it makes business sense for Canada to support Aboriginal students in their quest for education. According to their reasoning, support for these students that translates into higher educational attainment rates would actually yield savings for the government. Sharpe and Aresenault (2010) suggest the larger society would benefit due to economic growth, knowledge transfers, a reduction in crime and decreased spending on health.
However, I will interrupt this argument for “Canadian cost savings” to draw attention to a recurrent theme that outlines the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and Canada, when Euro-centric solutions are proposed to solve an “Aboriginal issue.” As will be reviewed later, Aboriginal peoples are tired of imposed solutions. Aboriginal peoples want their constitutional self-determination rights recognized and after living through hundreds of years of colonization, they have tired of the recurring negativity and oppression from imposed solutions.

**Accepting Responsibility.**

As will be reviewed in Chapter Two, there is a history of legislation and policy that has continued the suppression of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. I include excerpts from Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s (2008) speech to provide a clear picture of a new view of Canada’s perception of its responsibility for these historical wrongs:

*Mr. Speaker, I stand before you today to offer an apology to former students of Indian residential schools. The treatment of children in Indian residential schools is a sad chapter in our history.*

*In the 1870’s, the federal government, partly in order to meet its obligation to educate aboriginal children, began to play a role in the development and administration of these schools.*

*Two primary objectives of the residential schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture.*

*These objectives were based on the assumption aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal.*

*Indeed, some sought, as it was infamously said, “to kill the Indian in the child.”*

*Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country.*
The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian residential schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on aboriginal culture, heritage and language.

While some former students have spoken positively about their experiences at residential schools, these stories are far overshadowed by tragic accounts of the emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect of helpless children, and their separation from powerless families and communities.

The legacy of Indian residential schools has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today. It has taken extraordinary courage of the thousands of survivors that have come forward to speak publicly about the abuse they suffered.

The government recognizes that the absence of an apology has been an impediment to healing and reconciliation.

Therefore, on behalf of the government of Canada and all Canadians, I stand before you, in this chamber so central to our life as a country, to apologize to Aboriginal peoples for Canada’s role in the Indian residential schools system.

To the approximately 80,000 living former students, and all family members and communities, the government of Canada now recognizes that it was wrong to forcibly remove children from their homes and we apologize for having done this.

We now recognize that it was wrong to separate children from rich and vibrant cultures and traditions, that it created a void in many lives and communities, and we apologize for having done this.

We now recognize that, in separating children from their families, we undermined the ability of many to adequately parent their own children and sowed the seeds for generations to follow, and we apologize for having done this.

We now recognize that, far too often, these institutions gave rise to abuse or neglect and were inadequately controlled, and we apologize for failing to protect you.

Not only did you suffer these abuses as children, but as you became parents, you were powerless to protect your own children from suffering the same experience, and for this we are sorry.

The burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for far too long.

The burden is properly ours as a government, and as a country.
The government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the Aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly.

As will be further explained in my theoretical approach to this research, I have adopted a “two-eyed” perspective that both reviews and questions assertions such as the apology above and sets them against the reality of Aboriginal experiences. To do this, I will include a story from an Indian Residential School (IRS) survivor. Her story underscores why Harper’s 2008 apology was necessary and it highlights how the Canadian government’s previous attempts at restitution were not successful.

The story of Flora Merrick outlines her experience when she participated in the Alternative Dispute Resolution Program (ADR) created by the Canadian government for IRS survivors. The ADR process was part of the 2003 National Resolution Framework, intended to compensate IRS survivors for the harm they experienced in residential schools, including physical and mental abuse. Although the ADR process was intended to be cost-effective and timelier than formal litigation avenues, Regan (2010) suggests the process ultimately did not reach its goal because it did nothing more than “replicate colonial power relations” (p. 134). Flora Merrick’s story helps to highlight some of the issues with the ADR process. At the time she told this story, Flora Merrick was an 88-year old Elder:

I cannot forget one painful memory. It occurred in 1932 when I was 15 years old. My father came to the Portage la Prairie residential school to tell my sister and I that our mother had died and to take us to the funeral. The principal of the school would not let us go with our father to the funeral. My little sister and I cried so much, we were taken away and locked in a dark room for about two weeks. After I was released from the dark room and allowed to be with other residents, I tried to run away to my father and family. I was caught in the bush by teachers and taken back to the school and strapped so severely that my arms were black and blue for several weeks.... I told this story during my ADR hearing, which was held at Long Plain in July 2004.... I was told that my experiences did not fit into the rigid categories for being compensated under the ADR. However, the adjudicator, Mr. Chin, after hearing my story at my
hearing, awarded me $1,500. The federal government appealed to take even this small award from me. I was willing to accept the $1,500 award, not as fair and just settlement, but only due to my age, health and financial situation. I wanted some closure to my residential school experience, and I could also use the money, even as small as it was. I am very angry and upset that the government would be so mean-spirited as to deny me even this small amount of compensation.... I’m very upset and angry, not only for myself, but also for all residential school survivors. (Regan, 2010, p. 128)

The calls for change, including an appreciation of the impact of colonization and demands for recognition of treaty rights have been ongoing for decades. A marked moment in this movement of “Indian Control of Indian Education” (ICIE), gained momentum in the 1970’s with a policy paper written by the National Indian Brotherhood of Indians (1972), now the Assembly of First Nations. During the early stages of this call to action, it can be understood why change was slow to occur. However, Mendelson (2008) states,

the continuing consequences of the oppression of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada explains the low starting point 30 years ago, but it does not explain the lack of improvement in high school completion rates over the last decade. (p. 2)

According to the Atlantic Evaluation Group (2010), the IRS system is a partial explanation for this markedly slow movement in Canada. This topic is reviewed in Chapter Two in the context of historical legislation and policy directives including treaty rights and self-determination.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research, through a consultative and engaging process, was to determine what strategies and programs help Aboriginal students succeed at postsecondary institutions. More specifically, because recent educational attainment data suggest Aboriginal students are more apt to enroll and succeed in college, the
focus concentrated on colleges in Ontario. In this context, student success was defined as “the likelihood that students will annually progress from grade-to-grade until they achieve their [academic goal]” (Cowley, Easton, & Thomas, 2011, p. 3). In order to avoid paternalistic patterns and imposition of a term fundamental to the research, Aboriginal students, staff and Elders were asked to define success in their own terms during the interview process.

A review of the historical context in Canada outlines current challenges Aboriginal students face; however, the research concentrates on healing strategies and successful practices. Attention is paid to programs and strategies that have engaged Aboriginal communities in postsecondary education. The overall review includes federal, provincial or Aboriginal (First Nation, Métis or Inuit) programs.

On a positive note, Aboriginal participation in postsecondary education has been increasing (Rae, 2005; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009). The intent of the research was to examine this success and determine what has been supporting Aboriginal students in postsecondary environments. Moreover, the research includes a gap analysis. Aboriginal communities, including Elders, staff and students, were asked what was missing and what services would be useful or necessary to support aspiring Aboriginal scholars.

Theoretical Framework of the Research

In order to recognize the reality of the present day, I adopted a two-eyed seeing approach. This approach was founded in Cape Breton’s University Institute for Science/Toqwa’tu’kl Kjijitaqnn and Health (Iwama, Marshall, Marshall, & Barlett,
The two-eyed seeing approach recognizes the realities of the educational system in that Indigenous and Western worlds are inevitably connected. Two-eyed seeing seeks to yield the positives from both the Indigenous and Western pedagogies. According to Battiste (2009/2010) two-eyed seeing “is to normalize Indigenous knowledge in the curriculum so that both Indigenous and conventional perspectives and knowledge will be available – not just for Aboriginal peoples, who would be enriched by that effort, but for all peoples” (p. 17). This approach is tempered with realism in recognizing that sometimes trying to find commonalities and shared strengths between the two worlds is a “foolish endeavour” (Iwama et al., p. 18). Admittedly, it is sometimes challenging to see the positive attributes of Western pedagogy when it comes to “Indian Control of Indian Education” (ICIE). The concept of ICIE is explored in more detail in the literature review, thus I will not address it at length here.

In this discussion it is imperative to recognize the slow bureaucratic processes that must change in order for Aboriginal self-determination to become a true reality under an Aboriginal leadership model. Although the processes have lagged for centuries and this alone renders a justified call for action, I endeavour to use the two-eyed seeing approach to present an inclusive argument to support and define necessary change. This corresponds with Wilson’s (2008) approach that reminds us that an Indigenous approach calls for a balance and connectivity.

The worldviews used to ground the thesis are thus a combination of Aboriginal and Western. From a Western perspective, the research embodies an advocacy approach combined with social constructivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). These two approaches render the research calling for change (advocacy). The need for change
and highlighted suggestions resonate with Aboriginal thought because they recognize the context in which the Aboriginal student has lived (social constructivism). These perspectives recognize that Aboriginal students are part of a marginalized society that our current laws, systems and policies have yet to adequately address the marginalization gap. In accordance with an advocacy approach, there is recognition of an ongoing political context that underpins this research. From the social constructivist approach, I rely on my interactions with the participants, using open-ended questions during my data collection to elicit their experiences. At the same time, I recognize that my own experiences and perspectives will undoubtedly shape my conclusions and recommendations. As the research progressed, I found myself less comfortable relying on Euro-centric models to guide me. My approach to the research began to shift my worldview as I learned about the true and hurtful impact of colonization including a history of dishonoured treaties, funding shortfalls, racism and marginalization. As my worldview shifted, I became leery of relying on Euro-centric models to guide me. In fact, it felt disrespectful and inconsistent with my desired approach as I made a conscious effort to align my approach with Aboriginal beliefs and pedagogy including the two-eyed seeing approach.

On A Personal Note

On a personal note, this research provided me with an opportunity to explore my Aboriginal ancestry while pursuing my academic goals. Within the last 15 years my mother, Laura Bourgeois, rediscovered our Aboriginal ancestry and it appears I am genetically predisposed to write about my ancestry and record my family’s history.
My mother’s quest to trace our Aboriginal ancestry was made easier with the
discovery of a book written by my European ancestor, Edwin Thompson Denig. Editor
John C. Ewers republished Denig’s work entitled, “Five Indian Tribes of the Upper
Missouri: Sioux, Arickaras, Assiniboines, Crees, Crows” (Denig, 1961). In his original
work, Denig explores his own history in early Canada circa 1812-1858. As an
ethnographer, Denig describes his professional role in the fur trade and explains his
deep connection with the First Peoples of Turtle Island, including his marriage to
Deer Little Women of the Assiniboine Nation, also known as the Nakota people of the
Prairies. It is through this marriage that my Métis heritage was born and continued
through to my late maternal grandfather, Philip Bourgeois. I am fortunate to have
pictures of my long deceased relatives who established the Métis lineage. These
photos are published in Denig’s aforementioned book (see Figure 1).

![Deer Little Woman (Assiniboine Nation) and Edwin Thompson Denig](image)

Figure 1. A Métis Ancestry is Born

Note. From “Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri: Sioux, Arickaras, Assiniboines, Crees,
Crows” p. “opposite page 10”.

17
I wish to use this opportunity to engage in this discourse and add to the discussion regarding potential solutions to support more Aboriginal student success. I choose to recognize a violent past, the disruption of colonization and the legacy of the IRS, yet my focus is on solutions to promote further developments for Aboriginal student success in postsecondary education.

As I have disclosed, the recognition of my Aboriginal ancestry is fresh. This means I have not grown up with Indigenous knowledge or traditions embedded in my core teachings. This is a limitation for my study. Although the ancestral news did not reach me until later in life, it does explain why my relatives from the Canadian Prairies would send my family gifts such as Native dolls dressed in traditional clothing or animal hides which we used as decorative wall hangings in our recreation room. Perhaps it also explains my deep respect for our earth and its well-being. Nevertheless, I must be cautious that my upbringing as a White privileged child in Northern Ontario has undoubtedly shaped my worldview. I recognize and sometimes feel guilt for the privileged life I have been afforded.

I began this endeavour with limited knowledge. As noted, I was not raised with an Aboriginal belief system at the centre of my family’s daily culture and traditions. I realize this means I do not have a lifelong experience of the dissonance Jules (1999) describes as trying to live in two very different worlds. My immediate family members have not been torn away from me only to be placed in schools where research clearly accounts that “students” were beaten for speaking their native tongue and forced to assimilate to a foreign culture (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Steckley & Cummins, 2008; Lavallee & Poole, 2010; Walker, 2009). I have not been subjected to the frequent racism and discrimination experienced by Aboriginal
students on postsecondary campuses in Canada (Erwin, 2009). Nevertheless, I wish to be an ally for Aboriginal peoples and, where possible, help improve access to and success in education.

Learning more about this subject raised feelings of anger, frustration and shame regarding the actions of my past and present Canadian governments. It is challenging to keep these feelings set aside. In order to honour Indigenous philosophies, I feel it important for me to disclose these feelings. Aboriginal epistemologies render it impractical to remove oneself from research recognizing we are all interconnected with all things, people and our environment (Harris, 2002). In fact, Harris (2002) defines the very notion of trying to remove oneself from the learning process as “preposterous” (p. 188). Nevertheless, I strive to find a balance between these two worlds in order to present a useful and reasonable research study if I wish it to be considered by both the Western and Aboriginal communities.

For all of the reasons that epitomize my Euro-centric upbringing, Aboriginal communities may not accept my research nor me because of my late adoption of and interest in Indigenous philosophies. Similar to the experience Dr. Stephanie Shields in her work “Waking Up to Privilege” (2012), I recognize my unearned White privilege and how it has afforded me opportunities not allowed to my First Nation counterparts. This has been an eye-opening journey for me. I recognize that I can only speak from my own personal journey and those stories I have been graciously told and afforded an opportunity to re-tell.

I was cautious moving into my data collection phase. As stated by Pidgeon and Cox (2002), “for Aboriginal peoples, [research] has meant centuries of violation, disrespect, subjectivism, and intolerance” (p. 96). The authors suggest researchers
should exhibit behaviours that include honesty, consultation, confidentiality and recognition that Aboriginal participants may be guarded. Ethical research considerations from the Tri-Council policy statement regarding research with Aboriginal peoples call for “free and informed consent, concern for welfare and a recognition for power imbalances” (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, December 2010, p. 105). After reading Wilson’s (2008) book that is dedicated to an Indigenous approach to research, I appreciate that I must also be connected with my research and the community it involves. In Wilson’s words, “research is ceremony” (p. 137). In following these principles, the research was approached with a recognition and appreciation for Indigenous theories and knowledge, including the respectful place for Elders.

The research however is further constrained by a Euro-centric system. The very fact that the research was conducted via an “ivory tower” institution renders it connected to colonial imperialism and thus disconnected from traditional Indigenous pedagogy. Despite a two-eyed seeing approach, it is questionable whether following such a process can adequately respect and describe Indigenous philosophies and needs. Perhaps the most appropriate way to demonstrate the challenges associated with merging these two worlds is through Harris’ (2002, pp. 194-196) narrative. Although the story encompasses humour, as is common with Indigenous teachings, it highlights the conflict that can arise when Western and Indigenous philosophies collide.
Coyote Goes to School.

Coyote was once again fed up with running around all day in the hot sun for a few scrawny gophers and rabbits. Dirt up his nose, dirt in his eyes, and what for? Barely a mouthful. Coyote had tried getting food at the supermarket one time like the Human People do but he got the sh*t kicked out of him for that. So, once again, he went to his brother Raven, to ask him for advice.

Coyote said, “Raven, there’s got to be an easier way to get fed. I tried the supermarket – got beaten up. Tried to get money from welfare but came up against the Devil’s Spawn in a K-Mart dress. Nothing’s worked so far. You got any other ideas?”

“Well,” Raven said thoughtfully, “the White Humans seem pretty well fed and they say that the key to success is a good education. Maybe you could go to school.”

“Hmm,” Coyote mused, “maybe I’ll try it. Couldn’t hurt.”

Well, Coyote went off to the city to the university because that’s where Raven said adults go to school.

In a few days Coyote was back.

“Well my brother,” Raven inquired, “did you get your education?”

“No exactly,” Coyote replied, “education is as hard to get as a welfare cheque. To get an education like the teachers at the university it takes at least 10 years – that’s a Coyote’s entire lifetime – and, in the end, you don’t get paid much anyways.”

“When I got to the university, they asked me what program I was in. I didn’t know so they sent me to this guy who told me about the programs. I kinda liked the idea of biology – if I learned more about gophers maybe they’d be easier to catch. I liked the idea of engineering – maybe I could invent a great rabbit trap. But in the end I settled on Native Studies. Now that’s something I can understand – I’ve known those guys for thousands of years, even been one when it suited me.”

“So I went to my Introduction to Native Studies course and, can you believe it, the teacher was a White guy? Now how much sense does that make? I saw native people around town – any one of ‘em has got to know more about native people than some White guy.”

“When I asked this guy what Indian told him the stuff he was saying, he said none – he read it in a book. Then I asked who the Indian was who wrote the book. And he said, it wasn’t an Indian, it was a White guy. Then I asked him what Indian the guy who wrote the booked learned from and the teacher got mad and told me to sit down.”

The next day I went to my Indians of North America class. I was really looking forward to meeting all those Indians. And you know what? There was another White guy standing up there and not an Indian in sight. I asked the teacher, “Are we going to visit all the Indians?” He said, No. So I asked him, “How are we going to learn about all the Indians then?” And he said, just like the other guy, from a book written by a White guy. So I asked him if I could talk to this guy who wrote the book and the teacher said, “No, he’s dead.”
“By then, I was getting pretty confused about this education stuff but I went to my next class – Indian Religions. And guess what? When I went in, there wasn’t another White guy standing up at the front of the room – there was a White woman!”

“I sat down and I asked her, ‘Are we going to the sweatlodge?’ ‘No.’ ‘Sundance?’ ‘No.’ ‘Yuwipi?’ ‘No.’ ‘Then how are we going to learn – no, wait, I know – from a book written by a dead White guy! I’m starting to get the hang of this education business.”

“So then I go to my Research Methods class thinking I’ve got it figured out. In this class the teacher (you’ve got it – another White guy) said that our research must be ethical, that we must follow the guidelines set out by the university for research on human subjects. The rules are there, my teacher said, to protect the Indians from unscrupulous researchers. Who made these rules I asked – you guessed it – a bunch of White guys. They decided we need protecting and that they were the ones to decide how best to protect us from them. So I told my teacher that I wanted to interview my father. The teacher said, you’ve got to ask the ethics review committee for permission. What?! I’ve got to ask a bunch of White guys for permission to talk to my own dad? That can’t be right. I was confused all over again.”

“So I sat down and thought about this for a long time. Finally, I figured it out. If White guys teach all the courses about Indians and they teach in the way White people think, then to find out about Indians teaching the way Indians think, all I have do was give up Native Studies and join the White Studies program!”

I included this story because it is important for me to remember the coyote’s journey. I must avoid a paternalistic stance. I cannot assume I know the answers and this is true for all non-Aboriginal people. I may be well versed to become an ally, but I do not wish to embody the essence of colonial imperialism by dictating what Aboriginal peoples should do or what should be done for them. Nothing can or should replace the voices and opinions of Aboriginal people themselves.

Given the current context in Canada, and perhaps globally at the moment, I feel it is also necessary to address the Idle No More (INM) movement which calls on Aboriginal peoples and allies alike to become informed and enact change to protect the rights of Indigenous peoples and the land on which we all live. In their own words,
the vision calls on all people to join in a peaceful revolution, to honour Indigenous sovereignty, and to protect the land and water. INM has and will continue to help build sovereignty and resurgence of nationhood. INM will continue to pressure government and industry to protect the environment. INM will continue to build allies in order to reframe the nation to nation relationship, this will be done by including grassroots perspectives, issues, and concern. (Idle No More, 2012, paras. 1-4)

Again, allies are welcome, but the INM vision will be driven and dictated by an Aboriginal-led philosophy.

Another profound limitation that is essential to recognize is the diversity among Aboriginal peoples in Canada (Educational Policy Institute, 2008a; Jules, 1999). Findings here will not be immediately transferable to other parts of the country, the province or even the local area. There may be generalizations that prove foundational for further research or program implementation, but Pidgeon & Hardy Cox (2002) remind us that findings will need to be localized and inclusive of Aboriginal community input.

Finally, I must recognize the potentially difficult task of change for non-Aboriginal peoples to decolonize their thought. I have willingly sought this perspective and I have struggled at times to decolonize a lifetime of experiences. The intent is to highlight success strategies identified by Aboriginal peoples that enable Aboriginal students to obtain postsecondary credentials. It is assumed this change will prove to be a daunting task because it faces hundreds of years history, numerous calls for change (Chretien, 1969; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; National Indian Brotherhood, 1972; Patterson, 2006), and countless broken promises (Carr-Stewart, 2006). I wonder whether Western leaders and Euro-centric institutions of higher learning will accept the research. The solutions may require current leaders to step away from their comfort zone and recognize the
current state of power relations. It may not be an easy process to convince leaders who have held the power to pass this authority directly to Aboriginal leaders.

A Note On Terminology

I began this thesis with a definition of the word “genocide”, and the word “colonial” is used often in this paper. In reference to Aboriginal peoples, colonialism can often be linked with paternalism where paternalism is defined as the interference of a state or an individual with another person, against their will, and defended or motivated by a claim that the person interfered with will be better off or protected from harm. (Dworkin, 2010, para. 1)

Following the example of Erwin (2009) I too use the terms oppression, marginalization, paternalism and discrimination to describe the consequences of colonization, imperialism and an imposed Euro-centric system.

Some terms used in the study are outdated and are now deemed offensive. The intent is not to offend, but to reflect a period in time and/or terminology reflected in legislation or an era. In some instances the term First Nation has been used to replace Band or Indian, although no legal definition exists for First Nation in Canada. The First Nation term generally includes Status and Non-Status Indians, but does not include Inuit or Métis. However, although the term Indian is now seen as derogatory, it is still in use in Canadian legislation such as the Indian Act. Indian refers to those who are recognized by the Constitution Act of 1982 as Aboriginal. Until recently, this term only included Status Indians, Non-Status Indians and Treaty Indians. Status Indians are those who the federal government has deemed eligible, by legislative requirements, to list their names on the Indian Register and Non-Status Indians are
those who consider themselves to be Indian, but they do not meet the federal legislative threshold to list their names on the Indian Register. After a recent federal judicial review, the term Indian now includes Métis as Indians under the Canadian Constitution (Metis Nation of Ontario, 2014). Métis are recognized as one of the three Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, meaning “mixed blood”, or the descendent of ancestors who were both Aboriginal and European. Inuit are those who live in Arctic Canada and are recognized as one of the three Aboriginal Peoples.

Finally, listed below in Table 1 are the acronyms that commonly appear through the paper.
Table 1: Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADR</td>
<td>Alternative dispute resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFN</td>
<td>Assembly of First Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACCC</td>
<td>Association of Canadian Community Colleges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUCC</td>
<td>Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCL</td>
<td>Canadian Council on Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSA</td>
<td>Canadian Student Alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HECQO</td>
<td>Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRSDC</td>
<td>Human Resources and Skills Development Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICIE</td>
<td>Indian Control of Indian Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INAC</td>
<td>Indian and Northern Affairs Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INM</td>
<td>Idle No More</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRS</td>
<td>Indian Residential School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MNO</td>
<td>Métis Nation of Ontario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTCU</td>
<td>Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIB</td>
<td>National Indian Brotherhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCAP</td>
<td>Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSE</td>
<td>Postsecondary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCAS</td>
<td>Ontario College Application Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSSSP</td>
<td>Post-Secondary Student Support Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SGA</td>
<td>Self-governance Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRC</td>
<td>Truth and Reconciliation Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My Approach to the Research

This thesis is heavy with quotes and citations. This is an intentional tactic employed to maintain authenticity. I feel it is critical to include original words and text to demonstrate legitimacy, to quote Aboriginal peoples speaking for themselves,
and sometimes to underscore the cruel realities Aboriginal peoples have faced. I hope the direct quotations will help readers understand why it is sometimes difficult for me to remain objective and emotionless about this subject.

I chose to have an Elder to guide me in this process. Shelley Charles is an Ojibwe Anishinabe Elder, and Elder/Advisor Aboriginal Relations at Humber College Institute of Technology & Advanced Learning (Humber). She is grounded in firm beliefs of authentic Indigenous knowledge and cultural integrity. She tests my knowledge and perspectives, tells me stories that recount traditional teachings and provides new directions for me to explore. Shelley provides clarity and historical context critical to the authentic perspective I am seeking. I have also been fortunate to encounter several other Elders in my journey who have openly, and cautiously at first, accepted my inquisitive nature with kindness. They share their stories and wisdom. In this sharing they have helped me learn to Indigenize my own thoughts. It is difficult to separate their thoughts and influences because their influences are weaved through this study; however, their input is addressed more thoroughly in Chapters Five through Seven.

Outline of the Thesis.

Aside from treaty rights and beyond the discourse of economic prosperity for Canada, there is a need to recognize and address the atrocities of the past. Canada has a moral and ethical obligation to address the legacy created by a history of genocidal colonization (Brant Castellano et al. 2008). All of this leads me to my research questions that look at not only the challenges that Aboriginal students face,
but also the challenges Aboriginal peoples as a whole face in trying to live in an oppressive colonized society. The educational attainment gap for Aboriginal peoples is a breach of a fundamental human rights and the gap needs to be addressed. My overarching question, “According to students, staff and Elders engaged in Aboriginal Resource Centres, what are the factors that affect Aboriginal student persistence and success in Ontario colleges?” was designed to provide a macro overview of the current situation. As such, the literature review in Chapter Two provides an overview of the context in Canada including treaties, colonization practices such as the Indian Residential School System and legislation that has been used to systematically oppress Aboriginal peoples.

Chapter Three addresses my methodology, including my development of an anti-racist lens and the challenges associated with research reliant on self-identification with Aboriginal peoples. Chapter Four presents data regarding Aboriginal student enrolment in Ontario colleges. This chapter includes a review of Euro-centric studies that shed light on factors that affect postsecondary persistence and success for disadvantaged populations, including public policies, reports and commissions. Chapter Five presents my analysis of the student interviews including key factors that contributed to Aboriginal students choosing to enter college. This chapter also explores the barriers Aboriginal students face in Ontario colleges that can impede their ability to succeed academically. Chapter Six summarizes the findings of the research, compares these findings against the literature reviewed and presents a call to action for Aboriginal communities and respective Canadian parliaments and departments. Chapter Seven concludes with an overview of what services/programs Ontario colleges could provide to positively impact Aboriginal
student persistence. Finally, I present my personal reflections regarding what can be learned about Aboriginal cultures vis a vis the “scientific methods” of traditional “mainstream” research, and I propose what type of further research is required.
CHAPTER TWO:
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The historical data reviewed in this chapter includes policies and legislation that provide an understanding of the current context of Aboriginal education. Academic, institutional and government reports are examined. I strongly believe that knowledge of our history of colonization, genocide and a movement of healing are critical to understanding how a path forward can be forged. In order to seek solutions and progress into the future, it is important to recognize and address the challenges of the past. The impact of colonization is not only unique to Aboriginal peoples. It has far reaching consequences that create many challenges for ethnically diverse students in a Euro-centric society (Ryder, 2011).

From a historical perspective, Canada’s relationship with Aboriginal peoples has been marred with conflict, dishonesty and death. Since the time of first contact, and as the relationship moved from collaboration to oppression, Aboriginal peoples have struggled to adapt to a colonized way of life that has consistently encroached on and disrupted their traditional ways (Young et al., 2010). We can turn to several historical documents that outline the severe impact of colonization on Aboriginal peoples in Canada. There have been a multitude of studies, research reports and commissions over the years. I shall not endeavour to recount each one, but instead highlight some of the more prominent and influential ones.

Thus my literature review begins with Canada’s history of creating barriers for Aboriginal students and moves to a focus on documents that support Aboriginal students and calls for change. Shelley Charles, Elder/Advisor Aboriginal Relations at Humber and my thesis committee have provided some research topics and literature;
however, the majority of the research has been conducted through the broad searches on the World Wide Web including the University of Toronto Libraries and databases such as Education Resource Information Centre, T-Space, Library Archives of Canada: Theses Canada, Proquest Dissertations & Theses and Google Scholar. Key words included any combination of the following list: Aboriginal student success, Aboriginal barriers, native education, student retention, native education college, native community colleges, native persistence, Aboriginal funding, First Nation education, Métis education, Inuit education, Indigenous knowledge, Indian education, colonization, decolonization, self-identification, self-governance and self-determination.

This literature review first focuses on Canada’s policy of assimilation and indoctrination with regard to the First Peoples of Turtle Island (Milloy, 1999). The impact of colonization is explored and a recounting of the movement from cooperation to domination is presented (Young et al., 2010). Key legislation and policy are reviewed, including an in-depth look at Indian Residential Schools (IRS) where IRS are defined as:

a cooperative effort between the Canadian government and Christian church organizations that saw perhaps more than 150,000 Aboriginal children taken to boarding schools, miles away from their families to be ‘civilized’, educated and converted to Christianity. (Walker, 2009, p. 1)

Issues such as a lack of funding are broached in the context of access, or lack thereof, with regard to Aboriginal students and postsecondary education. Following this historical review, the study moves into a discussion of the Indigenous Renaissance including topics such as self-determination, sovereignty and Aboriginal educational philosophies. For example, Aboriginal communities have advocated
movements of strength and persistence such as Indian Control of Indian Education and Idle No More and progress is being made.

Creating Barriers

As established in Chapter One, Aboriginal students are underrepresented in postsecondary education. However, before we are able to discuss solutions to this moral, ethical and treaty “realization gap”, we must first understand how these “gaps” came to be for Aboriginal peoples. The Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) not only describes the process of colonization as “wrong” but as a process that was intended to erase an entire way of life including Indigenous cultures, beliefs, values and educational systems (p. 3). Further, the Report outlines that although the Aboriginal living standards have increased in recent years, the impact of colonization has manifested itself in numerous negative ways such as a lower life expectancy rate, increased health problems, cycles of abuse, decreased high school graduation rates, lower postsecondary attainment levels, inadequate living conditions, higher employment and increased levels of incarceration.

Canadian history is a story of “dishonoured treaties, theft of Aboriginal lands, suppression of Aboriginal children, impoverished and disempowerment of Aboriginal peoples” (Ministers of Supply and Services Canada, 2010, p. 6). The colonization process has created within it a marginalized society (Carr-Stewart & Steeves, 2009) and with specific reference to education, the lack of Aboriginal representation has created a policy void (Brant Castellano et al. 2008). The language and culture of Indigenous peoples in North America has been, and continues to be threatened
(lehnhotonkwas & Maracle, 2002). Moreover, through this process of colonization, an educational system was created that Steckley and Cummins (2008) describe as a tool intended to take Native children out their communities, thus isolating them from connections to their land, their people and the traditions. According to Milloy (1999), “in the vision of residential school education, discipline was curriculum and punishment was pedagogy” (p. 44) where the intent was to remove the children from their parents so the parents would not “hinder the civilization process” (p. 26). We do not need confirmation from Steckley and Cummins (2008) as to the “devastating impacts” this had on the community (p. 190). Nevertheless, Steckley and Cummins (2008) refer to the lasting effects many Indian Residential School (IRS) survivors have as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Lavallee and Poole (2010) recount their research regarding the practices embedded in the IRS that saw ceremonial practices banned and reprimands for speaking a native language. Lavallee and Poole (2010) assert that if healing is to begin, we must recognize the negative impact of these schools on the mental health of the Aboriginal population – at least those who survived this ordeal. At this point, the atrociously high death rate within Indian Residential School system must be brought forward and acknowledged.

During a formal guest lecture at Humber College in Toronto, Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair, Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), disclosed the death rate for Canada’s IRS (personal communication, April 6, 2011). As outlined on the TRC website (2012), Justice Sinclair recounted the IRS history that began as early as the 1870’s and ended with the last IRS closing in 1996. In over 130 locations across Canada, schools intended to “kill the Indian in the child” did often reach their goal.
Schools were rotting with physical, emotional and psychological abuse. This abuse was multi-fold and enacted at the hands of teachers, administrators and other students (Walker, 2009). A gasp came over the crowd of students, faculty and staff at Humber as Justice Sinclair let the alarming statistic sink in – the death rate for Indian Residential Schools was 40-60 percent (personal communication, April 6, 2011). Although the death rate statistics are still under investigation by the TRC with evidence and the death toll mounting, additional sources quote death rates at various schools ranging from 24-75 percent with severe outbreaks tuberculosis being a main cause of death of death (Bryce, 1922). Steckley and Cummins’ (2008) cite Miller’s 1996 researching stating that “it is quite within the mark to say that 50 percent of the children who passed through these door did not live to benefit from the education which they had received therein” (p. 193). According to Milloy’s research (1999), the Anglican boarding school, Old Sun’s School, opened its doors on the Peigan Reserve in 1890. Two years later in 1892, the death rate was 47 percent. Additionally, Milloy recognizes not only the prevalence of tuberculosis, but also suggests that a large number of “students” died in the process of trying to run away from the schools. Further, Justice Sinclair disclosed that even when the Canadian government became aware of these alarming statistics, nothing was done to correct the problem. Raptis and Bowker (2010) and Bryce (1922) confirm the government’s knowledge and inaction in addressing the death rate in the IRS system. According to Steckley and Cummins (2008) the practices continued and “death would become part of the residential school tradition” (p. 193).
Approximately 150,000 First Nation, Inuit and Métis children were forced to attend Indian Residential Schools (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2010; CBC News - Canada, 2010; Walker, 2009). Again the number of students who died during the approximate 126-year reign of the Indian Residential Schools during Canada’s genocide remains a growing total but when the statistics recounted above are combined with the mandatory attendance rates, it is no wonder Milloy (1999) suggests that hundreds and thousands of students died. Moreover, in the context of these horrific morality rates, attendance at these schools for Native children became compulsory in 1920 under the Indian Act (Walker, 2009). Aboriginal parents who did not cooperate and would not send their children to an IRS, or who attempted to remove their children from an IRS were promptly escorted to jail for breaking the law (Sinclair, personal communication, April 6, 2011). Milloy (1999) corroborates that parents who refused to send their Native children to an IRS were subject to penalties of fines and imprisonment upon conviction and determination of guilt. Although more discussion of these atrocities is somewhat beyond the scope of this thesis, suffice it to say what remains to be seen is if Canada will hold those responsible for the genocide by means of criminal prosecution. At minimum, thousands of children have died and not one person has been charged with murder or even negligence. Inaction would again demonstrate Canada’s half-hearted attempt to address the atrocities of the past.
Canada’s Assimilationist History

This review recognizes the difference and connectedness of policy and law. Both are reviewed in order to appropriately address the research questions posed. From one perspective, “the reliance on federal policies rather than laws is problematic for First Nations. Policies do not have the force of law and may be affected by difficulties in accessing funding” (Phillips, 2011, p. 240). On the other hand, legislation does have the power of enforcement and the Canadian government has used this power in a careful and calculated way to affect PSE for Aboriginal peoples. For example, Canada used the legislative power of the Indian Act to enforce enfranchisement, in that only those Indians who voluntarily relinquished their Indian status were allowed to attend university (Brant Castellano et al., 2008). According to the First Nations Education Council (First Nations Education Council, 2009), the Indian Act of Canada included this clause as recently as 1951. In other words, Canada now recognizes that its own history and Euro-centric values were embedded in assimilation discourse (Walker, 2009; Harper, 2008). Canada’s policies and legislation envision the absorption of Indigenous peoples into a “Western” way of life. Through isolation, legislation and punishment the Canadian government endeavoured to erase the Indian way of life (Kirkness, 1999; Steckley & Cummins, 2008; Walker, 2009), which is a form of genocide.

I reviewed various versions of the Indian Act spanning a period from 1876 to 2010. This review revealed countless examples of paternalistic and imperialist thought. For example, in 1877, an Act of Parliament defined a person as “an individual other than Indian, unless the context clearly requires another construction” (Parliament of Canada, 1877a). With specific reference to education and
postsecondary education, the 1876 Indian Act outlines the process by which Indians could attend university. As previously mentioned, for over 75 years, Indians were forbidden from attending university unless they “voluntarily” relinquished their status as an Indian, otherwise known as enfranchisement (Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium, 2005; Brant Castellano et al., 2008).

In 1882, the North-West Mounted Police deliberately withheld rations from Cree Chief Big Bear and his followers until he agreed to sign a treaty that would relocate the Assiniboine Nation (the nation of my family’s ancestry). This same year, the Assiniboine Nation encountered starvation, sickness and death (Regan, 2010). This suppressive and authoritarian mindset continued and the 1906 Indian Act (Parliament of Canada, 1906b) specified the numerous acts for which an Indian could be subjected to jail sentences. More specifically, for participating in celebrations, dances or ceremonies, Indians were “guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months and not less than two months” (Parliament of Canada, 1906b, p. 1487). According to Monture-Angus (1999), Canada has used its legal system to introduce and limit the rights of Aboriginal people, even though these limitations were never negotiated. In reflecting upon what Paulette Regan (2010) learned during her time as Director at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, she describes the legislative process, and specifically treaties, as disguised in benevolence and generosity when in fact the government negotiators' promises were nothing more than false words intended to marginalize and assimilate their Native counterparts. Even if we fast-forward to the present day, the Indian Act current as of October 6, 2010 (Minister of Justice, 2010) embodies this oppressive and controlling intent. Its very title still employs to the now
defunct terminology “Indian.” The Indian Act references residential schools and the powers the Canadian government has to approve, direct, consent and allow the actions of the “Indians”. Colonizing discourse remains purposively weaved throughout the document.

Moving back to a historical perspective, perhaps one of the most notable documents and examples of Canadian paternalism is the Government of Canada’s Indian Policy of 1969, better known as the “White Paper” (Weaver, 1984). Weaver (1984) describes the “White Paper” written by Canada’s future Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, as a catalyst to an Indigenous revolution. Chrétien (1969) wrote the paper when he was Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. The White Paper (1969) recounts a history of discrimination and declares the government’s commitment to end the practices that created barriers and marginalized a society. Chrétien suggested a framework for moving forward and proposes the closing of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. He recognizes that the colonization process has led to a broken society. Immediate and long-term change is deemed inevitable. He recognizes consultation would be important for the future and change would be slow. He suggests the bulk of the policy change would take five years to implement. However, Chrétien was short-sighted in his approach. Although he suggests consultation with Native peoples would be an appropriate measure for future discussion, he failed to engage the community for which he was proposing future change. This paternalistic approach did not go unnoticed. Both the Alberta Chiefs of Indians and the National Brotherhood of Indians responded with decrees denouncing the government’s White Paper with Citizens Plus (1970) and a declaration of Indian Control of Indian Education (1972) respectively. The responses
began an Indigenous movement to reclaim a way of life, to rebirth threatened traditions, to hold Canada accountable to treaty obligations and to have self-determination.

Before moving on, allow me to draw attention to the fact that Chrétien was a little off in his five-year timing outlined in the White Paper. The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development is still in place albeit renamed as the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. And though the last IRS closed in 1996, it was not until 2008 that Canada officially apologized for the imposition of Indian Residential Schools and the resulting genocide. The official apology from a Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, occurred five years after Chrétien left office. At this point, it is necessary to mention that Jane Stewart, in her role as Minister of Indian Affairs in 1997, offered an apology on behalf of Canada to Aboriginal peoples because of colonization. According to Monture-Angus (1999), the so-called apology revived many hurtful memories and painful pasts. In essence, Monture-Angus (1999) states that although the apology was a step in the right direction, at the time it “massaged White guilt instead of alleviating Indian pain” because social services to support Aboriginal peoples were not in place to deal with the aftermath (p. 26).

Bearing all of this in mind, I would argue that one of the most insulting pieces of historical legislation is the bounty that was placed on Micmac heads (Neu & Therrein, 2005; Wilson, 2008; Paul, 2000). In 1749, Cornwallis, the Governor of Nova Scotia issued a proclamation:
His Majesty’s Council, do promise a reward of ten Guineas for every Indian Micmac taken or killed, to be paid upon producing such Savage taken or his scalp (as in the custom of America) if killed to the Officer Commanding at Halifax, Annapolis Royal or Minas. (Paul, 2000, p. 109)

The bounty is inherently disturbing, but what remains atrociously insulting is the fact that this piece of legislation has not been repudiated even today! While the Canadian and Nova Scotian governments decide who has the authority and what the due process is to repeal this Act, it remains active legislation despite repeated calls for repeal from local Aboriginal communities.

**Accountability in Canada**

According to Canadian legislation, provincial jurisdiction controls education for the non-Aboriginal population in Canada, but education for Aboriginal peoples remains a federal responsibility (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2012a; Simeone, 2011). Nevertheless, the Indian Act includes the federal government’s declaration that Aboriginal education shall be the responsibility of the provinces. It is important to note that Aboriginal peoples did not agree to the change of responsibility - it was legislatively imposed. Phillips (2011) states, “the provincial focus on education has allowed the federal government to control the agenda in First Nation education” (p. 240). He suggests, “the federal government has done everything it can to get out of its legal responsibility” for First Nation’s education (p. 233). Phillips (2011) recounts a history where the Crown first gave responsibility to church-run schools where Aboriginal students experienced abuse. Next the responsibility was shifted to provinces and this too failed, with chronic underfunding and low
attainment rates. Finally, responsibility is shifting to First Nations, but Phillips (2011) suggests that the schools have been left without appropriate support and very little input into their decision-making. Phillips (2011) concludes that this comedy of errors has failed First Nations students as they continue to fall behind their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

In a report by the Auditor General of Canada (Office of the Auditor General, 2000), the Auditor General recognizes the responsibility of the Canadian government for providing education under the various education treaties, albeit disguised under the reference of duties outlined in the Indian Act. In the conclusion of the Report, the duties of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada are outlined more clearly:

We believe that regardless of how education is delivered – through First Nations, provincial or federal schools – the Department has a responsibility for effectively monitoring the system. This is not only because the Department is funding education, but also because it has obligations for providing education. (p. 4-19)

The Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada website (2010) also insists that

the Government of Canada and the courts understand treaties between the Crown and Aboriginal people to be solemn agreements that set out promises, obligations and benefits for both parties. (para. 1)

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada also acknowledges

they [First Nations] surrendered their interest in lands in exchange for certain other benefits that could include reserves, annual payment or other types of payment and certain rights to hunt and fish. (para. 7)
Yes, these are “solemn promises,” but upon a closer examination of the wording from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, the department responsible for Aboriginal education, there appears to be a glaring omission in the federal’s government’s stance. There is no mention of educational rights for Aboriginal peoples.

In 2000, the Auditor General concluded that, “the education gap directly affects the current well-being of Indian students as well as their access to a strong socio-economic standing in the future” (p. 4-15). The Report calls for federal legislation to be drafted in consultation with First Nations after repealing sections from the Indian Act that deals with education. According to the Auditor General (2004), the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Canada has a policy objective “to encourage registered Indians and Inuit to acquire university and professional qualifications” through the Post-Secondary Student Support Program, but it finds the framework in place is “deficient” (p. 17). The Auditor General (2004) blames the deficiency on the ambiguity of the Department’s role and responsibilities. This includes a lack of clarity around how funds are distributed/allocated and how performance and results are tracked. The Report concludes, “the weaknesses seriously undermine the capacity of the Department and First Nations to work together towards achieve the programs’ objective” (Office of the Auditor General, 2004, p. 18). Years earlier, the Auditor General’s Report states “that more and faster progress was urgently needed” because at the then rate of change, it was projected to take 23 years for the Aboriginal population (on and off-reserve) to achieve educational parity with the rest of Canada (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2000, p. 4-13).
In 2004, the Auditor General’s Report (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2004) reviewed the initiatives of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). Although the Report suggests that INAC again has created several initiatives, it concludes that “limited progress” had been made in “addressing most issues and recommendations raised in [the] April 2000 Report and in the June 2000 Report” (p. 1). The 2004 Report again highlights the significant education gap between First Nations people living on-reserve and the rest of Canada, indicating that since 2000, the time to close this gap had increased slightly from 27 to 28 years. By definition, a negative movement is hardly a sign of progress. In the same 2004 Report, the Auditor General calls for the implementation of five key principles of effective accountability including: “clear roles and responsibilities, clear performance expectations, balanced expectations and capacities, credible reporting, reasonable review and adjustment” (p. 22). The Report concluded that the absence of data render it difficult to determine whether or not the Department is failing or succeeding to meet its educational mandate for First Nations.

The Auditor General provided an update on this audit following a May 2006 progress review (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2011). The most recent Report concludes that despite considerable efforts on behalf of the federal government, progress in terms of closing the education gap for First Nations has been “elusive”. In fact, the 2011 Report finds that the education gap between First Nations living on-reserve and the general population has widened, the shortage of adequate housing on-reserves has increased, comparability of child family services is not ensured, and the reporting requirements on First Nations remain burdensome. (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2011, p. 8)
With specific references to PSE, the Report finds that although an audit of PSE funding was recommended in 2004, no such review has been conducted. More specifically, there is no mechanism to ensure funding provided to First Nations is meeting the demand.

In 2004 and 2005, the Canadian government and Aboriginal leaders engaged in an 18-month consultative process known as the Kelowna Accord, formally entitled “First Ministers and National Aboriginal Leaders: Strengthening Relationships and Closing the Gap”. This was an ambitious endeavour to create a 10-year plan to “close the gap” in educational attainment between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. Patterson (2006) states that the process “was pivotal in that it produced the Government of Canada’s long-term commitment to continue processes for cooperative policy development” (p. 6) and it “drew public attention to the subject of the well-being of Aboriginal peoples” (p. 16). With a pledge of $5.1 million of funding over the following five years, “all governments acknowledged that Aboriginal peoples need the capacity to participate in the development of policies, programs and services that affect them” (p. 8). According to Patterson (2006), this high level of involvement and policy development between the Aboriginal leaders and the government leaders was unique in Canadian history. In November 2004, the Auditor General of Canada made a recommendation to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada that it should “immediately develop and implement a comprehensive strategy and action plan, with targets, to close the education gap” (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2004, p. 10). Unfortunately the Kelowna Accord, including allocated monies, never came to fruition because the 38th Parliament was dissolved in November 2005 before the plan had been approved (Patterson, 2006). The
Conservative party (Stephen Harper) replaced the outgoing Liberal Prime Minister (Paul Martin) and the Kelowna Accord remained another unexecuted government endeavour. Nevertheless, a recurring theme resurfaces. As Patterson puts it:

> the process made it clear that, where it concerns them, Aboriginal people were to be the initiators of policy change and not just subjects for consultation on government programs. (Patterson, 2006, p. 13)

As has been consistent with Canada’s history, change has been slow. After Harper’s apology in 2008, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was not launched until 2009. Further, “Shannen’s Dream” is yet another example of the government’s continuing lack of progress and half-hearted commitment to “reconciliation”, including a lack lustre commitment to fair and equitable access to education for First Nation children. The House of Commons unanimously voted to adopt “Shannen’s Dream” in February 2012. This motion entitled “All First Nation Children Have an Equal Right to High-Quality, Culturally-Relevant Education” was put forward to honour and recognize the commitment to education from a young First Nation girl who passed away in an automobile accident in 2010 at the age of 15. Shannen Koostachin was from Attawapiskat and she had a dream for safe and comfortable schools and culturally based education for First Nations children and youth. According to the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada (2013), “Shannen worked tirelessly to try to convince the Federal government to give First Nations children a proper education” and her hard work was recognized by a nomination “as an ambassador for all the children of Attawapiskat, for the International Children’s Peace Prize given out by the Nobel Laureates” (para. 7). Further, to honour Shannen’s legacy and commitment, the campaign seeks to “engage Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to better understand the education
inequities and to take action to ensure all First Nations children and young people attend good schools and receive a proper education that prepares them to achieve their dreams and be proud of their distinct cultures and languages” (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, 2013, para. 2). The vote to accept “Shannen’s Dream” was 286 yeas to accept the motion and zero nays (Parliament of Canada, 2012, para. 31). The order read:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should adopt Shannen’s Dream by: (a) declaring that all First Nation children have an equal right to high-quality, culturally-relevant education; (b) committing to provide the necessary financial and policy supports for First Nations education systems; (c) providing funding that will put reserve schools on par with non-reserve provincial schools; (d) developing transparent methodologies for school construction, operation, maintenance and replacement; (e) working collaboratively with First Nation leaders to establish equitable norms and formulas for determining class sizes and for the funding of educational resources, staff salaries, special education services and indigenous language instruction; and (f) implementing policies to make the First Nation education system, at a minimum, of equal quality to provincial school systems. (Parliament of Canada, 2012, para. 31)

The commitment to Shannen’s Dream sounds too similar to those already reviewed, but it is still relatively fresh; thus it remains to be seen how the Canadian government will choose to enact this commitment.

Unfortunately, Shannen Koostachin’s death does not stand-alone. Several years earlier in 2007, Jordan River Anderson, a First Nation child, was born with a rare medical condition. As the provincial and federal governments quarrelled over financial responsibilities, Jordan’s condition deteriorated and Jordan died (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2013a). Although “Jordan’s Principle” now provides provisions for continuity of care for First Nation children living on-
reserve, it took the death of a young child to spark this change. One cannot help but wonder how many more Aboriginal people, youth and small children must die before the Canadian government will accept its full legal responsibilities?

In the wider community, if we as Canadians do truly wish to acknowledge the past and correct the pains caused by centuries of colonization, let us heed the advice of Regan, past Director of Research for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada. She encourages us to “deconstruct the foundational myth of [Canadians as] benevolent peacemakers” (Regan, 2010, p. 11). Through Regan’s experience with the TRC, she learned that most non-Native people resist acknowledging the fact that Canada’s history is one of violence. In a survey conducted in 2008 by the TRC with the general population in Canada, the results demonstrated that 32 percent of Canadians were not very familiar with Aboriginal issues and 17 percent were not very familiar at all. Only 11 percent of respondents identified acknowledgment or accepting responsibility for the IRS as essential. Regan (2010) believes this lack of knowledge maintains a “comfortable intellectual, psychological and emotional distance from the harsh realities” (p. 42). She asks all non-native Canadians to do as she has done and accept a different story of Canada’s past. Canadians must recognize the popularized version of peace is nothing more than a myth. She asks us to “re-story” our history to one that includes violence, domestic terrorism, marginalization, greed and death. Regan believes we must recognize that the story of government negotiators as righteous and reasonable is in fact a myth and retold only in the White settler version of history. In short, healing will only be possible when the truth has been acknowledged and both parties are treated with equal and due respect.
If it is a question of leadership and accountability on the part of the Canadian government, according to Phillips (2011), Canada already has a natural leader for ensuring that these commitments are met. The Indian Act explicitly states that the Minister of Indian Affairs is in control of First Nations education; therefore, “in effect, the Minister of Indian Affairs is Canada’s National Minister of Education” (Phillips, 2011, p. 236). Relying on the policies of the United Nations (2009), collaboration between Indigenous Peoples and institutions is important to the success of creating inclusive and successful educational opportunities.

It is important to note that Canada recently has attempted to embark on a national initiative to develop a “First Nations Education Act” (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2012). A discussion guide has been developed outlining the government’s commitment to shift educational responsibilities for First Nations to the provinces amid an approach that envisions local flexibility and stable predictable funding. The document speaks to a collaborative effort to operate an educational system within the confines of the department, in which the Government of Canada maintains regulatory control. As will be explored later, these types of paternalistic measures have met little success in the past; on the contrary, this has given the spark to the previously mentioned national (and perhaps global) Indigenous movement, “Idle No More”, which speaks to and affirms Indigenous rights.
Global Human Rights Policy

Today’s globalized world no longer allows countries to function in a policy vacuum. Looking to the global stage and specifically the United Nations (UN), Canada historically demonstrated itself as a leader with regards to human rights. For example, Canadian, John Humphrey, once a Director of the UN’s Human Rights Division, helped prepare the blue print for the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Canada adopted the Declaration, along with the rest of the General Assembly, on December 10, 1948 (United Nations, 2012). One could assume the adoption of this Declaration demonstrates Canada’s political stance and commitment to universal human rights. More specifically, key articles of the Declaration underscore the essence of this commitment where article 26 outlines the right to education:

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. (2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. (3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children. (United Nations, 1948, para. 48)

Further, on May 28, 1990, Canada signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as it particularly sets out and acknowledges the rights of Indigenous children (United Nations, 2014). More specifically, the Convention recognizes that children should grow up in a family environment that is supportive and inclusive of happiness,
love and understanding. This inclusive environment should be one of peace, dignity and tolerance. With specific reference to Canada’s obligation to support this convention, article 30 reads:

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language. (United Nations, 1990, para. 30)

However, we must remember that these words hold no legal force in Canada and that if the Canadian government chooses a path of inaction, the words become nothing more than lip service as they have so many times before. The potential for inaction becomes more concerning when James Anaya’s conclusions are reviewed. James Anaya visited Canada in 2013 for nine days as a United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Anaya, 2013). His final report is still pending, but his initial statement of conclusion was illuminating in pointing to Canada’s sordid history with Aboriginal people as outlined so far. Although Anaya recognizes some progress has been made in recent years, including the 2008 residential school apology, he raises the alarm that challenges are ahead because,

Canada faces a crisis when it comes to the situation of Indigenous peoples of the country. The well-being gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada has not narrowed over the last several years, treaty and Aboriginal claims remain persistently unresolved, and overall there appears to be high levels of distrust among Aboriginal peoples toward the government at both the federal and provincial levels. (Anaya, 2013, para. 5)

He recognizes that the Indian Act has undermined the ability of and continues to undermine Aboriginal peoples’ self-sufficiency, including self-determination. With respect specifically to education, Anaya concludes that educational outcomes will be difficult to improve until housing conditions that he describes as “woefully
inadequate” (para. 13) are addressed. Anaya’s conversations with Aboriginal leaders informed him that educated Aboriginal peoples such as nurses, teachers and engineers, choose not to return home to the deplorable housing conditions on-reserve; thus the economic state of the reserves remain stagnant, inadequate and substandard. Further, the Aboriginal leaders Anaya spoke with consistently expressed concern about the consultation processes the federal government undertook regarding the First Nations Education Act:

I have heard remarkably consistent and profound distrust toward the First Nations Education Act being developed by the federal government, and in particular deep concerns that the process for developing the Act has not appropriately included nor responded to Aboriginal views. (Anaya, 2013, para. 9)

Anaya is hopeful that increased communication between all levels of government and Aboriginal peoples can help improve the “crises”. Not surprisingly, he recommends recognition of treaty rights and meaningful thorough consultation. He concludes his initial report with a promise of further in-depth recommendations and best practices. In waiting of his report, Anaya suggests Canada ought to consider the United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a reliable model and framework for consultation and standards to address the “long shadow of a history of misdealing” in order to “enrich Canadian society for the benefit of all” (para. 18).

**United Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

There is a common belief that Canada has a moral and ethical obligation to recognize and honour treaty rights and provide appropriate educational systems for Aboriginal students (Carr-Stewart & Steeves, 2009; McDonald & Wesley-Esquimaux,
From a global perspective in further support of this opinion, one could consider the United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Declaration was adopted by the General Assembly in a plenary session on September 13, 2007 (United Nations, 2008). In 2007, Canada actually voted against the Declaration (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2012a), but after growing pressure from domestic and international pressures, Canada adopted the Declaration on November 12, 2010, stating that “Canada reaffirms its commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of Indigenous People at home and abroad.”

But the Department of Aboriginal Affairs also notes the document is “non- legally binding and does not change Canadian law” (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2010, paras. 1 & 4). The Department explains that Canada had several concerns with the Declaration in 2007 and although “the concerns are well known and remain” after consultation with Aboriginal leaders who urged endorsement, Canada was confident it could “interpret the principles expressed in the declaration in a manner that is consistent with our Constitution and legal framework” (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2010, para. 13). The countries that have endorsed the resolution agree in principle that Indigenous peoples

are equal to all other peoples, while recognizing the right of all peoples to be different, to consider themselves different, and to be respected as such. (United Nations, 2008, p. 1)

In this instance, it is important to review several sections of the Declaration, including direct quotations, in order to clarify the commitment undertaken by the Canadian government. Article 37, section 1 of the Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples
first recognizes that Indigenous peoples have “the right to the recognition, observance and enforcement of treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements with States or their successors and to have States honour and respect such treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements” (United Nations, 2008, p. 13). Further, article 14, sections 1 and 2 state:

Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning [and] Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination. (p. 7)

Finally, article 21, sections 1 and 2 declare:

Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to improvement of their economic and social conditions, including inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security... [and] states shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of Indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities. (p. 9)

Upon review and reflection of these articles, one could argue that Canada has already adopted and accepted the necessary responsibilities to ensure that Aboriginal peoples have fair and equitable access to education. Further, Canada has agreed the Declaration can fit within its own legal framework and so it leaves little doubt that Canada has an obligation to ensure Aboriginal students have equal access to education. The challenge will remain however that Euro-centric institutions must act upon these policy decisions. Given the history just reviewed, and based on the conclusions of James Anaya’s visit to Canada, a timely implementation appears unlikely. This is the context within which I undertake my research.
Access and Its Link to Racism

Statistics and research have been presented demonstrating that the Euro-centric model of education is not working for Aboriginal students. This portion of the literature review delves deeper into this area. My review identifies why Native students are having trouble adapting to a foreign way of life (Steckley & Cummins, 2008). First we must understand the dissonance experienced by Aboriginal students in a Euro-centric model of education. The Indian Chiefs of Alberta published a strong stance on this issue more than 30 years ago; declaring the “root cause” for the greater proportion of drop outs in the case of Aboriginal people is linked to a difference in cultural values:

In Federal Indian Schools the content of the curriculum is usually that of the provincial school system [as it still is predominately today], and the provincial school system is geared to the needs of the dominant White society. Very little about Indian people is taught in our schools, and what has been taught has been very negative. (Indian Chiefs of Alberta, 1970, p. 264)

Traditional Indigenous education envisages the community as the classroom where each member is at all times a student and a teacher (Battiste, 2009/2010; Kirkness, 1999). On the other hand, a Euro-centric educational system is hierarchical and competitive and can create systemic barriers for non-White students (Erwin, 2009). Research suggests that Native students feel disconnected from their traditional beliefs and teachings when they are asked to remove themselves from their environment and find an objective view (Battiste et al., 2002; Iwama et al., 2009; Harris, 2002). For example, Harris (2002) states library research and high stress exams are foreign to Indigenous learning paradigms. If we couple these opposing educational paradigms with a history of colonialism and imperialism, we have the perfect storm. This perfect storm can be seen to have created broad
barriers to postsecondary education for Aboriginal students. These educational barriers can be further subdivided into areas such as “information or knowledge or motivation, academic and financial” (Education Policy Institute, 2008a, p. 9). The barriers can manifest themselves as psychological trauma for Aboriginal students, including a lack of self-confidence (Berger et al., 2007). As if an internal struggle were not challenging enough, Aboriginal students are racialized, since they face accounts of racism and discrimination in their pursuit of education (Erwin, 2009). This challenge is echoed by the United Nations (2009), stating that as a part of racism and discrimination, Indigenous peoples are marginalized. Sadly, these current accounts also echo the 1970’s findings of the Indian Chiefs of Alberta who explicitly recount stories of Indian children being subjected to various types of discrimination and racism thus demonstrating the decades of repeated racism that Aboriginal students face in a Euro-centric education system. The Indian Chiefs of Alberta (1970) note the devastating and negative impact as a result of discrimination regardless of whether or not such acts are committed deliberately or inadvertently, the effects are the same: Indian students acquire inferiority feelings and terminate their educational careers prematurely. (p. 273)

One example of discrimination that the Chiefs documented includes employees at a local health unit who treated non-Aboriginal children for head lice, but refused to treat the Aboriginal children. In another case, after a trial period of integration with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children, a school principal sent letters to Aboriginal children’s parents stating “Your children are not ready for integration, so send them to the reserve day school” (p. 274). This disrupted the Aboriginal children’s learning and the letters appeared to have been sent arbitrarily without adequate support and documentation to support the principal’s decision.
The Indian Chiefs of Alberta outlined that Aboriginal children were being treated differently including being transported far distances from home – that is if the buses that frequently broke down were even working. In one instance, a school principal refused to deliver band-subsidized lunches to Aboriginal students because a non-Aboriginal parent complained the Aboriginal students were getting better lunches. In another example, a student in grade nine, who was over-age for his grade, was given overly used and worn textbooks. When questioned, the school principal said it was irrelevant because he expected the student to drop out anyway.

The Indian Chiefs of Alberta also documented acts of “open confrontation”. This included a grade nine teacher who openly encouraged over-age Aboriginal students to drop out because she did not believe they would succeed. The teacher admitted she encouraged dropping out because she did not want to bring her class average down on the final grade nine results. In another junior high school, a teacher told an Aboriginal student, “You’re a dumb Indian”, after which the student immediately attacked the teacher. The student was expelled and forced to live 250 miles from her home because compulsory school attendance was in place. No action of reprimand was taken against the teacher who uttered the inflammatory insult to the Aboriginal student.

Unfortunately, decades later, the racism continues. In her work, Regan (2010) cites a report published in 2005 by the Department of Canadian Heritage that demonstrates racism is a much wider issue. The Report states that 46 percent of Aboriginal peoples living off-reserve have been subjected to racism or discrimination and 56 percent of Canadians knew that Aboriginal peoples were subjected to discrimination at the hands of other Canadians (p. 108). The United Nations (2009)...
suggests that societies must remove negativity from the learning environment by addressing stereotypes, using appropriate terminology in course materials and developing strict anti-discrimination rules.

As was discussed earlier, barriers are multi-level in the educational system and in order to understand why Aboriginal students are not graduating from postsecondary institutions, we must first recognize that a large proportion are not graduating from Euro-centric high schools (Education Policy Institute, 2008 a&b; Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2011). Research indicates that the lack of role models and parental involvement are contributing factors to this phenomenon. In a survey studying parental and community engagement, the First Nation Educational Council (McDonald, 2009) lists a number of barriers, first identified by Malatest & Associates Ltd, that limit Aboriginal involvement in secondary school, particularly lack of parental involvement. Examples of the barriers include the parents’ negative experiences with Euro-centric education, communication barriers, poverty, intimidation and racism, and segregation (McDonald, 2009). The parents’ experiences and unwillingness to engage with a Euro-centric system can be linked back to their experiences as survivors of residential schools. In short, Euro-centric education has not been a pleasant experience for Aboriginal peoples. Berger, Motte and Parkin (2007) present the Aboriginal student’s perspective when seeking PSE:

- inadequate financial resources; poor academic performance; lack of self-confidence and motivation; absence of role models who have postsecondary education experience; lack of understanding of Aboriginal culture on campus; and experience of racism on campus. (p. 58)
In this context, we must remember the Indian Residential Schools (IRS) caused “extreme emotional anguish that lingered on for years, often resulting in confused personal identities, alcoholism and the inability to engage in productive activities” (Thomas, 2010, p. 333). It is understandable why some parents have been less than enthusiastic to re-engage and encourage their children to pursue education in Canada’s systems. The scenario presents yet another layer of complexity and challenges for the Aboriginal student who is a first generation student. Without a role model to guide them, Finnie et al. (2011) suggest that Aboriginal students can be faced with a lack of preparedness for PSE, including a lack of information or finances. It is easier to understand why some Aboriginal students are the first in the family to attend PSE (Environics Institute, 2010).

Exclusive not only to Aboriginal students, Berger et al. (2007) suggest that first generation students are less likely to understand the cost and benefits associated with higher education. First generation learners do not have the benefit of an experienced learner and may even be “skeptical” about the potential benefits of PSE (Berger et al., 2007, p. 54). In a study reviewing the participation of low-income students, Deller and Oldford (2011) reiterate the same concern that some students do not understand the “opportunity cost” of education. Further, Deller and Oldford (2011) believe the situation is highly complex beyond financial barriers, including social and cultural determinants such as parental involvement. It is no wonder Aboriginal students may feel an ongoing disconnect with a dominant colonized culture, the education system and the barriers it imposes. For all the reasons already addressed with reference to colonization, including historical and current
racialization, marginalization and negative residential schools experiences, these arguments underscore the need to address and recognize treaty rights to education.

A Holistic View of Education

In a recent report examining the equality of educational opportunities in Canada, the Council of Ministers of Education (2012b) recognizes educational pathways, including the importance of the early years, stating that adequate preparation in early years creates strong links to secondary school completion. This suggests that a holistic view must be adopted when assessing access to and success in PSE for Aboriginal students. The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) (Montour, Antone, Wilson, Coulter, Stonefish, & Laughlin, 2012) indicate it is not enough to simply review PSE completion rates in isolation. They recommend that an assessment of education must consider the school, the teacher, the caregivers, the children, the community, the Elders and the land. More specifically, this means the Aboriginal view of education is beyond the Euro-centric structure of K-12-PSE. Aboriginal pedagogy includes aspects of community learning, experiential learning through life experiences outside of the classroom, the importance of the land, traditional teachings and oral cultural history.

The United Nations (2009) describes traditional education and institutions for Indigenous Peoples as a “lifelong pedagogical process and an intergenerational transfer of knowledge aimed at maintaining a flourishing and harmonious society of community” (p. 11). The UN’s definition includes all aspects of community at the core of decision-making, a mutual trust between the learners and the teacher and a
deep respect for the land, with sustainable management practices. The UN’s approach includes meaningful consultation with Indigenous philosophies embedded in the educational systems and not forcing Aboriginal peoples to adopt, accept and conform.

Another critical component in this equation must include the successful completion of a high school diploma. If one accepts Mendelson’s theory (2008) that education is more than high school and that education should be PSE or a trade certification, a student must first graduate from high school or its equivalent. Deller and Oldford (2011) declare that the most significant barrier to PSE attendance for low-income students in Ontario is the absence of a high school diploma as a basic PSE entrance requirement. The challenges Aboriginal students face to complete high school are numerous. From strictly a funding perspective, First Nations students who attend on-reserve schools must learn to survive in an environment that is short of support services. According to Carr-Stewart, Marshall and Steeves (2011) “the failure to fund First Nation education systems has left First Nations schools unable to provide supportive second level services similar to the array of services established in provincial school board/divisions” (p. 363).

The data in Table 2 suggest that over a 7-year period, Aboriginal students did not have the environment or support required to succeed in high school in Canada (see Table 2). From 1995 to 2002, the data demonstrate a declining rate of high school graduation over a 7-year period.
Table 2
First Nation Students Enrolled in Grade 12 or 13, Canada

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Enrolment in Graduating Year</th>
<th>Graduates</th>
<th>Graduation Rate as a %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995-96</td>
<td>5,909</td>
<td>2,001</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996-97</td>
<td>5,618</td>
<td>1,785</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-98</td>
<td>5,948</td>
<td>1,975</td>
<td>33.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-99</td>
<td>6,038</td>
<td>1,939</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-00</td>
<td>6,463</td>
<td>2,072</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-01</td>
<td>7,062</td>
<td>2,168</td>
<td>30.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>6,706</td>
<td>1,983</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. From Carr-Stewart, 2006

Similar data to those reflected in Table 2 are discussed in a report released by the Auditor General of Canada (Office of the Auditor General, 2000). The Report reviews the function of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, with specific reference to its treaty responsibilities for providing First Nations with elementary and secondary education. The Report outlines 20 years of issues with education for First Nations, including inadequate government and management structures and the loss of Aboriginal languages. Issues of deficiency associated with funding, curriculum and teacher training combine with alarming educational attainment statistics to reveal the differences in education patterns between Aboriginal peoples and all other Canadians.

The statistics are not surprising recognizing that during this same time frame, the Auditor General (2000) “could not find a formal articulation of the Department’s [of Indian and Northern Affairs] role or responsibilities in education” (p. 4-11). The Auditor General therefore concludes that “the Department’s accountability for results is weakened and its assurance that education funding is being spent appropriately is, at best, unclear” (p. 4-11). Consequently, the Report calls for the Department to articulate its role and demonstrate leadership to ensure its educational
responsibilities are being met. One can begin to appreciate the struggle an 
Aboriginal student would face when issues of self-esteem, self-worth and racism 
flourish in an educational system that favours Euro-centric beliefs and lacks 
Aboriginal policy and voices.

Looking at the links between K-12 education and PSE, Patterson (2006) 
highlights an attempted partnership between First Nations and the federal 
government that began in 2004, known as the previously mentioned “Kelowna 
Accord”. In her review of the process, Patterson (2006) states that 

in 2001, 44 percent of Aboriginal people aged 20 through 24 had less than 
high school education as compared to 19 percent for Canada as a whole. Only 
23 percent of Aboriginal people aged 18 to 29 reported having completed their 
postsecondary education, compared to 43 percent in the rest of Canada. (p. 9)

Five years later, the statistics had hardly improved. In fact, according to Patterson 
(2006) the PSE attainment gap between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population 
grew from 20 percent in 2001 to 26 percent in 2006. The Canadian Council on 
Learning (CCL) (2009) confirms that 

in 2006, 68 percent of non-Aboriginal young adults (aged 25-34) held a 
postsecondary credential, compared to 42 percent of Aboriginal young adults. 
(p. 4)

Three years later, Colleges Ontario (2009) conducted an environmental scan 
and it too concluded that Aboriginal students are less likely than non-Aboriginals to 
complete high school. In short, all of these statistics are highlighting a significant 
education gap at both the secondary and postsecondary levels between Aboriginal 
and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada, and it is becoming clear why it exists.
According to 2011 Statistics Canada data outlined in a report examining dropout rates and labour market outcomes for youth (Council of Ministers of Education, 2012b), between 2007 and 2012, the three-year average high school drop out rate among First Nations people living off-reserve, Métis, and Inuit aged 20 to 24 was 22.6 percent compared to 8.5 percent of non-Aboriginal people (p. 20). Similarly, when reviewing the most recent census data from Statistics Canada (2012) in Table 3, one can see that overall educational attainment rates for the off-reserve Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations are relatively the same for high school, trade certificates and colleges (see Table 3). However, the data suggest the biggest challenges and educational gaps for Aboriginal peoples in Canada remain with the completion of a high school diploma and the attainment of a university degree. Over the course of the three years from 2009-2011, there was on average an 11.6 percent difference between the high school completion rate for off-reserve Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students. Further, albeit over a small series of years, there appears to be minimal difference in gains in high school completion for the off-reserve Aboriginal population (a 2 percentage point increase) from 2009 to 2011. In reviewing the statistics associated with university attainment levels, if one assumes a gain of one percent per year for only off-reserve Aboriginal students and no increase to non-Aboriginal student achievement rates, it will take at least 18 years to close the university degree gap.
Table 3
*Educational Attainment, Population Aged 25-64, in Canada and Ontario*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Group</th>
<th>&lt; High School</th>
<th>High School</th>
<th>Trade/ Apprenticeship</th>
<th>College</th>
<th>University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>ON</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>ON</td>
<td>CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2011</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-reserve Aboriginal</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Aboriginal</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2010</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-reserve Aboriginal</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Aboriginal</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2009</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-reserve Aboriginal</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Aboriginal</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2012*

Moving from comparing national PSE data to that of Ontario, Finnie et al. (2012), present the following perspective: “Aboriginal college students have the highest leaving rates of any group in Ontario (32%) and the rest of Canada (33.1%); and Aboriginal graduation rates are lower than those of other college students in Ontario (52.5% vs. 59.1%) and lower than the rest of Canada (43.8% versus 54.9%)” (p. 22). Further, the authors suggest that “Aboriginal students have significantly higher rates of leaving university without earning a credential” (Finnie et al., 2012, p. 48) and when it comes to student success there is a need to look at more than just retention strategies such as targeting students before PSE. Finally, Zhao (2012) examines Ontario’s PSE participation rates for 18 to 21 year-olds from 2002-2007.
The participation rates were 27 percent for college enrolment non-Aboriginals and 21 percent for Aboriginals, a smaller gap than the 42 percent for university enrolment and 36 percent for Aboriginals.

A trend can be seen in the data presented thus far. Regardless of the statistics reviewed, over the last two decades, it is a grim picture for Aboriginal students, specifically for high school and university completion. The data suggest that college diploma achievement rates are relatively at par, while areas where the most gains are to be made for Aboriginal students are with high school completion and the attainment of a university degree. One might suggest that colleges have been more successful due to their structure of support services given their access mandate (Dennison & Gallagher, 1986; Clark, Moran, Skolnik & Trick, 2009). Nevertheless, in light of this apparent success of colleges, in a study examining PSE persistence in Ontario and Canada, let us remember the analysis of Finnie et al. (2012) who found that although the difference was not enormous between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students (1-9%), Aboriginal students had the highest leaving rates both in Ontario and the rest of Canada.

How are these statistics to be explained? I would suggest that a “chilly climate” consistent with our history of colonization has left behind what Lavelle and Poole (2010) refer to as a negative impact on native identity. As a result of colonization’s negative impact, Brade et. al (2003) suggest Aboriginal students may feel “less deserving, less intelligent and less worthy” of PSE (p. 239). Combining all of these conditions, including the historical context, one can start to appreciate the devastating impacts on Aboriginal students. According to the 2004 Auditor General’s Report, the operational level of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada had “ambiguities
and inconsistencies in the role of regional offices in fulfilling the Department’s mandate and achieving its education objectives” (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2004, p. 11). This same report from the Auditor General speaks to the absence of reliable and consistent data regarding actual costs of education delivery. Carr-Stewart (2006) claims that when the Canadian government does acknowledge the disparity in achievement levels, it attempts to counter the low achievement rates outlined by the statistics by saying the data do not account for First Nations students who return to school years later and cultural or socio-economic factors are not taken into account. Further, Carr-Stewart also presents data that suggest First Nation students are more likely than non-First Nations to drop out or leave school either before grade nine, before age 20 or before high school graduation (see Table 4).

Table 4
*Comparative Information on Elementary and Secondary Education, 2000*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Attainment</th>
<th>First Nations</th>
<th>All Canadians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student eligible to attend elementary and secondary school who are not enrolled</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop-out rates before completion of grade 9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth between 18 and 20 who left school</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth between 18 and 20 who graduated</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population with at least high school education</td>
<td>37*</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*on-reserve

*Note.* Adapted from Carr-Stewart, 2006

Although the statistics do present an alarming situation of inequity, the focus here should be correcting the recognized issue that the Department “in charge” of Aboriginal education lacks vision, clarity and appropriate funding models.
In reviewing the challenges and barriers Aboriginal students face in a Euro-centric system, one can understand why there have historically been and continue to be lower educational attainment rates for Aboriginal students compared to the non-Aboriginal population. Carr-Stewart, Marshall and Steeves (2011), advocates of First Nation’s education, declare “many factors intertwine in this dismal picture, for too long and a lack of funding and institutional resources have marred the provision of quality educational services for First Nations people” (p. 364).

**Funding**

A further issue to add to this discussion is a lack of funding at both the secondary and postsecondary levels. A lack of adequate funding is one of the main barriers for Aboriginal students as different governments and Euro-centric bodies point fingers of accountability at each other with no one area wishing to claim responsibility. According to Norrie and Lennon (2011) and the Atlantic Evaluation Group (2010), funding plays a key role with regard to PSE access for underrepresented groups. According to Berger et al. (2007), the price of PSE in Canada has increased dramatically in the past 15 years. This increasing cost has been explicitly identified in an American context. In a joint report, the Educational Policy Institute and Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Cooperation (2008) stated that, “in the early 1980’s, it was inconceivable [emphasis added] that a community college student would take on a loan” (p. 4). Berger et al. (2007) caution that the increasing cost of PSE not only increases student debt upon graduation, it also inhibits entry and persistence. Further, Aboriginal students are less able to pursue
loans or financial assistance; such as government loans from those they deem “the oppressor”, namely federal and provincial institutions (Erwin, 2009). More important, according to the United Nations (2009), “public spending on Indigenous education is generally inadequate and lower than for other sections of the population” (p. 22). Although overall, Ontario college participation rates are relatively high when compared to the national average, Drewes (2008) concludes that the correlation between participation in PSE and family income remains significant in Ontario as well as other parts of the country. Drewes’ conclusion is clearly relevant to the observation of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (2011), which compared annual income between Aboriginal and the education of non- Aboriginal peoples and found a nearly 27 percent difference. Thus funding and disposable income favours non-Aboriginal people.

In 2004, the Auditor General of Canada declared a need for an equitable distribution of funds allocated to education (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2004). Yet the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, responsible for First Nations education, was not even tracking the number of unfunded eligible students. In 2004, the Auditor General outlined some key events that have affected PSE for First Nations students. The review spans 1977 to 2003, noting key milestones, which include a policy decision in 1989 to increase funding for PSE. This created the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) on March 20, 1989; under which funding was no longer based on a fixed budget. Program administration for postsecondary funding was transferred to First Nations and these changes dramatically increased access for students. In 1992, a Department review determined that there remained a lack of funding. Nevertheless, despite the
successes of the PSSSP, annual funding increases for postsecondary education were capped at 2 percent growth (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2004). Simeone (2011) recognizes that ever since, the cap has been a source of tension between the Canadian government and Aboriginal peoples. As the First Nations point out, the cap prevents taking into account population increases and inflation, which results in funding shortfalls.

The lack of access to funding for Aboriginal students can be demonstrated in concrete numbers (McDonald & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2010) where between the years of 2001 and 2006, 10,589 First Nation students were denied access to PSE because of a lack of available funding. Further, McDonald and Wesley-Esquimaux (2010) estimate that the 2 percent cap on PSE funding in 1996-97 resulted in a 20 percent decrease in attendance: 27,5000 students in 1999-2000 fell to 22,000 students in 2008-09. Looking at these statistics, and remembering that education is a treaty right (Carr-Stewart & Steeves, 2009; University of Toronto, 2009; National Indian Brotherhood, 1972; McDonald & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2010; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Carr-Stewart, 2006; Brant Castellano et al., 2008), one can understand why McDonald and Wesley-Esquimaux (2010) call the PSE funding for First Nation students “grossly inadequate” (p. 7). Chronic underfunding for Aboriginal education is also noted by Brant Castellano et al. (2008). Moreover, despite the federal treaty obligation to fund PSE, a 2010 inventory of Canadian University programs and services for Aboriginal students (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2010) highlights federal funding as the smallest source of support for facilities, on campus activities, academic and transition programs (all references specifically address programming for Aboriginal students).
This funding inadequacy has been blamed on Aboriginal students themselves and their “psychological state”. Usher (2009) says that the literature demonstrates Aboriginal students are at high risk of not persisting while noting that inadequate financial resources are a significant contributing factor as it is in other poor families. He recounts the PSE “barriers” already discussed such as a dissonance with the Euro-centric system, discrimination and lack of role models. Brade et al. (2003) similarly address these psychological barriers and explain their manifestation from a historical perspective remarking that, “to be Native was to be excluded from the social, educational and employment arenas enjoyed by the White majority” (p. 244) but Usher (2009) emphasizes lack of funding as the important fact, adding that Aboriginal students have an increasing financial burden because they often must leave their communities in order to attend PSE. This translates as a need for more money to pay for accommodation and creates a potential for isolation, including a lack of emotional support. In his 2009 Report provided to the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, Usher addresses the status of the PSSSP. In a neutral and factual report, he reviews the federal system that provides non-repayable financial aid for First Nations students to attend eligible colleges and universities. He describes a system of funding that has gradually moved away from administration by the federal government towards control by individual First Nations. It is a system that is cumbersome and bureaucratic and which lacks a national distribution model. He concludes that “the amount of money available under the PSSSP has stayed roughly constant, in real dollars, over the past 15 years” (p. 12). Carr-Stewart and Steeves (2009) elaborate on this idea, arguing that the decision to cap the funding “guaranteed an inadequate funding formula” because the cost of living increases
were not accounted for (p. 5). Usher (2009) concludes that the funding cap has contributed to a rationing of dollars and a reduced amount of money available to support First Nation students. In short, he emphasizes, “as the costs have risen while the amount of money available has stayed more or less stable, the number of people receiving PSSSP has fallen” (Usher, 2009, p. 13).

A Report commissioned by Statistics Canada and The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (Atlantic Evaluation Group, 2010) puts this observation into context, stating that the PSSSP and the University and College Entrance Preparation Programs are the two main programs through which Aboriginal students can obtain funding for PSE which

increased by about 6 percent between 2002-03 and 2006-07. During the same period, tuition costs increased by 21 percent, and Canada’s consumer price index increased by 12 percent. (p. 48)

FNEC (2009) claims that PSSSP funding has been “historically inadequate to meet the postsecondary funding needs of First Nations across Canada” (p. 39).

Remembering that in order to reach PSE, students must first successfully navigate the K-12 system, it is important to note the funding shortfalls at the K-12 level as well. FNEC (2009) reminds us that, typically, First Nations lack funding for secondary services such as library books, librarians’ salaries, construction or maintenance costs. The shortfall was manifested in 2003 with 65 percent of First Nations school principals declaring inadequate funding as a barrier to the adoption and integration of information and communication technologies. According to FNEC, in 2007, although the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs identified that 69 new First Nations schools were needed across Canada, and an additional 27 were in need of major renovations, funding was provided to support 21 new schools and 16 renovations projects. (p. 24)
Phillips (2011) conducted a First Nations K-12 education funding review of several Canadian provinces, including British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Alberta and Ontario between the years of 2001-2010. In these reviews, it is reported that funding for students at a First Nation or provincial school ranges from $1,500 to $7,000 per student. What is responsible for this wide range? Phillips (2011) explains that

the only difference was that one school was on a First Nation while the second school was a provincial school. There are different funding levels for different schools and the First Nations School was receiving less. (p. 238)

According to the AFN (2011), “on average, First Nation schools receive at least $2,000 less per child, yet are required to deliver a provincial curriculum by provincially certified teachers” (p. 6). Carr-Stewart (2006) argues that reducing the educational budget results in fewer teachers being hired and/or beginning teachers at lower salary levels; the lack of purchase of up-to-date curricula; limits the educational programming provided within the schools...; and limits school trips and extra-curricular activities. (p. 1007-8)

She is concerned about the long-term effects on student attainment, not to mention the significant effect on teacher morale. This again demonstrates a system created to marginalize Aboriginal peoples. An underfunded education system that lacks parity with its off-reserve counterparts will not support Aboriginal student success.

These concerns are echoed by the AFN (2011), who states that underfunding denies access to items such as gyms, libraries, textbooks, computers and science labs. This comment is taken from their report, “It’s Our Time: A Call to Action on Education. A Year in Review: 2010-2011” (Assembly of First Nations, 2011). Their call to action includes an urgent need for the Government of Canada to reconcile the rights of Aboriginal peoples in education acts across the country to create a secure and sustainable fiscal framework, including equitable funding arrangements. The
AFN envisions a full support system for First Nation education and the creation of positive learning environments in First Nation communities. Unique to this paper is the invitation for “corporate Canada and philanthropic organizations” to support partnerships and investments for program, training and infrastructure (p. 16). The Assembly of First Nations is tired of waiting on unanswered calls and the lack lustre performance of the Canadian government.

One cannot help but wonder why the countless government documents and decrees in support of education for Aboriginal peoples have sparked such little change. The inaction of funding continues in spite of ongoing calls from Aboriginal communities and government and academic reports underscoring the need for change, and in particular the need for appropriate and adequate funding. According to the Drummond Report (Drummond, Giroux, Pigott, & Stephenson, 2012), a multi-year strategy to top up First Nation’s funding is required because it is commonly noted that federal funding falls well short of parity with provincial education on spending per student. The intolerable delays from the federal government to increase per-student funding for on-reserve education to close the gap with provincial funding levels must end. (p. 211)

The Drummond Report suggests Ontario’s prosperity and global competitiveness is based on a strong education system. The authors specifically address First Nations education, stating that on-reserve education is in urgent need of reform. Despite the fiscal restraint and economic challenges in the province, the Drummond Report (Drummond et al., 2012) finds there is an urgent need to improve First Nations on-reserve education. The Report calls the current state of First Nations education in Ontario “unacceptable” (p. 209).
The concerns at the K-12 level are all too similar to those noted by the Auditor General of Canada about PSE funding. The 2004 Report about PSE funding noted “significant weaknesses concerning the PSSSP’s management and accountability framework” including a lack of clarity in defined roles and responsibilities (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2004, p. 1). With resounding accord, funding for Aboriginal education has been declared to be critical in Aboriginal student success.

In summary, a critical approach reveals the government’s commitment to Aboriginal education as questionable. In fact, the government’s actions and policy manoeuvres can be seen as reflecting nothing more than lip service and public political posturing. A history marred with paternalism, imperialism and lack of respect for fundamental human rights has significantly impacted both access and funding for Aboriginal students with regards to education. This review demonstrates a pattern of underfunding. This complex, poorly administered and underfunded rationing program does not sound like an equitable Canadian policy directive in support of increasing Aboriginal education.

**Treaty Rights**

In a document entitled *Gathering Strength – Canada’s Aboriginal Action Plan*, the Government of Canada, led by the Prime Minister, announced on January 7, 1998 that it affirmed

both historic and modern-day treaties will continue to be the key elements in the future relationships between Aboriginal people and the Crown. The federal government believes that the treaties, and the relationship they represent, can guide the way to a shared future. (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2010, para. 13)
The Crown has affirmed these Constitutional rights for Aboriginal peoples on more than one occasion. For example, the same document states that “treaty rights already in existence in 1982 (the year the Constitution Act was passed), and those that came afterwards, are recognized and affirmed by Canada’s constitution” (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2010, para. 4). As noted above, an even more recent governmental perspective on education recently announced by the Council of Education Ministers, Canada (2012a) envisages a “school system that reflect the values of the legislation cited by creating and maintaining conditions that foster success and equitable treatment for all” (p. 13). Yet in reality, as one critical theorist pointed out, “from the 1880’s onwards, First Nations have demanded fulfilment of the Crown’s treaty commitments, often to little avail” (Carr-Stewart, 2006, p. 1000).

On the wider topic of treaty relations, yet indicative of the one-sided nature of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations, is the Royal Proclamation of 1763; the British Crown issued a proclamation under King George III upon the conclusion of the Seven Years War with France and Britain. It is the cornerstone of many treaty conversations, especially Aboriginal land claims (Steckley and Cummins, 2008). The Proclamation created limits for Canadian borders and Indian lands, including traditional Indian hunting grounds. According to the Proclamation, lands not ceded by the Indians remained their property and could not be settled by non-Indians. Although there remains controversy between Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian government about whether or not the Proclamation is in force, Aboriginal peoples believe this document outlines Aboriginal ownership of non-ceded lands.
Centuries after the Royal Proclamation, the Indian Chiefs of Alberta prepared a foundational document “Citizens Plus” (1970) to inform the Canadian government that the 1969 Chrétien “White Paper” intending to impact treaty land rights would not be supported. The Chiefs felt the Canadian government was attempting to shift the management of Indian Affairs, including land and treaty rights, from a federal to a provincial level. Moreover, the Chiefs were quite concerned about the potential negative long-term impacts of yet another imposed decision:

To us who are Treaty Indians there is nothing more important than our Treaties, our lands and the well-being of our future generations. We have studied carefully the contents of the Government White Paper on Indians and we have concluded that it offers despair instead of hope. Under the guise of land ownership, the government has devised a scheme whereby within a generation or shortly after the proposed Indian Lands Act expires our people would be left with no land and consequently the future generation would be condemned to the despair and ugly spectre of urban poverty ghettos. (Indian Chiefs of Alberta, 1970, p. 189)

Further, the Indian Chiefs of Alberta outline that Indians have upheld their end of the agreement and put forth a compelling argument as to why there should be recognition for native life and the contribution of Aboriginal peoples in Canada:

Everyone should recognize that Indians have contributed much to the Canadian community. When we signed the treaties we promised to be good and loyal subjects to the Queen. The record is clear – we kept our promises. We were assured we would not be required to serve in foreign wars; nevertheless many Indians volunteered in greater proportion than non-Indian Canadians for service in two world wars. We live and are agreeable to live within the framework of Canadian civil and criminal law. We pay the same indirect and sales taxes that other Canadians pay. Our treaty rights cost Canada very little in relation to the Gross National Product or to the value of the lands ceded, but they are essential to us. (Indian Chiefs of Alberta, 1970, p. 194)

According to the Indian Chiefs of Alberta, the spirit and intent of the treaties is more important than the precise lettering of a language that was foreign to their ancestors at the time treaties were signed. In Indigenous thought, the treaties were intended to
run forever with room to change as current lives changed. This would mean that Indian rights would be assured “as long as the sun rises and the river runs” (Indian Chiefs of Alberta, 1970, p. 199).

With respect to treaty rights, and education in particular, Carr-Stewart (2009) argues convincingly that an essential aspect of any discussion related to First Nations education must include the numbered treaties. The numbered treaties are formal contractual agreements between the Crown and First Nations that delineated the terms under which First Nations agreed to share their traditional lands with new comers. (p. 10)

Unfortunately despite the intention to reach a negotiated agreement “treaties would, however, be as much a symbol of misunderstanding than one of mutual agreement” (Carr-Stewart, 2001, p. 128). Regan (2010) suggests that Native negotiators were insistent about including education clauses in treaties being signed with the Canadian government because, as believers in continuous and ongoing learning, the Indigenous leaders knew their people would need new skills to survive in a changing world. Various treaties outline the federal government’s obligations to provide education. Figure 2 illustrates historic treaties in Canada. According to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (2013b), the treaties outlined on the map were negotiated with First Nations between 1725 and 1923 and “these treaties cover most of Ontario, the Prairie Provinces, parts of Vancouver Island, Northwest Territories and Atlantic Canada” (para. 2).
Figure 2: Historic Treaty-Making in Canada

Note. From Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, December, 2013b
A review of some of the actual language in numbered treaties shows a remarkable amount of similarity and commitment on the part of the Crown. For example, Treaty 2 in Southern Alberta outlines: “And further, Her Majesty agrees to maintain a school in each reserve hereby made, where the Indians of the reserve shall desire it.” Treaties 3, 4 and 5 which span Ontario, Saskatchewan, central Alberta and small parts of Manitoba all have the same and similar language to Treaty 2: “And Further, Her Majesty agrees to maintain schools for instruction in such reserves hereby made as to Her Government of Her Dominion of Canada may seem advisable, whenever the Indians of the reserve shall desire it.” Although Treaty 8 which covers parts of British Columbia, Saskatchewan, northern Alberta and the North West Territories, includes Canadian authority to control decision-making, the language does speak to education and includes a provision for teachers’ salaries: “Further, Her Majesty agrees to pay the salaries of such teachers to instruct the children of said Indians as to her majesty’s Government of Canada may seem advisable.” Finally, Treaty 9, which covers most of Northern Ontario, takes another step beyond salaries and includes building and equipment provisions under more carefully chosen paternalistic language: “Further, His majesty agrees to pay such salaries of teachers to instruct the children of said Indians, and also to provide such school buildings and education equipment as may seem advisable to His majesty’s Government of Canada” (Charleston & McDonald-Jacobs, 1998, pp. 2-3). According to First Nations, this language clearly demonstrates a treaty right for appropriate funding levels from the government of Canada for Aboriginal education in Canada.
The then NIB and now AFN highlighted one clear message in the various treaties that; the right to determine educational policy is the “exclusive domain of each First Nations government” (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 14). The NIB/AFN calls for an educational system that is self-determined, inclusive of community needs, unique to a localized region, adequately funded (by the federal government) and based upon preserving Indigenous philosophies. The Indigenous way of life thus must be embedded in quality curriculum. They envisage a system based on a traditional way of life that holds respect for Elders and is grounded in integrity and compassion. Adequate federal funding is key to their formula for success as is an authentic understanding of the Indigenous way of life for both Native and non-Native populations. The NIB/AFN realized this would not be an easy task and officially call for “radical reform of the Indian Act [and a] repeal of all sections that promote paternalism” (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 33). They saw the general educational philosophy as a way to restore Indigenous pride in their own culture. Gaviria (2013) explores the notion of education in the context of self-determination and how this translates into the present day. She sees a complex struggle for Aboriginal peoples when postsecondary education and self-determination intersect:

Postsecondary education appears to inherit both the spirit of the struggle and the practicalities of running the achieved polities...the right to self-determination brings about social reorganizations and with the, new elites, new exclusions, and renewed relationships with capital. These reorganizations are neither fixed in an ideology of resistance or environmental stewardship, nor can they be reduced to colonial or post-colonial relationships. (Gaviria, 2013, p. 199)
Moving back to the historical perspective, the AFN assessed education, jurisdiction and governance 20 years after the call for radical reform. In 2012 the AFN once again concluded

First Nations must have the opportunity to define their vision of First Nations student success and, with that, be supported in their endeavour to create standards and curricula, teaching and language development. (p. 36)

Thus Aboriginal leaders have argued that in order to move forward, they must identify standards on what and how they want their children to be taught and then assessment tools and theory will be developed to assess the success of their vision on continuous learning.

According to Brant Castellano et al. (2008), the Crown’s responsibility is three-fold: to establish schools, to provide adequate educational outcomes and to provide a choice to Aboriginal Peoples regarding their own education. These themes and requests repeat themselves throughout this historical evolution. More specifically, Chapter 5 of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) was dedicated to a similar list of recommendations for the future direction of education for Aboriginal peoples. In addition to recognizing the treaty promise of education, the Commission outlines in detail 440 recommendations, elaborating on each point with further explanation. The recommendations to improve education for Aboriginal Peoples include: an acknowledgment of self-government (note not self-determination); support for early childhood education and youth empowerment; recognition and transferability of and for Aboriginal education programming; curriculum development; a focus on Aboriginal languages; Aboriginal involvement in decision making and strategy development; a focus on high school programs including re-entry and cooperative education; an expanded network of Aboriginal teachers and teacher
education and development programs; adequate funding for all levels of education – including postsecondary and specifically Aboriginal institutions of higher learning. The inclusion of Elders in the consultation and education process is highlighted, along with a need to recognize and appreciate Indigenous knowledge. Finally, the RCAP recommends reliable and appropriate data collection methodologies along with an underlying need to share information for future planning and development.

Some of the recommendations, including calls for treaty implementation, are slowly coming to fruition and others are waiting to be acknowledged. The ICIE movement has progressed and the present state of Aboriginal philosophy regarding First Nations’ education is reviewed in the final portion of the literature review, which also introduces an overview of current and successful practices in Aboriginal PSE.

**Self-Determination and Sovereignty**

Embedded and referenced in the First Nations’ documents written by the Assembly of First Nations and the National Indian Brotherhood introduced above is the right to Aboriginal self-determination and more importantly – sovereignty. Gaviria (2013) defines self-determination as a right where

self-determination applies to peoples entitled to determine their status without external interference. Paradoxically, the collective consciousness of being “a people” evolves from a sustained external interference. (p. 10)

Monture-Angus (1999) draws attention to the difference between sovereignty and self-governance. In her opinion, self-governance falls short and is not enough. She sees the right to sovereignty and self-determination as the only solution to “the
Indian problem” and she defines sovereignty as including more than both rights and responsibility too. A sovereign nation is self-disciplined and self-determining:

Sovereignty aims at positioning Indigenous peoples as “stewards” on issues of global concern, specifically environmental sustainability.... Sovereignty also aims at reframing the relationship between Indigenous groups and the nation state. (Gaviria, 2013, p. 80)

It is critical to note that Aboriginal peoples in Canada interpret the right to self-determination and sovereignty as a legislative, treaty and inherent right.

The Library of Parliament of Canada has adopted its own language and produced a document on “Aboriginal Self-Government” (Hurley, 2009) outlining political and legislative history in Canada. Reference is made to the 1983 Penner Report, which according to Weaver (1984), provided a significant move towards the idea of Aboriginal self-governance. In a public federal document regarding Aboriginal self-governance, Hurley (2009) recognizes that in 1995, the inherent right to Aboriginal self-government was generally accepted as an existing right under section 35 of the Constitution Act. Hurley’s report (2009) opens with; “Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 recognizes and affirms the existing Aboriginal and treaty rights of Indians, Inuit and Métis, without defining those rights” (p. 1). It is in the definition of these words and application of these rights where the controversy lies. For example, not all First Nations have treaties and thus do not assert treaty rights, but rather see their rights as “inherent” or pre-existing, thus not reliant on validation from a colonized structure. Aptly stated by Monture-Angus, “just as the notion of self-government carries with it a derogatory meaning for many Aboriginal peoples, the phrase sovereignty carries with it a particular cultural and legal meaning which causes non-Aboriginal people to be fearful” (p. 38). Hurley (2009) recalls that the
1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples set out an approach to self-governance and Hurley submits his own call for the abolition of the Department of Indian Affairs. Hurley highlights self-governance agreements (SGA) across the country and a seemingly positive picture is painted, stating “negotiations are currently in progress in virtually every jurisdiction across the country” (p. 6).

The website for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) provides some insight into this matter. INAC claims the intent of SGAs is to arrange for “Aboriginal groups to govern their internal affairs and assume greater responsibility and control over their decision-making that affects that communities” (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2009, para. 1). Note the subtlety in the wording “assume greater responsibility” as opposed to “full responsibility and self-determination”. Although INAC confirms agreements will be locally negotiated, it clarifies the inherent right to self-governance is not a right to sovereignty. INAC states that no additional funding will be provided to establish or run SGAs and highlights a model of cost sharing “among federal, provincial and territorial governments, and Aboriginal governments and institutions” (para. 9). In staying true to a two-eyed approach, it must be acknowledged that this starkly contradicts the Aboriginal interpretation of treaty rights. INAC sees its own system as the benchmark to which Aboriginal education must conform yet Aboriginal peoples want full and total control and do not see the Euro-centric system as the benchmark. As outlined by Brant Castellano et al. (2008), key terms such as “control” and “consultation” have historically held different meanings as interpreted by the Canadian government and Aboriginal communities respectively. The lack of a common meaning has created controversy and frustration.
The AFN commissioned McCue and Associates (1999) to review the self-governing agreements (SGAs) with Canada and First Nations. McCue and Associates reviewed six SGA’s with specific reference to education and jurisdiction. Although the review states it is a “fair and reasonable assumption” for First Nations to believe they had “legal authority and power to educate their children in any way, by any means, for whatever purpose they so chose,” this was not the conclusion of the McCue Report (p. 4). The authors concluded that the SGAs provide limited control and conditions that restrict First Nations communities from comparable education because of the limited funding. In other words, the Euro-centric model is still the measure by which education shall be judged. Aboriginal leaders are cautioned that difficulties could inevitably emerge upon implementation of these agreements. Federal law still governs suitability and the comparable standard by which ICIE will be judged. The SGA report’s summary recommendation to the Aboriginal community reads:

At best, they suggest that the jurisdiction of self-government amounts to the jurisdiction to self-regulate and to self-administer. At worst, they affect a definition of self-government that is as narrow, albeit more refined, as the current model of Indian Act band governments. (McCue & Associates, 1999, p. 17)

This less than positive outlook is a shared perspective. The Aboriginal Institutes’ Consortium (2005) examined the government policy shrouding Aboriginal PSE institutions. The Report highlights that education has historically been used as a tool by the Canadian government to “absorb and assimilate” Aboriginal peoples (Aboriginal Institutes’ Consortium, 2005, p. 6). Although the Report outlines recommendations and key qualities of Aboriginal PSE institutions, it draws attention to similar concerns already raised. Aboriginal institutions lack consistent funding and
do not have full recognition and accreditation. For example, courses from Aboriginal institutions of higher education are often not recognized nor are they transferable to other Euro-centric institutions in Canada. Further, Aboriginal PSE institutions are often required to create partnerships with accredited (Euro-centric) institutions in order to grant a credential. These partnerships often lead to “high levels of frustration, a lack of mutual respect and process that are extremely time consuming” and are often costly because funding is channelled through the accredited institution to the Aboriginal institution for an administrative fee of anywhere from 15-30 percent (Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium, 2005, p. 51). The Aboriginal institutions therefore have minimal control over access to their own funding. The Aboriginal Institutes’ Consortium emphasizes that these forced partnerships fundamentally infringe on the principles of self-determination.

Returning to the NIB policy paper that calls for “compete and total control over education” and drawing attention to an ongoing 30-year struggle (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 21), it is difficult to consider ICIE a reality when a review of SGAs summarizes them as “flawed and worthy of reconsideration” (McCue & Associates, 1999, p. 24). In the words of Carr-Stewart (2006), “three decades later, the fulfilment of [the NIB] aspirations is still waiting” (p. 1014). According to Brant Castellano et al. (2008), the call for action gains credibility because research indicates that when Aboriginal Peoples have control over their own education, results include higher levels of completion and personal satisfaction. The higher education completion rates and personal successes help Aboriginal peoples achieve higher levels of employment (Brant Castellano et al., 2008).
Summary

This thesis has first recounted Canadian history, including the colonization of Indigenous peoples - the original inhabitants of Turtle Island. The literature review has discussed how a Euro-centric system has intentionally created barriers to Canada’s Euro-centric postsecondary education system for Aboriginal peoples. Second, the chapter challenged the Canadian peacemaker myth and assimilation practices, suggesting the Aboriginal experience of colonization was far from peaceful, in fact, it was the opposite of peaceful with its continuance of paternalism, mass death (genocide) and ongoing human rights violations.

With Prime Minister Harper’s apology in 2008, Canada announced its intention to accept its responsibilities for the role it played during the hurtful colonization process. Despite the adoption of the United Nation Declarations to support both basic human rights and the rights of Indigenous peoples, significant gaps persist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal in socio-economic status and PSE attainment rates. Despite the government’s attempts to colonize the People of Turtle Island, research was presented that highlights the strength and resilience of Aboriginal peoples as they continue to navigate Euro-centric systems marred with racism.

Finally, the chapter concludes with a more complete understanding of the path to decolonization and true self-determination. This includes an understanding of holistic education that is lifelong, wide in scope and not narrowed to the Euro-centric view of the K-12 system. Aboriginal arguments were presented that outline the rights of Aboriginal peoples as reflected and outlined in sacred treaties. These treaties confirm not only the Canadian government’s responsibility to provide education, but also its responsibility to provide adequate funding for the education. Further, as
sovereign nations, Aboriginal peoples have time and time again declared a right to self-determination that is beyond self-governance and paternalistic practices. Their documents and beliefs have been quite consistent: Aboriginal peoples intend to have their treaty rights recognized as long as the river runs and they will not sit idly by as the governments pass legislation to further a one-sided agenda.

Moving forward, Chapter Three presents an overview of my research methodology, including the organic movement towards a more Aboriginal centred methodology after a Euro-centric model had initially been followed. Chapter Four presents an analysis of Aboriginal student enrolment statistics in Ontario Colleges and provides the context of student success in the College system, drawing parallels to Aboriginal pedagogy. Chapter Five highlights the findings of the interview data with key participants, including an analysis of the students, staff and Elders thoughts about their interactions with Euro-centric PSE. Chapter Six presents frameworks to further Aboriginal postsecondary success strategies, including explicit recommendations for Euro-centric institutions to “Indigenize” their campuses. The final chapter summarizes and explores my personal reflections regarding my thesis journey, including possible next steps for further research and limitations of the present study. Finally, the thesis comes to a conclusion with Elders’ and then personal reflections about the key elements necessary to further Aboriginal student success strategies.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

As will be outlined further in the chapter, when I first began this research, I followed a Euro-centric path because this is what I knew and the research was being conducted with the support of a Euro-centric institution. However, as my knowledge about Aboriginal paradigms increased, and I began to further understand how to include an anti-racist lens in my research, I consciously moved towards a more Aboriginal-centred approach to the research. In its final form, the research includes a more explicit attempt to honour authentic Indigenous knowledge and to demonstrate a respect for and understanding of Aboriginal culture. More specifically, the research paradigm considers the following questions outlined by Shawn Wilson (2008), a self-described Opaskwayak Cree researcher, as critical insights into Indigenous axiology and methodology:

1. How do my methods help build respectful relationships between the topic that I am studying and myself as researcher?
2. How do my methods help build respectful relationships between myself and other research participants?
3. How can I relate respectfully to the other participants involved in this research so that we can form a stronger relationship with the idea that we will share?
4. What is my role as researcher in this relationship, and what are my responsibilities?
5. Am I being responsible in fulfilling my role and obligations to the other participants, to the topic and to all of my relations?
6. What am I contributing or giving back to the relationship? Is the sharing, growth and learning that is taking place reciprocal? (Wilson, 2008, p. 77)

It was thought, and was advised by the guiding Elder that, this authenticity and appreciation of Indigenous epistemology would be critical to the success of this research. This was in fact the case. The Aboriginal framework and the two-eyed seeing approach, established a comfortable and respectful environment in which the
research was conducted. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that this research was conducted via a Euro-centric driven process with protocols and process that did not always necessarily jive with Aboriginal paradigms. The ongoing challenge was to try and balance these two sometimes very opposing perspective while respecting the value of each process. The following sections outline my attempt to honour Indigenous pedagogy in the constraints of a Euro-centric system.

In order to review and understand successful and promising practices regarding Aboriginal student success, at each step, the researcher must be aware of how data are being collected with regards to Aboriginal peoples. For the reasons already discussed such as racism, colonial imperialism and the lasting negative effects of the residential school system, Euro-centric research and data collection presents a unique challenge in Aboriginal communities. For example, although a 2008 report (Educational Policy Institute, 2008b) declares that the number of Aboriginal students self-identifying is increasing, according to Battiste (2009/2010), Aboriginal self-identification is an “especially contentious and politicized matter” (p. 48). Battiste specifically references the history of colonization as a contributing factor. Oldford and Ungerleider (2010) agree with Battiste, stating that there is a challenge in obtaining accurate and reliable data with regard to Aboriginal students. Specifically, an understandable hesitation to self-declare can hamper the ability to review and “measure” Aboriginal student success as required in a quantitative approach. Aboriginal peoples may experience well-justified suspicion and fear when considering self-disclosure. This has undoubtedly impacted the enrolment numbers collected
through self-identification presented in Chapter Four. For this reason, one might suggest that the Aboriginal numbers in PSE are actually higher than the self-identified data demonstrate.

Racism has led to well-placed mistrust and caution (Educational Policy Institute, 2008b). In the context of community building, self-identification is critical and in Chapter Five I will explore the importance that interview participants placed on community and a sense of belonging. A basic insight in my research is that community will only be present and find strength when people are able and feel comfortable to gather in safety.

From a Euro-centric perspective, numbers, such as enrolment or educational attainment, often drive systems, where data can be used to justify the use of, or lack of distributing, public funds. The issues surrounding data collection with regard to Aboriginal student participation and persistence in Ontario colleges will be revisited in the following chapters because the lack of consistent measurement is a recurring theme.

Issues associated with disclosure are not limited to students. Young et al. (2010) suggest Aboriginal teachers have also been subject to discrimination and sometimes have been labeled as “not ‘real’ teachers” (p. 292). For Aboriginal teachers, this can translate to a lack of respect in their workplace, devalued curriculum and less emotional and financial support (Murray, 2008). According to Murray (2008), Aboriginal women educators in the postsecondary system encounter “all types of psychological and emotional abuse at the hands of educators and other students” (p. 187). This psychological and emotional abuse can be attributed to an ignorance of Canadian history and legislation. The historical context regarding
practices such as jailing Indians or relocating the young into Indian Residential Schools (IRS) where students were physically beaten for adhering to their own culture, not only contributes to psychological and emotional abuse, but creates real barriers and stops some Aboriginal peoples from publically self-identifying. Nevertheless, although an acceptable and national self-identification system remains elusive (Oldford & Ungerleider, 2010), discourses with regard to Aboriginal student success, including methods of identification, are under development.

**Research Design and Methodology**

The central purpose of this research was to examine the strategies that are engaging Aboriginal students. The intent was to identify programs and services that provide and support positive learning environments that are leading to the successful completion of academic programs in Ontario colleges. Ideally, I would have conducted research with each of the Ontario colleges; however, the review process within Ontario colleges requires approval from each individual College, which was not feasible given my timelines. Further, at the time I was seeking ethics approvals, not all colleges had an ethics review process to approve research with so-called human participants.

In order to provide an environmental overview and collect systemic data, a qualitative approach was selected to conduct a document analysis of Aboriginal Student Services provided at Ontario colleges. The Internet was used, and specifically the websites of each Ontario college, to collect public information regarding current services available to Aboriginal students. This collection method
was unobtrusive and did not require Ethics Board approval from each individual college. Then, Aboriginal student enrolment data were quantitatively analyzed (as presented in Chapter Four) to help determine potential research sites. The data were used to help inform the selection of the three research sites for face-to-face interviews.

To provide a more in-depth analysis of the services available to Aboriginal students, face-to-face interviews were conducted with Aboriginal key informants at these three Colleges. This multi-level and mixed method approach created an opportunity to review the services in-depth and provided Elders, staff and students with an opportunity to voice their opinions about what is supporting Aboriginal students and what more can be done. Face-to-face, semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted to elicit participants’ opinions. Questions relating to demographic information were asked of students (see Appendix A). The research proposed to answer the following overarching question: According to students, staff and Elders engaged in Aboriginal Resource Centres, what are the factors that affect Aboriginal student persistence and success in Ontario colleges? The following subquestions were created to answer the one main research question:

1. What previous studies shed light on factors that affect postsecondary persistence and success for disadvantaged populations? Aboriginal students in particular? What public policies, reports, commissions have discussed/recommended supports/ideas regarding education for Aboriginal students?

2. How many Aboriginal students are attending Ontario colleges? What is the demographical breakdown of First Nation, Inuit and Métis students?
3. According to Aboriginal students attending three Ontario colleges, what are the key factors that contributed to them choosing to enter college and what barriers are Aboriginal students in Ontario colleges facing that impede their ability to succeed academically? According to whom?

4. What services/programs are Ontario colleges providing that positively impact Aboriginal student persistence? Are these effective? How do we know?

5. What services/programs should Ontario colleges provide that might positively impact Aboriginal student persistence and how do we know they are effective?

6. In terms of the results found, what are the roles and responsibilities for:
   a) College leaders?
   b) Aboriginal communities?
   c) the Canadian government (provincial/federal)?
   d) the Aboriginal student?

7. And finally, what can be learned from Aboriginal cultures vis a vis the “scientific methods” of traditional “mainstream” research? What type of further research is required?

When I began this journey, I was not conscious of using a Euro-centric lens. I was unsure which colleges to seek out and where I would find Aboriginal students and staff willing to self-identify to participate. As stated earlier, in order to select my research sites, I first began with an overview of Aboriginal student services readily available on college websites. I supposed that colleges that provided and had more readily advertised services for Aboriginal students would be more likely to attract
Aboriginal students. Next, I struggled to find Aboriginal enrolment data in Ontario colleges. In the second stage of my research, I was finally able to find reliable data through the help of Humber’s Institutional Research Department. I combined this quantitative knowledge with the qualitative data I found during my website searches and literature review research, including available and relevant reports to select my research sites for my interviews.

In the third section of my research, a qualitative approach was selected with face-to-face interviews to integrate components of phenomenological and narrative methods. The intent of phenomenological research is to understand the experiences of research participants and “give a voice to society’s underclasses” while in narrative research, participants recount their personal stories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 14).

Phenomenological research typically involves a small number of subjects over a period of time through in-depth interactions (Morse, 1994 as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and in this study the interaction was focused on in-depth interviews in three Aboriginal Resource Centres. Phenomenological research seeks to neutrally engage with participants to explore their lived-experiences. The intent is to uncover meaning by identifying patterns and relationships. Consistent with a Euro-centric approach, researchers attempt to set aside their own biases in phenomenological research, which was admittedly difficult for me in this research. I thus incorporated aspects of the narrative method as well.

In narrative research, the researcher listens to the daily lives of participants and attempts to identify patterns in the language of the stories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Similarly, as posited by Denzin and Lincoln, narrative design, researchers combine
the experiences of the participants with their own views to interpret their stories, history and context. The personal views of the researcher very much become a part of the research.

However, from an Indigenous perspective, it is important to note the limitations of the Euro-centric research models and process. Indigenous thought posits that the essence of community is built through meaningful relationships based on respect and sharing. Traditional teachings and learning are ongoing and cannot be artificially started and stopped for fixed periods in time. Conversations and Indigenous teachings are not always structured with specific learning outcomes like the Euro-centric model. For Aboriginal peoples, learning is not a linear concept. Growth and learning can spontaneously take different and unplanned paths and the deviations do not render the learning any less valuable. In fact, these variations to learning can be just as valuable, and sometimes more valuable than the pre-planned path. Knowledge comes with a change in behaviour flowing from deep and holistic understanding of the topic at hand, including how the topic relates to the entire community, the history (ancestors), the land and the future generations. Thus, as will be argued by at least one Elder in the final chapter, a Euro-centric process cannot adequately address or incorporate Indigenous paradigms.

**Ethical Issues and Considerations**

In the interview phase, no research was conducted with “human participants” before ethics approval was obtained first from the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board and the corresponding Research Ethics Board at the site locations.
where the research was conducted (see Appendix B). The research adheres to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, December, 2010). More specifically, consideration included respect for persons, concern for welfare and justice. Free and informed consent was ongoing. As I have noted, throughout the research I tried to remain aware of the physical, social, economic and cultural environments unique to Aboriginal peoples as I listened to stories that were sometimes so different from my own. The research methodology was developed in order to mitigate any real or perceived imbalances of power between the researcher and the participants. All participants were ensured privacy and confidentiality by being informed of any potential limits to confidentiality and how that would be handled.

From an Aboriginal perspective, in order to develop trust and understand Aboriginal culture and practices, I participated in community events such as pow wows, art exhibits, traditional teachings and Idle No More teachings. Through these events I built relationships and learned more about Aboriginal cultures. Further, I recognize that diversity amongst Aboriginal peoples does not allow for broad generalizations.

I also honoured the important role of Elders in the community. As I noted in Chapter One, Shelley Charles, an Ojibwe Anishinabe Elder, with whom I now have close personal and professional relationships, has guided me through the research process. She ensured I recognized and respected customs, practices and appropriate authorities. She was involved with the project from inception to
completion. I also asked Elders if they wished to provide input before the study was finalized (see Appendix G). Their thoughts have formed the bases of Chapter Seven. Further, students were recognized as important holders of knowledge in this research and were invited to provide their valuable input. Finally, the research was made available to all research participants who were involved with the study (see Appendix H). Moreover, if any members of Aboriginal communities would like access to the research study or the results, I am happy to share and discuss the results. The intent of the research is to develop mutual benefits for organizations (Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal) and Aboriginal students endeavouring to pursue PSE studies.

As mentioned, I attempted to contact the Elders at each institution first before students were contacted. In order to respect the authoritative and protective role of the Elder within the institution and the community, I wanted to engage the Elders to ensure they had a comfort level with the research and data collection methods. However, Elders were not initially available nor initially willing to self-identify for the study. Now that I can appreciate the high demands placed on Elders, it may have been unreasonable to expect them to guide Euro-centric research when they are busy supporting Aboriginal students and supporting their local communities. However, once on site, they were gracious and thoughtful in meeting with me.

Students were asked to self-identify via a poster displayed in the respective Aboriginal Resource Centres (see Appendices D a and b). Methods to contact participants in advance by electronic means produced meager results, which I now understand better. The preferred self-identification option for staff, Elders and students was in-person at the Aboriginal Resource Centres. On the other hand, my first connection once on site in the Aboriginal Resource Centres was generally
students working in the Centres. The student employees and I would engage in open discussion during slow periods where we discussed the Centre, the students and services available. These students were all quite outgoing, friendly and very welcoming. I learned later that the Centres’ hiring staff intentionally sought the outgoing and gregarious nature exhibited by the student staff so other students would feel welcome in the Centres.

Participation was advertised as voluntary and before any interview data were collected, all participants were asked to read and sign an informed consent letter (see Appendix E for Aboriginal Student Consent Form and see Appendix F for Elder/Staff Consent Form). The letters explained to all participants that they were able to withdraw from the process at any time without penalty or reprisal. I reiterated this fact before beginning all interviews and ensured participants were comfortable before proceeding. All changes including omissions of information requested by the staff, Elders and students were respected and transcripts were amended accordingly. Further, they were informed they could have access to the final report by providing me with contact information in the form of an email address. Participants were informed through the poster that they would receive a $10 gift card for participation and many expressed appreciation for it.

**Interview Sites and Participant Selection**

The interview sites and participation selection processes followed typical Eurocentric research methodology as outlined in my initial ethics proposal. My two-eyed research was conceived as part of the larger context. As a result of the initial data
review of Ontario college websites and the hard Aboriginal student enrolment numbers, I chose three colleges for the study. Ethics approval was obtained from each research site (see Appendix B). College 1 has an established Aboriginal Student Centre and services, including a newly renovated Aboriginal Resource Centre including kitchen facilities, counseling, visiting Elders, program advising, a computer lab, a food bank, an employment skills partnership with a local coffee shop, and frequent cultural and study/life skills workshops. The College often partners with a local university for cultural events such as a yearly pow wow. It is located in a near northern Ontario city. College 2 also has an established Aboriginal Resource Centre and services but is located in urban southern Ontario. The Centre houses counseling, program advising, computers with free printing for Aboriginal students, a lounge with a television, visiting Elders and frequent cultural and study/life skills workshops. College 3 is in a multi-cultural environment in the Greater Toronto Area. The Aboriginal Resource Centre and services at College 3 are relatively new but are growing with each passing year. The Centre does have dedicated space for Aboriginal students, but this space is part of the larger student success and engagement department. College 3 provides transition support, counseling through an Elder, an Aboriginal student circle, external outreach to First Nation communities, PSE transition programming, and several on-campus events that are open to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants. Services not available to Aboriginal students through the Aboriginal Resource Centre are provided collaboratively through the larger student success department. College 3 has a focus that seeks to actively
engage the entire campus community with all of their events, including those held on campus outside of the Centre proper such as Aboriginal guest speakers and pow wows.

The purposive selection of these Colleges was intended to provide a cross-section of college practices in urban areas and was specifically tied to the Euro-centric approach to research. Nevertheless, the uniqueness of the data from Elders and students might contribute to the consciousness raising of college administrators pursuing investigations of student success.

I had hoped to connect with at least one far north college because far north colleges tend to have high Aboriginal student populations, however, the first far north college I attempted to contact, where I had personal connections to gate keepers, did not yet have a research ethics review process in place for human subjects. Given my time constraints, it was decided that I should move on to colleges with the necessary processes in place. The three Colleges chosen provided a mix of established and growing services.

It was anticipated that the interviews with seven to eight students at each site would be sufficient in order to draw meaningful insight into the student experience. I was not sure how many Elders I would be able to reach but I had hoped to reach at least one or two at each college. Each interview experience was extremely valuable. The time spent with students, staff and Elders was conscious raising and helped me shape and reshape my thoughts about Aboriginal PSE. Throughout the process, I was
respectful and attentive to the experiences of the participants. As with all interview-based research, respect was important to establish relationships of trust and build rapport.

Before interviews with the students were conducted, I first reached out to the key contact person responsible for Aboriginal services at each institution. I explained the nature of my research process; the two-eyed seeing approach and my connections to the Aboriginal communities such as my ancestry and the involvement of a guiding Elder (see Appendix C). My intent was to offer tobacco to each Elder in a face-to-face meeting in a manner reflective of Indigenous traditions and customs; however, as noted, I encountered difficulty in reaching Elders in advance. I had felt it necessary to engage in a consultative process and provide the Elders with an opportunity to provide input and question me about the process but this process was not easily realized. Even students were initially reluctant to engage with me in advance of meeting face-to-face. Given what I had learned about Aboriginal peoples and their less than favourable encounters with Euro-centric education, including research, I expected to find hesitation among some participants. It was not until I was on site, when I could start to build trust through relationships that people willingly agreed to participate. Once I was accepted by a few people in the community at each site, others were much more willing to participate and I experienced uplifting gifts of knowledge and insight from those who engaged with me.
I undoubtedly had my authenticity tested. For example, one student began our interview with an abrupt “Are you Aboriginal?” directed at me. I told her about my Métis background and the journey I had been on trying to learn more about my lost heritage and my interest in helping more Aboriginal students succeed in PSE. I had the inclination that if I had answered “no” to her question or not demonstrated a genuine interest in the future success of Aboriginal peoples, it would not have augured well for our conversation.

Perhaps I was too unaware of the “gift” typically offered by participants since all interviews went better than I hoped. From my experience, I learned an important element to accessing, building relationships with and engaging participants was spending time on site in the respective Aboriginal Resource Centres. The Aboriginal Resource Centres were integral to my research. The staff in the Centres was welcoming and helped me develop relationships. I asked my key contacts at each college for permission to provide an invitation for Aboriginal students to participate in the research study at the respective College. Before my arrival they distributed my recruitment poster by hardcopy, listserv and Facebook sites so there was an awareness of my research (see Appendices D a and b). Aboriginal students and Elders were invited to contact me if they were interested in participating. All participants reviewed and signed informed consent letters before the interviews began (see Appendices E and F).

The student interviews were limited to students who chose to self-identify as Aboriginal. In order to maintain an appropriate distance and ensure students were not in a position of coercion, some students did not self-identify for the study directly to me. Students were provided with an option to self-identify to a member of the
Aboriginal Resource Centre staff and then their names were forwarded to me. Participants were assured they could speak openly, honestly and my position within the college system would not interfere with their grades or employment status at the college. All participants were assured the data would be presented in a format, including the use of pseudonyms if necessary, which would not allow for individuals to be identified.

The interview participants were from the college sector in Ontario. It was assumed that a college with an Aboriginal Student Centre was more likely to have Aboriginal student services and would therefore provide a setting in which students could provide feedback. Finally, College 3 was selected because it was an accessible environment for me to conduct the pilot survey.

**Data Collection and Recording**

In congruence with Euro-centric theory, with the permission of the participants, I used an audio recording application named AudioNote on my iPad to record the dialogue of the interviews. Electronic notes were taken with this same application during the interviews to describe and capture non-verbal gestures. Though I had outlined this process in my ethics proposal, I found the technology sometimes hampered the interpersonal connection with participants. Although it seemed less of a barrier with younger students who appeared to have a higher comfort level with technology. Nevertheless, I endeavoured to use both the verbal and non-verbal communication cues in the analysis of the data. I also used the computer software,
Interview and Survey Questions

The questions used in the interviews were again a requirement of the Euro-centric process requiring Ethics Board approval. The questions were constructed using concepts that emerged during the research conducted for the literature review (see Appendix A). Performing a small pilot survey at College 3 was considered necessary. The draft interview questions were based on work funded by a contribution from the Canadian Council on Learning. It was a collective project between Cape Breton University, Dalhousie University, the University of King's College, Memorial University, the University of Prince Edward Island, Saint Mary's University and Saint Thomas University as identified at [http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/FundedResearch/Timmons-FinalReport.pdf](http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/FundedResearch/Timmons-FinalReport.pdf). This study was entitled “Retention of Aboriginal Students in Post-Secondary Institutions in Atlantic Canada: An Analysis of the Supports Available to Aboriginal Students” (Timmons et al., 2009). The questions are modified with permission. For example, the questions designed to collect demographic data were created uniquely for this research study.
Establishing Credibility

The interview and survey questions were pilot tested with two students at College 3. The pilot testing process was deemed critical to ensure the questions were comprehensible. Further, given the jaded past with research and Aboriginal peoples, the test pilot was important to avoid potentially offensive questions. No concerns were raised during the pilot interviews so no changes were made to the data collection instruments. However, the pilot interviews did allow me a valuable opportunity to become more familiar with the technology and appreciate the importance of developing rapport with participants.

As I began my interviews with the structured questions, I found that they became more of a conversational guide. Once I was on-site interacting with Aboriginal peoples in an Aboriginal friendly setting, it became clear to me that a strict Euro-centric structured approach would not work. As conversations became more natural, we developed a respectful interest in each other’s points of view. The structured questions became less important than their personal stories and experiences they wished to tell. Some students and staff had many great ideas and insights that I could hardly keep up with as a researcher intended to dutifully record the interactions for later analysis. Further, the insertion of myself, including my own beliefs and opinions (contrary to objective research) assured the success of my research.

I found the structured questions were specifically helpful with students who were a bit more shy or newer to their program or school. One question I began to ask students with regularity towards the end of my research that I wished I had included from the beginning was “Do you believe you would still be here without the support of
the Aboriginal Resource Centre?” The positive impact of the Centres was becoming increasingly clear as my research continued and I thought the students’ answers to this question could help validate not only the existence of the Centres but support an increase in resource development such as space, more staff and increased funding.

**Interview Data Analysis**

In accordance with Euro-centric research norms, data from the surveys and interviews were collected and analyzed to determine common themes amongst the participants. A content analysis was conducted upon review of the interview transcripts to establish key words and phrases that were common to participants. In addition to the key word identification, I made an explicit attempt to follow the concepts and themes that were deemed important by staff and Elders who participated in the research. Further, the theme development was also influenced by personal insights regarding Aboriginal culture including those learned through traditional teachings, specifically those from the guiding Elder who focused my attention on the importance of community, family, the land and the broad or holistic view of learning opportunities. Spending time in Aboriginal environments such as teachings from the guiding Elder and the Resource Centres contributed to the “in-depth experience” envisioned by a phenomenological approach. While conducting the interviews, I spent at least 2-3 days in each of the Centres interacting with staff and students. The Dragon Naturally Speaking software was used to transcribe the interviews so that I could become more familiar with the data where I highlighted key
quotes and then transferred these quotes to an excel spreadsheet using the commonly appearing themes as headers for data organization.

The developed themes were compared against the literature reviewed. In order to determine recommendations and conclusions from the research, a critical analysis was conducted to identify similarities and deviations from the literature. Particular attention was paid to the promising and successful practices for Aboriginal postsecondary education. The survey data touched on key themes within the literature such as the challenge of first generation PSE attendance, connection to traditional ways of life, on-reserve experiences, and connectedness to the Aboriginal community within the college(s) including the use of Aboriginal student service programming at each college.

**Methodological Assumptions**

Relevant stories and perceptions about the Aboriginal student experiences at the colleges were recorded and then transcribed. It is probable that my skills in interpersonal communication and specifically conducting interviews within the field of Human Resources helped me to establish a comfortable environment for the participants. However, I like to think that I also embraced a traditional medicine wheel approach by consciously embodying the key elements of kindness and respect in order to develop meaningful encounters. I was always cautious to be respectfully inquisitive, to ask permission to be included and to express my gratitude for someone sharing their experiences with me. I tried not to pass judgment while I was listening and if I did not understand a point, I would gently inquire if I could learn
more. Each person I approached in this manner was either willingly engaged in conversation with me or politely told me that it was not a good time. I made sure I was flexible to their needs. I wanted the participants to see and feel that I respected their time, I had a genuine interest in what was being said and for them to know that I hoped the information could help future Aboriginal students.

At the same time, I was immersed in a Euro-centric perspective that alerted me to a lack of generalizability to broader Aboriginal populations in my research methodology. I have become aware that Aboriginal populations are unique and demonstrate localized and differentiated culture (Educational Policy Institute, 2008b; Jules, 1999). On the other hand, the experiences described by students at three Ontario colleges may provide insight for other institutions of higher education.

Perhaps some may see my inability to remain absolutely objective and neutral in the process as a limitation. I now recognize the requirement to be objective as a Euro-centric belief, but Indigenous thought requires me to be connected so I do not see my growing connectedness to the research as a limitation. My two-eyed seeing approach requires me to find a balance between these two worlds. In my literature review, it was difficult to mask my emotions especially after I read about the intentional starving of my Assiniboine ancestors.

I felt it was necessary to humanize the topic. In conducting the interviews, I intended to remain quiet and allow participants an open forum to openly discuss their experiences. Originally I did not want to bias the data collection by injecting my own personal beliefs but as the research process unfolded, I felt that I also needed to demonstrate that I had an understanding of the issues, culture and challenges. In
the end, I feel that my ability to demonstrate an understanding of Aboriginal issues was critical to developing rapport and this directly impacted the authenticity of the stories I was told.
CHAPTER FOUR:
THE STORY BEHIND ABORIGINAL ENROLMENT STATISTICS IN ONTARIO COLLEGES

From a Euro-centric perspective, the focus of this study is type II access to postsecondary education or the question of “who goes to PSE” (Educational Policy Institute, 2008a, p. 3). Perhaps more aptly, the study asks who is not going to PSE? The focus is the underrepresentation of Aboriginal students in PSE in Canada and specifically in Ontario. The broader context is how Canadian legislation and policies have created barriers for Aboriginal students in attaining both secondary and postsecondary education (Anonson, Desjarlais, Nixon, Whiteman, & Bird, 2008). I recognize this approach and language would not be how Aboriginal scholars would address the issue, but sometimes it is important to “see through this eye” to frame the topic in a way that is recognized and understood in Euro-centric norms.

Finnie et al. (2011) find that the underrepresentation of Aboriginal peoples is predominantly in the university sector but not in colleges. They further suggest that the lack of a high school diploma is not the problem. Human Resources Skills Development Canada (HRSDC, 2011) attests the underrepresentation of Aboriginal peoples in universities in their outline of “Indicators of Well-being in Canada” (see Table 5). The largest education gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations aged 25 to 64 is the attainment of a high school diploma and university degree, where the non-Aboriginal population has higher achievement rates. The data
presented highlight a growing consensus that colleges are providing appropriate support/access for Aboriginal peoples to obtain a college diploma or trade certification.

Table 5
Educational Attainment, non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal Populations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Without high school diploma</th>
<th>High school diploma</th>
<th>Some post-secondary</th>
<th>College or trade certification</th>
<th>University Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Population</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Aboriginal Population</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. From Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2011

To explore the financial impact of well-being, let us consider Howe’s (2002) example of lifetime earnings (cited in Usher, 2009). According to Howe, education is the key to increased earning potential. If one accepts that educational attainment is an “Indicator of Well-being” as HRSDC suggests, then Table 6 demonstrates significant gaps in attainment levels between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations, thus demonstrating a significant problem concerning the well-being of the Aboriginal population in Canada. According to Howe’s statement of lifetime earnings and depending on gender, PSE can increase lifetime income from four to 13 times when comparing earnings of university graduates and non-high school graduates (see Table 6).
Table 6
*Lifetime Economic Benefits of Postsecondary Education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Attainment</th>
<th>Male Lifetime Earnings</th>
<th>Female Lifetime Earnings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No high school diploma / equivalency</td>
<td>$344,781</td>
<td>$89,502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma / equivalency</td>
<td>$861,636</td>
<td>$284,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-university PSE institution</td>
<td>$1,191,146</td>
<td>$646,904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>$1,386,434</td>
<td>$1,249,246</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. From Howe, 2002, cited in Usher, 2009*

These attainment rates, when combined with the literature presented in Chapter Two, demonstrate both an educational and economic gap when it comes to the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations in Canada, favouring the non-Aboriginal population.

The next section of this chapter presents and further examines enrolment data specifically from the 24 colleges in Ontario with a focus on Aboriginal student enrolment. From this data, we will be able to see a snapshot of the individualized context at each college in Ontario from a quantitative perspective only.

**Aboriginal Student Enrolment in Ontario Colleges**

In conducting research for this study, I found a challenge in finding accessible and reliable enrolment data. To address my research question, “How many Aboriginal students are attending Ontario Colleges and what is the demographical breakdown of First Nation, Inuit and Métis students?” I contacted numerous governmental and Aboriginal organizations requesting enrolment numbers for
 Aboriginal students in Ontario colleges. These requests met with minimal success. Finally, with the help of Humber’s Institutional Research Department, I was able to obtain data from the Ontario Colleges Application Service (OCAS) database. The data presented here are a unique contribution to this field of study.

Table 7 represents total student enrolment for all 24 Ontario colleges and specifies Aboriginal students’ enrolment in their first years of Fall 2008, 2009 and 2010. Further, a comparison is drawn between the number of Aboriginal students who self-identified versus the total student population in all Ontario colleges. The Aboriginal student enrolment data are reliant on self-identification through the OCAS application process (see Table 7).
Table 7
Student and Aboriginal Enrolment in Ontario Colleges, Fall 2008-10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ontario College</th>
<th>Total Student Enrolment First Year</th>
<th>Total Aboriginal Enrolment First Year</th>
<th>Aboriginal Enrolment as a % of Total Enrolment First Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Algonquin</td>
<td>9,778</td>
<td>8,433</td>
<td>8,499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambrian</td>
<td>2,721</td>
<td>2,962</td>
<td>2,894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadore</td>
<td>1,872</td>
<td>2,359</td>
<td>1,949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centennial</td>
<td>8,088</td>
<td>11,144</td>
<td>13,192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boreal</td>
<td>909</td>
<td>876</td>
<td>997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conestoga</td>
<td>5,030</td>
<td>5,692</td>
<td>5,658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confederation</td>
<td>2,430</td>
<td>2,711</td>
<td>2,588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durham</td>
<td>4,382</td>
<td>5,034</td>
<td>5,021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanshawe</td>
<td>10,409</td>
<td>8,765</td>
<td>10,098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fleming</td>
<td>4,048</td>
<td>4,683</td>
<td>4,878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Brown</td>
<td>11,628</td>
<td>12,603</td>
<td>13,730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgian</td>
<td>5,610</td>
<td>5,675</td>
<td>5,763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humber</td>
<td>11,473</td>
<td>13,700</td>
<td>11,247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Cite</td>
<td>2,251</td>
<td>2,757</td>
<td>2,704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lambton</td>
<td>1,992</td>
<td>2,025</td>
<td>1,905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalist</td>
<td>1,871</td>
<td>2,337</td>
<td>2,059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohawk</td>
<td>8,159</td>
<td>8,180</td>
<td>7,217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niagara</td>
<td>5,034</td>
<td>5,201</td>
<td>6,041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>863</td>
<td>1,177</td>
<td>1,186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sault</td>
<td>1,305</td>
<td>1,663</td>
<td>1,616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seneca</td>
<td>14,441</td>
<td>9,464</td>
<td>11,594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheridan</td>
<td>9,407</td>
<td>7,484</td>
<td>8,894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Clair</td>
<td>5,352</td>
<td>5,611</td>
<td>5,464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Lawrence</td>
<td>3,548</td>
<td>3,323</td>
<td>3,088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>132,601</td>
<td>133,859</td>
<td>138,282</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Adapted From Humber College Institutional Research Department, November 15, 2011

Over the three-academic-year period from 2008-2010, the college with the highest percentage of Aboriginal students enrolled was Confederation with 15.49, 16.01 and 13.84 percent Aboriginal enrollees, respectively. Over this same period, Algonquin was the college with the second largest number of Aboriginal students enrolled, but was on average of 5.94 percent lower than Confederation. The colleges
with the lowest number of self-identified Aboriginal students were Boreal and La Cite. The data suggest that geographic location is important to Aboriginal peoples where enrolment trends indicate a connection with colleges that offer Aboriginal students the ability to enroll while staying close to home. This is not a surprising trend given the connection Aboriginal peoples have with their traditional lands, their families and local communities.

According to the OCAS data, over the three-academic-year period from 2008-2010, Aboriginal enrolment through self-identification was up 8.81 percent whereas the total student population grew by approximately 4.1 percent. In comparison to the larger context of student enrolment, Aboriginal students who self-identified represented 1.68 percent of the total student population in 2008, 1.8 percent in 2009 and 1.77 percent in 2010. The total number of college students grew from 132,601 in 2008 to 138,282 in 2010 whereas the number of Aboriginal students who self-identified grew from 2,234 to 2,450 respectively. The enrolment numbers correspond with research that suggests Aboriginal student enrolment is on the rise (Rae, 2005; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009) but the reason behind the marked increase in 2008 is unknown. It could be suggested that colleges are doing a better job at engaging Aboriginal communities and creating environments where students feel safer to self-identify.

Table 8 displays and ranks, from highest to lowest, the ratio of Aboriginal students enrolled in a college to the entire student population in the 24 Ontario colleges in 2010. Again, in 2010, the college with the highest percent of Aboriginal students, as compared to the entire student population, was Confederation (13.10%), followed by Sault (10.4%) and Canadore (9.59%). The five colleges of the
Greater Toronto Area had the five lowest levels of representation: Humber (0.56%), Sheridan (0.55%), George Brown (0.46%), Seneca (0.37%), and Centennial (0.23%). The data suggest northern colleges are more likely to attract Aboriginal students to their schools whereas the Greater Toronto Area colleges have some work to do with increasing Aboriginal enrolment and perhaps retention too (see Table 8). Southern colleges will need to create a stable and welcoming environment if they wish to attract Aboriginal students from remote or northern communities and/or encourage more students to self-identify. As will be discussed in Chapter Five, Aboriginal students can face transition challenges or “geographical trauma” when they move to an urban centre that is disconnected from their traditional ways (Nardozi, 2011). If the institutions have not found ways, or are not truly committed to welcoming Aboriginal students, the students are more likely to feel alienated and thus are they are less likely to persist. However, it is also important to consider the actual population of Aboriginal peoples in each geographic area when comparing these percentage rates against the total college enrolment levels. For example, if the number of Aboriginal peoples in a local area is 1 percent and the Aboriginal student enrolment rate at the local college is also 1 percent, proportionally speaking the local college would appear to be doing very well in attracting Aboriginal students even though the actual enrolment ratio appears to be quite low. This concept is particularly important when reviewing enrolment numbers in this context because college students are more likely to be drawn from the immediate and surrounding areas, thus geographic location and student mobility should also be considered in analyzing these enrolment statistics. Finally, as noted, statistical inferences are also
Challenging due to the varying degrees of self-identification, itself something that may be correlated with geographical context (e.g. urban v. rural).

Table 8
Aboriginal Student Enrolment Ranked by College, Fall 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ontario College</th>
<th>Aboriginal Students as a % of Total College Enrolment Fall 2010</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confederation</td>
<td>13.10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sault</td>
<td>10.40</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadore</td>
<td>9.59</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>9.27</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambrian</td>
<td>6.43</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Lawrence</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lambton</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algonquin</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalist</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgian</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohawk</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanshawe</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Clair</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fleming</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boreal</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niagara</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durham</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Cité</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conestoga</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humber</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheridan</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Brown</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seneca</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centennial</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Adapted from Humber College Institutional Research Department, November 15, 2011

Data distinguishing the demographic breakdown of the Aboriginal students as First Nations, Métis or Inuit are not available from OCAS prior to 2010; however, the demographical breakdown of Aboriginal students who were enrolled in year one in fall 2010 can be seen in Table 9. Status and Non-Status First Nations students
represented 79.72 percent of all self-identified Aboriginal student enrolled in 2010. Self-identified Métis students represented 10.61 percent, followed by Inuit students with 1.22 percent. Although 8.45 percent of students self-identified as Aboriginal they did not identify in one of the three categories of First Nations, Métis or Inuit, so they could not be further classified and thus remain “Unknown or Other” in Table 9. The data suggest First Nation and Métis students are much more likely to enroll and self-identify in Ontario than Inuit students or perhaps there are no Ontario colleges “north enough” to serve the Inuit students (see Table 9).

Table 9
Aboriginal Student Enrolment in Ontario Colleges, Fall 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aboriginal Student Enrolment</th>
<th>Fall 2010</th>
<th>% of Total Aboriginal Enrolment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Status First Nation</td>
<td>1,809</td>
<td>73.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Status First Nation</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>5.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Métis</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>10.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inuit</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown/Other</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>8.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Aboriginal Ancestry</td>
<td>2,450</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Adapted from Humber College Institutional Research Department, November 15, 2011

We can compare this data to those released by Statistics Canada in the National Household survey (2013) that included roughly 4.5 million households. The sample of adult Aboriginal peoples aged 25 to 64 who self-identified and completed the survey accounted for 671,400 people, or 3.7 percent of the total population in Canada aged 25 to 64. As outlined in Table 10, the National Household survey examined educational attainment rates for First Nation, Métis and Inuit (see Table 10).
Table 10
Aboriginal Educational Attainment in Canada, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Attainment Level</th>
<th>First Nations</th>
<th>Métis</th>
<th>Inuit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Both Sexes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trades Certificate</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>44.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Diploma</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Degree</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2013

The National Household data do not differentiate between status First Nation and non-status First Nation. It does however, identify that self-identified Métis students have the highest educational attainment rates, followed by First Nations and then Inuit. Trade certification is the most likely credential for all groups, with college diplomas the second most likely and university being the least likely attained credential for all three groups. Finally, in almost all cases, Aboriginal women have higher educational attainment rates except for the Inuit population in the areas of trades and colleges diploma.

Nevertheless, when comparing the National Household survey and the Ontario enrolment data from OCAS, it appears that First Nation and Métis students are more likely to attend, self-identify and succeed in PSE than Inuit students. Again, we must remember that Inuit students may be less likely to relocate to an Ontario college and if they do, they will incur extra financial burdens for relocation and will be further
away from their support systems. In this context we must be cautious not to use
statistics as the only indication of apparent success. For example, perhaps Métis can
pass for White and are less likely to self-identify as Aboriginal.

Referring for a moment specifically to Métis students, they may be successful
with their academics but according to Dion (2012) in a report reviewing the Faculties
of Education Ontario that supports new K-12 teacher development, Aboriginal
education does not often include the Métis perspective. Dion (2012) suggests
courses tend to lack Métis content and recent K-12 teacher graduates do not feel
equipped to teach Métis education. It may be that too heavy a burden is being
placed on the Métis teachers to make necessary changes to integrate Métis
education into curriculum. There is only one declared Métis college and it is in
Saskatchewan (Gabriel Dumont Institute). This means that Métis students may be
facing barriers just as do First Nations and Inuit populations. This again underscores
the complexity of the issue at hand, highlighting the importance of recognizing
diversity and the need for consultative and localized approaches.

**Interpretation with Caution**

As has been discussed, there are many complexities associated with self-
identification for Aboriginal peoples in a Euro-centric system. Thus, these enrolment
numbers should be interpreted with caution, including the possibility that the true
number of Aboriginal peoples enrolled in Ontario colleges is actually higher than has
been reported through data reliant on self-identification in a Euro-centric system
known to cause dissonance for Aboriginal peoples. Further, the data are a historical
snapshot in time and Aboriginal student success strategies are constantly evolving, ongoing and gaining momentum. For example, one college was in its infancy of service provision for Aboriginal students at the time the study began. With the passage of four years and with the support of senior administration at the College, the number of enrolled self-identified Aboriginal students has increased by almost 600% since 2008. The Elder/Advisor of Aboriginal Relations at the college believes the marked increase can be attributed to her ability and freedom to implement a traditional Indigenous vision that sought and seeks more dedicated resources for Aboriginal students. This vision includes the Aboriginal Resource Centre’s commitment to increasing community outreach and to building relationships of trust with Aboriginal communities on behalf of the institution (Shelley Charles, personal communication, November 26, 2013).

Compounding the issue of data reliability is a recent HEQCO study (Lopez-Rabson & McCloy, 2013) reviewing Ontario college completion rates for all students. Although Lopez-Rabson and McCloy (2013) suggest only 55 to 77 percent of students in Ontario complete their program within twice the prescribed program length, this does not account for student mobility including positive attrition such as transfer to a university program. Students are not tracked when they move among institutions and Finnie et al. (2012) concur that a level of finer scrutiny is required in analyzing enrolment data than is currently employed because students may in fact being moving institutions. This may be especially true for Aboriginal students who must travel long distances to PSE. Moreover, Lopez-Rabson and McCloy (2013) echo the concern about student mobility in that students are not tracked when they move from one institution to another. The Ontario Education Number could prove a useful
tool to provide better insight. Student mobility data were not recorded in this study but some students did speak of experiences at other PSE institutes. As will be discussed in the recommendations, interviewing students with experience at more than one postsecondary institution could be another way to provide a more complete overview of Aboriginal students’ experiences.

Finally, although according to some researchers Aboriginal enrolment numbers appear to be on the rise (Rae, 2005; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009a), these numbers ought to be examined with caution for several reasons. First, according to Battiste (2009/2010), self-identification for Aboriginal students can be a highly contentious matter. Battiste suggests that (2009/2010) some Aboriginal students may exhibit unwillingness to self-identify for several reasons that encompass historical patterns of residential schools and current challenges associated with racism. Moreover, a report commissioned for the Métis Nation of Ontario (Stonecircle, 2011) also highlights the absence of a standardized approach to collecting enrolment data for Aboriginal students in PSE in Ontario, stating that the collection systems in place rely solely on self-identification.

**Euro-Centric Student Success Theories**

It is important to note that the following PSE student affairs research that supports enrolment and persistence represents Euro-centric solutions for Euro-centric systems. Although mainstream theories may offer insight into the topic at hand, solutions for Aboriginal students must be Aboriginally-led. Nevertheless, I provide this overview of the current state of Euro-centric student affairs to help
develop a context of PSE student success practices. This language and knowledge may be important for change seekers who advocate for services to support more Aboriginal student success. In order to understand how a system must be changed or needs to change (and speak the language of the colonizer), it is also important to understand a system’s current state to determine a starting point for visionary change. Further, being able to refer to mainstream theories may also be prudent for change seekers to “validate” their change agenda by demonstrating a current understanding and familiarity of Euro-centric best practices. This is not to minimize the validity of Aboriginal pedagogy but to recognize the current power structure, the decision-making processes and the language of academia in Euro-centric institutions. Change seekers may find it useful to “talk to talk” and draw comparison between the two pedagogies because there are in fact many similarities. Thus it may help change seekers to present a vision that does not appear too daunting a task or something that can fit into a recognizable frame of reference to those holding the power. Specific Aboriginal pedagogy and educational visions are reviewed in more depth in Chapter Six, but interestingly enough many trends in current mainstream Euro-centric theories mirror long-held Aboriginal beliefs about learning, such as the importance of communities and relationships both on and off campus, a holistic experience of learning including parental understanding/support, and hands-on experience to compliment skill development.
The College Access Mandate.

According to the HRSDC data (2011), it would appear that colleges have proven successful in what Dennison and Gallagher (1986) refer to as the colleges’ access mandate to provide PSE to the broader community. Let us remember that colleges were structured to recognize the whole student, including the need for supports in and out of the classroom. Ontario colleges were created with an intention to increase the level of support and non-university options for aspiring students (Ryder, 2011). According to the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (2012), Aboriginal peoples rely significantly on Canada’s colleges and institutes to access post-secondary education. Colleges and institutes have enormous success in attracting, nurturing, and graduating Aboriginal learners. (p. ii)

According to Dennison and Gallagher (1986), there are five characteristics that define a college: open door access; community orientation; emphasis on teaching; comprehensiveness; and responsiveness to societal needs. Further, the Vision 2000 Report (Pascal, 1990) suggests that Ontario colleges should be more inclusive as they monitor and advocate for educational equity. The Canadian Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2012b) state:

in inclusive education, educational values and beliefs are centred on the best interests of the students, promoting social cohesion, belonging, equal opportunities for success and active participation in learning. (p. 14)

Institutions of higher learning have a role to play in readying our workforce for the competitive and global labour market (Baily, 2011). Norrie and Zhao (2011) specifically highlight the role colleges have in “reducing and eventually eliminating PSE attainment gaps” for students from underrepresented groups (p. 2) while Deller and Oldford (2011) suggest if Ontario wishes to increase its postsecondary education rates, it must focus on increasing successful participation for traditionally
underrepresented groups. However, as was discussed in Chapter One, the validity of increased pressure on Aboriginal participation in a Euro-centric system to save us from our skills crisis may be questioned. A parternalistic approach to help “save” marginalized groups cannot and should not be the solution. In fact, one could argue that this approach be justifyingly labeled unethical and even exploitive.

**Retention and Engagement Theories.**

According to Lopez-Rabson and McCloy (2013), a study of student attrition in Ontario GTA colleges suggests that colleges must engage students on both academic and social levels. This means providing the appropriate tailored services that engage students one-on-one with faculty and connect them to on-campus events outside of the classroom. An early alert system that monitors students at risk of leaving in order to provide timely proactive intervention is integral to Lopez-Rabson and McCloy’s (2013) recommendation to combat student attrition. Finnie et al. (2012) identified reasons for students leaving colleges. The most prominent reason for students leaving their primary PSE program of choice was “didn’t like it/not for me (48.5%)” (p. 20). Other reasons for switching or leaving a program included health, personal or other reasons (20.1%), to change schools or programs (10.3%), not enough money (8.2%), wanted to work (6.7%) and marks too low (6.2%). The authors indicate that educational institutions must target their interventions, examining the whole student, including the history prior to PSE, academic records and students’ perspectives about their own success. Deller and Thomas (2013) describe broad early intervention programs that begin in elementary and secondary school systems. Barriers cannot be addressed in isolation and a program mix is essential. For
example, finances may be important along with academic preparedness and parental support and expectations. Deller and Thomas (2013) suggest that systemic evaluations are required to determine the appropriate services,

\[
given \text{ that barriers differ both among individuals and over time, it makes sense that the most successful programs are those that are flexible enough to be responsive to individual needs. At the same time, each program, despite its unique character, still needs to reach as many students as possible. (p. 9)}
\]

In the unfortunate cases where the intervention is unsuccessful, Lopez-Rabson and McCloy (2013) believe it is essential for the colleges to have “re-absorption strategies to discover what these students’ need to return to PSE” (p. 4). In short, colleges ought to be taking an active role to engage all students, including tailored approaches that recognize a multitude of challenges and this includes tailored outreach and support for Aboriginal students.

Again looking at the topic from a Euro-centric perspective solely to gain a better understanding of the environment, Tinto’s person-environment models have been used as the cornerstone for many pieces of student services research. Tinto (1997 & 1994) believes in learning communities and that an inclusive and supportive environment helps students in their goal to become educated. He posits that students are more apt to succeed and tackle the stresses and demands of postsecondary education with a supportive social network. Building on Tinto’s works, and more specific to the college environment, Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt et al. (2005) suggest that engagement is the key to student success, including persistence and attainment rates. Moreover, the authors argue that student engagement, particularly in a college setting, is more important to student success than academic
preparedness since college-bound students are widely diverse in their academic skills. Kuh et al. (2005) summarize several best practices from leading student engagement principles including

- student faculty contact, cooperation among students, active learning, prompt feedback, time on task, high expectations and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning. (p. 8)

Further, research supports the notion that first year students perform better scholastically when they become involved with a group (Lorenzetti, 2002; Tinto, 1997). Similar to Aboriginal pedagogy, Tinto (1997) discusses the strength of learning communities – one of his core beliefs. Tinto outlines how community interactions help students become collaborative teams in constructing their own knowledge. He believes that classrooms should be structured to allow dialogue and discussion to enhance learning. Moreover, the settings of these learning teams should expand beyond the traditional confines of a classroom. Retention and student development theory expands to encompass out of class extracurricular activities such as varsity sport, social clubs and study groups. Again, this demonstrates a similarity with Aboriginal traditions of learning that calls for a holistic hands-on experience both in and out of the classroom.

Student engagement theory suggests that students who are engaged are more likely to persist (Lorenzetti, 2002; Tinto, 1997; Dietsche, 1995). Zhao (2011) defines student engagement as “the effort, interest and time students invest in meaningful learning experiences” (p. 2). Codjoe (2005) draws attention to some critical aspects of student retention. Namely, “the longer a student stays at an institution of higher learning, the higher the cost of losing that student becomes” (Codjoe, 2005, p. 31). Colleges must work to provide opportunities for different
departments to come together and deliver unique programs designed to enhance student development. In terms of retention, “valuing education excellence, student satisfaction and development and quality in services is the foundation of successful retention” (Dietsche, 1995, p. 430). Student development theory recommends “developing connections that allow for collaboration between the classroom and student service elements will likely result in positive-sum gains for all stakeholders” (McMurray & Sorrells, 2007, p. 1220). Thus it would follow that colleges should aim to retain all students until graduation and keep retention rates high.

Organizational Design.

There are many barriers to students seeking help, such as self-esteem, disclosing causing discomfort, social norms, apprehension and fears and not understanding the benefits (Vogel, Wester, & Larson, 2007); however, this “deficit model” can unjustly place blame on the victim. As has already been discussed at length, colonization in Canada has a long history of one-sided imposed decision-making. Nevertheless, the first year can be a daunting year where students are undergoing maturation and confidence building and these are all relevant concerns for Aboriginal students who must adapt to a Euro-centric school system. According to Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot (2005), institutions should be intentional about how they approach the first year experience. It must be a comprehensive and integrated approach that is inclusive of all stakeholders. The authors suggest creating an organizational structure that is comprehensive, integrated and coordinated. All facets of the organization need to be learner-centric from recruitment and admissions to students affairs and faculty. Kuh et al. (2005) assert that student
success must be an institutional priority from the highest level of leadership. Combined with O’Banion’s work (1997), learning colleges are envisioned as always placing the learner first and at the centre of all decisions. O’Banion’s writing (1997) suggests that colleges should rethink new technologies to improve teaching and management, increase performance standards for student and teaching, flatten the hierarchies, move away from centralized decision making, and build relationships with business and industry. It must also be recognized that students have a responsibility for their own learning (Day, et al., 2004), but best practice research states colleges ought to provide and support learning opportunities (Schmidt & Kaufman, 2007). Colleges should recognize the wide diversity of learners and encourage learners to bring those diverse experiences into the learning forums (Day et al., 2004).

As suggested by Day et al. (2004), all employees should have a general understanding of the context in higher education. Student engagement should entail conscious and intentional actions that engineer the environment and the experience. A recommendation for interconnectivity between the program of study, experiential learning, and activities in and out of the classroom again sounds similar to emerging Aboriginal best practices in adapting to a Euro-centric way of learning.

Mainstream research suggests (Shugart & Romano, 2006) that colleges should remove silos within the organization to promote cross-training and focus on the student experience. According to Day, et al., (2004) the intention should be to create a vibrant educational partnership among members of the academic faculty and student affairs professionals in which all campus educators share broad responsibility for achieving defined student outcomes. (p. 35)
In the Aboriginal context, this means all staff should have an understanding of Aboriginal culture and how to support Aboriginal student success. This follows the increasing trend of student affairs and academic services collaborating. Seifert, Arnold, Burrow and Brown (2011) describe this trend as a move from siloed decentralized service provision to an environment that functions more like a spider-web where interdepartmental connections are key to service provision. The authors suggest these spider-web like service designs are often linked to philosophies focused on “student success” or “student engagement” (p. 23). Seifert et al. conclude collaborative service provision in PSE is the best way to meet students' needs because it reaches a larger number of students and it becomes core to the culture of the institution. They caution there is no one model that will appeal to all institutions; rather it is an opportunity for wide and broad involvement unique to each institution:

creating a shared commitment to student success comes from supporting people involved in all dimensions of the education endeavour to meaningfully engage with each other in the support of student success. From students to staff to faculty to alumni to community members; all can play a role in creating integrated programs and services that support student learning and success. (Seifert et al, 2011, p. 43)

Stated differently, these theories could recognize the importance of adapting to the diversity of Aboriginal peoples. In summary, success strategies for students and current PSE theory are echoing an Aboriginal perspective that calls for local community consultation and involvement. The importance of orientation and transition support for Aboriginal peoples will be explored further in Chapter Five.
A Holistic Yet Individualized Approach

In congruence with Aboriginal student development theory, Euro-centric development theory suggests an approach that is holistic and encompasses the entire student (Day, et al., 2004). Kuh et al. (2005) argue that there is no single strategy for student success and that it is a “unique combination of external and internal factors working together to crystallize and support an institution-wide focus on student success” (p. 21). This holistic approach is corroborated by Shugart and Romano (2006) who suggest having cross-trained staff enables employees to “engage students in learning end-to-end processes” (p. 142). Day et al. (2004) suggest that no one area is solely responsible for institutional outcomes and data assessment. The authors posit that “every campus should be ready to define and measure its desired student outcomes” (Day, et al., 2004, p. 19). Further, to heed the advice of Hook (2004), public institutions such as colleges need to be both transparent and accountable.

Zhao (2012) believes colleges must look beyond student financial assistance to provide PSE access for the underrepresented students. More specifically, he suggests policy initiatives must be tailored to sub-groups considering characteristics such as income, first generation status, disability and independent living status. Finnie et al. (2012) too call for an approach that “treats students as individuals rather than as members of a group” (p. 49), again a recognition of diversity in all its forms. I would argue that Aboriginal students should be properly named here because they too struggle with meeting the financial demands of PSE. As was outlined in Chapter Two, the 2 percent growth cap on PSE funding for Aboriginal peoples was unilaterally imposed by the Canadian government in 1992. Let us also
recall that according to Aboriginal discourse, this has guaranteed a formula of underfunding PSE for Aboriginal peoples and created a decades old shortfall of resources. As a result of this shortfall, Aboriginal students may be completely denied funding to attend PSE (remembering education is a treaty right). If they do receiving funding, it is often tied to highly bureaucratic processes and is likely insufficient to cover the variety of PSE costs such as tuition, food, rent/mortgage, travel and childcare needs.

Moving forward, colleges with low Aboriginal enrolment will need to recognize Canada’s historical context and understand that Aboriginal students have a complex relationship with Euro-centric school systems. Nevertheless, for a variety of reasons, from a lack of data collection tools, to a justified unwillingness to self-identify as Aboriginal, collecting data regarding Aboriginal student success in higher education remains a challenge. Further, if Ontario colleges wish to track the success of Aboriginal students, colleges will need to focus on creating positive and welcoming environments for self-identification. I would add that Aboriginal educational attainment rates suggest that universities ought to be part of this movement as well. Potential solutions may incorporate elements of Euro-Centric and Aboriginal pedagogy if they are to be implemented in Euro-centric systems. Naturally the preferred argument of this thesis would be a dedication and commitment to pure Aboriginal pedagogy, however, I recognize that at the current time with the current power structure in Canadian PSE, this may be an unrealistic goal for some Euro-centric institutions. Thus, in this study I will draw on all data presented including
Aboriginal and Euro-centric theories, to help create a positive and welcoming PSE environment that may encourage enrolment, self-identification and persistence. This combination or blending of theories (two-eyed approach) may initially be a more realistic option on a path to a fully Indigenous vision.
CHAPTER FIVE:

STUDENT AND STAFF EXPERIENCES IN THREE ONTARIO COLLEGES

Chapter Five presents the results of my analyses of the transcripts of my face-to-face interviews of this study. This includes the perspectives of staff, Elders and students with reference to the success of Aboriginal students in three Ontario colleges. The aim is to provide an overview of what services are helpful to Aboriginal students and outline areas for potential growth and/or modification. Data were gathered and findings are presented in the following categories:

1. An overview of participant demographic data;
2. Participants’ definitions of student success; and
3. Emergent themes.

Demographic Data

I interviewed two Elders, four staff and 25 students. I started all interviews with a script, including a series of three standard interview questions with a potential of up to five potential probing questions. Elders and staff questions were similar, yet slightly different than student questions. Some modifications were made to the questions to allow for natural conversation flow and less structured conversations. All students were asked the same eight demographic questions (see Appendix A). The following describes an overview of all participants who voluntarily self-identified to participate in the study. Ten participants were interviewed at College 1, including
eight students and two staff members. Twelve participants were interviewed at College 2, including ten students and two Elders. Nine participants were interviewed at College 3, including seven students and two staff members.

Within the last two years, Colleges 1 and 2 have built new Centres specifically for Aboriginal focused services. College 3 had the smallest space, yet it was still space dedicated for Aboriginal services and within the next two years, as College 3 expands, it will also have new dedicated Aboriginal Resource Centres at the two main campuses.

Demographic data regarding the student participants is listed in Table 11. Only a few more females were interviewed (56%, n=14) than males (44%, n=11). All but one of the students spoke English as a mother tongue. One male student suggested he “dabbled in Ojibwe” but he did not describe himself as a fluent speaker, while another male student appeared shamed he could not speak his native language but said he intended to learn one day.

The age of the students ranged from 18 to 44 years, with the average age being 26. This suggests the participants are more reflective of mature students or those not attending directly from high school. Student program choice varied from environmental or recreational studies, to engineering, health, business and general arts and science. All student participants were enrolled in a full-time program including a one-year certificate (12%, n=3), two or three year diplomas (76%, n=19), an apprenticeship (4%, n=1), a four-year degree (4%, n=1), and a one-year postgraduate certificate (4%, n=1). Only one student (4%) mentioned being previously enrolled in a dual credit program.
When asked whether they lived the majority of their life on- or off-reserve, there was an even split between on-reserve (44%, n=11) and off-reserve (44%, n=11) background while the remaining students (12%, n=3) said they lived half of their lives on-reserve and half off-reserve. Students who self-identified as having lived on-reserve were more apt to have considered the impact of distance from their family and communities when considering their PSE choice. Further, students from small or remote communities voiced appreciation for the Aboriginal Resource Centres, including support in transitioning to a foreign Euro-centric way of life.

Only a small percentage of students (12%, n=3) were first generation, meaning they were the first in their family including their mothers, fathers, grandparents, brothers, and sisters, to attend PSE. One anomaly was a mature student who did fit the traditional aforementioned definition of first generation; however, her son had graduated from PSE a few years before her so she was not considered first generation. Finally, one student was not the first in her family to attend PSE but she was the first in her family to obtain a degree. She was not included as a first generation student.
Table 11
Profile of Student Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Year of program</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>On/Off Reserve</th>
<th>First Generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2 of 2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>On</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1 of 2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>On</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1 of 1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>On</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1 of 1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Off</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1 of 2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>On</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2 of 2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Off</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3 of 4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Off</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2 of 2</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Off</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1 of 1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>On</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1 of 3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>On</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2 of 2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>On</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1 of 2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Off</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1 of 1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Off</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2 of 2</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2 of 2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Off</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1 of 1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>On</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2 of 2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>On</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1 of 2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>On</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1 of 1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2 of 2</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1 of 2</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Off</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3 of 3</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Off</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3 of 3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Off</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2 of 2</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>On</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1 of 2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Off</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Meanings of Student Success for Participants

Each participant was asked to personally define his/her own meaning of student success for Aboriginal students. Participants were not limited to only one choice because the question was open-ended. Thus many participants had multi-layered conceptions of success. Seven common themes emerged in the student responses. There were two most salient elements of the students’ definition of success. The first was a definition of success that included either being able to pass
all their classes and/or ensure that they achieved graduation. The second was a career mindedness, meaning that the students were concerned about being able to find gainful employment in their fields after graduation. These themes correspond to how the student success literature defines success.

Following closely behind finding gainful employment was the students’ desire to ensure they had gained the necessary knowledge and skills to be successful in the future. In other words, these students wanted to ensure that they had the practical skills and theoretical knowledge to excel in their respective fields. A student’s specific definition of success for herself brings life to these themes. This quote demonstrates the complexity such a question can draw and how PSE sets a stage for a life of learning:

First of all definitely graduating. I think I would like to leave postsecondary feeling that I learned enough that I need to go to work. And I want to know now that I know where to go to get further training or further experience because really four years at school, and especially with the curriculum, you don’t learn everything that you need to know. I would like to know enough and know where to get more. I think that’s what I’m trying to say. I will always be a lifelong learner.

Grades-related discussions were the fourth most likely response. Students were not always concerned about getting an “A”; rather their concern was more about striving to do their best and whatever that meant to them. As mentioned, students’ definitions of success often spoke to their academic standing in the current program but they also spoke to their next step and transitions into their careers:
Keeping up my grades to a proper level, at least about a three point GPA. Staying punctual, paying attention, graduating. That is success for me. Just generally doing well above average in my program. I think my vision of success is just maintaining that it takes people a very long time to get a job but success in the program is obtaining all the knowledge I can from the program and coming out on top. At least you have the knowledge and you have the power even though finding a job may be difficult.

They spoke of recognizing their strengths and weaknesses in certain subjects and often said that as long as they had passed, and tried their best they reminded themselves to be satisfied with their marks. Two students mentioned not being concerned with marks at all. They said they were only interested in obtaining their respective credential. For example, one mature student had a very different view of success where she already felt she had the required skills and experience but she was looking for the academic credential to validate her more than two decades of experience. She reflected on other students' views of success and how that differed from her own:

For myself, success is graduating all my classes. It may sound like I lowered my standards but since I’ve been in school I’ve watched people be obsessed with getting 80s and 90s. I just want to pass my classes and get my piece of paper. I can see their point of view because they are all young kids but I just want to get my piece of paper. I’ve got 25 years of experience behind me. I guess being on the honour roll probably would help but I don’t think it’s detrimental for me to carry on once I’m done here. That is what I’ve always wanted. I just wanted to get a piece of paper to match my work [I currently do].

We can see a difference in the level of reflection and academic purpose when we contrast this mature student’s definition of success with a 20 year-old Aboriginal student in her first year of a foundations program. Her short definition describes her success with an initial focus on grades and then towards her unknown path after school: “I guess [success is] maintaining a high average, as well as creating contacts social networking and building my future.”
The last three themes identified were growth, being in PSE and other personal goals. Students described growth opportunities as either spiritual growth or as the ability to demonstrate and develop leadership qualities with their peers outside of the classroom. The students who defined success as simply “being in PSE” had experienced a difficult time in PSE and had seriously considered dropping out. Two students said they had a personal life goal to attend PSE or obtain a specific career; therefore, success for them was pursuing this significant life event. This tie to a significant life event speaks to the last theme of achieving a personal goal:

Just the fact that I got accepted to college and the fact that I’m going through and staying in the college is a big success because last semester I was having a really rough time and I was actually thinking of dropping out and now I’m just coming up to my last semester.

Staff and Elders were asked the same question (to define Aboriginal student success). The staff and Elder responses gleaned five themes, three of which were similar to the students’. Participants were not limited to one definition and therefore the responses were also often multi-layered and complex. One staff member’s definition of success demonstrates not only what success means for Aboriginal students, it also provides insight to the complexity required to adequately provide services to support the students’ success. Her comment points out that Aboriginal students may need supports ensuring success beyond academics. She believes Aboriginal students need a place to feel welcome on campus, a place where they can explore their own culture and spirituality. She believes this is important to help with their PSE transition, particularly if an Aboriginal student is coming from a remote reserve to a large city:
I would think that to be successful there needs to be a lot of well-rounded and a lot of supports to help them finish and be successful. I think it’s one thing for them to be successful academically. I think sometimes that takes a lot of peer tutoring or a lot of help with studying. But I think it’s very important to have Aboriginal services and the Centre for them to use the facilities and also a welcoming space for them to come to the college in general.

When I asked why she felt the existence of the Centre was so important, she responded:

I think because a lot of the students that identify as Aboriginal come from outside communities and they are really grounded culturally and spiritually with the communities. And when they come here, they don’t have that support system and it’s a little bit of a shock and it’s something that they have to transition into as well. Though being able to have an environment that is friendly and open for them to help is really beneficial for the transition. But I think that for most students in general, and specifically for Aboriginal students, especially if they come from remote areas.

The staff and Elders’ most common three definitions of Aboriginal student success were very similar to the students’ definitions. The two most prominent themes of success identified by staff and Elders were attending graduation and a student’s ability to find gainful employment. The third commonality with students was the mention of student success being equated to students being able to achieve their personal goals. This meant further education, simply having accomplished a personal goal to achieve a PSE credential or finding one’s true purpose in life. As noted, three students told me simply being in PSE was their definition of success whereas staff and Elders had a slightly different view of the PSE experience. Although the staff and Elders mentioned attending PSE as a definition of success, they qualified this statement to include an intention that student success should include a positive experience for Aboriginal students. Finally, the last theme mentioned by one Elder participant was making a connection back to the community.
Not surprisingly, consistent with an Aboriginal worldview, this Elder said student success includes improving the community as a whole and understanding how individual actions impact the larger whole:

[Success is] a sense of doing your part almost like pursuing your soul’s true purpose knowing that you’ve done something worthwhile before you leave this world. It’s important for everyone to see their value. Finding your value can be something that is very difficult. And this is what I’m trying to do with my son to get him to see the value in what he’s doing and in his choices and not just about himself. If the community as a whole is what we are really trying to create, it is a community of trust and love and belonging and compassion.

Interesting to note is the difference between the definitions of student success presented here and the definition presented in Chapter One as “the likelihood that students will annually progress from grade-to-grade until they achieve their [academic goal]” (Cowley, Easton, & Thomas, 2011, p. 3). The initial Euro-centric definition narrowly defines success and has a clear focus on credential achievement. On the other hand, the participants’ definitions were much more broad in scope, and one might say more “holistic”. For example, a wider scope with an inclusion of spirituality and the importance of the learning journey, regardless of the credential earned, appears to be unique to the Aboriginal paradigm.

Reported Influences on Student Program Choice

In addition to their own views of success, students were asked to describe the reason behind their program choice. Students cited more than one influence in their decision of program choice at college, which I grouped into six themes. The most frequent responses that students cited were either that they wanted a specific program perhaps offered only at that particular school or they were drawn by a
school’s reputation. Many students had done their research and knew what program they wanted including the most appropriate school to offer their program of choice. One student decided to look at the curriculum offered and based her decision to attend on her research:

[The school is] really good for my program. I’m in early childhood education. I took a look at the course content, and everything else, and it seemed that it would benefit me more than if I went to the other colleges that I got accepted to.

Another student described how the program’s reputation was also an important deciding factor for him:

[This school] offered a journalism program, which was supposedly one of the best in the country so I decided to apply for the best program in the country. That’s why I came here. My teachers always said you are in the right program or you should be a journalist. It’s changed my life in a good way.

The second most frequently cited influence on program choice was geographic location. This included students who wanted to stay close to family. One student, even though he had moved a full-day’s drive away from his core family, was comforted knowing that he would still have some familial connection while away at school. He and one other student also felt comforted that the Aboriginal Resource Centre at College 1 had a good reputation for helping Aboriginal students. As he put it:

I have a few family members here. I come from about ten hours away and I knew some the people who came [here] and I heard a lot of good things about the [Aboriginal] support services.

Only a few students mentioned they had a previous connection to a specific campus or school and this was often because a family member had a connection with the campus. For example, one student’s mother had worked on campus as a
full-time employee and he felt that he had already developed a familiarity with the campus and the Centre since he often visited the campus with his mother when he was an aspiring young student.

Another student’s comment underscores the importance of family. After careful consideration of his options, being close to his family was the only option for him:

I chose this school mainly for location. I wanted to be close to home. I did look at programs at other colleges throughout Ontario but it would actually mean I had to leave my community. For me, I found my family means a lot and that is where I find a lot of my strength - from being with my family. If I went far away, I wouldn’t have that needed contact with them. That didn’t sit well with me so I concentrated more on the closer colleges.

Finally, funding issues influenced student program choice. For example, sometimes university was deemed too expensive so college became the preferred option because of the lower tuition cost. One student described how her financial realities clashed with her initial university plans. She not only ended up in a different school than initially planned, she ended up in a different province to pursue her hands-on practical college education.

The first choice is actually “Plan B”. I am from Alberta and when I applied for school I was already planning to attend university. I wanted more hands-on so when I did plan for “Plan A”, I couldn’t afford the tuition so I had to apply to a school that was publicly owned. I came here because of the tuition.

This comment demonstrates the impact and realities of a lack of sufficient funding for Aboriginal students wishing to attend PSE.
Centrality of Aboriginal Student Services

As part of the interviews, Aboriginal students were asked to name any services that they believed had been helpful to them in their academic journey. Five common services were named, including student success support, community connection/Aboriginal Resource Centre, cultural grounding, funding and counseling. Many participants listed more than one service.

The most common type of support sought by students was student success support which included services such as peer tutoring, mentoring, acquiring study skills, resources for coping with stress, assistance for learning disabilities, facilitating conversations with faculty and enrolment transition programs that ensured a smooth transition to college life such as orientation. This is how one direct entry student described how she felt when first attending college and the importance she placed on having a place to go for support:

The first semester I wasn’t really open. I was kind of in shock moving to the big city coming from a small town but meeting people here at the Centre made it easier.

From a student perspective, PSE barriers can include a multitude of issues or, as the Canadian Council of Learning (2009a) calls it, a constellation of barriers. Students spoke of isolation and the challenges associated with being distanced from their family members. Some students looked forward to weekend visits when they could be reunited with family. Without question, the students appreciated having the Aboriginal Resource Centres available to them to have a positive and helpful place to be on campus. This is not surprising given the sample consisted of students who self-selected to engage with the Centres. Nevertheless, the Centres were the first points of contact for all services. Students appreciated having a “one-stop-shop” to
go for all their needs and were happy they did not have to traverse the campus to find services scattered across departments. One student described his appreciation and view of centralized service provision:

There’s this place called the Aboriginal Student Success Centre. I just called it the Aboriginal lounge when I first came to school about six years ago. There was just one Aboriginal friendship lounge. The workers were scattered throughout the college in different sections so it’s great that they actually found a space to put them all in one centre area instead of having to go here and go there asking someone. You can’t find the service more or less unless you sift your way through the different avenues to find the proper person. Now they’re actually centred in one location which is 10 times easier to get the help and service that you need. I found even some of the peer helpers have been actually very helpful. Like everybody I don’t know everything. I like to think I do. You always come across that stuff that you really question so it’s great that there are people here that you can ask. One person might know this or another person might. Someone here normally does usually know and they are able to help you.

Of importance to note is that four students believed they would not still be enrolled in their college without the help of the Centre. An additional three felt the Centre had played a significant role in helping them succeed at college. Given the responses of these students and their reference to the importance of the Centres, one can see why I wished I had asked about the importance of the Centres specifically for all students. This information could have been used to support the argument for dedicated space on campus and increased funding for the Centres. As is often the case with industrial research, the insight to inquire about the Centres’ impact on individual students did not come until I was about halfway through my interviews.
One student described her Aboriginal Resource Centre as having provided valuable experiences, which she did not think she would have had without the Centre:

I’ve been president of the Aboriginal Student’s Circle and it’s been a great learning experience and a great leadership opportunity. Also just the type of things – they invite me out to conferences, our meetings, galas – anything like that. It’s just really great professional development and great opportunities that I wouldn’t be able to get anywhere else.

A recurrent theme throughout all participants’ interviews was the connection to their communities and other Aboriginal peoples. They found these connections through the Centres. At least four students openly stated that they preferred and felt most comfortable interacting with other Aboriginal students or Aboriginal staff when seeking support. They felt that fellow Aboriginal students shared a common worldview that allowed them to connect with ease on personal and spiritual levels. It seemed not to matter if someone was from a rural, urban, large or small community as long as some common Aboriginal values were there: kindness, respect and compassion. One student described why she enjoyed visiting the Aboriginal Resource Centre on her campus:

I wasn’t really open to talking to other people. I did and I didn’t feel like I was having support…. Here it’s based on your religion, if that’s how you want to classify it. It feels like they understand more where you are coming from. Like in the counseling services – they do understand.

Another student described his experience and his preference for the Centre’s atmosphere:

It’s just comforting here. Everyone is always saying hi to each other, they have movies going, there’s always just conversation. People helping other people, people trying to figure out things they can help them with. Just kind of like open. Students helping students and staff helping students. It’s like a second home.
As noted above, many of the students who attended the Centres, did so on a regular, if not a daily basis. They found comfort, community and a second home in their Centres.

Staff and Elders also appreciated the importance of being able to connect with students in the comfort of the Centres. They recognized that having a support person who understands and respects Aboriginal philosophies is in a better position to support students as one commented:

I think that having someone to relate to on a personal level instead of the more corporate level is what students are really looking for. And to have a person be able to provide services, in whatever the issue is. Even getting them connected we are referring them to a good person. If it’s out of our area or power to be able to go that extra step to get them in the right area is really important. And I find that just because you are of the same culture you automatically have gained a stronger bond right from the start. It’s an advantage for us. It’s in our best interest to go that extra mile and ensure they are successful. It’s almost like a family relationship. We really want to see our brother or sister really succeed so we’ll do whatever it takes. Instead of a business relationship where you give them what they need and you move on to the next person.

One staff member described her vision of the Aboriginal Resource Centre when she first began her role several years earlier. She knew it would be important to connect with students and provide them with a sense of belonging:

I started off talking about creating a place of belonging and looking at the Centre and thinking about how welcoming it is. I think that is the first order of business. Are students coming in here? Do they have that sense that it’s a home for them? Can they feel comfortable? Is it a source of pride? Can they go in there and see and meet other people who can see where they come from, their background, a sense of pride and a shared sense of understanding? And there are very specific things. Can you walk in there and can you smell the medicine? Is their artwork on the walls?

Closely linked with the importance of the physical gathering space in the Aboriginal Resource Centres, but named as distinctly different by many students, was the importance of cultural teaching and grounding with traditional beliefs.
grounding included Elder teachings, Idle No More sessions or access to traditional medicines. For example, a mature student described the power of her experience in an Idle No More “flash mob” at her college:

I swear to God, a drummer showed up and the girls got my hand and I started to cry. It was just so awesome to be a part of that and to be included is more than words can say. Really, for people to say that you can be here and you do have a place here.

Through this one comment, it can be seen how a powerful experience celebrating Aboriginal culture brought both a sense of community and belonging on campus.

Students also identified services related to funding as commonly sought. Funding concerns included issues related to finances for attending PSE, completing or updating information with Band Council requirements and/or applications for bursaries and emergency loans. Funding was a source of stress for students since it included challenges with foreign and highly bureaucratic processes. Students were quite thankful for help in navigating the systems that provided access to and sometimes helped them remain in school.

According to staff, services regarding funding typically involved the navigation of bureaucratic paper-work processes. Students required help with application processes including the use of the faxing services to communicate with their primary funders. One student described not only the importance of the funding support she received from her home community but also the importance of the Centre’s help in keeping her connected with her funder. As was the case with many students, if she did not continue ongoing communication with her home community, her funding would have been suspended:
My community helped out refinance the tuition fees and they gave me some living expense money. That helps out a great deal in terms of pursuing my postsecondary education – having to take out student loans I’ve never had to do before so I’m assuming it’s quite complicated and makes things a bit tougher.

Some students were described as seeking emergency loans while others sought access to the onsite food bank. One student described his experience when he was in financial difficulty and how the Centre was able to provide immediate support including connections on campus and general financial management strategies:

I had a lot of financial trouble this year and I was in the office and they were able to point me in the right direction and show me information. Fill out this form here, take it there and show that person. They have extensions and phone numbers so I can actually contact with that person. They also have workshops in the semester and they’re very helpful...like the last one I attended was about finance and credit/debt. It was informative.

Another student specifically outlined her financial challenges and concern with the cost of food in student residence:

And the food is way too expensive here – way too expensive. I mean who can afford $10 a meal on small meal plan. I was getting two meals a day, and it was costing me $20 a day to eat. You can’t live like that especially when you’re just getting simple chicken and pasta with a drink and it is coming to nine something. It’s too expensive and they expect students to be healthy and successful with the meals they are giving in the residence but they can’t keep the kitchen clean and they don’t give affordable food. I think without the bursaries I don’t think I’d have money to eat right now.

When finances or stressors became difficult to handle on their own, students spoke about accessing counseling services to address personal or academic issues. Students would access counseling when they were feeling overwhelmed in their lives and were seeking help for issues such as a roommate conflict, a course load that
was too heavy or if they found themselves in a program in which they lacked interest.

This is how one student described his experience and the impact counseling had for him:

I had a bit of a tragedy in my second year in my third semester; three of my family members died. They [employees at the Centre] were here to support me and keep me from dropping out my program... my program is very competitive and very stressful and very hard at times and I feel like if I didn’t have the Aboriginal Resource Centre as a place to help with ideas and support with problems, I probably wouldn’t be here at this point. Whereas now, I’m very likely to be graduating as an honours student.

Staff members spoke about the need to provide services on both formal and informal levels. Walk-in service for counseling was described as very important for students because students used drop-in appointments frequently. A student described his experience accessing counseling services and the help he was able to access:

Last semester I felt like I was crying, there are so many things going on, textbooks, roommate. I felt like I was in a deep hole. I was in there [counseling] for two hours putting a plan together that helped me get out a giant pit of doom and gloom.

In addition to the services already mentioned, the staff and Elders also expressed their view that concentrating on employability for students was important during the college experience. Students were thankful when employment during school helped them with their finances, whereas staff and Elders talked about the importance of helping students realize their transferable skills, especially for those from remote reserves whose employment experience to date had been working trap lines and fishing. College staff tried to help students translate work experience such as trapping and hunting to urban skills and teach them how to relate in a professional environment such as “how to interact with a boss” and “the importance
of being on time”. College 1 had specifically developed a partnership employment program with a local coffee shop to provide Aboriginal students with work experience. One first year student who was participating in the work program spoke with a level of security and comfort about his future because of his involvement in the program:

So far I want to work outdoors. Next year I am taking the outdoor adventure program but this time I’m more ready for it. This time I know I can work because now I have work experience and I’ll never be out of work because [the coffee shops] are everywhere. I know I’ll always have a little bit of cash.

He knew that with his employment experience, he would likely always be able to find employment because the coffee shop chain he worked for is so popular with so many locations in Canada. The work experience gave him confidence not only about his future in general, but also for his future studies.

Finally, although only one student mentioned childcare, its availability would have been very important in addressing an emergency. One mature student who was living away from her family with her young son told me about a time when she had challenges with her son’s day care routine and her family was too far away to help. As a result, she had to stay home with her son and she missed a test in class. As she explained,

for Aboriginal women like for myself (I have a small child) there was a time I missed class because he was having difficulty in preschool. He refused to go to school and I missed class that day. I missed an assignment and I missed a quiz so it affected my academics. It’s just him, the city and me so there is nobody I could leave him with. If there were some type of emergency care to let you get to class that would be helpful.

Since the situation caused her a large amount of stress, it would have been helpful to have emergency day care on campus.
Frequency of Use

Students were asked about how often they engaged Aboriginal student services. Almost half of the students said they used their respective Aboriginal services on a daily basis. Some of these students joked that they would sleep there if they could. Those who worked at the Centres commented that they would attend the Centres even on days they were not acting as an employee because they “liked the atmosphere”. Almost one third of the students availed themselves of the services two to three times a week and the rest of the students sought services less than two to three times a week. The habitual attendees of the Centres established a strong comfort level and routine with the services and the Centres at their respective colleges.

Students suggested that the open and welcoming atmosphere of the Centres was critically important to their engagement with them. For example, one student rarely availed herself of the services at her college’s Centre. Yet she was the first to self-identify for the study at her college. I found this intriguing so I probed further. After I described the variety of services that were available to her, she seemed surprised so I asked why she so rarely visited the Centre. She described the difference between her experiences at a previous institution where she regularly attended the Aboriginal Resource Centre and her lack of engagement with her current college:

When I first came to the Centre it was somewhere else and just a smaller room. I went there once when I first got here. And I guess it wasn’t as good as it is now. I found it kind of different. I did college before out West, just a general first year. In our Aboriginal Centre we always had the door open which is a more welcoming feeling – like “please come in”. So when I went there the first time, the door was locked. And it was like someone had to let you in so it didn’t seem very welcoming at the time and people didn’t really talk to me much....
So after that I didn’t really go out of my way to come here.

From this comment, we can see how important it can be to ensure a Centre’s atmosphere is always open and inviting. The importance of community is explored further in the following section.

Advocacy and Building Community

All three colleges I visited had services, or at least connections to services, that were centralized through the Aboriginal Resource Centres. As noted, College 3 had the smallest physical space with fewer services solely dedicated for Aboriginal students, but the Centre was part of the institution’s larger student success department and the larger department seamlessly filled service gaps. Similar to the other two Centres, staff members at College 3 provided individualized attention to ensure the transition to all services was seamless for students.

Staff members clarified the importance of the services and revealed how the service providers envisage their roles as key to the success of Aboriginal students. Consider the reflections and driving inspiration behind one staff member at College 1 who referred to a student from a reserve who had come to us, come to me and she said, “I walk into the college and I just become so panicked and so overwhelmed just by the sheer people passing by. And I just freeze.” And I thought, “Well, where she’s coming from and what she’s having to deal with, she is a bright student, full of promise good marks coming in, but can she succeed here? Are we going to see her graduate?” When she is dealing with that type of anxiety of dealing with an institution, this is huge. The place is huge. This place can be really overwhelming -- who do you turn to? And we lost her. And I thought, “How can we help these students?”
Aside from providing a gathering place, according to staff and Elders, the most prominent type of support provided for Aboriginal students was access to student success services already described. These were peer tutoring, mentoring, workshops to develop study skills or provide skills for coping with stress, assistance for learning disabilities and transition programs that ensured a smooth transition to college life. One staff member described the intentional interventions he conducts on behalf of students who have been denied entry into a program. In this case, he follows-up with students to inquire why they were denied entry. Once he has this information, in his words, “he leaps into action” and starts connecting with Registration, Program Coordinators, Financial Aid – whatever the students may need to overcome the challenges. He estimates this practice of following up on denied applications translates to approximately 15 more Aboriginal students being accepted each semester. He said:

We help with the admission process, unlike mainstream follow-up. We follow-up if someone was put on a wait list or wasn’t accepted. We review the application for students on an inquiry basis. For example, a student will contact me and say, “I didn’t get into the kinesiology program. Would you mind looking into my application?” So I contact the admissions officer for that specific program and find out what the issue is and see if there is any way that we could work it out and get them into program.

The staff member understood that having relationships within the college and knowledge of its systems could be a great benefit for students gaining access to the institution and/or navigating barriers:

Sometimes you get a little further when you’re an employee versus a student. With those departments, it’s a bit easier to talk to or to negotiate on someone else’s behalf. It’s always difficult to do that on your own or for yourself. So we provide that service as well.
This underscores the positive impact that personalized and flexible attention can yield. It also demonstrates once again the challenges that first generation students can face because they likely do not know the systems. They likely do not know the right people to help them navigate their PSE experiences or how to self-advocate. The Aboriginal Resource Centres are closing the information gap for students and advocating on their behalves.

Staff and Elders were asked about the type of services offered by their respective college. The connection between cultural grounding and the link to community is difficult to separate. It was interesting to detect the small differences in the student and staff/Elder responses with regard to the importance of cultural grounding. This service is more salient for students the 10 student who mentioned it because they wanted and were seeking support regarding their cultural heritage and traditional knowledge. This is not to say that cultural or traditional knowledge was unimportant to the remaining participants, only that it was not specifically mentioned by students and staff members may take it for granted that a student walking into the Centre is seeking out a connection to their heritage.

Staff and Elders spoke to the importance of providing a gathering place to generate a sense of community. A staff member described his outlook and the need to build relationships within Aboriginal communities both on and off campus:

"We’re relating. When you work in an Aboriginal community you have to build relationships before you build anything else. You can’t promote a business or product without building a relationship first. You have to create a trust."

The Centres were all quite flexible in welcoming any and all people who entered and wanted to explore Aboriginal culture. As one staff member jested, they “do not
ask for a status card at the door.” Many students may have lost their native heritage and the Aboriginal Resource Centres can help people reconnect with that heritage, as one staff member commented:

A lot of students [have] come in and said, “I know that there is Aboriginal ancestry my background somewhere but my parents never wanted to talk about it and they were ashamed of it.” We want to give them a chance to explore that in whatever way that means to them.

This was an important concept to have imbedded in the philosophy of the Centres because there were comments made such “I was worried that I’m not native enough” to be part of the Aboriginal culture. For example, one staff member who worked in one of the Aboriginal Resource Centres expressed his concerns about “not being native enough” upon his initial hire because he too had never been in touch with his native heritage. Students occasionally spoke about a disconnect from native traditions and were concerned about whether or not they would be accepted by other Aboriginal peoples in the Aboriginal Resource Centres. I fear this trend is a consequence of colonization and the “cultural genocide” that I referred to earlier.

These “feeling lost” experiences and disconnect from a traditional Aboriginal way of life are the historical legacy of the IRS system. One Aboriginal student’s comment underscores how colonization has pulled her away from her Indigenous culture. Her home was physically located close to a reserve, but it felt far away from her ancestry. She was disconnected and did not know how to find her way back to her Aboriginal ancestry until she joined her Aboriginal Resource Centre. In her words, she did not belong on a reserve,
I actually wasn’t really connected with the Aboriginal community when I was growing up. I lived right beside a reserve. It was literally just a distance across the highway that made it so huge. I went to a Catholic school instead. I talked to a friend and just a friend acted different so that when I was on the reserve I wasn’t a reserve person at all. And that’s all I knew. I thought, “Either you are in or you are out.”

The Aboriginal Resource Centre at her college helped connect her with her heritage. When I asked her if she felt more connected with her Aboriginal culture because of her experience with the Aboriginal Resource Centre she said yes, noting that the Elder on campus had a large part in her reconnecting with her Aboriginal heritage. I will speak more to this in my final chapter, but I could relate to this feeling of not being native enough. When I first began this journey, I did not know a lot about my Métis heritage. I had concerns about whether I was native enough and I too was worried about being accepted.

**Decolonization**

Staff told me stories, including their personal and professional aspirations to “Indigenize the campus”. They wanted Aboriginal peoples to feel safe and included on campus. For example, one Elder described the importance of educating the whole campus and having an Aboriginal Resource Centre that is open to everyone on campus:

I think that it’s important. It’s a place for Aboriginal students to come and get the cultural guidance they need and to have that support they need in place but it’s a great bridging opportunity for other students as well. They don’t really have an awareness of Aboriginal culture or knowledge and they are able to benefit from that.
Staff and Elders thought it was important to provide cultural grounding to not only the students but to all staff and students. They felt that if all staff and students had a broader understanding it would help Aboriginal peoples feel more welcome and encourage a sense of belonging on campus as a whole. To support this goal of inclusiveness, one college had created a “cultural safety” program designed to raise an awareness of how to relate to and interact with Aboriginal students. The program provided some general understanding of Aboriginal issues and Aboriginal peoples’ backgrounds. The intention was to help faculty and staff relate to Aboriginal students so they do not immediately send students to the Centre without first trying to help them. The staff members described the impact this type of training can have to indigenize the campus when the welcoming space for Aboriginal people’s moves beyond the Aboriginal Resource Centre:

We don’t want all Aboriginal things to be happening inside the walls of this space. We want there to be visual cues all throughout the campus, and a goal, an ideal sense that cultural competencies are flourishing throughout the whole campus. Service providers for the faculty who are worried about saying something offensive but we want them to refer, let people know about these resources and maybe they can incorporate some Aboriginal content into their curriculum and not only just give out the sad Aboriginal statistics. Are they presenting things in an empowering way? So for example a suicide in this community, but here is a program that they introduced to make an impact in a positive way [instead of only talking about the fact there is a high rate of suicide].

Further, staff identified transition issues including informational and financial barriers corresponding with the Educational Policy Institute’s research (2008a) which named what they called “motivational and academic barriers” for Aboriginal students. Staff recounted students’ feelings of fear and isolation. Aboriginal students, especially those from small and remote reserves, can feel out of place and can panic in large urban environments surrounded by non-Aboriginal people. Some of their
students said they had never seen a White person before attending college and so they were unsure how to interact and some felt more comfortable dealing with and seeking support from Aboriginal peoples. For staff and Elders, it was critically important for the campus to be a welcoming place for Aboriginal peoples. This was not limited to the creation of an Aboriginal Resource Centre, but an entire campus that was “Indigenized” so wherever an Aboriginal person ventured, s/he would feel safe, welcomed and accepted. This point is recognized even in non-Aboriginal documents. For example, according to the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada (2009) and the Auditor General of Canada (2004), cultural dislocation and isolation culminate to impede educational achievement for Aboriginal peoples.

**Racism and the Aboriginal Student Experience**

Participants were asked to describe their experience providing (staff/Elders) or accessing Aboriginal support services (students). All participants were asked to recount either a positive or negative experience that contributed to their overall experience being connected with the postsecondary institution. They were also asked about potential growth opportunities for new service development. The responses to these questions often touched on some of the aforementioned themes; however, additional points emerged through these less structured conversations. Throughout the interviews, the participants and I established a rapport and the interviews became more conversational as they progressed. Students then told me powerful personal stories that recounted their struggles transitioning to PSE and the
anxiety associated with adapting to PSE, including the stress of being distanced from their families, the challenges of being a first generation student, and encounters of racism. One student described how her Centre had become her safe-place:

Just for me, I think it was super important to have this lounge as part of the cultural shock. Just physically being around so many people was difficult for me. It’s probably the same for all Aboriginals or all small-town people. It’s just physically tiring for me and to have this quiet peaceful place where there is less energy and there is smudging done regularly - it’s a lifesaver. I don’t know how I would’ve done without it.

The importance of a sense of belonging and safe place was foregrounded as staff and students described some of the emotional and racial barriers Aboriginal students experience. Staff and students described the impact that racism had on them personally and how the experience intersected with their educational experiences. One staff member described the barriers Aboriginal students can face in their home communities, including internalized racism. This staff member who made the following comment had visited approximately 70 reserves across Ontario and Quebec for the past three years:

For Aboriginal students...the main issue is youth are isolated from the bigger picture in life. They are isolated to what the world, what Canada has to offer. They live on a reserve with limited to no access to what most Canadians have access to. This causes a mentality of being comfortable with limitations and being comfortable with a lifestyle of poverty. They don’t know what they don’t know. They don’t know what is available. They are not exposed to what is available and I asked them what they want to be. They don’t know what there is to be. This isolation not only limits them but also damages their self-esteem and their ability to be more or to dream.

When I asked him to expand on what he meant by the limits, he told me about a story when he was on-reserve for a community outreach event. He was both puzzled and troubled by what he witnessed:
It limits them because they accept it. It limits them because of...— let me give you an example. A young student came up to me and said she was interested in health fitness, but she didn’t know what she wanted to do. And then I conducted a workshop an hour later and she was a participant in the workshop. I asked the group what they’re interested in or what they wanted to do and no one replied. Then I asked the girl who I met an hour before the workshop, would you like to say what you are interested in? And she put down her head and didn’t say anything. It puzzled me for so long. Why wouldn’t she say that she was interested in health and fitness in front of her peers? So I asked her after the workshop. She said because it’s just a “dumb idea”. So from that comment I gather that’s what she believed. That’s what she was passionate about but she couldn’t say it in front of her peers. And it’s because if she went against the norm she [thinks she] would be put down by her peers if she started to think differently or to dream or to want more than what was available.

Even more disheartening was that racism continued once students reached PSE. Ten students in my study expressed recognition that race somehow influenced or was a part of their college experience and most of the time the influence was negative. For one student, the racism was experienced through tokenism in class where as an Aboriginal student she sometimes felt the need to defend the Aboriginal perspective in class or challenge myths and misconceptions held by her peers. She described her feeling that in these moments, when an Aboriginal issue would arise, the class would look to her but she felt conflicted. She felt compelled to address it although she also felt that she wanted to be quiet because Euro-centric view clashed with her own beliefs. This caused anxiety, stress and dissonance for her. As a more mature student, she has been able to somewhat reconcile the dissonance:

For me, it’s all postsecondary and in the way they [non-Aboriginal people] view the world that people/man is superior to everything else on the planet. Coming from my traditional background and the sense that we are all connected, nothing is above the other. I’m learning to manage.... You to sit there and listen because you’re there to learn their knowledge. As much as I’d like to share my belief it is not really necessary. I don’t feel like that is the appropriate time to raise all my beliefs.... I’m here to learn this for now, not deny what I believe, but put that to the side and say this is the knowledge I need for this course.
She thought it was unfair for others to expect her to have knowledge and answers for all Aboriginal communities. Yet at times she also felt obliged to speak on behalf of Aboriginal peoples.

Students frequently reminded me that Colleges 1 and 2 are both on traditional Indigenous territory. They were shocked and bothered that fellow students (and staff) were often unaware of this historic fact. The students were hurt by the lack of recognition for their people and the connection to their land, which, as has been discussed, is a cornerstone of an Aboriginal way of life. One student at College 2 outlined the frustration she experienced when she felt like her college was an intrusion on traditional lands and there was not enough respect for Aboriginal space on campus:

I think you see all these other areas throughout the school where students can go and sit. They are huge. And then these guys get this little wee dinky space where you cram six computers into two little wee rooms and into one little room in a hallway. And it’s [Indigenous name] College you know. They have no respect for that name whatsoever.

Another student described the internal conflict she had when she experienced racism on campus during an event meant to celebrate Indigenous culture:

It was my first year. I wasn’t involved with the Aboriginal Resource Centre. I was watching the pow wow and I was with some friends that were not native but they were immigrants from another country, I don’t even know where. I experienced some racism from them. At first I took it hard because I felt like if this pow wow wasn’t here that I wouldn’t feel that way. But then later on I was able to really think it out and deal with it. And I’m pretty sure I talked to [the Elder] about it after and she helped me so I was able to just get over it and talk about it. Because I grew up really in a White Catholic society and in coming to [college] I thought it was so great. Everybody is so different, I can fit right in and everybody just accepts that you’re from a different culture but then all of a sudden it kind of backlashed on me with racism. I had never had it a lot before. It was always kind of often joking but this was straight in my face. So that was the first time.
The most powerful account of the impact of racism came from a Mohawk student at one of the colleges. I specifically name him as Mohawk because he was so proud of his heritage and I want to honour that for him. We had a wonderfully engaging conversation that was enlightening for me. Below, I have included part of our conversation outlining the participant’s encounters with racism that he endures on an ongoing basis. This conversation happened when our interview was nearly complete and it all flowed from the simple question that I had begun to ask with regularity when closing the interviews, “Is there anything else that I haven’t asked you that you think is important for me to know?” I felt it would be important for readers to see that as a researcher, I was not leading him to a conclusion about his racialized experiences. The young man recounted his experience living as an Aboriginal person in Canada and how it has clashed with Euro-centric thinking. He has seen challenges, but he also offered hope and suggestions for the future. He described what felt like an invisible “force field” that alienates and distances him from some non-Aboriginal peoples and he described how education and awareness are the tools by which this force field can be overcome:

Just like with any other Aboriginal I have very strong Aboriginal features. When walking through the halls people still have that, I guess, where they are afraid to engage us, afraid to come near us. Until they actually get to know us.... It’s been my observation my whole life just watching how people react walking around with my family at the mall, walking around with friends at the mall, going to concerts. Just watching how people react to seeing me. I have very strong Aboriginal features. I don’t know whether it’s just Western society, North American or Canadian society, it’s always that stigma that “They are bad people. They are not people to be associated with.”

I asked him what types of behaviours he saw that led him to believe there was White fear and intolerance:
It’s their looks, their body language the little subtle changes in the way they walk, in the way they talk. A very visible thing is when you come and sit down, and there is one desk beside someone. It’s normal for people to move their stuff to make room for you but they are actually grabbing it and they hang onto it. A lot of other times people just put it between their feet or they just move it to the other side but [my experience is that] people visibly hang onto it and grab onto it. It’s almost like they don’t want to let it go because they’re afraid something is going to happen to it. I’ve experienced that a number of times at school. And walking down the hall, it’s almost, like an invisible force field or something and it moves along and it just move things out of the way. I’ve experienced that as well. Walking, it’s natural for people to just brush each other or come within the personal space of two feet. It’s natural when you’re walking through a crowded hallway. You can see those people that actually move to the other side just so they won’t come near you.

The stigma that this Aboriginal student felt did not include all non-Aboriginal people:

And just from my observations foreigners are more accepting in interactions even walking throughout the hall. They are more accepting than a non-Aboriginal person.... I found in classes. I’m more accepted by what I consider new people that are fresh to the country I guess what we would call new Canadian. (So like somebody who is a visible minority?) Yes they are more accepting of us. They are more inquisitive as well. But the thing is I found that even the non-native are inquisitive. But because they fear us, they won’t approach us to ask questions but when you actually speak about our culture and our ways, their ears are up like radar and they hear everything.

When I asked whether or not he believed the racism has gotten and better or worse, he told me that he has not seen any change and does not expect it to until mainstream society accepts Aboriginal peoples are here to stay. The young man feels that education and awareness will bring a path to understanding but he is concerned about what he perceives is a glaring omission of Aboriginal issues in mainstream media:

I don’t know if you know this -- all the things happening around Canada and Aboriginal rights. There’s been a media blackout. They are not reporting anything. It’s barely mentioned in the newspapers they don’t say anything on the national news show. You actually find more information on social media websites about what is going on.
He also suggested that colleges can play an important role bringing heightened awareness on campus because he believes there is an inherent interest in Aboriginal peoples. As he explained,

What happened last fall [was] Aboriginal awareness week. Making awareness -- that is the best thing they could be doing. Letting people know that yes we are here. The college will be accepting of us more times than not. We’ve never had that week before and now they actually do that so it was a huge step towards awareness and letting people know. What I find in classes as well is when I do presentations my focus would be on an Aboriginal issue of some sort. You’ve been in class where a presentation is going on, people are doodling or not paying attention. When we are presenting on an Aboriginal issue everybody there is at attention. They want to know. The thing is, they are afraid to ask. It’s almost as if it’s the elephant in the room. They don’t want to speak about it. It all comes from that fear. If the individual himself can overcome that fear and actually approach and ask, Aboriginals are more than willing to speak and say, “Yes, this is who we are and this is what we do.”

In response to my question about non-Aboriginal student reluctance to approach Aboriginal students, he responded:

That’s where that fear comes in. It’s so ingrained in Canadian society. They are afraid until they actually get to know that person. After that, they are not as afraid or scared and they are more apt to ask a question. There’s a few people in my class now that had apprehensions of interacting with me last fall when I first started. But now they’ve actually become good friends.

Commenting on the pervasiveness of feeling “shut out”, the Aboriginal student added:

I’ve grown up and spent my whole life living day by day and it’s almost to the point where you try not to even notice it anymore. You actually do not notice it except when it’s very overt. That’s when actually you see it.

He emphasized that there seemed “no time out” from this force field of racism:

After that you start thinking about [the racism] and you start seeing it as you are moving around. Yes for me, I lived with it my whole life. I’ve come to accept that, yes, that’s how some people are. There are those people who aren’t afraid, they are inquisitive people so they will come up and ask and they will engage with others and they will talk. I just really respect that if a person is too afraid I’m probably not the only other thing they’re afraid of. There’s got to be
other things in their life that they want to know about that they’re scared of and they’re not going to approach it. (You’ve come to peace with all of this?) Yes I had to it’s not going to change for now.

It was clear through the stories I was told in the interviews that new and inclusive perspectives could address healing on many levels. The comments above reveal a young man who has been able to forgive the everyday racism he experiences as he seeks positive answers. However, one of his fellow students explained that she has not yet been able to come to peace with the pervasive feeling of discrimination she experiences every day. In her words, she recognized her outlook was a perspective she wished she could change to rid herself of the anger. But she had not yet been able to work through her frustration and anger associated with colonization in her everyday life. In fairness to her, why should she have to learn to live with racism? In her words:

This place is too small for the amount of people who come here. When you come in here to do studying it’s almost impossible to [do so]. I know it’s me and this is a personal thing, something I think I need to work on, but it really bugs me when I come here and there are tons of non-native people in here. That drives me nuts.

I asked her if she knew why she felt this frustration and if she could explain where she thought it was coming from. She explained to me how she sees the pervasive impact of colonization:

It happens everywhere else and just over and over again. I come here and it happens here too. It just bugs me. Native and more so when I see non-native people coming in here and they [complain] about [the services for Aboriginal students], “Well how come I can’t get this fax? How come I can’t get this photocopy for free?” At least they say you have to be native to do that.
She said she was not trying to be anti-White, but she did want to see specific resources dedicated to native students. She felt that dedicated resources and space for native students was reasonable considering the major impact of colonization all over Turtle Island:

It’s hard too, I don’t want to sound like I’m cold or angry or anything like that, but the native centre, it should be for native people. I could see if someone is bringing a group in here. I bring a non-native group in here when I have to do work but it’s the ones that just come in here that think they can come in here. Maybe it’s just history, like it still happens, they think they can do whatever they want. They infringe on our space out there and they infringe on our space in here.

At this point, it is critical for me to recount my experience when attending one of the colleges to conduct interviews in April 2013. I had never been fortunate enough to visit this campus before so I was a first time visitor. Before my arrival, I had searched the Internet for a campus map and found my intended destination – the Aboriginal Resource Centre. Upon arrival, despite the incorrect signage due to construction on campus, I found parking and set out to find the Aboriginal Resource Centre as depicted on my campus map. As I walked the halls, I began to faintly smell a scent I recognized. Smudge! Instantly I knew I was headed in the right direction and that I must be close. I smiled and found comfort in the smell knowing it was guiding me to my intended destination. I found the Centre and was greeted by a Métis Elder conducting a morning smudge. It helped to both welcome and calm me all at once. I felt more ready to tackle the adventure ahead of me that day. Then, only minutes after I had been enveloped by this comfort, two members of campus security arrived sharply at the Aboriginal Resource Centre. Without entering the Centre, they stood at the door with it kept slightly ajar demonstrating what appeared to be either an unwillingness or discomfort to enter the Centre. They were quite
concerned about the foreign smell and accusingly questioned the Elder as to what she was doing. In mere seconds, my sense of comfort and belonging evaporated and it was replaced with feelings of disappointment and as if we had been doing something wrong. I can only imagine the negative impact this type of institutional response would have on the self-esteem and sense of belonging for young Aboriginal students. Needless to say, it felt miles away from a welcoming atmosphere that celebrated, understood and accepted traditional Aboriginal norms.

On a more positive note, at least one student was pleased to describe the efforts of her professor who would bring up issues such as the impact of colonization into her classroom. She said her non-native faculty, on more than one occasion, had intentionally raised an Aboriginal perspective in her program. This led to her having a positive view of the college as she described her experience:

I think [my institution] is very forward thinking -- or maybe the professors are in my environmental sustainability class. We’re talking about the tar sands and how they’re destroying the environment up there. My teacher very clearly linked that to genocide towards the First Nations people because they are clearly still depending on the land and doing this is deliberate -- a deliberate action of genocide. I found that very powerful that he would say that so openly in the classroom and teach what it is obviously happening.

Nevertheless, one positive experience does not outweigh the numerous negative accounts from other students. It is clear from these stories that colleges still have more anti-discrimination and decolonization work to do because participants commonly described the importance of community, including a sense of belonging on campus. The data suggest, although the Colleges are making gains at providing an overall positive space for Aboriginal peoples in general, more work needs to be done to create a welcoming environment on a holistic and campus wide level.
Interview Analysis Summary

The following summarizes the responses of staff, Elders and Aboriginal students during the face-to-face interviews. The open-ended interview questions yielded data and themes that demonstrate both the service usage levels of Aboriginal students and highlighted some of the key challenges the students are facing in PSE. For example, a broad range of support was deemed very important to students, along with a desire to stay connected with their communities and their culture. Guidance sought through counseling was important to help students navigate their PSE experience, including bouts with racism. Students were quite grateful to receive help with the funding issues because this sometimes meant a difference in whether they continued with school or had food to eat.

When reviewing the data collected to determine the factors that influenced students’ attendance at college, students were most frequently interested in a specific program. Students considered the reputation of the school in the decision making process, including the presence and knowledge of an Aboriginal Resource Centre. According to the students, they were influenced by the location of the school because many wanted to stay close to their home community and family. Some students had previous connections to a specific campus either because a family member had attended or had worked on campus, or they had attended special transition programming such as dual credit. Finally, finances influenced students’ decisions to attend college because the cost of tuition at college is less expensive than university tuition.
For staff and Elders, the pervasive themes were to provide appropriate services and to create a positive space in the entire campus, both in and out of the classroom, that would ensure Aboriginal students felt welcomed and supported on campus. The staff and Elder responses gleaned a more holistic view of the educational experience where they often spoke of the need to initiate or change an institution-wide response. They wanted to see an “Indigenized campus” that was not only welcoming for Aboriginal students, but incorporated some traditional Indigenous beliefs in every day decision-making, including policy decisions.

These findings are consistent with the themes outlined in my literature view, including the impact of colonization and the desire for Aboriginal peoples to choose their own path (Indian Control of Indian Education and self-determination). Some of the issues are similar to those experienced by first generation students (Environics Institute, 2010) such as a lack of understanding and a lack of financial support and isolation, although only 12 percent of the student population in the study were actually first generation. Research suggests (Statistics Canada, 2013) that educational attainment rates for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples are relatively equal in a college setting, therefore, the first generation literature, including support strategies, may prove more valuable in a university setting where Aboriginal students are more apt to be first generation learners. Most importantly though, it appears colleges are doing something right in providing support to Aboriginal students. This is a move in a positive and healing direction. However, the data also suggest there is more work to be done in order to support Aboriginal student success.
In summary, the data presented here in Chapter Five underscore the impact of colonization on Aboriginal communities in and beyond the PSE context. For example, the stories of these 25 student participants highlight a loss of Indigenous language, a loss of culture and a loss of traditional lands. Moreover, the experiences of racism substantiate why Aboriginal peoples often feel out of place in a Euro-centric schooling system. A further divide is created when Euro-centric beliefs clash with traditional Indigenous values. The data suggest that for Aboriginal peoples, there is a fundamental importance to be placed on the concept of community, where community includes connections to family, traditional land, other Aboriginal peoples and an appreciation and desire for traditional ways. Aboriginal Centres were an important gathering and safe place for Aboriginal peoples on campus. The Centres were a place to connect with and build community. Formal and informal services such as counseling and academic skills workshops helped Aboriginal students with orientation, transition, funding and racism. In short, the Centres were a place for Aboriginal peoples to connect with other Aboriginal peoples to celebrate culture, learn about traditional teachings or find kinship. The participant data suggest services intended to support Aboriginal students should include a gathering space for Aboriginal peoples to connect and receive support from other Aboriginal peoples in both formal and informal ways. Finally, I would be remiss not to note that the participants believe PSE institutions, as a whole, must be “Indigenized” or welcoming for Aboriginal peoples and inclusive/respectful of their worldviews.
CHAPTER SIX:

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORTS FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

Education was once used as an instrument of oppression against our language and cultures and tore our families apart. Now, we must and are turning this completely around.... Education has the power to light the path and ignite the fires of all of our Nations creating hope and opportunity for generations today for years to come. (Assembly of First Nations, 2011, p. 18)

The purpose of the research was to address one overarching question:

According to students, staff and Elders engaged in Aboriginal Resource Centres, what are the factors that affect Aboriginal student persistence and success in Ontario colleges? Subquestions were created to answer this one overarching question.

Some of the questions have been addressed in Chapters Two, Four and Five. In this chapter, a history and overall summary of policy and support services for Aboriginal students is presented. This chapter provides a summary of emerging best practices according to Aboriginal sources, recommendations from participants, and analysis of relevant literature.

Changing Aboriginal Education Policy

Chapter Two established and acknowledged education as a moral, ethical and treaty right for Aboriginal peoples (Carr-Stewart & Steeves, 2009; McDonald & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2010; Carr-Stewart, 2006; National Indian Brotherhood, 1972). This chapter turns to a promising period, one that emphasizes and recognizes fundamental rights and freedoms of Indigenous peoples. What I am referring to is the “Indigenous Renaissance” (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002), “Indian Control of Indian Education” (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972) or a “cultural resurgence”
According to Brant Castellano et al. (2008), the period between 1967 and 1982 marked a major shift from assimilation to revitilization, especially in education.

Following Chrétien’s 1969 “White Paper” referred to in Chapter Two, the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB), now the Assembly of First Nations, drafted an address to the Canadian government entitled, “Indian Control of Indian Education” (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972). The NIB states that the education system is not working and it is time for change. The NIB sees a holistic vision of education that develops the whole person and includes all stages of life. Although it recognizes the value of the elementary, secondary and postsecondary system, the Indigenous philosophy does not confine itself to the Euro-centric model of education. The document provides a pillar on which First Nations educational philosophies stand, including the right to self-determination. I feel it is important to include the original educational vision of the NIB:

*In Indian tradition each adult is personally responsible for each child, to see that he learns all he needs to know in order to live a good life. As our fathers had a clear idea of what made a good man and a good life in their society, so we modern Indians, want our children to learn that happiness comes from:*

- *Pride in one’s self,*
- *Understanding one’s fellowmen, and,*
- *Living in harmony with nature.*
These are lessons which are necessary for survival in this twentieth century.

- **Pride** encourages us to recognize and use our talents, as well as to master the skills needed to make a living.
- **Understanding our fellowmen will enable us to meet other Canadians on an equal footing**, respecting cultural differences while pooling resources to the common good.

- **Living in harmony with nature will insure preservation of the balance between men and his environment which is necessary for the future of our planet**, as well as for fostering the climate in which Indian Wisdom has always flourished.

We want education to give our children and knowledge to understand and be proud of themselves and the knowledge to understand the world around them. *(Statement of the Indian Philosophy of Education, National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 1)*

The vision references the importance of the people, the community as a whole and the land on which we live. Elders echo this interconnectedness with the people, the land, spirituality and survival across Canada *(Brant Castellano et al., 2008)*.

According to Brant Castellano et al. *(2008)*, education will lead to a long life in harmony with Mother Earth including wisdom and knowledge of responsibility to care for the earth and the community.

The NIB *(1972)* recognizes their own broken society. It is a broken history of paternalism and the withholding of inherent rights to education. In the future the authors see not only Indian children proud of their own heritage, but a mutual understanding and every Canadian child appreciating and understanding the role of the original inhabitants of Turtle Island. They decree it imperative to have Indian teachers teaching Indian students. Curriculum requires change, parents need to be more involved and solutions must be unique to localized areas. The NIB *(1972)* calls for “radical change, free choice [and the ability] to participate fully in [their] own
social, economical, political and educational advancement” (p. 3). Under the Declaration that education is a treaty right, and the responsibility of the federal government, they envisage control at local levels and “generous federal financial support” to operate the Indigenous educational system (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 13). They see an educational system that increases the quality of teaching and provides a positive portrayal of Indian history and culture. Finally, the NIB (1972) addresses the problems with integration of Indian children into mainstream/White society. They call for an end to a one-way process because it is no longer acceptable for the Indian student “to give up his [or her] identity, to adopt new values and new way of life” (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 25).

The NIB/AFN published another report, “Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision of Our Future. A Declaration of First Nation Jurisdiction Over Education” (Charleston & McDonald-Jacobs, 1988). Respectfully submitted on behalf of the First Nations, the paper calls for an end to paternalistic practices and recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty and the right to self-determination. This paper calls for Indian Control of Indian Education (ICIE) demanding the failed federal system be abandoned:

Aboriginal peoples of Canada continue to suffer social disintegration and deprivation under the paternalistic administration of the federal government.... Only 20 percent of First Nations children complete the secondary level compared to the national rate of 75 percent. (Charleston & McDonald-Jacobs, 1988, p. 9)

The state of Aboriginal living standards is reviewed, including scarce housing, unacceptable employment rates, low incomes, high levels of children in the welfare state, a death rate two to four times higher than other Canadians, alarming suicide rates, diminished life expectancy, and an overrepresentation of First Nations in the
penal system. For the NIB/AFN, treaties are at the core of their arguments. They call for and demand equality with non-Aboriginal peoples, citing negotiated and documented treaty rights. A decade later again, the AFN (McDonald & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2010) produced a report with another call to action. A renewed vision for self-determined education is presented:

First Nations view education as a process of nurturing learning in linguistically and culturally-appropriate, holistic learning environments that meet individual and collective needs, thereby ensuring that all First Nations peoples achieve their personal and collective visions within lifelong comprehensive learning systems. (McDonald & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2010, p. 10)

McDonald and Wesley-Esquimaux’s (2010) First Nations philosophy envisions education as a lifelong process. According to Jules (1999) native education includes “experiential learning, observation and listening” (p. 41). It therefore follows that appropriate education for Aboriginal students will encompass these pedagogies. These ideas are supported by Harris (2002) who sees the decolonization of classrooms including the use humour, experiences outside of the classroom, and a mutual respect between teachers and students. Battiste, Bell and Findlay (2002) believe

the task of decolonizing education requires multi-lateral processes of understanding and unpacking the central assumptions of domination, patriarchy, racism, and ethnocentrisms…. Decolonizing requires the institutional and system-wide centering of the Indigenous renaissance and its empowering intercultural diplomacy. (p. 84)

The authors suggest the involvement of Elders is crucial along with a healthy respect for Indigenous knowledge. To expand, this means resource materials including books, journals and theses would all be made available to a learning community. Curriculum should be inclusive and appropriate funding for resources should be available including adequate staffing to avoid burnout and tokenism. The National
Working Summit on Aboriginal Education (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2010a) calls for a major culture shift of what they refer to as “Institutional Indigenization” (p. 16). They too echo the need for inclusive curriculum, sustainable funding and community engagement; however, discussions at the summit suggest future directions should be more focused on positive success stories. According to the AUCC (2010a), it is time to leave negative assumptions behind and celebrate Aboriginal achievements.

A report commissioned by the Aboriginal Institutes’ Consortium (2005) outlines the unique functions of Aboriginal postsecondary institutions. The Report states that these institutions address the “cultural, linguistic, intellectual, social and economic and conditions of Aboriginal peoples in Canada” (p. 33). Moreover, the Report highlights the important role played by the institutions in educating thousands of Aboriginal students and boasting a student success rate in Ontario of 80-90 percent. Nine key characteristics are outlined that distinguish Aboriginal institutions of higher education as different from the mainstream:

1. Boards directed and controlled by Aboriginal communities.
2. Aboriginal faculty ensure a holistic approach to education (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual).
3. Infusion of First Nations history, culture, traditions, and values throughout the curriculum.
4. Methods of instruction that address Aboriginal learning styles.
5. Community involvement/integration of community throughout the educational process; linkages and referrals to various community organizations.
6. Aboriginal support staff ensures a focus on student support and the creation of student support networks.
7. Elder support, spiritual and traditional teachings.
8. Programs and services that instill recognition and preservation of Indigenous knowledge and history, recognition and respect for the land, environment, people and community; designed and delivered by Aboriginal peoples for Aboriginal peoples.

9. Program and service delivery in community based, culturally rich environments. e.g. on-reserve. (Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium, 2005, p. 34)

In a special report to the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council of the United Nations (2009) suggests several key elements to achieving the implementation of education for Indigenous peoples. The Report calls for a collaborative effort that develops teacher training and incentives for teachers to remain in remote areas. The goal is to provide specialized training to keep Indigenous teachers in their home communities. Shared-decision making in terms of planning, design, implementation and evaluation of educational systems is seen as critical to this process. This includes the larger community, parents, educational leaders and institutes of higher education. The UN Report highlights several pitfalls that could hamper progress, including: a lack of control over educational initiatives, lack of consultation, failure to consult with Indigenous leaders, lack of adequate resources, lack of instruction in the mother tongue and curriculum that reflects too heavily views of the dominant groups.
Creating and Measuring Positive Impact

The Euro-centric but holistic student success theories reviewed in Chapter Four can be compared with the promising practices that were recommended in various reports and studies with an Aboriginal focus; however, there are challenges associated with this type of evaluation. Many Aboriginal student programs and services are still very new or have not been implemented for lengthy periods of time. At the time of study, College 1 was undergoing a longitudinal program evaluation to determine the effectiveness of its services, which is still ongoing. HEQCO has also observed this lack of evaluation data (Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2010) with regard to Aboriginal student services. According to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (2012), a spirit of trust must first be developed to create baseline data for trend analysis.

In order to personalize and provide Aboriginal input into Aboriginal education, it is imperative to honour the stories and input of the participants. Let us recall that according to Aboriginal students, staff and Elders, the most prominent type of Aboriginal student support related to academic success or transition to PSE. More specifically, these services included orientation programs, tutoring, counselling and facilitating conversations with faculty members. All participants saw the value of providing a safe and positive place for Aboriginal students on campus. The Aboriginal Resource Centres were central to providing a safe space, but staff and Elders wanted to ensure that positivity encompassed the entire campus. Nevertheless, participants saw the value of the Aboriginal Resource Centres because the Centres provide
gathering places where students formally and informally interact with peers and Elders. The Centres provide a place for communities to gather, to converse, to feast and to access traditional medicines and teachings.

One evaluation factor that could be used to demonstrate the effectiveness of these services is the frequency of the usage rates. Almost half of the students said they visited the Centres on a daily basis. This would suggest the Centres have done an excellent job at welcoming students and creating a safe space. However, we must consider the students who do not know about the Centres or do know about the Centres yet choose not to enter. Gaining perspective from these students could provide valuable insight into how to engage more Aboriginal students. The challenge will be finding the students in the first place. Battiste, Bell and Findlay (2002) suggest that in order to reach these students, the contamination must be removed to create a space where students want to come forward. For example, contamination might be described as the experience of one Aboriginal student who was upset with non-Aboriginal students using services dedicated to Aboriginal students in the Centre. Battiste, Bell and Findlay (2002) believe that a multi-lateral process should address and remove domination, patriarchy and racism. Ideas about how to create this safe space are addressed in the following section.

According to Brant Castellano et al. (2008), “if education is done badly, then it can do more harm than good” (p. 118). This is particularly true for Aboriginal peoples. One Elder asked me to imagine a scenario where an Aboriginal youth leaves his/her reserve to attend PSE. After years of commitment and investment both personally and from the community, the young adult returns home with a postsecondary credential, however, there is no job available on the reserve. The new
graduate is now unemployed and the value of education is diminished. The Elder said the impact on the community can be devastating including the messages this sends about the importance of attending PSE and pursuing one’s dreams.

Further, one Elder felt strongly about a holistic view of education suggesting that a path forward for educational institutes, and people at large, would focus more on interpersonal connections:

I think about opening up and looking at different ways and understanding how people learn. Not everybody learns the same way. They’ve done study after study saying Natives really learn well in a hands-on kind of way. Yet still nothing has changed. And I would like to see more of that more holistic kind of teaching. The kind of teaching that isn’t just going to give you that knowledge but is going to give you so much more. You look at the kids these days. There are people who are very intelligent -- they’ve gone to school to be this or that but they have no idea how to have a relationship. They are missing so much in ways of coping skills and life training. These should be a part of all education learning -- how to be a good person. Humanity. I think it should start right from when they are young and go right up through. It should never stop. You start running into problems when you begin to choose what it is that we will be instead of listening to what we really are. Things become so hard and rigid that if you fail it is so hard to get that back.... I’m definitely seeing something where we really need to get over ourselves first. Get rid of our pride and ego things like that. Learn to love and accept each other. This is where these values that go across the board come in. This kind of value that certain discipline should reflect.

A second excerpt from this same Elder suggests that “risk management strategies” or attempts to avoid institutional liability are interfering with employees’ abilities to help students in need:

We’ve been finding all different types of ways, for example, that policy can get in the way. Simple things can really make things difficult. A lot of the time it’s the result of things created by ourselves -- like insurance. It takes the human out of being. It takes the humanity of being human. It’s almost like “policy I can’t help you.” Because it’s policy that I can’t give you a ride home even though there’s this big emergency and you’re in emotional need, [Policy dictates that I must say] I’m sorry but I can’t give [you a ride home] because of liability.
The Elder’s example underlines that it is important for employees to connect with student and that one way to do this is by showing compassion for students. The Elder suggests that as a society, we are “a bit lost today” in that we are not taking the time to find our true purpose in life and we therefore struggle to find true happiness. Euro-centric institutions have become too impersonal. In other words, we have created systemic barriers that impede a personal connection critical to not only humanity, but to an Aboriginal paradigm. In his words, what is needed is people who really care and will go above and beyond for the students and let them know it. If [institutions] have [this type of employee] I guess you just talk to [students] in a way that you let them know you understand and help them in any way you can or any way that you’re allowed. Being a compassionate human isn’t a liability.

Another Elder referenced her experiences in high school programming – a unique equiastrian-care initiative helped to build the confidence of young Aboriginal students through creating nuturing relationships and bonding with the animals. In her work, she saw the value of creating a safe and welcoming place for Aboriginal students in educational settings. These Elders’ experiences and views correspond with Berger et al.’s belief (2007) that a lack of self-confidence, academic preparedness and psychologial trauma can create barriers for Aboriginal students in a Euro-centric setting.

Aboriginal students and staff both referenced the importance of adequate funding and financial support for students. Some students questioned how they would have been able to eat without the support of the Aboriginal Resource Centre. Staff members saw the value in helping the students navigate bureaucratic funding processes and facilitating employment opportunites on campus. This raises perhaps the most important issue, that of funding. The interview data suggest that in order to
continue a positive trend of successful practices, students still need help accessing PSE. The interviews revealed that Aboriginal students struggle with obtaining sufficient money to attend school, buy supplies, pay for rent and buy food. This was particularly difficult for mature students who had families to support and/or mortgages to pay while attending PSE full-time.

Frameworks for Aboriginal Student Success

Building on the recognition that virtually all Euro-centric colleges and universities in Ontario offer some type of support for Aboriginal students (Malatest & Associates, 2010), the following represents a limited list of recommendations based on the findings of the study. It is my hope that these recommendations can be used to further the dialogue pertaining to Aboriginal student success and persistence in not only colleges, but also higher education as a whole. The recommendations provide some suggestions for possible next steps in program and policy development to set a context of best practices. First, I present a number of current Aboriginal student success frameworks, followed by specific recommendations that include a synthesis of thoughts that includes input from Aboriginal students, staff, Elders and authors cited in the literature review.

With specific reference to enrolment and retention, Timmons et al. (2009) argue that change requires institutional funding for Aboriginal student centres, promotional materials to reach new and incoming students, housing for Aboriginal students with children, bursaries, scholarships, distance courses, flexible completion options and a self-identification option on all applications to be used as a contact list
to promote activities and resources. It is relevant to note that the participants in this study specifically addressed the importance of many key elements outlined in the frameworks, save for an overt mentioning of distance courses.

Another example of a framework for consideration is offered by LE,NONET, a research project conducted by the University of Victoria (Hunt et al., 2010). This multi-year project recognizes that “education has the potential to build the capacity of Aboriginal peoples to improve quality of life both in rural and isolated Aboriginal communities and for urban Aboriginal people” (Hunt et al., 2010, p. 4). The goals of the research are to change the Aboriginal student experience to a more positive one and increase Aboriginal student access to the institution. Accounts of Indigenous learning philosophies mirror previous research reviewed, including a pedagogy that sees learning as holistic, lifelong, experiential, rooted in culture and involved with the community. The authors hope the research will provide tangible findings to enhance respectful programming that supports Aboriginal student success.

LE,NONET’s key principles and best practices are summarized in six categories: reciprocal learning; supporting Indigenous identity development; culturally relevant programming; community building; relationship building and individualized programming. Reciprocal learning envisions the Indigenous principle of community learning where we are all students of each other’s teachings. It seeks to diminish the hierarchical nature of Euro-centric learning by respecting that knowledge may be shared equally between student and teacher. Supporting Indigenous identity development recognizes the diversity within the Aboriginal cultures, including recognition for differentiating factors such as rural, urban, Métis, First Nation and Inuit. Local programming and customization are at the root of culturally relevant
programming. Community building requires not only a physical space for gathering; it provides students with opportunities to connect with each other, faculty, staff and non-Indigenous students. Community welcomes extended family, children and partners. In this context, Aboriginal students can build relationships and develop meaningful connections. Finally, individualized programming recognizes the unique development of each student and flexibility is key to the success of this best practice. In their last words, Hunt et al. (2010) articulate the hope that other postsecondary institutions will use these findings to enhance the Aboriginal student experience in their own environment.

The LE, NONET framework touches on many key elements already discussed as important to Aboriginal pedagogy, including the recognition that an intentional effort to increase success strategies is required. Further, the framework recognizes the importance of connecting Aboriginal students with their culture and respecting traditional ways of life. The process endeavours to include the important element of full and meaningful consultation in order to recognize the individuality of students and their unique needs.

For a third example of a framework, we can turn to the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami organization, which published its national strategy, “First Canadians, Canadians First” outlining a plan to increase Inuit education in Canada (Simon, 2011). The current strategy builds on a 2006 initiative toward Inuit-centred education models. According to the recent report, 75 percent of Inuit children are not completing high school. Following five years of research and consultation, the first-ever national summit regarding Inuit education sought input through vast consultation within the Arctic region of Canada, including parents, youth, education leaders and policy
specialists. A National Committee on Inuit Education was created with a mandate to provide national leadership regarding the communication and implementation of the national strategy. The committee identified a three-fold strategy to “close the education gap” of Inuit people: support children to stay in school; provide Inuit relevant curriculum in the Inuit language and at least one of Canada’s official languages; and generally increase the number of education leaders in Inuit communities. The strategy outlines 10 recommended core investments to improve Inuit education.

Similar to other reports already discussed, the national strategy envisions a holistic model that involves parents, supports early education and leaders within the community and contains a focus on postsecondary success. This means input and consultation should be widespread and inclusive. The recommendations call for Inuit-centred curriculum and university in Inuit Nunangat. Although a standardized Inuit language writing system is proposed, a focus still remains on bilingualism with one of Canada’s official languages. While the National Committee on Inuit Education suggests a media campaign is needed to mobilize and involve parents, parents are only part of this equation. The strategy seeks to involve Inuit educational leaders for regular discussions and professional development sessions including succession planning for mentoring new educators. Some of the “top-down-ness” of these reports is visible when it appears the report is blaming Inuit leaders for not taking more proactive measures. For example, it is argued that the leaders ought to be discussing ways to create inclusive and Inuit-specific curriculum that respects Inuit culture, history, worldviews and the land. The strategy defines a need to analyze and
identify support services suggesting that solutions may require collaborative interventions from multiple health and social service organizations. It is suggested that the focus be on persistent gaps in programs and services.

In reference to Inuit PSE attainment, the first recognition is that access to and positive experiences in PSE must increase. The Report suggests more information is needed to properly analyze the situation and that barriers to PSE must be identified and removed. Questions posed in the Report are similar to the research questions posed in this study. For example, it asks what paths Inuit students are taking to reach PSE, where Inuit students are successful and what supports are helping them? In order to support Inuit students, the Report suggests we must first understand how to support Inuit students in reaching PSE and then also understand why they are leaving before graduation. The National Committee on Inuit Education suggests that best practices should be shared once they are identified, institutes of higher learning should be inclusive of Inuit programming and a northern university is proposed. The intent of the new university is to expand PSE opportunities and strengthen the northern economy through research and critical inquiry. It is suggested that the university be focused on Inuit culture and language yet inclusive of global Indigenous postsecondary learning. It is the belief that an Inuit-centred university would increase the educational attainments rates for Inuit students in graduate and postgraduate programming. However, one must heed Gaviria’s (2013) advice that Inuit education should build on the struggle for restitution of Indigenous rights, nourish alternatives to colonial and neo-colonial intervention and/or promote engagement to assert sovereign rights beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. (p. 98)
Not surprisingly, the Report recognizes an educational attainment gap for Aboriginal peoples, but the focus remains on long-term success strategies to close this gap. Further, the strategy seeks to ensure its continuity by ensuring that key knowledge is passed along through mentoring programs. Again, the Inuit strategy calls for ongoing dialogue, meaningful consultations and a deep respect for Indigenous traditions, including a respect for Indigenous language. The Inuit strategy calls for a need to evaluate and assess results whereby this information ought to inform policy and decision-making (Simon, 2011). This means the Inuit education gap must be monitored, including specific interventions (with Inuit leader guidance) to support positive experiences. Mary Simon, Chair, National Committee on Inuit Education, looks to the future and cautions that change will take time:

The Strategy is a blueprint for a new era in Inuit education. Implementing its recommendations will necessitate a collective determination to identify new resources, and strengthen the capacity in Inuit regions to transform education systems. This will not happen overnight. (Simon, 2011, p. 4)

Being respectful to the encompassing Aboriginal term used in this study that includes Inuit, First Nation and Métis, let us also review the Métis perspective for an Aboriginal educational framework. The Métis Nation of Ontario signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Ontario’s Ministry of Education that signified a commitment to enact the recommendations outlined in “A Métis Education Action Plan”, (Métis Nation of Ontario, 2008). The action plan has three specific goals at the K-12 level:

- to increase the attention to better Métis education in the Ontario education system; to build capacity for evidence-based decision-making, and to develop a community outreach parent engagement process that supports improved Métis student achievement. (Métis Nation of Ontario, 2008, paras. 3, 4, 5)
The Report states that although attainment numbers for Métis students appear to be improving, equitable education for Métis students remains unrealized. Through community involvement and partnership with the Ontario government, the action plan intends to focus on improving education outcomes for Métis students, ensuring that curriculum in K-12 and teacher training is inclusive of Métis content. The Métis Nation of Ontario asks that all students in Ontario learn about Métis culture and that schools create an environment that support Métis learning.

To evaluate the action plan, the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) produced three follow-up reports reviewing the effectiveness of support for Métis learners in PSE (Stonecircle, 2011), Ontario’s K-12 education (Anuik & Bellehumeur-Kearns, 2012) and teacher training programs in Ontario Universities (Dion, 2012). The PSE Report (Stonecircle, 2011) reviews the status of data collection methodologies and highlights promising practices with regard to Métis students in Ontario’s postsecondary system. As previously mentioned, the Report cautions that the current system tracking Aboriginal educational attainment in Ontario is inconsistent and relies solely on a practice of self-identification. In this context, the MNO calls for the PSE system to adopt a uniform approach with a standardized process. The Report highlights many of the barriers already raised such as finances, academic preparedness, discrimination and a lack of role models. The Report suggests several promising practices including: an increased number of Aboriginal faculty and staff; pro-active Aboriginal student recruitment and admissions policies; transition and bridging programs; specific programs for native studies; support programs and services including a gathering space, counsellors and child-care; financial assistance; awareness programs for non- Aboriginal staff and Aboriginal input into policy
decisions including institutional governance. Finally, in order to enact these promising practices, the Report calls for Métis representation on advisory councils and partnerships with key institutions governing PSE such as the Ontario University Application Centre, OCAS and MTCU. The recommendations conclude with a suggestion for exploring a greater Métis presence in PSE. The MNO Report suggests that the creation of a Métis PSE organization in Ontario could work nation-wide with other Métis educationally focused organizations to create a national strategy that would guide and support the development of Métis education in Canada.

In the review of K-12 education, several promising practices for making education more welcoming and inclusive of Métis perspectives are listed (Anuik & Bellehumeur-Kearns, 2012). The Report highlights the effectiveness of: school boards with Aboriginal (Métis) representatives, including advisory boards with parental and teacher involvement; dedicated resources to teacher training translating to more Métis education being adopted into curriculum; and inviting Métis educators into the educational environment yielding valuable learning opportunities for teachers, staff and students. The Report reviewing the state of Faculties of Education (Dion, 2012) was much less favourable. This Report does not produce a list of promising practices; rather the eight key findings highlight an absence of Métis specific content and an unwillingness to change. Dion (2012) concludes the environment is “not particularly welcoming to Métis students” and there is an unwillingness to include a Métis perspective including a deeply embedded resistance to engaging with Aboriginal Education by students in the Teacher Education Programs. (p. 6)
This is hardly a sign of commitment to an inclusive paradigm. Dion suggests that Ontario Faculties of Education must find ways to include Métis content, employ Métis people to teach such content and recognize that Aboriginal education means more than just First Nation education. Dion states that course directors need to seriously attempt to integrate Métis curriculum into the teacher education programs and create an environment where teacher candidates appreciate why it is important to include a Métis perspective. Finally, Dion believes a national Métis education conference will help to share knowledge and expertise pertaining to Métis education. She believes it is important for K-12 schools/administration such as the provincial governments, to provide teachers with more resources and strategies to incorporate Métis culture and history into classrooms.

The MNO Reports underline the importance of recognizing all Aboriginal groups. The works highlight the importance of having the needed representation to ensure all views are being expressed and resources are available to support inclusive initiatives. Moreover, the MNO Reports underscore how institutions will need to ensure they approach Aboriginal student success strategies intentionally with a focus on flexibility and individualization. The Reports also remind us that when reviewing the PSE context, it is critical to expand the scope to, at the very least, include the K-12 environment. That is to say, student experiences do not happen in isolation. Experiences, both positive and negative, from one level of education are carried into the future academic journeys and these experiences have the potential to impact student beliefs, behaviours and success. In short, institutions must be intentional about the environment that is created on campus and ensure that Aboriginal student success is a conscious strategy at the forefront of the student experience.
Finally, considering this study is focused on PSE in Ontario, it is important to consider the “Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework” (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2011). This Report builds on a 2007 framework produced by Ontario’s Ministry of Education. The MTCU framework (2011) focuses on two key challenges,

improving Aboriginal learners’ achievements in educational settings and closing the educational attainment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in [Ontario]. (p. 3)

The approach was developed through consultative dialogue with the Aboriginal community involving representatives from postsecondary institutions and skill-development service providers. The MTCU states (2011) that this is a renewed committed for the provincial government to support Aboriginal student success, including a framework grounded in the following five principles:

excellence and accountability; equity, inclusion and respect for diversity; cooperation on and shared responsibility for postsecondary education and training; respect for Constitutional and treaty rights; respect for Indigenous Knowledge and languages and cultures. (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2011, p. 6)

The goals of the framework are: to provide transparency and accountability through improved reporting mechanisms; respectfully respond to the needs of Aboriginal learners; increase the levels of Aboriginal student success; and increase the amount of skilled Aboriginal students who are ready to enter the labour market.

Eight strategic directions have been developed to help achieve these goals. The focus is to increase the number of Aboriginal students attaining the necessary training and education so they can productively participate in today’s dominant society. The MTCU (2011) is cautious to name this a starting point, suggesting flexibility is inherent in this strategy. Under the goal of transparency and
accountability, the MTCU states strategic communication will ensure the Aboriginal communities are receiving information necessary to establish partnerships. Opportunities will be created to share information, specifically success stories. Reporting will ensure funding is distributed for actual activities and baseline data will be monitored at a provincial level. Further, this information will be shared through public reporting and provincial reports. The question with this strategy remains whether or not it will be yet another example of top down control or indeed whether it will be ever implemented.

Nevertheless, the stated goal is to be responsive and respectful and the Report envisions real and sustained engagement with Aboriginal communities. It is planned that organizations and Aboriginal staff and faculty will have input into “ministry-supported decision-making, planning, advisory and/or governance bodies” (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2011, p. 25). Upon closer examination of the language, “ministry-supported” decisions could very well mean paternalistic control as it has so many times in the past.

With such a new strategy in place and only published in 2011, it remains to be seen whether the MTCU will achieve its goal. On the positive side, it appears to encompass many of the key components already noted in the study such as consultation with Aboriginal communities, a recognition of diversity within Aboriginal communities, the crucial involvement of role models including Elders, programming that is grounded in Indigenous epistemology, experiential learning and adequate funding. Aboriginal assessors will be the best judge of its success. At the current time, the MTCU has not yet released an update about the success of the policy so it
is difficult to analyze its effectiveness. However, perhaps the absence of data and follow-up highlights a problem unto its own when the Report was so repeatedly focused on accountability and transparency.

In the absence of having a MTCU progress report to review, let us turn to Cherubini (2012) who provides a less than favourable overview of the MTCU framework. Cherubini argues that the document is written in problematic government friendly language that favours the well-meaning intentions of the public sector bureaucracy. He argues the framework is yet another Aboriginal education policy that has “neither successfully addressed the challenges of an obviously marginalized Aboriginal student population” nor does he believe the framework is visionary in nature (p. 42). Aside from the problematic language that highlights past barriers, Cherubini believes the document represents the Ontario government’s “self-declared” commitment to Aboriginal student success and he argues that the framework relies too heavily on a focus of the “tax-paying public”, including the government’s responsibility for monitored spending (p. 52).

This last review by Cherubini reminds us to be critical of well-intentioned, and strategically positioned documents regarding Aboriginal student success, especially when it has been produced by a governmental organization. Given the government’s jaded history with the Aboriginal peoples of Turtle Island, it is questionable whether any government published document can be trusted as anything more than political posturing. Too often, the historical pattern reveals a litany of broken promises, calculated deviance and compounding decades of inaction.
PSE Related Recommendations

The preceding framework review suggests there is an emerging consensus regarding how to best support Aboriginal students in PSE. However, it is also imperative to review the Crown’s duty and legal obligation to consult Aboriginal peoples. The Supreme Court of Canada outlines the Crown’s duty to consult and, if necessary, accommodate Aboriginal peoples in Canada (Haida Nation v. B.C. Minister of Forest, 2004). The Court’s decision requires both sides to act in good faith throughout the process and there is a declared difference between “mere consultation” and “meaningful consultation”. The Court’s ruling outlines the Crown’s responsibility to act “honourably” and, if required, to “accommodate” (pp. 522-523).

More explicitly,

The Crown, acting honourably, cannot cavalierly run roughshod over Aboriginal interests where claims affecting these interests are being seriously pursued in the process of treaty negotiations and proof. It must respect these potential, but unproven interests…. To unilaterally exploit a claimed resource during the process of proving and resolving the Aboriginal claim to that resource, may be to deprive the Aboriginal claimants of some or all of the benefits of the resource. That is not honourable. (p. 526)

Further, the precedent-setting decision specifies that:

The foundation of the duty in the Crown’s honour and the goal of reconciliation suggest that the duty [to consult] arises when the Crown has knowledge, real or constructive, of the potential existence of the Aboriginal right or title and contemplates conduct that might adversely affect it…. Knowledge of a credible but unproven claim suffices to trigger a duty to consult and accommodate. (pp. 529-530)

Although the decision recognizes that each situation is unique unto itself, in the case of education for Aboriginal peoples in Canada and given the literature presented in this study, it is difficult to see how the Crown is not reasonably aware of ongoing calls
from Aboriginal peoples for recognition of their educational treaty rights. Thus in the context of education, it is the Crown’s legal obligation to meaningfully consult with Aboriginal peoples, but also to accommodate and act honourably.

Aside from the legal obligation just reviewed, consultation with local Aboriginal communities is a key idea common throughout the reports. It is reasonably argued that meaningful consultation is the primary necessity and key indicator of program success. Further, the frameworks also present common philosophies with regard to holistic learning, building community via mentors and role models, access to funding, Indigenizing the campus and supporting Aboriginal students with orientation and transition. The following section expands on these themes, presenting concrete recommendations for PSE institutions to consider when implementing an Aboriginal student success framework in a Euro-centric environment.

First and foremost, the literature and legislation is clear; any path forward with Aboriginal education must include meaningful and localized consultation with the community such as students, parents and Elders (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972; Canadian Council of Learning, 2009b; Popovic, 2011; Battiste, Bell & Findlay, 2002; Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2010; Malatest & Associates Ltd, 2010; Stonecircle, 2011, Haida Nation v. B.C. Minister of Forest, 2004). This should be viewed as a minimum requirement and recognition of a basic right. More importantly, “consultation” cannot be decided to be complete by one side (the government) if the other side (Aboriginal peoples) does not feel that their voices and concerns have been adequately heard and addressed. In short, paternalism and imposed solutions for Aboriginal peoples must end.
Broadly speaking, solutions or ideas derived through consultation in one area may be a cornerstone for another, but as the AUCC states (2010b), solutions should not be assumed to be a “one size fits all”. Again, this means consultation should be expansive and widespread. The diversity of Aboriginal communities will need to be recognized including a distinct recognition of First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities.

**Holistic Learning.**

Education is a lifelong process. Like many other groups of marginalized students, Aboriginal students may need help in early years and the graduation of high school is of particular importance. Education must be seen as a continuous process and not just from K-12-PSE. As discussed in Chapter Two, a holistic purview considers connections to the land, community and experiential learning, and traditional teachings with oral history and Elders. Support mechanisms for students are needed and curriculum should be inclusive of Aboriginal history and content. Elders interviewed, the Canadian Council on Learning (2009), the United Nations (2009), Popovic (2011) and Dion (2012) all emphasize the importance of viewing education as a holistic and inclusive experience. Moreover, students also suggested that connections and access to spirituality and traditional teachings were an important part of their positive outlook regarding postsecondary experiences.

The Popovic Report (2011) recommends expanded outreach and involvement with community partners. In examining the pre-PSE environment, the Report also
recommends that an on-reserve K-12 education system be developed in cooperation with First Nation communities where high school support programs extend to all Aboriginal students, not just those identified in the Indian Act.

The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) has also produced what it refers to as a holistic model for Aboriginal learning in Canada (Canadian Council On Learning, 2009b). The research was conducted over a three-year period and the approach to data collection was extensively consultative. CCL engaged Aboriginal learning experts, community members and over 70 organizations and international governments. The goal of the Report was to demonstrate the link between education and well-being for Aboriginal peoples. Findings are organized into three main areas: Sources and Domains of Knowledge, The Lifelong Learning Journey, and Community Well-being.

Community Well-being underscores the importance of strong connections within Aboriginal communities and recognizes the social nature of learning. Sources of Domains of Knowledge are further divided into four main areas that are all deeply rooted in tradition and culture. The connections to the larger population, the land, traditions and spiritually are all deemed critical to an Aboriginal learning model. All encompassed in this area is family, community, Elders, culture, language and spiritual teachings. The Report recognizes that these connections are integral to Aboriginal communities, including First Nation, Métis and Inuit. Learning is depicted as a highly socialized process with family, role models and particularly Elders playing key roles. The lifelong journey recognizes that in Aboriginal communities, learning begins at birth and continues throughout adult life. In essence, a newborn Aboriginal baby is a student for life and CCL (2009b) outlines that teaching may come from a
variety of sources such as “school, home, community, workplace and the land” (p. 31). Significant value is placed on experiential and community based learning. Activities such as volunteering are deemed as highly valuable learning experiences.

CCL notes a growing trend in connecting to the virtual community and suggests that digital connections and online learning, or distance education, is increasing in popularity. However, they identify a barrier to this trend in that many Aboriginal peoples have limited access to Internet connections that enable distance learning.

CCL (2009b) argues convincingly that the recognition, understanding and application of this holistic learning framework creates a more balanced approach to education for Aboriginal peoples. Connections to family, community and lifelong learning are deemed critical for new frameworks promoting Aboriginal learner success. As is common with other research reviewed here, CCL (2009b) recognizes that in order to enact this vision changes are still required. Information gaps must be overcome but it is proposed that this framework will inform “effective social policy and program development” (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009b, p. 60). CCL (2009b) concludes with future directions to move this framework forward. The Report calls for an inclusive and consultative approach with goal development involving Aboriginal learning organizations, governments and researchers.

Similar to the CCL, the Malatest Report (2010) argues that programming should enlist a holistic approach that encompasses pride in cultural knowledge and traditions. This holistic approach expands to include both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and recognizes there must be a common understanding of each other’s cultures. Community plays an integral role. Providing links for students to and minimizing time away from Aboriginal communities (including the consideration
of distance education) is deemed important. The authors suggest creating a safe-
space for students to gather. They suggest outreach should include connections to
the community and access programs. Once programs, such as on campus child care,
have been established, they must be communicated and promoted. Not surprisingly,
the authors also underscore a need for outcomes based measurement such as exit
interviews and formal evaluations of programs. Although this is invasive, is it
justified? Often programming and funding decisions are based on an ability to
demonstrate a return on investment. Without data to support program success,
funding may be more difficult to obtain and sustain. The authors conclude that
Elders should be consulted more frequently and engaged in educational directives.
They also note that the number of Aboriginal teachers has increased, thus increasing
the number of role models. They conclude that a forum for future discussions would
increase the ability to share information and this forum is currently lacking. Finally,
they believe the Canadian government could play an important role in the wider
implementation of these practices. However, Gaviria (2013) cautions about how
much control governments should have as she outlines the experiences of the
Nunavut Arctic College. Gaviria (2013) promotes self-determination, which does not
allow Indigenous culture to be appropriated or compromised. In her words:

[the college] has become an arm of the government that appropriates cultural
codes into a Canadian-type college to reduce social barriers to education and
meet human expectations...the college attempts to do so as it develops the
capacity and fully embarks on applied research. However, the resources are
neither in place nor does there appear to be a political urgency to follow
through. The right to develop Inuit culture, as a dimension of the Indigenous
right to self-determination, is hence circumscribed to access and equity without
mainstream content being effectively influenced by Inuit cosmologies. (pp.
188-189)
Funding.

It is the Canadian government’s legal obligation to provide adequate and long-term funding to support education for Aboriginal peoples. Whether it is provincial or federal funding, the commitment must be realized because chronic underfunding was a recurring and ongoing theme in the literature reviewed (Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, 2011; National Brotherhood of Indians, 1972; McDonald & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2010; Carr-Stewart, 2006; Drummond et al., 2012; Phillips, 2011, United Nations, 2009). Further, a lack of finances was a source of anxiety for postsecondary students and staff members acknowledged the weight it placed on students. Moreover, the government’s arbitrary and one-sided decision to place a 2 percent cap on the growth of PSSSP funds to support PSE for Aboriginal students should be removed. According to the Auditor General (2004), the postsecondary funding program for Aboriginal peoples, defined in this context as First Nation “Status Indians” and Inuit, was highly successful before funding levels were capped due to lack of government resources. The Popovic Report (2011) concurs that the 2 percent cap on the PSSSP must be lifted and funding levels should be adjusted to accommodate for shortfalls including adding the needs of Métis and Non-Status students. Over and above these policy changes, the Popovic Report (2011) asserts that institutions should create a means for helping students with targeting funding to overcome geographic barriers and relocation costs. Currently, too many Aboriginal students struggle to obtain appropriate PSE funding. The government imposed funding cap has limited Aboriginal PSE enrolment where too many Aboriginal
students, especially those who do not fit the pre-determined government label, have been denied entry to PSE because they cannot afford the ever increasing costs (McDonald and Wesley-Esquimaux, 2010; Usher, 2009; First Nations Education Council, 2009).

At the secondary level, provincial schools on-reserve should, at the very least, be funded at the same level as their off-reserve counterparts. A commitment to funding for Aboriginal education includes resources such as adequate academic support services, staffing and educational awareness programming at all levels of education. Finally, funding at all levels needs to be long-term without highly bureaucratic processes that create barriers and steal the valuable resource of time (Auditor General of Canada, 2011).

**Role Modeling.**

Aboriginal students need Aboriginal role models such as Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal peer mentors. In addition, as noted in the Malatest Report (2010), Aboriginal support programs are urged to seek local input from relevant communities. This includes community role models and specifically Elders and Aboriginal teachers. It is argued that this input is critical to create programming that will support the local population. The Popovic Report (2011) encourages PSE institutions to continue offering transitional and preparatory programs to help Aboriginal students overcome barriers, including Aboriginal-to-Aboriginal mentorship programs to help students during the decision-making processes regarding their educational choices. The Popovic Report (2011) also states that providing
mentorship means adequate staffing in guidance departments including information related to financial aid, PSE choices and high school curriculum choices. Programs to support Aboriginal teacher education training are critical to establishing more role models inside the classrooms. Both the staff and student participants in my study spoke about the importance of connecting with fellow Aboriginal people and the immediate comfort level created from a shared worldview. The role models must be from all communities, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis. We must heed Dion’s recommendation (2012) not to ignore Aboriginal diversity by failing to recognize each distinct group. More Aboriginal leaders and voices in and outside of the classroom will help address what Brant Castellano et al. (2008) call a policy void caused by lack of representation.

**Community Through Indigenization.**

The Popovic Report (2011) identifies “barriers” that are common to those already addressed such as funding, history/colonization, high school completion, first generation and self esteem issues. “Solutions” under these same types of headings outline 19 different recommendations. The Report calls for an increased awareness about Aboriginal peoples and teacher training including resource guides that outline the injustices of the past. This would ensure educators are sensitive to Aboriginal ways and Aboriginal students will feel less alienated.

This raises an important issue. Regan (2010) cautions that learning cultural sensitivity will not be an easy task for many White Canadians. She believes not only do White Canadians struggle to deconstruct the peace-maker myth, many Canadians do not know or accept as fact the atrocious injustices Aboriginal peoples have faced.
in our country’s past and present history. Education and awareness programs should be open to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples alike. This recommendation will help to decolonize education as suggested by Battiste, Bell and Findlay (2002) and the United Nations (2009). Education about Canada’s history will help people become aware of the patriarchy and domination that are part and parcel of colonization. Education and awareness ought to challenge and correct peoples’ assumptions with respect to Aboriginal peoples. A movement for organization-wide awareness in colleges could adopt the positive and current trend in student affairs to create an institution-wide culture of support including a “spider-web” of decentralized supporters (Seifert et al., 2011). This may require some non-Aboriginal Canadians as allies to restory our past and accept that Canadian history is not one of peaceful and respectful colonization, rather it is a history of injustice, paternalism and genocide for Aboriginal peoples. A place to start with the restorying might be with Regan’s (2010) recommendation to challenge the Canadian peacemaker myth through education and training to build a new understanding.

It is clear that each campus should have a gathering space such as an Aboriginal Resource Centre that offers cultural teachings, spiritual guidance and a place to build community. The students and staff in my study spoke about the importance of feeling and being connected with traditional ways. The notion of a gathering space should be considered a minimum standard for PSE institutions. Several studies highlighted thus far recognize the importance of this gathering space (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2010; Timmons et al., 2009; Malatest & Associates Ltd, 2010; Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, 2011; Stonecircle, 2011). Moreover, the data presented in Chapter Five is
consistent with this emphasis on the important role of Aboriginal Resource Centres as a place of belonging and safety on campus for Aboriginal peoples.

Recognizing the centrality of a campus-wide approach, PSE institutions need to “Indigenize” their campuses. A safe place should be created for all Aboriginal students where racism is abolished and there is a greater understanding of Aboriginal history and worldviews. Following a pan-Atlantic Canada study reviewing retention in postsecondary institutions, Timmons et al. (2009) suggest several key strategies for improving Aboriginal student success. The researchers recognize the challenges of racism and prejudice, suggesting Aboriginal awareness campaigns should honour traditional Indigenous culture and ensure faculty and administrators have such understanding. The researchers share the notion that Aboriginal input with regard to institutional affairs is important. They suggest avenues such as an Aboriginal Council and an Aboriginal Advisor to the President.

The AUCC (2013) also highlights the importance of community as well as access to information. They offer a broad survey of services found on university campuses that include social and cultural activities, gathering spaces, Elders on campus, links to the local community, tailored academic counseling, peer-to-peer mentoring, employment/career counseling, on campus housing and day care. Further, the AUCC (2013) also stresses the importance of localized programming recognizing that there are more than 650 Aboriginal Nations across Canada suggesting, “there is no one solution that will fit all” (p. 7).
Orientation and Transition.

Students must first complete elementary and secondary school in order to reach PSE. Statistics Canada and the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada partnered to undertake a literature review to determine supports needed to help Aboriginal peoples transition into PSE (Atlantic Evaluation Group, 2010). The Report recognizes that education is a continuum and it highlights both barriers and suggestions to moving forward. It suggests that at the current rate of increase in Aboriginal attainment rates, it will take 60 years to close the postsecondary educational credential gap between First Nations and other Canadians. Not surprisingly, the Report calls for an increase in funding to the overall envelop for Aboriginal students in PSE. However, the Report also calls for solutions including academic preparation that begins early in life and is pan-Canadian. It is suggested that investments in early childhood education programs would yield significant results and Aboriginal role models should deliver curriculum. In short, the Report advocates adequate funding, culturally appropriate curricula, involvement of the Aboriginal community and creating positive climates in which Aboriginal students can learn and thrive.

Several students and staff in my study spoke about transition issues. Thus it follows that orientation support and program advising services should be made available to Aboriginal students. I envisage a system that draws on the community theme, recognizing the severity of what Nardozi (2011) references as “the trauma of geographical transitioning” when an Aboriginal student leaves her/his own community to attend PSE (p. 113). The sole responsibility for transition cannot rest only with Elders because they may not have time in an already demanding schedule.
to be the sole provider of support. Further, relying solely on the Elder undermines the expansive and inclusive nature of community in the living and learning experiences central to Aboriginal pedagogy. Aboriginal staff and peer mentorships can help share the responsibility of creating a sense of community and belonging. This will help students combat feelings of isolation, especially those who move from remote and/or small communities. This support not only recognizes the importance of the community theme, it also recognizes the effectiveness of learning communities (Tinto, 1997 & 1994) and the need for institutions to be intentional about creating a positive first year experience (Upcraft et al., 2005).

**Access Pathways.**

A comprehensive online directory similar to the AUCC directory of Aboriginal services at universities should be created for colleges. The AUCC (2013) describes a comprehensive directory of resources that has been made available through an online searchable directory. According to AUCC, this directory has grown since its inception in 2006 with updates in 2010 and 2012. It is now a “one place information on programs, activities, services, policies and financial assistance available at more than 75 universities across the country” (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2013, p. 1). The AUCC believes the directory will help Aboriginal students navigate their experiences with postsecondary institutions, finding appropriate supports when they are needed and ultimately aid the students in attaining their educational goals. The recommendation for colleges to adopt this directory is of particular importance because educational attainment data presented in this thesis suggest that Aboriginal students are more likely to obtain a college
diploma as a PSE credential. As Battiste, Bell and Findlay suggest (2002), it is crucial to empower the decision makers and enable them to make informed decisions by providing Aboriginal students with guidance and decision-making tools.

Given the success of colleges in their attraction and retention of Aboriginal students as demonstrated by the educational attainment statistics, it follows that PSE institutions in Ontario should work together to increase student mobility from diplomas to degrees. A focus should be placed on pathways and transition programs to help students move seamlessly, with adequate transfer credits, from diploma to degree programs. Aboriginal students should have the same access as non-Aboriginal students if they want a degree.

Although participants in my study did not mention distance education, yet I believe it is still a critical recommendation to address. Student participants frequently said that proximity to family was a deciding factor in their program choices; therefore, providing and enhancing distance education allows students the opportunity to stay close to family, their community and traditional lands thus minimizing the impact of “geographic transitioning”. According to Castellano et al. (2008), Canada has already put in substantial efforts into online learning including increased access for Aboriginal communities, especially in more remote areas like the far north. This increased access is important because online learning allows Aboriginal students to access further education while they stay connected to their support systems including their traditional lands, family and larger community. This recommendation to support and enhance online learning echoes the conclusions of
the LE, NONET study (Hunt et al., 2010) and the MTCU PSE framework (2011). Also, institutions may wish to focus on bringing the hands-on trade programming directly into the communities, on-reserve.

Childcare was not a pervasive theme mentioned by participants; however, it is important to note that the average age of student participants in the study was 26. It is likely that a mature student will have additional family responsibilities, including parenting and/or guardianship. In order to facilitate in-person on campus attendance, institutions of higher education should consider providing affordable onsite day care for Aboriginal students. This is underscored by the pervasive theme in my data that spoke to the importance of family and wanting to keep family close while completing academic studies. It also corresponds with the suggestions of Malatest & Associates Ltd’s (2010), the MNO Report on PSE (Stonecircle, 2011) and the Popovic Report (2011) state that onsite services to support Aboriginal students in PSE should include daycare. The daycare need not be specifically for Aboriginal students, but priority or “set-aside” places ought to be considered to ensure Aboriginal students have access to childcare spaces.

**A Collaborative Approach.**

In order to achieve all of these recommendations, it will require cooperation from all levels of government, postsecondary institutions, and local Aboriginal communities. The Popovic Report (2011) states that federal and provincial governments should be working together to support high school students who must relocate in order to attend high school, thus creating a transparent funding formula in collaboration with Aboriginal communities to underlie fair distribution of funds and
help reduce misspending. However, it is important to remember that under the principles of self-determination, the ultimate decision-making for fund distribution ought to be done by local Aboriginal communities.

A recurring theme in my research is that such solutions are neither the task of an individual nor one single program initiative. Real change will only be realized through the cooperation of individuals in the Aboriginal communities, the different levels of governments and the PSE institutions. Echoing the words of the NIB (1972), the decision-making process will need to be consultative and inclusive. According to Brant Castellano et al. (2008),

designing an effective education system involves a process of translating community needs and aspirations into effective programs and operations. There are different stages to this process, and each much be connected carefully if the system is to work well. (p. 125)

In the words of one Elder, progress to move this agenda forward will require many individuals to accept his/her own personal responsibility.
CHAPTER SEVEN:
MOVING TOWARDS MORE ABORIGINAL STUDENT SUCCESS

As addressed in the last chapter, it cannot fall to one individual or one group to single-handedly address the impact of colonization for the Aboriginal peoples of Turtle Island. Future success, as it relates to PSE and Aboriginal peoples, depends on the collaboration of many groups and many individuals. Success demands ongoing commitment and dedication. The following presents the potential implications of the findings reported here as they relate to college leaders, Aboriginal communities, the Canadian government (provincial/federal) and Aboriginal students.

College leaders will need to continue to focus their efforts on building connections with local Aboriginal communities. College leaders will need to continue to establish themselves as trustworthy, open to dialogue and demonstrate an understanding of Aboriginal perspectives. Aboriginal peoples need to feel welcomed and safe on campus. Aboriginal peoples such as teachers, administrators and staff will need to be hired to provide role models for students and provide advice on Aboriginal relations, including program and policy development. Colleges need to investigate all avenues to provide adequate financial support for Aboriginal services and staff. If adequate funding is not available, it is the role of college leaders, to become allies to Aboriginal peoples and find the necessary funds either through strategic partnerships or lobbying of the provincial or federal governments. After all, it is the federal government’s responsibility to provide funding for First Nations education. What I have seen work for at least one college, is building on and...
leveraging personal connections within Aboriginal communities to reach out to a network of Aboriginal support programs. Colleges need Aboriginal leaders who know the access points and have relationships with gatekeepers.

When one looks at the root cause of low Aboriginal attainment rates in Eurocentric colleges, Canada has already accepted and acknowledged that colonization was wrong and that it has caused grave amounts of damage to Aboriginal communities in Canada. It is now time for Canada to right the wrongs of the past. Providing appropriate funding for postsecondary education is an excellent place to start. Further, referring back to a holistic view of the issue at hand, if the government is truly willing to accept its responsibility for the impact of colonization, it could revisit and update the RCAP list of recommendations and begin implementing the already identified solutions to address the gaps between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations such as poverty, high incarceration rates, health concerns, and educational outcomes. There is need for more data collection but now is also the time for action, hence the Idle No More movement.

Aboriginal communities are asking for active and consultative processes with institutes of higher education. As one Elder advised me, parents, Elders and students should be involved and accept their own individual responsibilities to heal their communities and move the education agenda forward. It is a community agenda and solutions need input from the entire community. As the Elder said, each Aboriginal person on Turtle Island will need to be involved in the decision-making process providing input and feedback about the nature of services that are required. Aboriginal communities will need to have sound and transparent decision-making
processes, including funding distribution that meets their own standards and not those imposed through colonization and imperialism. I recognize this is a controversial issue at the moment, but providing Aboriginal organizations with more autonomy and lessening the demand for over-reporting would stop exhausting precious resources on bureaucratic processes. The conversations and energies must be allowed to move away from finger-pointing and blame if real solutions are to be realized, developed and implemented.

On a national scale, the Canadian governments, both provincial and federal will need to accept their lawful, moral and ethical responsibilities to provide education for Aboriginal peoples. The governments need to recognize and honour treaty obligations including adequate funding and access to education. They must stop working through their own set of paternalistic and one-sided decision-making processes. Although the federal government bears the responsibility to provide education for First Nations, this does not absolve the provincial government of its responsibility to provide education to all Canadians, including Aboriginal peoples. They are divided in name but the federal and provincial governments are two branches in the same tree. They cannot divide themselves and then blame each other for failing to meet legal obligations.

Further, Canadian courts must render more timely decisions. An Aboriginal led system could be created to roll-out and monitor legal/treaty compliance. Penalties for non-compliance should apply to the fullest extent possible by Canadian law. However, it would also be important for Aboriginal peoples to determine appropriate repercussions and remedies for non-compliance – perhaps this will become an expanded mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. After all, the TRC is
already in possession of a vast body of knowledge regarding Canadian history and the relationship with Aboriginal peoples. It could be a natural next step for the TRC in seeking true justice and reconciliation.

Finally, as one Elder said, Aboriginal students must accept their own responsibilities to heal the communities and accept their own true purpose in life. I recognize the challenges Aboriginal students can face in a Euro-centric system saturated with racism but history shows us Aboriginal peoples are strong and resilient (Battiste, as cited in Tripp & Muzzin, 2005). Every time I see my guiding Elder in traditional dress conducting traditional ceremony, especially in a Euro-centric setting, I am so proud to see her strength and the commitment she has for her culture to endure. Aboriginal students can find pride in the willingness and ability to thrive in traditional ways despite concerted efforts by the Canadian government over hundreds of years to the contrary. Students own the responsibilities of their academic journeys, including institutional research, program choice and academic success, but appropriate services must be available and advertised to encourage and allow students to seek help in a proactive manner. Further, given the importance of community, successful Aboriginal students should be encouraged to become involved to lead, mentor and coach their peers.
**Personal Reflections**

Sometimes the greatest divide we face lies between honouring the interdependency of all beings in all aspects of being – spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental – surviving an academic world that privileges the ‘intellectual’. (Iwama et al., 2009, p. 18)

I struggle to define the journey that I undertook in trying to do justice to two very different, yet intertwined paradigms. I have grown personally, I have grown academically and I have grown as an Aboriginal person. This journey has helped me understand my ancestral past and connection with First Nations. It has forced me to recognize my White privilege including the ways in which I have benefited from colonization. As I described in my opening chapter, this research process has changed my worldview. It changed how I look at research models. I began with a focus on Euro-centric processes and models because that is what I knew and it was the system in which I had been schooled. As I began to learn more about the true history of colonization for Aboriginal peoples, I no longer felt comfortable applying a Euro-centric lens to this research. A strictly Euro-centric lens felt inappropriate and disrespectful to Aboriginal peoples, especially those who engaged in this journey with me and trusted me to be a conduit for their voices and beliefs. As the research progressed, driven by this respect for Aboriginal peoples, I found myself wanting and needing to align with Aboriginal pedagogies and worldviews. I connected with my research on very deep and personal levels and therefore struggled to remain objective but I know that “objectivity” is a creation of Euro-centric thought. Perhaps it is more ethical to refuse to stay “objective” because the time to sit and wait
peacefully for action is long past when the situation and need for change is so clear. I understand and appreciate why so many Aboriginal people have affiliated with Idle No More. The time for change is now.

In preparing my research proposal, I was concerned whether the Elders, staff and students would trust me as a researcher. Thankfully I was able to connect with all participants and collect stories that provided valuable data and insight. In fact, it was a remarkably powerful academic and personal journey. I feel fortunate to have been entrusted as a conduit for these important stories and authentic experiences. As I move forward with the dissemination of my research, it remains to be seen whether the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities will accept me as a credible researcher and as a knowledge source.

As I reflect back on Wilson’s research paradigm (2008), I ask myself whether or not I have been able to maintain an Aboriginal research framework in a Euro-centric process. I do believe my approach was respectful and that I was able to maintain a connection between the topic and myself. If anything, I was surprised at just how connected I became to the topic. Further, I think the students, Elders and staff who participated in the interviews could hear my passion and genuine desire to be an ally. This helped me build respectful relationships along my journey and allowed me access to the key informants of this study.

When I consider how I will remain respectful to other participants involved and how we can form stronger relationships, again I am cautious with the language I choose to record my voice. I have a deepened understanding of the issues at hand, but I know there is so much more to learn. I believe that future and respectful conversations about my insights will continue to consider new thoughts and ideas
from those who have different perspectives to offer, particularly people from
Aboriginal communities including Elders. Moreover, I think my personal role is to
continue the conversation about increasing Aboriginal student success and that is my
intention. I have a voice that can no longer be silent. I know too much to be
comfortably silent and more voices are needed from all sides, Aboriginal and non-
Aboriginal. Finally, I have agreed to share my results with all participants who
expressed an interest. They too can perhaps use the information to start or continue
a conversation of change in whatever way is meaningful for them.

On a very practical level as a college administrator, in connection with the Elder
at my workplace, I am continuing my efforts to Indigenize my own campus. For
example, in November 2013 I partnered with the Elder and Aboriginal Resource
Centre to offer two three-hour sessions of Aboriginal Awareness training to faculty
and staff on campus. This was the first training of its kind at my college and it was
developed and led by a visiting Ojibwe Elder. I was pleased to see an overwhelmingly
positive interest from the local college community and the high level of response to
the open invitation. Our intention is to continue this training until it becomes
ingrained in the fabric of the institution as mandatory for all new hires. This is one
way in which I can help create a more welcoming space on campus not just for
Aboriginal students but for all Aboriginal peoples. However, in order to be authentic
about my journey and my desire to help Indigenize the campus, I do this in
collaboration with an Elder. She is the traditional knowledge carrier. She has the
wisdom, and she has accepted the responsibility to determine the path forward.
Nevertheless, I am here to be her ally and to help in whatever way she deems
appropriate. Upon reflection, I do believe our learning together has become reciprocal. She teaches me about Indigenous ways and I am an ally in her navigation of the Euro-centric system.

More specific to this thesis, however, are the unique contributions of this research. Throughout all of my extensive research and reading, I was challenged to find enrolment data for Aboriginal students in Ontario colleges. Months of relentless research and commitment finally yielded positive results. The fact that I am able to present an analysis of the Aboriginal student enrolment data, albeit with caveats around self-identification, is a unique and valuable contribution to the field. Further, my research is also unique in that it concentrates on Aboriginal Resource Centres in three Ontario Colleges. This in-depth perspective of the Centres provides critical insight into not only the importance of the Centres, but it also highlights what types of services might be most useful to support Aboriginal students such as a gathering space, a place to build community and support for academic skills, orientation and funding shortfalls.

On another positive note, time and time again my intellectual curiosity was accepted and nourished by so many helpful individuals along the way. There is no doubt there is a willingness, at least amongst the Aboriginal peoples I encountered, to help heal and create positive outcomes for the future. Solutions must come from within the Aboriginal communities and postsecondary institutions will need to rethink colonial practices and Euro-centric ways. The fastest growing population in Canada has its sights set high and the communities are healing themselves. Ongoing demands for recognition of treaty rights will not be silenced.
Future Considerations and Research

I have already addressed recommendations that I believe will move the educational success and persistence of Aboriginal students forward. Now, recognizing the inconvenient truth of traditional mainstream research in academia, the following represents recommendations for future research opportunities specifically for Euro-centric institutions.

First, although this is not the focus of my research, I feel it is important to start with a basic observation that must be addressed. A concerted effort should be made to investigate and address the loss of Indigenous languages, which would also include a loss of cultural and oral history. Iehnhotonkwas and Maracle (2002) and many others are concerned that colonization has created the potential to lose Aboriginal languages. This concern is underscored by the fact that only one out of 25 students in my study spoke an Indigenous language as a mother tongue. I would like to hope that this study is not representative of the larger whole, but the potential loss is too great to ignore. Attention must be drawn to this observation.

Returning to the implications of my research, the following questions could help develop evaluative measures for Aboriginal support services at a specific institution. As part of face-to-face research with Aboriginal students and/or recent graduates, the following questions could provide a wider view of PSE preparation, retention and program effectiveness: Would you still be here without the Centre and/or its service? What do you think was most the important thing that helped you reach this PSE institution? Have you attended another PSE? Can you compare the experience at your previous institution to your current experience?
Staff members and Elders provided critical and valuable input into the support services sought by Aboriginal students. It is likely that more research with a larger number of participants at colleges and universities would yield insightful solutions for supporting Aboriginal student success. Further, as I found in my research, Departments of Institutional Research may already hold or have access to important and potentially relevant data, therefore, it would be prudent for future researchers to connect with these departments.

Future researchers may find that focus groups create a more comfortable environment for Aboriginal students to share their experiences. Some student participants were initially quite shy and answers may be more thorough if participants feel less isolated and/or can build on ideas of peers. More importantly, how do we reach the Aboriginal students who are not coming into the Centres at all? One of my greatest concerns is the students I did not have a chance to meet. It is those students who did not make it to PSE or did not see value in an Aboriginal Resource Centre that hold valuable information to define the needed support. Before we can reach these students, more work may need to be done to ensure the campuses have become a welcoming place to self-identify. Also, if the students will not come to you as a researcher, you may need to go them through electronic means in social media or preferably in person at community events such as pow wows or education fairs, or you might arrange to be Aboriginally correct and ask to be invited there.

Broadly speaking, in Canada, the term Aboriginal is all encompassing of First Nations, Métis and Inuit. Although some recommendations may provide foundational insight into possible new research directions, it is important to remember that all Aboriginal cultures are unique and different in their traditions, beliefs and
worldviews. I have learned that the diversity is too broad to adequately address as a whole under an umbrella Aboriginal term. Future research may be more effective if it is focused on one specific community - First Nation, Métis or Inuit. More research regarding education, including higher education, could help identify specific and unique data to help support more Aboriginal students.

Considering that the lack of a high school diploma is a major barrier to PSE, it may be prudent to visit Aboriginal communities to study how to support high school Aboriginal students. What are the barriers that are preventing students from completing high school and what programs and support services will help them graduate? For example, at the K-12 level, Nardozi (2011) suggests,

future efforts on the part of the Education Director and the board of directors to hire a parental engagement officer, begin a parent council, and hold forums for children about absentee problems to point to promising opportunities to increase communication about issues recognized as problems by many in the community, and address longstanding concerns with school institutions held by those traumatized by residential schools. (p. 199)

Nevertheless, more evaluation is needed. For example, the HEQCO (2010) study stops short of deeming its findings best practices because of a lack of conclusive measurable outcomes. HEQCO’s “promising practices” discourse suggests the findings present favourable directions for supporting Aboriginal student success but more evaluative information is needed. Reviewing the short, medium and long-term impact of current strategies and programming in place will help determine their impact on retention. During my research I discovered colleges are providing a multitude of services such as spiritual and cultural counseling with Elders, traditional teachings, academic counseling peer mentoring, academic skills
workshops, employment opportunities, bursaries, food banks, etc. Yet the questions remain, are these programs working? How can they be modified for increased success?

Referring again to process, future research conducted via a Euro-centric model needs the support of a thesis committee, especially a supervisor that understands and is informed about Aboriginal culture. The research journey may not always follow traditional academic norms and there must be a willingness to explore new ideas, push boundaries and challenge the status quo.

Finally, as a non-Aboriginal person, do not try to solve the problem yourself. Recognize that solutions must come from the people not the researcher. At best, you can become an ally. The researcher is a conduit to relay the thoughts and feelings of the participants.

Limitations

Upon conclusion of this study, it is important to outline its limitations and I recognize that these limitations are being presented under a Euro-centric lens. The findings were drawn from a literature review, the interpretation of statistical data, an analysis of White papers and other reports and interviews with 31 key knowledge holders including Elder reflections regarding final results. It has been discussed on several occasions that there is a great amount of diversity among Aboriginal communities and decision-making must be done at the local level, therefore a limited
number of interviews restricts the generalizability of the recommendations. Consequently, one recommendation has been that local Aboriginal consultation is key to the success of programming to support Aboriginal student success.

Further, this study was focused on students, staff and Elders already engaged in Aboriginal Resource Centres. If the intent were truly to determine how to engage more Aboriginal students and encourage persistence, it would be prudent to reach those students who have not sought services and develop a functional strategy to support their academic success. Again, this may mean spending more time in communities or spending more time on campus, with the help of an Institutional Research Department to find these students who are not frequenting the Aboriginal Resource Centres. In this data driven context of Institutional Research, caution must once again be raised that researchers should not rely on Aboriginal enrollment percentages along as an indicator of a welcoming environment.

Third, although a concerted effort has been made to include an Aboriginal paradigm, the research has been conducted using a Euro-centric driven process. This very system is embedded in colonization that Aboriginal communities have been struggling with for hundreds of years. This fact is further exacerbated because, despite my efforts to the contrary, a White privilege lens through which I have seen this world for the better part of my life has undoubtedly influenced me. In writing this thesis, I have been encouraged to present my own ideas, but not impose solutions, and this has admittedly been a challenge because I am so desperately motivated to help.
When I began this journey I truly did not understand the current and ongoing impact of colonization. I am not even sure that I fully do now, but I feel as if I can no longer see the world in the same way I did before. I now find the decades of inaction and chronic underfunding on the part of Canadian government to be intolerable, whereas before, I was comfortable ignorant to the ongoing struggle for the recognition of Aboriginal treaty rights.

Finally the study is limited to colleges. Although the study did not include a focus on far northern colleges where Aboriginal student populations are at their highest, it is hoped that the recommendations or ideas to consider will be useful to all institutes of higher education.

**Elders' Reflections and Vision of Education**

The following presents a summary of the thoughts and visions of Elders consulted regarding Aboriginal student success in PSE. The reflections are not specific only to PSE because a native pedagogy requires a holistic view that is lifelong and all encompassing; therefore, focusing solely on one component of education would dismiss a critical element of their reflections. One Elder emphatically advised me that a mainstream process such as this Euro-centric research process can absolutely not encapsulate Aboriginal pedagogy because it lacks an essential component of the Indigenous paradigm – the interactive and ongoing experience of learning. That is to say, the written word alone is not sufficient to replace the type of learning that is built through conversation, relationships and hands-on experience. She believes knowledge becomes deeper when you begin to apply it because it
impacts your values, your beliefs and then it starts to impact your experiences and change your relationships. You know you have learned when you have become a different person through a change in behaviour. To her, Aboriginal focused hands-on community events and integrated curriculum must be part of daily campus life. Each campus should also have healing circles, smudges and traditional teachings as part of daily campus life.

The Elders have the following recommendations to put forth as guiding principles to create positive, inclusive and welcoming environments for Aboriginal students in PSE. Moreover, the Elders suggest that if we want to enact real change in PSE institutions, there is a need to be innovative and determined to do things differently in ways that are authentic to Indigenous worldviews. One Elder calls for visionary actions during a conservative time, and despite the fact that the change may not be welcome, frontiers must still be challenged. This may require people to challenge traditional Euro-centric norms, including power structures, which is not likely to be met with favour. Second, in seeking this change there must be a long-term vision and the vision must be inclusive. It is important to include input from students, youth, parents and Elders while also remembering to include the importance of the land. Finally, he believes mainstream institutions have a significant role in creating a positive space for Aboriginal students to learn and it is important to see the work as a collaborative journey.

True to a holistic framework, the Elders believe in a vision where the larger role of education is critiqued and the vision is not limited to one specific institution. The focus for change should be on those programs, services or alliances that will make a positive difference for Aboriginal students such as adequate funding and dedicated
space to gather and feel community. One Elder believes that currently the success of Aboriginal peoples is the exception not the norm. He does not want the success of one Aboriginal student to be a token success story that needs to be widely celebrated because “s/he made it despite the odds.” He believes institutions need to ensure more Aboriginal students are succeeding, with adequate supports; therefore the concentration will be on normalizing the success of Aboriginal peoples meaning Aboriginal student success is wide-spread and expected. Success would not be something that is unique but a standard expectation and reality for all Aboriginal students. He believes institutions need to create an environment of trust where programs and services are in place that nourishes the success of Aboriginal peoples.

The Elders suggest it is essential to create a place of belonging on campus for Aboriginal students such as an Aboriginal Resource Centre. Having a sense of belonging makes a difference in whether or not students engage and they believe it is difficult for students to engage and benefit when they do not feel connected to the institution. I recognize that this idea has been presented over and over throughout the thesis and its repetition ought to demonstrate its importance. One Elder believes the institution should feel like a home for students. More specifically, she believes Aboriginal students should feel like they have an extended family on campus. The students should have an environment where they feel free to learn about their culture and their identity. In other words, institutions need to allow people to be Indigenous and let them explore what that means to them in an environment that is supportive and understanding.
The Elders counsel wisely that institutions need to focus on the individual needs of each student. Institutions must ensure the students have the knowledge they need to be successful and to contribute to the community in a healthy way. Institutions of higher learning should be places that support students’ determinations to be successful. This means there should be recognition that sometimes Aboriginal students, particularly young men, take a break from school and return later as mature students. This should not be viewed as a failure, but a part of a lifelong journey.

Finally, through guidance and input from Aboriginal peoples, institutions must find ways to authentically Indigenize the campus in a holistic way meaning this philosophy is lodged into the institution at every opportunity. This means holding a traditional smudging ceremony would not immediately signal the Department of Public Safety to investigate a security breach or that each college’s Board of Governors has an Aboriginal member and/or an Aboriginal Education Council guiding the Indigenous vision of institution. Of course, the vision needs to be Indigenously led and not be forced to conform to Euro-centric norms.

Conclusions

From the onset of this journey, I have declared a personal interest in the topic, including a yearning to know more about my ancestral past and to be an ally to Aboriginal students who are reaching for their academic goals. My genetic background, combined with my passion for student retention, created a fury of intent when I discovered the power of policy during my doctoral studies. I now realize that
what appears to be a small policy change can impact major change in postsecondary education. For example, removing the 2 percent cap from First Nation postsecondary funding and expanding the program funds to include Non-Status Indians and Métis would immediately provide more access for Aboriginal students. Moreover, funding on-reserve schools at the same levels as their off-reserve counterparts would allow First Nation schools to compete with teacher salaries and keep more up-to-date with technologies. This is why I will continue this conversation when my study comes to a close. The potential to help impact meaningful change is far too great.

My experience speaking with Aboriginal students, staff and Elders has been a humbling journey of growth and awakening. I feel fortunate to have been afforded the opportunity to learn so much about Aboriginal cultures. I realize that I have so much more to learn. Most importantly, as I look forward to my career in higher education, and in the context of Aboriginal education, I will personally take the following key concepts from this study with me to inform and hopefully influence my colleagues and decision-makers:

1. Treaty rights are foundational to any discussion regarding Aboriginal rights.
2. Education is beyond a privilege, it is a basic and fundamental human right for all people.
3. Education is a basic human right, and so is access to education in an environment free from discrimination.
4. Education, and leadership in education, is a shared responsibility.
5. Consultation with local Aboriginal communities, including parents, Elders and students, is critical to successful collaboration and partnerships.
6. Respecting and protecting the environment is critical and pervasive for Aboriginal peoples.

7. More effort is required and supports are needed to help Aboriginal youth complete high school and obtain university degrees.

8. Adequate and long-term (and ideally sustainable) funding is critical to providing successful services and programs to support Aboriginal students. When funding suffers, so do salaries, infrastructure, service programs and ultimately students.

9. A movement is afoot. Building and drawing upon their own strength, their communities and in tandem with support, motivation and appropriate funding, Aboriginal students can and will succeed in a Euro-centric system.

It is important to recognize that there has been a recent shift in support services for Aboriginal students, especially in Ontario. As stated in the HEQCO study (Malatest & Associates Ltd, 2010), more than 40 institutions have some type of services for Aboriginal students and this is an increase from five years earlier. This increased demand for service is testament to the proactive and ongoing interventions of Aboriginal peoples who have survived genocide and are committed to future success. Further, in this context, they have maintained many of their traditional beliefs and customs as well as contributing to mainstream society of which they are also a part. They have endured incarceration, ridicule and discrimination to preserve their culture and protect their traditional ways.

There is much work to be done in Canadian institutions of higher education although colleges in Canada, and at least three in Ontario, appear to be heading in the right direction. With the largest youth population on its way through the K-12
school system in Canada, including an anticipated 16 percent growth in Ontario by 2016 (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2011), Canadian institutions of higher education must act swiftly in collaboration with Aboriginal communities to create welcoming and safe spaces for Aboriginal students to support their studies. One of the first steps is to provide new and ongoing education/awareness for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations. As I have mentioned many times before, this means Aboriginal voices speaking to their own experiences and history. Aboriginal students need to know what options are available to them and the non-Aboriginal population needs an increased awareness about how to help support Aboriginal students. Through meaningful consultation and truly collaborative dialogue, an educational system that welcomes and celebrates Aboriginal peoples can be created. With so much to gain, driven by treaty and moral rights, Canadian institutes of higher education and corresponding government bodies have little choice but to join the movement and become Idle No More.


Appendix A

Interview and Survey Questions

Elder/Staff Questions

1. How do you define success for Aboriginal students at a postsecondary institution?

2. As an Elder/staff of Aboriginal Student Services, what student supports does your college provide for Aboriginal students?

3. Do these supports help Aboriginal students succeed?

Potential Probing Questions:

1. Tell me about your experience organizing these supports.

2. Tell me about your experiences promoting these supports.

3. Describe an experience or event that positively contributed to your overall perspective on the available supports.

4. Describe an experience or event that negatively contributed to your overall perspective on the available supports.

5. What kinds of supports would you like to see available?

Aboriginal Student Questions

1. How do you define success for yourself at a postsecondary institution?

2. As an Aboriginal student, are there supports at your college that helped you?

3. What supports would have helped you?

Potential Probing Questions:

1. Tell me about your experiences accessing these supports.

2. Tell me about your experiences using these supports.
3. Describe an experience or event that positively contributed to your overall perspective on the available supports.

4. Describe an experience or event that negatively contributed to your overall perspective on the available supports.

5. What kinds of supports would you like to see available?

Student participants will be asked to provide demographic data in the form of the following questions (asked orally and only where applicable):

1. Are you full-time student?

2. What program are you enrolled in?

3. What year of study are you in?

4. How often have you used Aboriginal support programs while enrolled in college?

5. What is your first language?

6. How old are you?

7. Have you lived the majority of your life on or off-reserve?

8. Are you the first in your immediate family, including grandparents, mother, father, sisters, and brothers, to attend postsecondary education?
Appendix B

Approval Letter for Other Ethics Boards

<Printed on OISE letterhead>

[Insert Date]

Dear Research Ethics Board Chair,

Thank you for taking the time to consider my research study at XXXX College. The title of my research study is: Aboriginal Student Persistence and Success in Ontario Colleges.

I am a doctoral student, of Métis descent, in the department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education at the Ontario Institute For Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto. This research is being conducted as part of my fulfillment for a doctorate degree in higher education. My project is being supervised by Dr. Charles Pascal of Higher Education at OISE, University of Toronto. Should you have any questions for my advisor, you may reach him by phone at: 416.716.7245 or by e-mail at: charles.pascal@utoronto.ca.

The University of Toronto’s Ethics Review Board has approved my research and I am seeking approval to conduct research at your college. Attached you will find my ethics approval application for XXXX.

I wish to speak with both Aboriginal students and Elders at three different colleges across Ontario. I plan to speak with 1-2 Elders and 7-8 students at each college. I would like to conduct face-to-face interviews that are 45-75 minutes in length. Risks associated with the study are no different than experiences of everyday life. All participants will sign informed consent letters outlining the research, the methodology and the associated risks. They will be told that they will not be judged or evaluated because of the opinions they have expressed. If a participant withdraws, his/her data will not be used in the analysis.

I endeavour to determine what barriers are affecting Aboriginal student success in postsecondary education. Please note the focus of my research will be inclusive of Indigenous paradigms such as community consultation and localized decision-making. I intend to focus the conversations on what is helping Aboriginal students succeed in postsecondary education.

Any information obtained during this study that could identify participants will be kept strictly confidential unless permission to disclose was granted by the individual. Information may be published in educational journals or presented at educational meetings/conferences but identities will be kept strictly confidential. Consent forms will be maintained separately from the data collected. The data will be stored in an encrypted file. All data collected will be used for the purposes of a PhD thesis and
perhaps for subsequent research articles. All raw data (i.e. transcripts, field notes) will be destroyed five years after completion of the study.

Participation is voluntary and participants may refuse to continue with the study and it will not have consequence of any kind. If the study design or use of the data is changed, participants will be so informed and consent will be obtained for the revised research study. For their time, participants will be compensated with a $10 gift certificate for either Tim Horton’s or the Bookstore.

If you agree, please sign the letter below and return it to me in the envelope provided. If you have any questions, you may contact my supervisor, Dr. Charles Pascal at: 416.716.7245 or by e-mail at: charles.pascal@utoronto.ca. Finally, you may also contact the University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics for questions at: ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416.946.3273.

If you have any questions or wish to discuss my application further, please contact me: 416.553.9244; email: christa.hinds@gmail.com. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and support.

Sincerely,

Christa Hinds
(Enclosure)

________________________________________
Administrator’s Signature

________________________________________
Date
Appendix C

Contact Letter/Script

[Insert Date]

Hello, my name is Christa Hinds. I received your contact information from.....

Do you have a few minutes to talk?.....Great. Let me tell you a bit about my study and the process and see if you have any questions.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my research study at XXXX College. The title of my research study is: Aboriginal Student Persistence and Success in Ontario Colleges.

I am a doctoral student, of Mètis descent, in the department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education at the Ontario Institute For Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. This research is being conducted as part of my fulfillment for a doctorate degree in higher education. My project is being supervised by Dr. Charles Pascal at the University of Toronto.

[Elders/staff only – in order to respect cultural traditions, I wanted to meet with you first to describe the process, ask for your permission to approach the students and offer you tobacco.]

I wish to speak with both Aboriginal students and Elders at three different colleges across Ontario. I plan to speak with 1-2 Elders and 7-8 students at each college. I would like to conduct face-to-face interviews that are 45-75 minutes in length. Risks associated with the study are no different than experiences of everyday life. I endeavour to determine what barriers are affecting Aboriginal student success in postsecondary education. I intend to focus the conversations on what is helping Aboriginal students succeed in postsecondary education. I will be asking students about their experiences using the services and I will be asking about Elders’ experiences providing those services.

[Elders only – I would be asking you for permission to distribute a poster via any student listservs for Aboriginal students along with posting the document in the Aboriginal Student Services department.]

Recommendations for improvement or change from Elders and students regarding future development of Aboriginal Services will be presented in my final research paper. Please know that I appreciate and acknowledge the diversity amid Aboriginal communities and recognize the challenges of generalizability. (local consultation)

Participation is voluntary and if you choose to participate, I’ll ask you to read and sign a consent form before we begin an interview. The consent form will tell you about the study and review that any information obtained during this study that could identify participants will be kept strictly confidential unless permission to disclose is provided
by the participant. Information may be presented/published in educational journals or presented at educational meetings/conferences, but identities will be kept strictly confidential. You should also know that the research results will be made available to your college. Consent forms will be maintained separately from the data collected. The data will be stored in an encrypted file. (One College only – The Elder on site may review the raw data. If she does, it will only be in aggregate form and any indentifying information will be removed. This means she will remain blind the participants’ identity.)

For your time, you will be compensated with a $10 gift certificate for either Tim Horton’s or the Bookstore. Those who choose to participate may refuse to continue at any time with the study and it will not have consequence of any kind. You will still be offered the gift certificate if you choose to withdraw. You will not be judged regarding your input, opinions or it you choose not to participate. You can choose not to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with. If you choose to withdraw, your data will not be used in the analysis.

If the study design or use of the data is changed, participants will be so informed and consent will be obtained for the revised research study.

Does this sound like something you would like to participate in?

If you think you need time to think about it, I can provide you with my information so you can contact me if you wish to schedule an interview?

Review contact information for follow-up questions. Schedule interview if appropriate.

If you have any questions, please ask:

Dr. Charles Pascal 416.716.7245; e-mail at: charles.pascal@utoronto.ca.

Me 416.553.9244; email at: christa.hinds@gmail.com

Or you may contact the Research Ethics Board Chair at your college or the University of Toronto.

UT contact information: ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416.946.3273.

College contact information is: ________________.

Thank you for your time.

[If appropriate - I will follow-up with an email confirming our appointment time and the contact information I previously mentioned in case you have any questions. Confirm email address of potential participant.]

<END>
Appendix D (a)

Interview Recruitment Poster

Are you an Aboriginal student?

Do you have ideas about what influences Aboriginal student success and persistence?

If yes, please contact me!

A graduate student at OISE/UT would like to talk to you about how to increase Aboriginal student success in Ontario colleges.

Help determine what is working and what needs to change. *

Please contact:

Christa Hinds, PhD Candidate, OISE, University of Toronto

e: christa.hinds@gmail.com

c: 416.553.9244

Meegwetch!

* Student participants will be offered modest compensation ($10 gift certificate) for their time.
Appendix D (b)

Interview Recruitment Poster – Version Two

Are you an Aboriginal student?

Do you have ideas what influences Aboriginal student success and persistence?

A graduate student at OISE/UT would like to talk to you about how to increase Aboriginal student success in Ontario colleges.

Help determine what is working and what needs to change.*

If you are interested, please contact:
Aboriginal Liaison Officer, ext. 5424

Meegwetch!

* Student participants will be offered modest compensation ($10 gift certificate) for their time.
Appendix E

Informed Consent Letter for Student Participants

<Printed on OISE letterhead>

[Insert Date]

Dear Student,

Meegwetch for taking the time to consider participating in my research study: Aboriginal Student Persistence and Success in Ontario Colleges.

I am a doctoral student, of Métis descent, in the department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education at the Ontario Institute For Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto. This research is being conducted as partial fulfillment of a doctorate degree in higher education. My project is being supervised by, Dr. Charles Pascal of Higher Education at OISE, University of Toronto. Should you have any questions for my advisor, you may reach him by phone at: 416.716.7245 or by e-mail at: charles.pascal@utoronto.ca.

In order to respect Aboriginal customs and traditional, including the protective and authoritative role of the Elder, I attempted to speak to the Elder at your college prior to conducting any research.

You are invited to participate in this study and participation is voluntary. You have been invited to participate because you have self-identified as an Aboriginal student at XXX College. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please ask me or you may contact the Research Ethics Board Chair at your college. His/her contact information is: ________________.

I wish to speak with both Aboriginal students and Elders at three different colleges across Ontario to inquire about Aboriginal student success and persistence in Ontario Colleges. I plan to speak with 1-2 Elders and 7-8 students at each college.

The study involves a face-to-face interview and oral questionnaire that will, in total, be approximately 45-75 minutes in length. Participants will be asked about their opinions, perceptions and experiences regarding Aboriginal support services at their College. I will also be asking about demographical information from all student participants to identify information such as the program and year of study, age, and first language. I intend to focus the conversations on what is helping Aboriginal students succeed in postsecondary education. After the interview, I will write brief notes that will be used to assist me in remembering the surroundings of the interview (i.e. characteristics of the site).
With your permission, the interview will be audiotaped. At no time will you be judged or evaluated because of the opinions you have expressed. You may refuse to answer any question you are not comfortable answering and you will not be judged or evaluated for not answering. You may request that any information in written form or audiotape, be eliminated from the project. If you choose to withdraw, you data will not be used in the analysis. Finally, you are free to ask any questions about the research and your involvement with it and may request a summary of the findings of the study.

For your time, you will be compensated with a $10 gift certificate for Tim Horton’s.

There is minimal risk to you in participating in this interview and your identity will be kept confidential. I do not have access to or the ability to impact your grades or enrolment status at your College. Information may be presented/published in educational journals or presented at educational meetings/conferences, but identities will be kept strictly confidential. (One College only: The Elder on site will have access to raw data but this will be in aggregate form. All identifiable information will be removed thus she will be blind to the identities of participants.) Data will be analyzed and reported in a manner that does not identify individuals unless permission to discuss was granted by the individual. You should also know that the research results will be made available to your college.

Should the conversation evoke an unintended negative emotional or psychological reaction, you are advised to seek the services of an Elder or counselor at your college.

If you would like to add something to the interview after you have reflected on the experience, please contact me. I am also happy to provide you with a copy of the final results. In order to do this, I will need your contact information either email or postal address.

If you have any questions related to your rights as a participant in this study, or if you have any complaints or concerns about how you have been treated as a research participant, please contact the University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics: ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416.946.3273.

If you have any questions at any point in the process, please contact me and I will discuss your concerns: 416.553.9244; email: christa.hinds@gmail.com. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and support.

By signing below, you are indicating that you are willing to voluntarily participate in the study, you have received a copy of this letter, and you are fully aware of the conditions above.
I, ________________, agree to participate in the aforementioned research study. I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw from the study without penalty at any time. I understand my data will only be used in ways that provide anonymity to me and it will be stored in a confidential file.

Signature: ____________________________

Date: ________________________________

☐ I agree to be audiotaped.

☐ I wish to have a summary of the final study results.

Christa Hinds (researcher)                              Dr. Charles Pascal (thesis supervisor)
Candidate, Leadership, Higher and                       Professor, Human Development & Applied
Adult Education                                         Psychology
Humber College                                          OISE/University of Toronto
3199 Lake Shore Blvd                                    252 Bloor Street West
Office A110A                                            Office 9-184
Toronto, ON, M8V 1K8                                    Toronto, ON, M5R 1S4
416.553.9244                                            416.716.7245
christa.hinds@gmail.com                                 charles.pascal@utoronto.ca

* Please keep a copy of this letter for your records.
Appendix F

Informed Consent Letter for Elder/Staff Participants

<Printed on OISE letterhead>

[Insert Date]

Dear Elder/Staff in Aboriginal Student Services,

Meegwetch for taking the time to consider participating in my research study: Aboriginal Student Persistence and Success in Ontario Colleges.

I am a doctoral student, of Métis descent, in the department of Leadership, Higher & Adult Education at the Ontario Institute For Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto. This research is being conducted as partial fulfillment of a doctorate degree in higher education. My project is being supervised by, Dr. Charles Pascal of Higher Education at OISE, University of Toronto. Should you have any questions for my advisor, you may reach him by phone at: 416.716.7245 or by e-mail at: charles.pascal@utoronto.ca.

You are invited to participate in this study and participation is voluntary. You have been invited to participate because you are an Elder/Staff Aboriginal Student Services at XXXX College. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please ask me or you may contact the Research Ethics Board Chair at your college. His/her contact information is: ____________________.

I wish to speak with both Aboriginal students and Elders at three different colleges across Ontario to inquire about Aboriginal student success and persistence in Ontario Colleges. I plan to speak with 1-2 Elders and 7-8 students at each college. In accordance with this philosophy, all Elders who participate in the interview process will be provided an opportunity to reflect and comment on the results before the research is finalized.

The study involves a face-to-face interview that will be approximately 45-75 minutes in length. Participants will be asked about their opinions, perceptions and experiences regarding Aboriginal support services at their College. I intend to focus the conversations on what is helping Aboriginal students succeed in postsecondary education. After the interview, I will write brief notes that will be used to assist me in remembering the surroundings of the interview (i.e. characteristics of the site).

With your permission, the interview will be audio taped. At no time will you be judged or evaluated because of the opinions you have expressed. You may refuse to answer any question you are not comfortable answering and you will not be judged or evaluated for not answering. You may request that any information in written form or
audiotape, be eliminated from the project. If you choose to withdraw, your data will not be used in the analysis. Finally, you are free to ask any questions about the research and your involvement with it and may request a summary of the findings of the study.

For your time, you will be compensated with a $10 gift certificate for Tim Horton’s.

There is minimal risk to you in participating in this interview and your identity will be kept confidential. Information may be presented/published in educational journals or presented at educational meetings/conferences, but identities will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be analyzed and reported in a manner that does not identify individuals unless permission to discuss was granted by the individual. You should also know that the research results will be made available to your college.

If you would like to add something to the interview after you have reflected on the experience, please contact me. I am also happy to provide you with a copy of the final results. In order to do this, I will need your contact information either email or postal address.

If you have any questions related to your rights as a participant in this study, or if you have any complaints or concerns about how you have been treated as a research participant, please contact the University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics: ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416.946.3273.

If you have any questions at any point in the process, please contact me and I will discuss your concerns: 416.553.9244; email: christa.hinds@gmail.com. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and support.

By signing below, you are indicating that you are willing to voluntarily participate in the study, you have received a copy of this letter, and you are fully aware of the conditions above.

I, ________________, agree to participate in the aforementioned research study. I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw from the study without penalty at any time. I understand my data will only be used in ways that provide anonymity to me and it will be stored in a confidential file.

Signature: _______________________________________

Date: ___________________________________________
☐ I agree to be audiotaped.

☐ I wish to have an opportunity to review, and comment on, the summary of the study results.

☐ I wish to have a summary of the final study results.

Christa Hinds (researcher)                      Dr. Charles Pascal (thesis supervisor)
Candidate, Leadership, Higher and              Professor, Human Development & Applied
Adult Education                                 Psychology
Humber College                                  OISE/University of Toronto
3199 Lake Shore Blvd                            252 Bloor Street West
Office A110A                                    Office 9-184
Toronto, ON, M8V 1K8                            Toronto, ON, M5R 1S4
416.553.9244                                    416.716.7245
christa.hinds@gmail.com                         charles.pascal@utoronto.ca

* Please keep a copy of this letter for your records.
Appendix G

Feedback Letter to Elders

<Printed on OISE letterhead>

[Insert Date]

Dear Elder,

This study was undertaken by me, Christa Hinds, a Senior HR Consultant at Humber College Institute of Technology & Advanced Learning, to complete my Ph.D. dissertation at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. The intent of this study is to identify the perceived needs and expectations of current Aboriginal students in three Ontario colleges. The intent is to provide Aboriginal Services departments and college leaders with recommendations that identify areas for improvement, change or continuation. I appreciate and acknowledge the diversity amid Aboriginal communities and recognize the challenges of generalizability. I intend to embed suggestions in philosophies that envision localized consultation. To this end, as per your request, please find enclosed a summary of the results from the research for your reflection and comment. I welcome your feedback. If I have not heard from you in 3 weeks, I will assume that you do not wish to comment.

Please remember that the data, with no personal identifiers, will be securely stored in a locked cabinet in my office at Humber at the Lakeshore Campus. As well, the data will be electronically archived on a password-protected computer database and maintained for five years and then erased. Any information that you provide will be confidential. Information collected from participants in this study has been aggregated; pseudonyms employed and no individual will be identifiable from these results. Data has been analyzed and reported in a manner that does not identify individuals unless permission to disclose was granted by the individual. Thus, your name will not appear in any report, publication or external presentation resulting from this study.

If you have any comments about the summary results you wish to share, please contact me at 416.553.9244 or christa.hinds@gmail.com. Should you have any questions for my advisor, Dr. Charles Pascal, you may reach him by phone at: 416.716.7245 or by e-mail at: charles.pascal@utoronto.ca.

If you have any questions at any point in the process, please contact me and I will discuss your concerns: 416.553.9244; email: christa.hinds@gmail.com. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and support.
Thank you again for your participation.

Sincerely,
Christa Hinds
(Enclosure)

Christa Hinds (researcher)
Candidate, Leadership, Higher and Adult Education
Humber College
3199 Lake Shore Blvd
Office A110A
Toronto, ON, M8V 1K8
416.553.9244
christa.hinds@gmail.com

Dr. Charles Pascal (thesis supervisor)
Professor, Human Development & Applied Psychology
OISE/University of Toronto
252 Bloor Street West
Office 9-184
Toronto, ON, M5R 1S4
416.716.7245
charles.pascal@utoronto.ca
Appendix H

Feedback Letter to Participants – Final Thesis

<Printed on OISE letterhead>

[Insert Date]

Dear Elder, Staff or Student,

This study was undertaken by me, Christa Hinds, a Senior HR Consultant at Humber College Institute of Technology & Advanced Learning, to complete my Ph.D. dissertation at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT), Canada. The intent of this study was to identify the perceived needs and expectations of current Aboriginal students in three Ontario colleges. The intent was to provide Aboriginal Services departments and college leaders with recommendations that identify areas for improvement, change or continuation. I appreciate and acknowledge the diversity amid Aboriginal communities and recognize the challenges of generalizability. Suggestions in the final paper are embedded in philosophies that envision localized consultation.

Your participation in the above study was very much appreciated. You indicated that you wished to receive a summary of the research findings. Please find attached a copy of the final paper.

Please remember that the interview data, with no personal identifiers, will be securely stored in a locked cabinet in my office at Humber. As well, the data will be electronically archived on a password-protected computer database and maintained for five years and then erased. Any information that you provided will be confidential. Information collected from participants in this study has been aggregated; no individual will be identifiable from these results. Data has been analyzed and reported in a manner that does not identify individuals unless permission to disclose was granted by the individual. Thus, your name will not appear in any report, publication or external presentation resulting from this study.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study please contact me at 416.553.9244 or christa.hinds@gmail.com. Should you have any questions for my advisor, Dr. Charles Pascal, you may reach him by phone at: 416.716.7245 or by e-mail at: charles.pascal@utoronto.ca
Thank you again for your participation.

Sincerely,
Christa Hinds
(Enclosure)

Christa Hinds (researcher)
Candidate, Leadership, Higher and Adult Education
Humber College
3199 Lake Shore Blvd
Office A110A
Toronto, ON, M8V 1K8
416.553.9244
christa.hinds@gmail.com

Dr. Charles Pascal (thesis supervisor)
Professor, Human Development & Applied Psychology
OISE/University of Toronto
252 Bloor Street West
Office 9-184
Toronto, ON, M5R 1S4
416.716.7245
charles.pascal@utoronto.ca