

Bending the Box: Learning from Indigenous Students

Transitioning from High School to University

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to understand how the unique social, historical, cultural, and Indigenous knowledge contexts of Aboriginal communities in British Columbia shaped high school to university transitions for Aboriginal youth. To this end, the Northwest Coast bentwood box acted as a metaphor that framed the theoretical inquiry and methodology for this study, which examined four Aboriginal Early University Promotion Initiatives (AEUPI) and three Aboriginal University Transition Programs (AUTP) in British Columbia. In addition, I utilized Archibald's (2008) storywork and Kirkness and Barnhardt's (1991) 4Rs of Indigenous methodologies, with an additional 5th R (relationships). The study also drew upon Martin Nakata's (2007) concept of the cultural interface, to analyze 32 interviews conducted with Aboriginal youth, and faculty and staff from the AEUPIs and AUTPs.

Key findings from the Aboriginal youth in this study suggest that learning about university through real-life experience offered by the initiatives/programs was meaningful. Second, both the AEUPIs and AUTPs provided youth with concrete opportunities to explore future academic and career pathways. Third, ensuring that the youth were provided with opportunities to develop relationships with positive Aboriginal role models in the university was seen as a success factor. Fourth, the AEUPI youth shared stories about the important leadership skills they developed as role models and mentors to younger youth in the initiatives, which in turn assisted them with their visioning process for university. Fifth, the students' sense of belonging at university was fostered by relationships with AEUPI and AUTP staff, Indigenous student support staff, Elders, and faculty. Sixth, the AEUPI youth overwhelmingly agreed that the experiences they had in these initiatives led them to feel wholistically successful. However, the AUTP youth had a conflicting experience. Ultimately, insights from the youths' stories suggest that the future of

AEUPIs and AUTPs is a promising one if universities take heed. To this end, all participants in the study critically detailed how Canadian universities can apply a wholistic conception of the 5 Rs to Indigenous high school to university transition programs.

Preface

This dissertation is the original, intellectual product of the author, A. Parent. The stories shared in Chapter 7 and the research findings reported in Chapters 8 to 12 are covered by UBC Ethics Certificate number H12-0113.

The digital graphics for this dissertation were done in collaboration with Marissa Nahanee. I have been given copyright permission to use her digital images for this dissertation. I have also been given copyright permission by the Lattimer gallery to use a photo of artist Clint Work's bentwood box carving.

Photos of Earl Muldon's (Delgamuukw) artwork were taken with permission by Earl Muldon.

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List of Abbreviations

The following words have been abbreviated in this dissertation:

1. Aboriginal Early University Promotion Initiatives (AEUPI)
2. Aboriginal University Transition Programs (AOTP)

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Chapter 1: A Timeless Horizon

1.1 Introduction: My Wanderings with Raven Begin

I can still remember my first day of college. It was my nineteenth birthday. I had just moved to Vancouver from Northern B.C. three days before and was staying with a high school friend, the only person I knew in the city.

My youthful enthusiasm to start a new life far from home had given me little time to prepare for one of the biggest transitions of my life. Undeterred by my ignorance of city life and post-secondary institutions, I found myself on an adventure from which I am still recovering. I had moved to Vancouver at the insistence of Natasha, a friend who had already completed her Bachelor's degree and was now working in Prince Rupert as a social worker. Her new boyfriend had just moved to Vancouver for a job and she wanted to be with him. So, she motivated me to move beyond my northerly surroundings, try something new and challenge myself with school. Natasha smoothly reassured me that "All you have to do is find a place and in a couple of months I can be your roommate when my job transfer gets authorized."

Once I realized that she was serious about her offer we frantically packed up my sparsely furnished apartment. She brought me to my plane and wished me the best of luck saying, "I'll see you in a couple of months. Call me when you are enrolled in school and have found a place for us to live." I bounced down the tarmac eager for a new adventure and uplifted by her calm assurances.

I had almost no knowledge about any of the colleges in Vancouver. I tried hard to recall what I had learned at Synala (a six week post-secondary bridging program at UBC) two summers previously. The Synala program supported Aboriginal high school students in their Grade 12 studies and encouraged them to enroll in post-secondary education upon graduation.

The program was useful in that it helped me to complete Grade 12 and gain the confidence to leave my community and attend post-secondary. More importantly, it gave me space to explore First Nations identity, values and culture(s). However, I did not remember learning much about colleges when I was in Synala and hadn't thought to do research about suitable colleges in the Lower Mainland before arriving in Vancouver.

Upon arrival, I casually asked Olivia (who had lived in the city for a few years) for the names of some colleges the night before I had to enroll in school. She told me that there was a college called "Douglas" somewhere in New Westminster but she couldn't remember the names of any others. I decided that Douglas sounded like a reputable school. Its name reminded me of my great-uncle Douglas, whom my grandfather and his twin greatly respected. This would be the college I would go to. I convinced myself that I knew what I was doing.

I awoke early that morning excited by the possibilities of the day, giddy with excitement and eager to explore new territory. I headed out the door with Olivia's directions to take the "99 B-Line bus down Broadway and get off at the Commercial Drive stop, then get on the Skytrain and go east for a while until you get to New West, I think." "Where do I go in New West?" I asked innocently. "I dunno," Olivia responded. "I think it is up a big hill somewhere," she muttered hesitantly. "How..ah.." "How much is bus fare?" "How long does it take to get there?" "And, um, where is this 'Bee-Line' bus stop?" I asked as I tried to quickly make note of her directions. Little did I know that BC transit made maps of all the Skytrain and bus routes for the lower mainland—which wouldn't have been of use anyway because I didn't know the address to where I was going.

Olivia had done her best to provide me with some rather vague directions. I grabbed my backpack and set off for school. I had no problem finding the B-line bus and waited patiently as

the monolithic blue metal caterpillar crawled through morning rush hour traffic to get me to the Commercial Drive Skytrain station. I silently wondered why they called this bus a 'bee'.

It was at the Skytrain station that I slowly began to realize that public transportation was more complicated than I had remembered. After stopping and asking several people for directions to make sure I had them right, I stumbled up to the Skytrain platform only to find that I had just missed a train. As I waited for my next train, I glanced curiously at the anxious commuters who would not make eye contact with me as they paced about the platform hopped up on their Starbucks coffee.

I boarded the train and found new meaning in the term "squeezed in like sardines," maintaining my balance as the crowded train careened down its track. I began to worry about which stop I should get off at. How much farther? Where was I going again? I slowly replayed Olivia's directions in my mind as I recalled "New West and up a big hill."

A short while later, the automated station announcer called out "New Westminster" in an eerie android voice. A number of students with backpacks started getting off the train. Hesitantly, I followed them as they forged their way down the stairwell and into the unknown.

I cautiously observed my new surroundings. I drew a HUGE sigh of relief when I turned and saw the "big hill" that Olivia had told me about and chided myself for worrying so much about where I was going.

My personal experience illuminates my interest in this study. When I began my studies at Douglas College in 1999 I didn't know that my transition into the world of post-secondary education had just begun. It was less than two months after I had started my studies that I decided to withdraw. My reasons were many: I did not understand the institutional language of the bureaucracy; there were few supports if any for Indigenous students at the college, including a lack of financial resources and First Nations student services; there were no Indigenous professors at the institution; and the curriculum and pedagogy were taught from a Western perspective with scant attention given to Indigenous knowledge or perspectives.

Even though I had attended the Synala Honours program, a high school to post-secondary bridging program, and could have been considered well positioned to take full advantage of university, I was still largely unfamiliar with college education, its administration system, and the range of 'educational opportunities' that it offered. In addition, I did not have adequate support to help me navigate its structures and the application process, or cultural familiarity with the post-secondary environment. All of these structural issues were compounded by personal and family difficulties and a rather hasty preparation for city life. As a result, my transition was unsuccessful.

Of course, it has taken me many years to identify the structural issues that impacted my transition into college and realize that my disheartening experience is an unfortunate reality for many Indigenous students who begin post-secondary studies right after high school. Sadly, even though it has been eleven years since I entered college, high school to post-secondary transition rates for Aboriginal students in the province of B.C have increased very little (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2010). Many colleges and universities have only recently begun to develop meaningful programs and services for Indigenous students. Even so, this endeavor has invariably

reflected the entrenched Western knowledge systems and ideologies on which universities are predicated (Association of Canadian Deans of Education, 2010). Although the structural parameters of post-secondary systems are being modified or 'bent' by Indigenous knowledge, approaches and practices, efforts to improve Aboriginal peoples' participation in universities remain limited by on-going socio-economic, political, and institutional challenges (Canada Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). The challenges are particularly significant for Aboriginal youth in the province of British Columbia (B.C.), who have a high school to university transition rate of four percent versus eighteen percent for non-Aboriginal students and are the fastest growing population in Canada (British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, 2010; Statistics Canada, 2006). In addition, Aboriginal high school students in B.C. are less likely to complete a Bachelor's degree within five years than non-Aboriginal students (15 percent as compared to 41 percent) (Heslop, 2009). These statistics point to the need for communities, schools and institutions to improve the resources available to the growing population of Aboriginal high school students who will prepare for and transition to university. In particular, there is a call for the promotion of early university engagement initiatives and transition programs as pathways to higher education. Further, while a number of national reports have been published which focus on barriers to post-secondary education for Aboriginal people (Association of Canadian Colleges, 2008; Avison, 2004; Holmes, 2005; Malatest & Associates, 2002 & 2004) there is at present little, if any, research in Canada that directly focuses on Aboriginal high school students' experience of transitioning to university (Hunt-Jinnouchi & Hall, 2009; Malatest, 2004). My research aims to address this gap by focusing on two pathways to higher education for Indigenous learners: early university preparation initiatives and university

transition programs. Further, I will approach these pathways as a lived example of the cultural interface, a concept put forth by Nakata (2007a; 2007b).

1.2 Locating Myself

I would like to acknowledge the Musqueam and Squamish people for providing me with a place to live and study while carrying out my research on their traditional and un-ceded territories. I grew up in Hazelton, British Columbia, and have lived in the Vancouver area for eleven years. On my mother's side of the family, I am Nisga'a from the Nass Valley of Northwestern British Columbia. My Nisga'a name is Nox Aya'a Wilt (one who is close to or near to her mother). We are part of the McKay family, from the House of Ni'isjoohl, and belong to the Ganada (Frog) Clan. On my father's side, I am of French and German descent. I am also a mother to a very busy, cheerful and loving toddler (Willow) who happily visits her grandparents' house so I can write.

My personal and professional involvement with the Urban Native Youth Association (UNYA) in East Vancouver over the last nine years supported my return to college. Most importantly the organization motivated me to do my Master's research on the impacts that community-based education had on the lives of Aboriginal youth and to share with community members, educators, and policy makers the important knowledge that I learned from the youth.

A continuous theme that has emerged in my undergraduate and graduate work is a keen interest in learning how to create positive and transformative institutional change for Indigenous post-secondary learners. My involvement with the SAGE (Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement) graduate and SAGE undergraduate initiatives has provided me with clear direction and ample opportunities to pursue this interest. I am appreciative of the mentoring experiences and conversations that I have had with my peers and Indigenous faculty members, as

well as the research and professional experiences that I have participated in to learn how institutional change can be achieved for Indigenous people in concrete ways.

As I journey through the third year of my PhD studies, my personal, community and academic experiences have intertwined to guide my exploration of Aboriginal learners' transitions to university. I have been inspired to work with Aboriginal youth, communities, and institutions in order to identify proactive ways to transform Indigenous students' transition to higher education.

My inspiration to explore the topic of Aboriginal university transition pathways has often (paradoxically) arisen from my frustrations with the structure of higher education. As the story at the beginning of this dissertation reveals, I have struggled to learn how to navigate the tensions, conflicts, and clashes that often occur for Aboriginal learners within this space. I have had many moments when these tensions have made me painfully aware that I am experiencing a process, which at times is invisible, and that I feel viscerally before I can find any words to describe it. The invisibility of some of these experiences has followed me into my Ph.D. endeavors, as the following story about Raven illustrates:

One fall day during the first year of my Ph.D. studies, I found myself in my department's graduate advisor's office seeking assistance to complete a national fellowship application. I was expressing my feelings of discontent with the fellowship's application process and procedures. The academic and fellowship process seemed backwards to me. I was upset that I was required to have a high number of academic publications to show that I was a 'good scholar', as I felt that it was more important to work with Aboriginal communities in sharing the knowledge I had learned from my Master's degree with them in a meaningful way (through a community feast and knowledge mobilization project). Since both of these endeavors took me a considerable amount

of time to carry out, I had only recently submitted my first journal article for publication. I felt that there is a wide range of accomplishments and practices one can master that are not always considered academic but are equally deserving of recognition for rewards and fellowships.

I also felt that it was essential to demonstrate respect and reciprocity to the community by asking our members to publicly witness the findings from my Master's degree research. Once I had done this, I considered the possibility of publishing this information. I can remember saying to my graduate advisor "I am getting tired of having to jump into the institutional box in order to show that I have merit as an Indigenous scholar". My graduate advisor gave an unexpected response to this. She looked at me with a sparkle in her eye and said, "well maybe you should start bending the box to suit your needs". I was immediately struck by her advice and sensed a strong resonance with Martin Nakata's (2007 a; 2007b) concept of cultural interface, about which I had recently read. I also saw a compelling relationship between his ideas about the cultural interface and the bentwood box I had been exploring in my writing. I instantly began to envision how they would both shape my research process and design (which I will describe in greater detail in the following sections).

1.3 Entry Point into the Cultural Interface

Nakata (2007) defines the cultural interface as the re-theorization of a lived space that empowers generations of Indigenous people to affirm and reinvent themselves in response to Indigenous and Western knowledge traditions that are both competing and ever changing. The conceptualization of the interface challenges the binary construction of Indigenous peoples as cultural 'others' who have been pathologized due to clashes between Indigenous and Western knowledge, customs and values. In so doing, it not only facilitates cooperation and understanding, but also raises new questions, creates new dilemmas, and calls for the

clarification of new meanings – such are the growing pains of a new and unprecedented paradigm (Shields, Bishop & Mazawi, 2005). According to Nakata (2007b):

The cultural interface is constituted by points of intersecting trajectories. It is a multi-dimensional space of dynamic relations constituted by the intersections of time, place, distance, different systems of thought, competing and contesting discourses within and between different knowledge traditions, and different systems of social, economic and political organization. It is a space of many shifting and complex intersections between different people with different histories, experiences, languages, agendas, aspirations and responses. As much as it is currently overlaid by various theories, narratives and arguments that work to produce cohesive, consensual, and cooperative social practices, it is also a space that abounds with contradictions, ambiguities, conflict, and contestation of meanings that emerge from these various shifting intersections (p. 199).

The cultural interface is thus not a space of exclusion and limitation shaped by the view that there is one right way of thinking (i.e., Western or Indigenous epistemologies). This is not to say, however, that this space is entirely harmonious. Rather, viewing the tensions between Indigenous/Western discourses and narratives creates the parameters of possibility for the cultural interface. As such, it aims to inspire scholars to develop new approaches that incorporate aspects of both knowledge systems and thereby expand the scope of ideas relevant to each while advancing trans-disciplinary knowledge (Durie, 2004). As a ‘paradigm of potential’, it seeks to expand the insights that arise from examining the gaps between two systems of knowledge in a manner which foregrounds the interests of Indigenous peoples. The insights generated by this enquiry could constitute the foundation of a transformative praxis that advances the

epistemological, economic, political, educational, social, and cultural interests of Indigenous communities.

1.4 A Frog's Eye View

First, it is important for me to explore my location at the cultural interface in order to enhance and deepen my knowledge of Indigenous research methodologies and practices. To this end, I will draw upon the metaphorical story of a frog. Metaphors are central to Indigenous ways of thinking and are often used in Indigenous communities as teaching and learning tools. According to Shawn Wilson (2008), “this is because they allow listeners to draw their own conclusions and to gain life lessons from a more personal perspective” (p. 17).

I will use the metaphorical story to explore the different levels of implication, analysis and meaning I have encountered at the cultural interface. This story began when I was writing my Master's thesis and continues to enlighten my understanding of the cultural interface. I invite you to once again journey with me into the cultural interface.

I was born into the 'Ganada' (or frog) clan and I will use the frog as a symbol of my experience at the interface. A frog has the ability to live on land and in water, which allows her/him to transcend boundaries and live in relational harmony with all beings. The earth, which represents the land and Indigenous theoretical and methodological knowledge, is inseparable from Indigenous peoples and contains knowledge about creation and the cyclical processes of life. When the frog is on land it uses its large eyes to see that the Earth's patterns and phases are in constant flux, like one's ideas in motion. These patterns and processes are never-ending. The land continues to impact who I am and provide me with opportunities to learn and grow in a wholistic way.

The frog's binocular vision also provides it with an in-depth perspective that is useful as it navigates through turbulent waters. These waters are representative of the struggle between the Indigenous and European knowledge systems that frame the deep social issues of colonization. It is necessary to use this perspective to infiltrate 'whitestream' consciousness, break the waves of colonization, and positively transform relations between Indigenous and Eurocentric bodies of knowledge. When the water is calm, the frog is able to swim freely with the current, allowing her/him to explore new places that border the land and water, while retaining the ability to swim away from the current of Western knowledge if it gets too strong. This is not unlike the stream of theoretical knowledge and concepts that position me on the border of Western and Indigenous knowledge systems.

According to Martin Nakata (2007) "in complex and contested terrains of overlapping knowledge systems different understandings often conflict, contradict, produce incoherence and make it difficult to 'make sense' of these contradictions" (p. 197). Within these spaces of contradiction, it is necessary for the frog to actively shape new practices (swim, jump, leap, fight, hop, rise, ascend, bounce, skip, descend, destabilize, submerge, penetrate, tumble, subside, plop, plummet, plunge, proceed, perch) in its adaptation to encroaching environmental elements in order to make and re-make itself everyday.

As the frog swims through the ever-changing current, it must continually take moments to surface and separate from the water's influence. By returning and detaching itself from the water it reaffirms the benefits of being able to live in both worlds and knowledge systems. The same is true for me when I take a momentary pause to reflect and detach myself from the 'genealogies of ideas and their representations' (Grande, 2005). Understanding this process of detachment allows me to see all the possibilities and tensions arising from interaction between

the systems of knowledge, and helps me to better understand my own perspective and follow my appropriate path or channel.

Leroy Little Bear (2000) writes, “No one has a pure worldview that is 100 percent Indigenous or Eurocentric; rather, everyone has an integrated mind, a fluxing and ambidextrous consciousness, a pre-colonized consciousness that flows into a colonized consciousness and back again” (p. 85). This highlights the relational interdependence between the two bodies of knowledge and reduces the tendency to construct Indigenous and Western theories as being in binary opposition to each other. In other words, I need to explore the interface between these systems to gain a wholistic view of my world.

A number of certain species of frogs return to the bodies of water where they were born, often resulting in annual migrations involving thousands of frogs. This movement is not unlike the recent resurgence of Indigenous knowledge (IK) in the academic, political and community contexts. Part of the reason why we have maintained continuity with our former knowledge tradition is because a significant amount of the content from this tradition has been transformed by its interactions with Western knowledge systems and continues to evolve in interactions with Western knowledge, its institution, technologies and practices. Therefore, IK is dynamic and always changing while still maintaining strong connections to particular traditions and practices. Because the frog evolves from an egg to a tadpole to the adult form it later inhabits, it embodies a significant message of transformation and growth that is relevant to both Indigenous and Western knowledge systems. This message also means that I will always be seeking knowledge and wisdom that will lead to the unfolding of rigid institutional and theoretical structures while utilizing my energies to help others on their journey; whether it be on land or in water, or both.

A central starting point for understanding Indigenous methodologies requires that I situate myself within the research process in an open and honest way. Like Margaret Kovach (2010), “I situate myself not as a knowledge keeper-this has not been my path-rather my role is a facilitator.” (p. 7). A significant part of my responsibility then is to ensure that I am prepared, and understand the epistemological landscapes and waterways that I am to traverse upon so I can translate in a ‘good way’ the truth that I find in whatever terrain I explore. The following section highlights the need to re-theorize Aboriginal high school to university transitions from Indigenous theoretical perspective(s).

Chapter 2: A Counterpoint to Dominant Understandings of Transition

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will critically examine existing literature on Aboriginal high school to university transitions in order to provide context for the research questions and purpose of this study. Secondly, it will provide a preliminary understanding of the bentwood box that will act as a wholistic metaphoric representation for the research design. Third, it will provide an overview of the dissertation's form and function in visual and written form.

There is little to no comprehensive literature available that discusses Aboriginal high school to university transitions from Indigenous theoretical perspective(s). As noted previously, there are some studies that have utilized socio-cultural theories that identify factors associated with Indigenous learners' successful completion of an undergraduate degree (i.e., family income; high school grades; family education level; family income; social integration with peers, faculty and administrators; and academic integration) (Pascarella, Smart & Ethington, 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

A number of other studies utilize a psychological framework in order to understand the adverse effects on individual students in times of transition and change. Some of these studies acknowledge that Aboriginal learners may be at a greater 'risk' of not 'succeeding' in post-secondary endeavors, and that changes in physical location, disruption of peer and family relationships, and adjustments to new academic and social expectations can negatively impact an Aboriginal learners' transition into post-secondary education. However, none of these studies focus specifically on university transitions pathways. And while these studies highlight some of the difficulties and tensions experienced by individual Aboriginal students, they often focus negatively on the deficits of the individual learner as the primary reason for their failure to

transition and do not acknowledge the myriad of institutional barriers that create these conditions (Falk & Aitken, 1984; Hards, 2006). It is not my intention to discuss the problems associated with the psychological approach. Rather, I aim to illustrate how this approach has been integrated with institutional approaches to Aboriginal university transitions (AUT). This is particularly important since it means that the majority of research and literature on the subject of transition utilizes an institutional approach.

The institutional and psychological lenses narrowly view transition in terms of issues of access, recruitment, admission, retention, and university completion rates (Astin, 1993; Terenzini, Lorang, & Pascarella, 1981). Therein, university transition is conceptualized as a linear process defined by individuals applying to, entering, and then acculturating into the institution. Often, the metaphor of a 'pipeline' is erroneously used to describe the transition process for Indigenous learners (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno, & Solyom, 2012). From this standpoint, transition to university is usually regarded as a positive experience involving new opportunities and change for the learners (Tinto, 1975; 1993). The acculturation process is seen as providing the individual student with the knowledge needed to understand the institutions' norms, procedures, and expectations of them. In other words, transition is seen as following a unidirectional trajectory in that a First Nations student intentionally assimilates into the culture of the university. This leaves little room for institutional accountability (Pidgeon, 2008a). As a result, the university is required to take little, if any, responsibility for transforming its policies and practices to reflect the culture(s) and IK of Aboriginal learners (Tierney, 1992).

Further, most institutional definitions of transition are usually regarded as positive because they are thought to establish a level of continuity between high school and university

environments to build upon and extend supportive connections between students and educators.

This understanding is illustrated by Pickrell (2008), who defines transition:

as the passing from one place or state to another or an event that results in transformation.

In post-secondary contexts, students transition from a familiar environment (high school)

to a new environment and role which is the post-secondary institution and student.

Pickrell's definition is problematic because most high schools are unfamiliar environments for Aboriginal youth in that the curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional designs rarely take these learners' needs and circumstances into account (St. Denis, 2010). It therefore does not illustrate the transition experiences of Aboriginal youth who enter a university. Having to transition from one unfamiliar environment to another will result in responses and experiences, some of which are negative rather than positive. If a student fails to 'successfully' transition the way a 'traditional student' is expected to, they become part of an institution's attrition rate and are labeled as having a deficit (such as improper academic preparation, personal problems, time management issues, poor motivation, and low achievement). These learners then become codified as a statistic, and that statistic is not qualified by the experiences and circumstances that are responsible for it – experiences and circumstances that distinguish Aboriginal learners from non-Aboriginal learners. As Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) state: "It is not enough for universities to focus their attention on 'attrition' and 'retention' as an excuse to intensify efforts at cultural assimilation" (p. 14). They argue that categorizing Indigenous learners in terms of 'attrition' and 'retention' has not produced desirable results. Paradoxically, the statistics themselves are evidence of this (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2011). They reveal the 'merit' of Kirkness and Barnhardt's (1991) seminal argument that universities must provide Aboriginal learners with an education that is relevant, respectful, responsible, and reciprocal with

regard to their needs and interests. The 4R principles offer universities an opportunity to apply cultural criteria that are meaningful to AUT. Upholding these principles will require the university to transform its current practices, policies, curriculum and structure.

The prevalent institutional perspectives that have shaped AUT have prevented universities from considering the ways in which numerous individuals, communities and circumstances can influence an Aboriginal learner. To most Aboriginal students, university transition is a continual process of relationship-building that is supported by a range of experiences that occur before, during, and after their entrance into higher education. As such, transitions are not always experienced only by an Aboriginal student, as families, community, and nations may also play a part. Relationships with families, communities and nations are fundamental to the social organization of Aboriginal peoples because they encompass integral interdependencies that support an individual's social, emotional, spiritual, and mental well-being (Nee-Benham & Cooper, 2000). Consequently, as Docket et al (2007) point out: "All participants and stakeholders in transition influence the process and the experiences, and are influenced by the transition. Stakeholders and participants in transition include children, families, educators, other professionals or agencies and communities" (p.15). It was therefore important to acknowledge the multiple individuals and groups that shape and are impacted by an Aboriginal student's transition into university. In so doing, I continued to explore the meaning of transitions with research participants as this research process unfolded.

2.2 Research Questions

My research addressed the following questions:

1. What are the origins, purposes, nature, and structures of early university preparation initiatives and university transition programs for Aboriginal learners that are offered by major research-intensive universities in British Columbia?
2. What challenges and successes do Aboriginal learners experience with these early university preparation and university transition programs?
3. Which university policies and practices hinder and facilitate Aboriginal learners' success as they transition into a university from early university preparation and university transition programs?

2.3 Purpose

My research first aims to investigate and extend the discourse of transitions by looking beyond how individual Aboriginal learners cope with 'adaptation' and 'adjustment' to university. This study focused specifically on how the unique social, historical, cultural, and Indigenous knowledge contexts of Aboriginal communities in British Columbia shape transitions. Second, the study critically discussed how Canadian universities can engage a wholistic conception of the 4Rs for Indigenous high school to university transitions (Archibald, Pidgeon, & Hawkey, 2010; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). In fulfilling these objectives, I aspire to gain and share insights into how the university can be transformed to enhance Aboriginal high school to university pathways in a meaningful way; and strengthen collaborative working relationships between learning institutions and Aboriginal communities.

2.4 The Bentwood Box: A Wholistic Research Design



Figure 1 Bentwood Box by Earl Muldon

The bentwood box was created by Northwest Coast Aboriginal peoples who ingeniously steam bent a single plank of cedar to form the four sides of a box (Stewart, 1984). It will serve as a visual, symbolic and metaphorical representation of my research design. As Margaret Kovach (2010) states, it is helpful to use visual representations in Western academic formats because they “mitigate the linearity of words alone” and can convey a multitude of [w]holistic layers and meanings which resist the standard reproduction of Western epistemology in research (p.41). These visual representations also have epistemological relevance to Indigenous cultures and provide a counterpoint to the “ten dollar academic words” that are an abundant currency in most academic research and knowledge-making practices (Myer, 2000). As such, the bentwood box has multiple functions for my dissertation. As a whole, it will be the symbolic container that houses the knowledge and information that I gather in my research process. As a configuration of interconnected parts, it constitutes a wholistic research design. As a multilayered metaphor, it illuminates the epistemological, theoretical, cultural and personal explorations put forth in the research.

2.5 Dissertation Form & Function

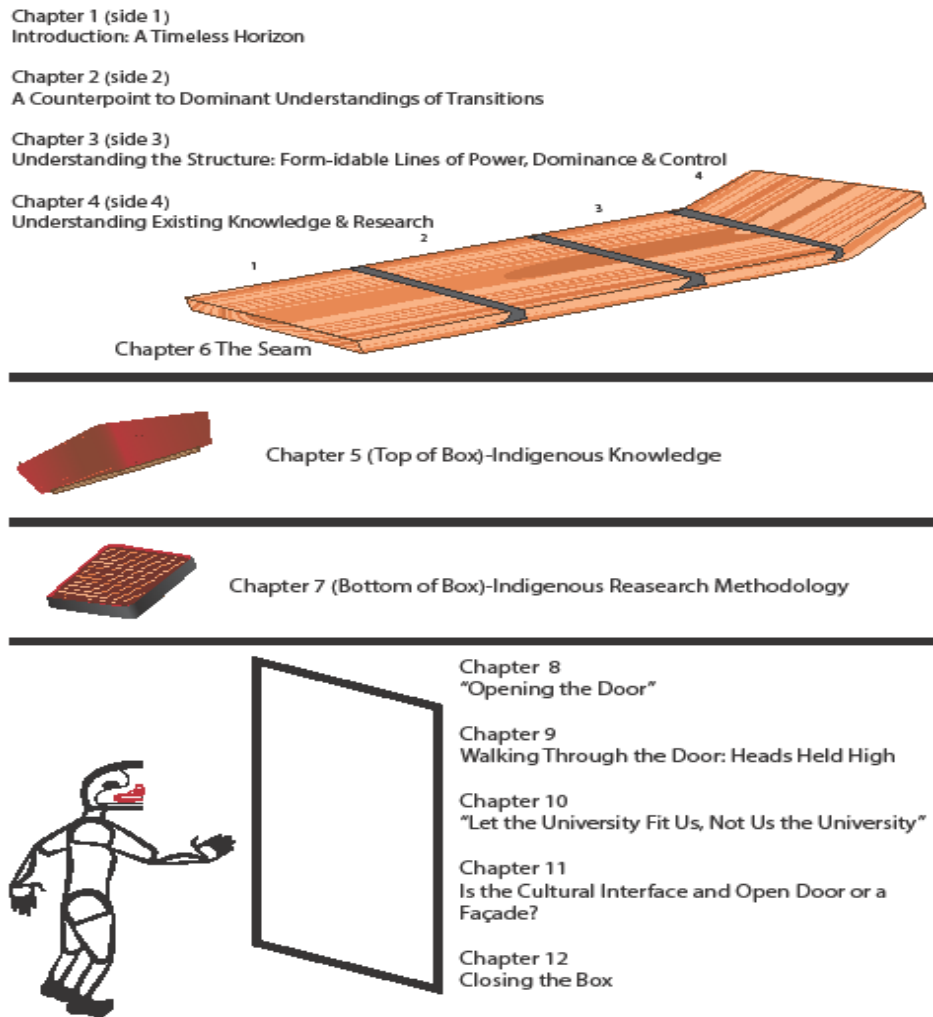


Figure 2 Making My Bentwood Box Research Design by Marissa Nahanee¹

¹ This figure illustrates how a bentwood box is made. My hands are held high to Squamish/Nisga'a artist Marissa Nahanee for her expertise and collaboration to design the digital graphics for my Ph.D bentwood box research design. Without her assistance, this project would be incomplete.

It is my intent for each one of the chapters in my dissertation to represent one side of the box and the seam that holds the box together. The findings from the research will be stored in the box. This means the various sides and seam of the box will be woven together to form a wholistic research framework. This is congruent with the metaphor of the bentwood box in that each side is interconnected with the other. Such a wholistic research framework is central to most Indigenous research methodologies for several reasons: it provides an opportunity to view the interconnections that exist between social, spiritual, and physical phenomena; it unites Aboriginal communities through shared experiences; it balances the relationships between researchers, participants and communities; it signifies the importance of a research practice that is facilitated through multiple lenses; and it connects the multiple aspects of the lived experience of individuals as part of community processes (Faires et al. 2004).² As such, I feel the bentwood box metaphor expresses wholism because it is dynamic and fluid as a metaphor and expresses a non-linear, circular philosophy. Although the box is generally defined as a square form, the curved bending of the bentwood box belies this conventional definition and therefore serves as a fitting example for my attempts to balance Indigenous and Western research techniques.

Further, the sides of the box correspond with parts of my dissertation (please see figure 1-2). The first side introduces the context in which this study emerged and my personal location in relation to the research. It also introduces Martin Nakata's (2007a; 2007b) concept of the cultural

² In creating a framework which relays the interconnection between Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous methodologies, I intend to emphasize the commonalities among Aboriginal communities' understanding of wholism in a way that does not over-generalize the similarities among Aboriginal peoples and remain, while remaining aware of the unique differences in languages, traditions, spiritual practices and governance among the approximately 500 distinct Indigenous communities in North America (Wagner: 2006, 149)

interface as well as a personal interpretation of its meaning. The second side (Chapter 2) critiques the dominant institutional approaches to Aboriginal university transitions (AUT). This side also reveals the research questions, purpose, and design. The third side (Chapter 3) foregrounds the formline, a design principle of Northwest Coast Art that will frame my analysis of higher education and delineate the colonialist, imperialist, and racist underpinnings of its structure. I will explain how the function of ‘basic’ formlines have shaped and replicated the design of the higher education system in Canada to reflect the inequities and power imbalances that operate in wider society. The fourth side (chapter 4) corresponds to current literature on Aboriginal high school to post-secondary transition pathways. The top of the box (chapter 5) will guide my exploration of the meaning of Indigenous knowledge systems. The seam of the box that remains after bending, visually represents Martin Nakata’s (2007a; 2007b) concept of the ‘cultural interface’ and will illustrate how Aboriginal university transition pathways function as an example of the cultural interface. The bottom of the box (chapter 6) will function as a frame for my overview of Indigenous methodologies, focusing specifically on Indigenous storywork (Archibald, 2008). It will also inform my explanation of how I will use the “4 Rs” of Aboriginal Research (respect, responsibility, reciprocity and relevance) (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991) with an additional 5th ‘R’ (relationships) as guiding ethical principles for my research. The participants’ stories and my analysis of the findings (Chapters 8, 9, 10, 11) will be housed within the box. The final chapter (Chapter 12) will complete the creation of my bentwood box research design. Here, I work with Archibald’s (2008) remaining storywork principles (synergy, wholism and inter-relatedness) to reconcile (or to sew) the cultural interface closed. The process will bring to light the study’s recommendations, limitations, significance and future directions.

2.6 Summary

In closing this chapter, I feel my research aims to bring forth a unique understanding of Nakata's cultural interface through the metaphor of the bentwood box.

Chapter 3: Understanding the Structure: ‘Form-idable’ Lines of Power, Dominance & Control

3.1 Introduction

As I began to write my doctoral exams, I began to feel confined by Western concepts such as ‘ideology’, and ‘discourse’, which had been assigned to me in my exam questions. I began searching for a visual verbal language that could embody the resistance I intuitively felt. I decided that my research project would be incomplete if I worked solely with concepts and terms derived from a purely Western lens. This chapter is an attempt to challenge some of these conventional academic boundaries as well as raise questions about the structure of higher education and its impacts on Aboriginal learners. It also reflects the beginning of my personal journey as an Indigenous scholar to learn how to balance my rich cultural traditions and Western thinking in a way that honours my personal expression, voice, and ideas. Inevitably, I found myself drawn to Northwest Coast Formline design. Formline design was (and continues to be) regarded as an essential expression for the visual articulations of Indigenous traditions and worldviews for many Nations along the Northwest coast. I am inspired by this artistic tradition’s inherently innovative structure because it encourages creativity, exploration, and growth. I will therefore work with the Formline design principles to frame my analysis of higher education and delineate the colonialist, imperialist, and racist underpinnings of its current structure. I will explain how the form and function of ‘basic’ formlines have shaped and replicated the institutional design of the higher education system in Canada to reflect the inequities and power imbalances that operate within wider society.

3.2 The Structure of Higher Education



Figure 3 Bentwood Box by Earl Muldon

Northwest Coast art owes its structure to a general system of design principles. Depending on how these are used, the crest or motif being portrayed can vary from realistic and easily recognizable to involved and somewhat difficult to figure out—or the identity figure can be totally abstracted through the rearrangement of its anatomical parts. Examining the individual elements largely used in the art form, and recognizing the ways in which those elements are put together enables us to grasp the structure of the art (Stewart, 1979, p. 16).

The design principles of Northwest Coast art can be seen as an analogy for the principles of Canadian higher education. That is, it cannot be defined separately from its policies and practices as well as its larger institutional context. As Stanley Rothstein (1991) states, “These practices [in higher education] are governed by the inculcation and pedagogic control by the state that sponsors it” (p.1). The higher education system therefore does not produce the ‘form-idable’ lines of power that determine the structure and needs of society as a singular, autonomous entity. Rather, it reinforces and reproduces these lines of power as an interdependent institution which is

interconnected with other economic, social and political institutions. From one perspective, the goals and structure of higher education institutions and their interconnection with other societal institutions can be seen as realistic, with its figure being easily recognizable, similar to the first description provided by Stewart. This viewpoint is aligned with the principles of multi-cultural education (introduced in Canada in the 1970s), which asserts that schools are to be culturally neutral, accommodate cultural differences, and educate students in ways that affirm their differences (Mackey, 1999). Seen in this way, the structure of higher education is transparent, essential and relatively unproblematic. As such, it is an example of the adage ‘what you see is what you get’ in that its practices and policies appear to the outside observer as if they were neutral or devoid of cultural politics, while in actuality they are not (A. Mazawi, personal communication August, 4th, 2010). However, from another vantage point, the structure of higher education emulates Northwest Coast art in that the anatomical parts can be rearranged in an abstract manner. In this case, the structure of higher education is obscured by an interconnected set of cultural, political and economic beliefs that have emerged to become the basis for a particular set of social relationships over time. These social relationships have been constructed in such a way that they seem to support the general interests of all people in a society, when they have actually been designed to serve the needs and goals of elite groups in a stratified system.

Northwest Coast art is often characterized by a set of strong contoured lines called formlines that are usually black and red in colour. According to Jim Gilbert and Karin Clark (2002) “The Northwest Coast Native style formline system is based on the principle that a creature’s shape or form, as well as its parts, can be represented by a continuous outline called a formline” (p.48). Employing the analogy, these lines represent the goals and interests that shape institutions of higher education. Black, the primary colour, structures the design and clarifies the

anatomy of the subject, while red, the secondary colour, is often used for elements that are of secondary importance (Stewart, p.19). The black line thus symbolizes the higher education institution's structure and the corresponding lines of thinking, while red lines represents the other social and political institutions or practices that normalize, reinforce and accentuate the anatomy of the structure's subject – the subject being the institution's ideological configuration. From the alternative vantage point mentioned above, these lines actually represent the agenda of dominant groups. In academia, formlines manifest in relation to various critical theoretical perspectives as discourse, ideology, a system of thought, or the status of truth (Foucault, 1972; Bourdieu & Passerson, 2000; Marx & Engels, 1976). For the purpose of this dissertation, formlines refer to 'ideological discourses' and practices that are intertwined with them. George Sefa Dei, Bud Hall, and Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg (2000) extend this line of argument and discuss how higher education institutions perpetuate social inequality. They assert that:

[I]nstitutions are not unmarked spaces of thought and action. Knowledge forms are usually privileged to construct dominance, and can be 'fetishized' so as to produce and sustain power inequities. Fetishized knowledges are assigned or come to acquire an objectified normal status, the status of truth. Thus they become embedded in social practices and identities, as well as in institutional structures, policies, and relationships” (p.4).

In this way, what is taught, how it is transmitted and what is conveyed to the learner within the structures of higher education is rarely universal, but in fact reflects the inequities and power arrangements that operate within the higher education system and wider society. These structures serve to constitute select practices, identities, and relationships which are not accidental, random, or idiosyncratic. Rather, they are supportive of the higher educational institutions and the

stratified interests within society. It should therefore not be surprising that a good deal of institutional effort is put into making these practices and relationships activities appear ‘natural’ and ‘essential’.

For Indigenous people in Canada, the multi-faceted process which is interconnected within the design of higher education has historically reflected legislation and policies that pursued assimilation. As such, the framework of higher education institutions originates the overlapping and interlocking formlines of colonialism, imperialism, and racism that have shaped it. These formlines have been entrenched by Canadian legal, political, educational, economic and social institutions and continue to impact the lives of Indigenous people in Canada today.

Engaging the analogy between Northwest Coast design principles and higher education structures shows how the power and dominance represented by the formlines can be unrecognizable at times because they are so deeply etched into the overall design that they appear to be an integral element. However, in art – as in education – these formlines have not existed without contestation or challenge. The late Northwest Coast Haida Master Carver, Bill Reid (1984) poignantly states, “All is containment and control and yet there always seems to be an effort to escape” (p. 50). As such, most Indigenous and critical scholars are aware of the detrimental impacts that this institutional design has had on Indigenous peoples’ access to higher education and their experiences within higher education (Archibald, 1995;; Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000a; Battiste, 2008; Hampton, 1995; Pidgeon, 2008a). They have challenged and tried to redraw the design in order to overcome the formidable barriers that it has erected. In so doing, they have revealed its flaws and identified the principles and practices which correspond to it (as will be discussed in further detail). Such perspectives have the capacity, then, to identify and reveal the prevalent and dominant formlines that carve the

parameters of the Canadian higher education institutions and the ways in which these formlines might not only be unfamiliar but might also operate to circumscribe Indigenous transitions within these institutions. As Stewart (1979) implies, it is necessary to examine the individual elements that create the structure of a system in order to reveal the meaning of its design. Accordingly, the next section will briefly identify the formlines of imperialism, colonialism, liberalism, and racism.

3.3 Identifying the Basic Formlines



Figure 4 Basic Formline Shapes

In most Northwest Coast art designs the formline is constantly curving and varying in width. According to Gilbert & Clark (2002), “At places where the design units come together or at divisions within the design, this line can taper to form a flowing smooth joint, or it may incorporate negative units such as crescents, which relieve the weight of an otherwise heavy black line...the most common formline building blocks are the ovoid and u shape” (p. 48-49). Trignons, circles, ovals, and quadroons are also commonly used. Once conscious of the basic formline building blocks, the artist can use them in an endless number of combinations, limited only by their imagination. This also holds true for the basic formlines that permeate higher education, wherein imperialism, colonialism, racism, and liberalism continue to appear in an endless number of combinations and are reinforced by the backdrop of larger political schemes.

3.3.1 Imperialism

Imperialism is both a line of thinking and a daily practice. Historically, this practice endorsed economic, military and political conquest and expansion around the world. As a line of thinking, it continues to manifest in various perspectives which have widespread cultural and intellectual implications for Indigenous people in contemporary times. Imperialism began in the 15th century as Europeans expanded their dominion around the world. Turtle Island - now called Canada – was among the nations colonized by Britain. The political, cultural, economic, and educational marginalization of Aboriginal people which subsequently stemmed from imperialist thought and practices were systemic in nature (Willinsky, 1998).

3.3.2 Colonialism

Colonialism is a corollary of imperialism and refers to the establishment of colonies which advance the interests of the ‘empire’ or imperialist, colonizing nations. As a line of thinking, colonialism was predicated upon erroneous, violent, and unjust practices in all realms of Indigenous peoples’ lives. This justification invoked liberalist assumptions (explained below) about the colonizers’ responsibility to civilize ‘the native’. Claims about paternalistic ‘development’ and the need to provide Indigenous peoples with unsolicited ‘benevolent aid’ distorted the true nature of the colonial endeavor. As McClean (2007) explains, “the de-valuing and/or demonizing of Aboriginal individuals, societies, and cultures functionally served colonialism by casting them as an impediment to the ‘natural’ processes of economy and civilization” (p. 31).

Colonial practices were the concrete manifestation of the colonial lines of thinking; these practices and lines of thinking functioned in tandem to construct the Canadian state. Like other territories, Canada was colonized to secure access to raw materials and commodities for the

French, and later the English. At first, these materials and commodities were exported to France and England. When the French and English subsequently settled in Canada, the colonialist enterprise led to the displacement of Indigenous peoples. This involved the imposition of Eurocentric legal, educational, spiritual, and political systems on Indigenous peoples and attempts to assimilate them. McClean (2004) states that “from the early stages of the Canadian colonial project, colonial authorities saw education as a functional mechanism for the creation of liberal citizens out of the “weird and waning race” of First Nations people in Canada” (p. 301). Education became a vehicle to ‘de-culturize’ Aboriginal peoples in order to secure access to labour, resources and land (Grande, 2005). Colonial formlines thus justified the implementation of residential schools and colonial systems of education. The impacts of residential schools and contemporary colonial systems of education continue to have a detrimental influence on Aboriginal peoples today.

3.3.3 Racism

‘Scientific’ racism (which originated from social Darwinism) was based on flawed research which supported the view that some peoples were biologically deficient in their mental and emotional capacities (Stonechild, 2007). According to this line of thinking, Aboriginal people were ‘un-civilized savages’ and inferior to ‘white Europeans’. As such, they would have difficulty adjusting to the social or cultural advances that the Europeans brought to their territory. Since that time, it has been widely established and proven that this form of discrimination had nothing to do with science. Nevertheless, racism continues to manifest into new forms, which include: institutional racism, personal racism, epistemological racism, and cultural racism (Henry & Tator, 2009). While it is important to note that each of the various manifestations of racism can be isolated for discussion purposes, I am in agreement with Henry and Tator (2009) who

suggest that “in reality each of these manifestations form a complex web of inter-related attitudes, feelings, beliefs, and behaviors that are linked to the collective belief system and are expressed in individual, institutional, and systemic policies and practices” (p. 31). Indigenous learners in the past and present continue to be impacted by all of these forms of racism in their daily lives as well as in educational institutional settings.

3.3.4 Liberalism

Classical liberal formlines developed and came into prominence in the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe and are part of a Western democratic political tradition. In its most basic sense, liberalism can be seen to include three assumptions: individual liberty, private property, and equality. However, as Smith (2009) asserts, “the meaning of each of these objectives and the procedures best thought to achieve them have varied over time according to historical circumstances” (p. 12). Despite its outward feel-good appearance, liberalism promotes a predatory individualism that ultimately seeks to homogenize (and consume) Indigenous people into its fold. Liberal formlines justify the legitimacy of colonial and contemporary appropriation of Indigenous lands and resources and are closely connected to the project of colonization and its capitalist expansion throughout Turtle Island. Liberal assumptions help to reinforce Canada’s ‘legitimacy’ as a State, and consequent jurisdiction over Aboriginal peoples. As Smith (2009) points out:

Liberalism is selective about [to] whom it bestows its benefits. It has a curious knack for passionately demanding freedom and the rights of individuals of diverse understandings and beliefs, while seeking at the same time to efface power imbalances in relation to power. It has a long history of finding pride in its inclusive nature, while at the same time

this history is unmistakably marked by the systemic and sustained political exclusion of various groups and ‘types’ of people (p. 6).

As such, liberalism provides Canada with an organizing ideology that institutionalizes the ‘Othering’ of First Nations people through its vast bureaucracy and remains a dominant configuration of Canadian society, symbolizing governance in this country today.

Focusing on liberalism also helps reveal the radical restructuring of Aboriginal peoples’ collective identity as part of a dividing mechanism utilized by Canada’s legal, social, economic and political institutions. Each of these institutions is supported by an assumption which upholds the notion of individual liberty in some shape or form. This assumption articulates the expectation that individuals be self-governing, responsible and autonomous in meeting their needs. Society is envisioned as a collection of individuals who need limited state protection to exercise their rights and obligations free from the excesses of the market or government (Fleras & Elliot, 2000). This thinking runs counter to First Nations’ epistemologies and cultures, wherein the social organization of the community consists of integral interdependencies which support an individual’s physical, social, emotional and mental wellbeing (Nee-Benham & Cooper, 2000). Taikaie Alfred (2005) explains that “Indigeniety is legitimized and negotiated only as a set of state- derived individual rights aggregated in a community social context-a very different concept than that of collective rights pre-existing and independent of the state.” In this sense, Canada has until quite recently been unreceptive to most imperatives that enhance group rights (particularly those that existed prior to its establishment) at the expense of the individual. As Fleras & Elliot (2000) say: “Anything that enhanced the group at the expense of the individual [is] viewed as retrograde” (p. 375). Historically, education served as an instrument to perpetuate Aboriginal peoples’ assimilation into the liberal norms of Canadian society. As will

be seen in the next section of this dissertation, liberalism is the basis for other trajectories of contemporary thought (i.e. social liberalism, multi-culturalism, humanitarianism, etc.).

3.3.5 Neo-liberalism

The formlines of imperialism, colonialism, liberalism, and racism that have historically configured higher education persist and continue to frame Indigenous higher education. Although a new(er) institutional design appears to have emerged, it continues to reflect traditional formlines and the apparent changes are superficial, obscuring the power dynamics and imbalance embedded in the design's anatomy. The historical contours of traditional formlines thus continue to shape educational practices and outcomes for Indigenous students studying at institutions of higher education. However, this is not to say that Aboriginal peoples' pursuit of self-determination through education³ and attempts to renegotiate the configuration of higher education have failed (Brayboy, Castagno & Maughn, 2008). Aboriginal peoples *are* contesting the power dynamics of hegemonic institutions and striving to reconfigure the parameters of higher education⁴. These efforts have borne fruit and given reason for hope, but progress has been slow as the old formlines are resistant to change. This is particularly so at present because current economic forces external to higher education favour the status quo.

These economic forces are driven by neo-liberalism, which has restructured higher education in a manner which reconstitutes the formlines of imperialism, colonialism and racism (McClean, 2007). Neo-liberalism is a market-based philosophy, which fundamentally opposes

³ Self-determination in higher education has mostly occurred through Aboriginal controlled institutions (First Nation University; Blue Quills College; Nicola Valley Institute of Technology).

⁴ Pidgeon (2007) has labeled these counter-hegemonic struggles as "pockets of presence".

social democratic principles and promotes competition, fiscal accountability, freedom of choice, privatization, standardization, and individualism in the educational sphere.

The current state of commerce (i.e., conglomerate corporate power within globalization) has required governments to adopt the neo-liberal philosophy to a certain extent, which has forced institutions to change their operations and styles of management to be congruent with a business model. In so doing, social relationships within educational institutions are redefined: students are transformed into consumers and the higher education system is redefined as a profit-making endeavor. Therein, knowledge becomes a commodity that is produced, bought and sold in a market environment while institutions of higher education are left with less government funding (Wotherspoon, 1998).

The neo-liberal restructuring of higher education is problematic on many levels and particularly so for Aboriginal peoples who wish to transition to and participate in higher education. As David Coburn (2000) maintains, neo-liberalism “is not particularly concerned about equality or [does not] regard it either as a positive virtue. That is if ‘the market’ is the best or most efficient allocator of goods and resources [institutions are] inclined to accept whatever the markets bring” (p. 138). Neo-liberal lines of thinking do not consider how an unfettered capitalist marketplace directly produces inequality and opposes the notion that democratic societies which advocate equality are obligated to redistribute resources to groups (such as Aboriginal peoples) who often do not have the ‘capital’ to ‘compete’ in the marketplace, or whose capital has been rendered irrelevant. As such, neo-liberalism de-historicizes the growth of capitalism, ignoring the exploitation of people and resources, and social imbalances that are inherent in this system. Consequently, it contributes to and is unconcerned about the exploitation

of Indigenous peoples and their lands, especially since neo-liberal philosophy assumes that those lands exist for profit (Grande, 2005). The neo-liberal emphasis within higher education therefore confronts Aboriginal peoples with several theoretical and practical problems as they transition into higher education.⁵

It must be noted that the formlines of imperialism, colonialism, liberalism and racism are not static, and nor are they forgotten institutional blue-prints of the past. At times they have intertwined with one another to re-enforce the tautness of the rigid linear structure of higher education institutions in order to prevent its design from changing too drastically. At other times, certain groups of people have sought to create new formlines with a shape and direction that challenges the old ones. Yet, no single line of thinking can be assigned causal or moral primacy, as state oppression is embedded in the collective consciousness (Sakej Youngblood Henderson, 2000). The five formlines that have been noted cannot fully capture the dynamic divisions within the institutional design because the higher education system is multi-dimensional, complex and characterized by contradictions which influence whether new lines of thinking and practices emerge in education. Nonetheless, the predominant formlines have retained some of their original shape and function. The names of legal, political and educational discourses pertinent to Indigenous peoples have changed in policy/written documents but most remain rooted in imperialist, colonial, liberal and racist assumptions (Baachi, 2000). In other words, the form and emphasis of the discourses have changed, but institutional designs and ways of thinking remain

⁵ The theoretical problems will be examined in the theory section of this dissertation.

much the same. As a result, they continue to negatively impact Indigenous persons' transition and participation in higher education in many powerful ways.

3.3.6 Indigenous Formlines

It is important to acknowledge attempts by Aboriginal scholars to create new Indigenous formlines. The works of several scholars (Archibald et al., 2010; Battiste, 2002; Battiste, 2008; Stonechild, 2006; Pidgeon, 2008a; Pidgeon, 2008b) best illuminate my analysis of the thinking and practices that have shaped Indigenous higher education jurisdiction, policy, governance, programs and student support services. For Indigenous communities, the goals and purposes of education extend beyond the bottom line thinking associated with neo-liberalism, wherein education is equated with increased income levels in functioning as a solution for social pathologies and Aboriginal peoples are viewed as an 'untapped labour reserve' for the Canadian economy. To state the contrary, Aboriginal scholars and communities have produced extensive documentation emphasizing that the pursuit and attainment of higher education significantly promotes the spiritual, mental, physical and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous peoples around the world (Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 2000; Hampton, 2005; Kuokkanen, 2007; Pidgeon, 2008b; Smith, 1999). As Marlene Brant Castellano (2000) poignantly states: "the promise of education is that it will instruct [Aboriginal] people to live long and well, respecting the wisdom of their ancestors and fulfilling their responsibilities in the circle of life" (p. xxxii). In a similar vein, Michelle Pidgeon (2008a, 2008b) suggests that most Indigenous students do not limit their definition of success to individual educational accomplishments and financial status following graduation. For many Indigenous students, higher education is valued because it enables them to build capacity within their communities and pursue aspirations for self-determination (p. 340).

Aboriginal peoples' assertion that education be seen as a vehicle for self-determination emerged from what is now known as the infamous "White Paper", which was introduced in 1969 by the Canadian federal government. This policy document sparked great controversy because it proposed to abolish the Indian Act and transfer the jurisdiction of Indigenous education to provincial governments. The formlines of colonialism, liberalism, imperialism and racism were clearly evident in this document, which advocated a brazen move to force assimilation. The document galvanized Aboriginal organizations and communities throughout Canada to resist the mandated threat of assimilation and propose alternative visions for their future. To this end, the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations) put forth a landmark educational policy proposal in 1972 titled 'Indian Control of Indian Education'. In writing this document, Aboriginal peoples created, for the first time in history, their own formlines to redesign the Canadian education system. The impact of this document was powerful and rippling, and it continues to reverberate in Indigenous education today. The proposal clearly expressed the Canadian Indigenous communities' aspiration to take a leading role in the education of their members. It took a comprehensive viewpoint in articulating First Nations' goals of local control, parental responsibility, and a culturally-based curriculum for youth and adult education programs. One of its key stated objectives was:

We want education to provide the setting in which our children can develop the fundamental attitudes and values which have an honoured place in Indian tradition and culture" (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p.2).

'Indian Control of Indian Education' (1972) was presented to Jean Chrétien, the former Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, and the federal government seriously

considered using it as the basis for new policy in February of 1973. Chrétien stated that Indian Affairs would respond to the proposal by reforming six aspects of educational policy: increasing the participation of First Nations in universities; involving Indigenous peoples in the management of K-12 schooling; consulting with the provinces regarding their involvement in Indian Education; establishing a First Nations cultural education centre; developing Indigenous education curriculums; providing instruction in native languages; and encouraging ‘Indians’ to participate in universities.

There have been several waves of Indigenous legal and political developments over the last 30 years⁶ which advanced the current emphasis on education for self-determination. As a ‘new’ formline, it has been configured by Indigenous peoples themselves and expresses the importance of education for Aboriginal communities. In addition, it has become a means to resist oppression by wider society (Hampton, 1995; Pidgeon, 2008; Stonechild, 2006).

The formline of self-determination provides a context for understanding Aboriginal youths’ experiences of university while simultaneously facilitating a strong critique of the colonial, racist, imperial and neo-liberalism formlines that permeate the structure of higher education. As Brayboy et al. (2013) have noted: “strong healthy Indigenous communities require individual community members who have been educationally successful” (p. 89). In order to be ‘educationally successful’ these individuals must also possess the cultural knowledge and skills

⁶ Given the time constraints of this dissertation, I am unable to explore the legal and political developments in detail. However, it is important to point out one of the most significant developments for First Nations’ political and educational autonomy. This occurred in 1982, when Canada repatriated its Constitution. The inclusion of Section 35-1 in the Canada Constitution Act signified a powerful political victory because it affirmed Aboriginal peoples’ existing treaty rights as well as other rights. Since this time, education for self- determination is seen as part of an extension of a Nation’s fundamental responsibility to educate its citizens.

necessary to apply their university credentials to the betterment of their communities in a culturally responsive way.

The challenge of incorporating the formline of self-determination into institutional structures aimed at serving the needs of mainstream populations is clearly evident when one examines the demographic reality of Aboriginal participation rates in Canadian universities, Aboriginal high school completion rates, and the university transition rate for Aboriginal youth into universities (which will be examined further in the next chapter).

In closing this section it is important to note that the five previously discussed formlines have been perpetuated from the past to the present in structuring Indigenous peoples' access to and participation in higher education. In Chapter 11, I will trace in greater detail how these formlines have shaped the institutional design of Aboriginal early university promotion initiatives and university transition programs.

3.4 Summary

A university education can be useful for Aboriginal students regardless of whether they wish to work in mainstream society, help their communities to exercise self-determination, or pursue their own understanding of health and well-being. However, the recent neo-liberal restructuring of higher education in Canada and throughout the world has worked against educational institutions' capacity to support Aboriginal high school to university transitions. It is often more difficult for Aboriginal learners to access and participate in higher education than it is for most other Canadians. This difficulty replicates the larger inequities that have long pervaded the lives of Indigenous peoples in Canada. That replication is still evident in the design of higher education institutions, which are continually re-created within the structure of imperial, colonial,

liberal, and racist formlines. As a result, historical a priori conditions have been maintained which inhibit Aboriginal peoples true participation in higher education. It is hoped that the new formline of self-determination will begin to erase some of these deleterious effects; and envision greater possibilities for Indigenous learners in higher education.

This chapter used the design principles of Northwest Coast art as an analogy for the current 'box' of higher education in Western institutions. This 'box' is comprised of sharp linear lines that represent Western epistemological orientations and all too often have effectively worked to circumscribe, limit, and adversely impact the educational goals of Indigenous learners.

As the formlines of Northwest Coast art are often carved or painted on the bentwood box, the metaphor builds on the Formline design analogy. However, the analogy elucidates what challenges, limitations and imbalances of higher education for Indigenous learners face, while the bentwood box functions as a metaphor of transformation and possibility. As such, it represents the multiple layers of meanings (epistemological, theoretical, and methodological) that I explore throughout my study in addition to framing my research design.

Using the box analogy to critique education is not new, and both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars have drawn upon it to reveal the conformity, rigidity and maintenance of norms that reflect the status quo in Western institutions of higher education. Within this context, the box of education is cast in a negative light. Accordingly, throughout this dissertation, I will attempt to trace how the formlines of imperialism, colonialism, racism, neo-liberalism that are drawn on the outside of the box continue to overlap and intersect with each other in new ways to reproduce an unwelcoming structure for Indigenous learners.

The next chapter of this dissertation will outline the major trends and gaps in the literature about Aboriginal high school to post-secondary transitions as well as detail the intentions and purposes of transition programs, while highlighting the need for further research on this subject. Additionally, it will identify small incremental changes in some programs, faculties, and practices that have begun to ‘bend’ the structural parameters of the box. These changes represent new formlines such as self-determination and give me hope that Indigenous epistemologies are gaining a stronger presence in academia as a form of expression and inquiry

Chapter 4: Understanding Existing Knowledge & Research

4.1 Introduction

As mentioned, the third side of the box corresponds to my literature review, which: (1) examines the demographical characteristics of Aboriginal students in higher education institutions; (2) maps the multiple pathways to university transitions; (3) explores the nature and intentions of early university promotion initiatives and transition programs; (4) discusses the purpose, benefits and challenges of Aboriginal university transition; and 5) identifies gaps in the research that highlight the need for future research. This section will provide a critical appraisal of the quantitative and qualitative information on Aboriginal post-secondary transitions and reinforce the need for further research in this area.

4.2 Demographics: An Incomplete Story of Numbers

Demographic information not only provides a statistical basis to support the necessity of the intended research, but also illustrates the need for greater institutional accountability so that more Aboriginal high school students transition into Canadian universities.

Despite the various efforts of Aboriginal communities, federal and provincial governments and higher education institutions, there are significant differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal university participation and completion rates.⁷ An examination of

⁷ It should be noted that there are many ways of identifying the Aboriginal population which can result in different statistics for particular identity groups. For example, the Canadian Census examines data that are based on definitions of 'ethnic origin', 'Aboriginal identity', and 'Registered Indian' and 'Band membership'. The Census is considered to be the primary source of data on the educational attainment of Aboriginal people in Canada. From the 1996 Census onwards, Statistics Canada has been asking a question about Aboriginal identity that allows respondents to self identify themselves with one or more of the three constitutionally recognized groups in Canada: First Nations (North American Indian), Metis and Inuit. According to Piotr Wilk, Jerry White and Eric Guimond (2009) "the primary disadvantage of the Aboriginal identity concept as a

cross-sectional Canadian census data from 1981-2006 reveals that university attainment levels for all Aboriginal groups has increased minimally. John Clement states that “in 2006, the Registered ‘Indian’ population had a much lower overall university degree attainment (5 percent) than the other Canadian population” (18 percent). Further, for “the Registered ‘Indian’ population older age cohorts (30-34 to 50-54) appear to possess slightly higher proportions with a university degree than younger ones. In contrast young other Canadian cohorts possess higher proportions with a university degree” (p. 75-76). In addition, the Registered ‘Indian’ population in post-secondary institutions contains a high percentage of women who have children (AUCC, 2008; Clement, 2009). The university attainment levels for Indigenous people of Inuit ancestry increased from 1981-2001, although Chris Penney (2009) notes “this increase is actually fairly small, from just over 1.5 percent to percent (p.53). The proportion of Metis individuals who graduated from university with a degree was the highest of all Aboriginal groups, with seven percent of Metis attaining a degree, in comparison to 18.5 percent of other Canadian populations (Piotr et al., 2009). These statistics clearly indicate that there is a correlation between Aboriginal statuses/identities, geographical location and university attainment. As Jerry White, Julie Peters and Nicolas Spence (2009) point out, “those peoples who are in the cities, and those who are closer to market centres and economic development have a higher educational attainment. Those in the North or in First Nations communities (reserves) fare most poorly” (p.5).

measurement for ethnic and cultural affiliation is that the Census did not collect information on self-reported Aboriginal identity before 1996, making it impossible to do any time trend analysis that would include pre-1996 data” (Penny, 2008). In addition, many Aboriginal people may self identify-with more than one group, creating an overlap between categories. Finally, the differentiation of the Aboriginal population makes it difficult to determine an overall figure for university attainment for all of these groups combined.

There are also regional and provincial differences in the type of educational institutions that Aboriginal peoples attend. For example, in British Columbia, seven percent of off-reserve Aboriginal⁸ people hold a university degree, as compared with 24 percent of the non-Aboriginal population. This finding reveals that Aboriginal students are more ‘inclined’ (or in other words, pushed by the education system) to enroll in post-secondary programs that do not lead to a university degree (Heslop, 2009).

Further, in 2006/07, 39 percent of Aboriginal students in British Columbia’s public post-secondary system were registered at rural colleges, while 23 percent were registered at universities (Ministry of Advanced Education, 2009). The B.C. Ministry of Advanced Education & Labour Market Development (2008) reports:

Roughly half the Aboriginal students in British Columbia’s public colleges, university colleges, institutes and Thompson Rivers University are registered in developmental or continuing education programs, compared with about a third of non-Aboriginal students. (p. 1).

Finally, the high school completion rates for Aboriginal students within the province of B.C. remain lower than those for non-Aboriginal students. For example, in 2011/2012, the provincial public high school Dogwood Program six-year completion rate was 57 percent for Aboriginal students, compared with 84 percent for non-Aboriginal students (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2011a; p 29). However, Aboriginal graduation rates vary across the province. The

⁸ As previously stated, there is great difficulty for-accurately measuring Aboriginal student’s participation in university their university attainment levels reflects because of differences in identity among Aboriginal groups and the way that these groups are measured by various levels of government. As can be seen from this quote, the B.C. Ministry of Advanced Education tracks students according to Aboriginal ancestry, and does not provide further distinctions according to other identities (i.e. Metis, Inuit, ect).

Vancouver School District (2011) has among the lowest graduate rates (30.8 percent) for Aboriginal students, even though a high number of Aboriginal students live within the district, which is located in an urban setting (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2011 b). In contrast, the Sooke School (2011) on Vancouver Island boasts a graduation rate of 61.7 percent, one of the highest graduation rates for Aboriginal learners in the province. (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2011c).

High school completion rates clearly have a direct correlation with the number of Aboriginal students who are eligible to transition to university directly from high school. The Student Transitions Research project reports that the high school to university immediate transition rate to a Bachelor's program in BC was 11.1 percent for Aboriginal students and 25.9 percent for non-Aboriginal students in the 2009/10 school year (Heslop, 2012). The B.C. Ministry of Education (2012) reports that that 261 Aboriginal students transitioned directly to a British Columbia post-secondary institution in 2010/2011, as compared to 1437 non-Aboriginal students. When this number is sub-divided into categories of higher education institutions (e.g., community college, institute, research intensive university, and teaching intensive university), only 5 Aboriginal students transitioned to a research intensive university, with the majority (150) transitioning into a community college (Ministry of Advanced Education, 2010).

The above statistics highlight the importance of examining Aboriginal high school university transition experiences. It should also be noted that while the statistics provide a useful starting point for analyzing Aboriginal learners' transitions into higher education institutions,

they do not by any means tell the complete story.⁹ Therefore, it is critical to consider qualitative information along with quantitative ‘data’ and to consider stories of Aboriginal persons’ lived experience in addition to the numbers.

4.3 Aboriginal High School to Post-Secondary Transitions and Pathways

There are a number of pathways for Aboriginal learners to transition into university: early university preparation programs and initiatives; distance education; on-line learning; satellite programs; university transition programs; Aboriginal controlled institutions transfers; community college transfers; or direct entry from high school (Adamanti-Trache & Andres, 2008; Pidgeon, 2008a). Most of the limited research that has been done on transitions tends to focus on the point when Aboriginal learners enter university, rather than viewing the multiple pathways and complex circumstances that shape their decisions to pursue higher education.

Many scholars emphasize the importance of identifying the ways in which high schools open up pathways into higher education for Indigenous students. Kanu’s (2006) study reveals the need for high schools to be held accountable for facilitating Aboriginal learners’ graduation rates, given that they provide a vital ‘pipeline’ to higher education. Ortiz & Heavy Runner (2003) call for attention to be placed on the effects that poverty and family difficulties have on patterns of educational achievement for Aboriginal students. They assert that “success in college reflects students’ high school experiences and socialization in the home community” (p. 219). Cheryl Aman’s (2008) study examines the impact of mobility on Aboriginal students’ academic achievement and ability to complete Grade 12 studies. She argues that further research on

⁹ Findlay & Weir (2009) have noted the problems (e.g., the usage of colonial categories, over-simplifications of complex identities and categories, researcher bias) that can occur when relying on quantitative information solely to inform perspectives about Aboriginal people.

student mobility is required if educators and advocates seek higher graduation rates and achievement levels for Aboriginal learners. Many other articles and monographs (Battiste, 2000b; Blair, 2001; Castagno & Brayboy 2006; Cajete, 1994; Corbiere, 2000; Gamlin, 2003; Stiffarm, 1998) have stressed the need for a culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy to keep students motivated and to help them to feel comfortable in school, thus supporting them in completing their studies.

It is important to note that, through its policies, the K-12 school system constructs differences between Aboriginal students as well as between other student populations. The literature emphasizes that the inadequacies of the K-12 system will require higher education institutions and Aboriginal communities to develop multiple strategies to support Aboriginal youth while they are in K-12 if their transition into university is to be increased. Early university preparation initiatives are a promising strategy, as planning and preparing for university while in high school increases students' likelihood of meeting university eligibility requirements and 'successfully' completing university (Fann, 2004).

4.4 Early University Preparation Initiatives and Youth Engagement

Positive experiences in elementary and high school significantly shape the pathways available to learners who wish to attend university. The K-12 system clearly plays a critical role in providing students with information, guidance and resources to help them prepare for entering higher educational institutions. Fann (2004) argues that high school staff (teachers, counselors, and administrators) channel students into college, university and vocational schools. To date, there has been very little empirical research that examines how students' relationships with high school staff influence their decision-making about higher education or career aspirations. Nor is

there much research examining the types of information and resources that public schools provide to Aboriginal learners and their families.

Research has shown, however, that children who aspire to attain higher education are commonly supported and encouraged by their parents (Hossler, Braxton and Coopersmith, 1989; Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper, 1999, McDonough, 1997). Because many Aboriginal parents have not attended college or university, they are often unable to provide the critical information that is necessary to help their children prepare and become eligible for university (Fann, 2004) even though they share a desire for their children to succeed in the educational realm (Steinhauer, 2012). As a result, many Aboriginal families must rely upon the K-12 system, universities, and Aboriginal organizations to provide their children with information about university preparation.

To this end, Aboriginal organizations and institutions of higher education are collaborating on a number of initiatives and practices. For example, the Association of University Colleges of Canada (AUCC) (2010) is beginning to document “Aboriginal Youth Engagement” as part of its reporting requirements for Aboriginal programs and student services. Further, the Assembly of First Nations (2011) and AUCC recently hosted an on-line dialogue with Aboriginal youth across Canada to listen to their thoughts and feelings about university education. Such efforts are part of a growing trend among universities, Aboriginal organizations, and all levels of government to acknowledge the importance of early university promotion initiatives for Indigenous learners.

Some universities across the country are now beginning to offer a limited range of early initiatives and strategies aimed at encouraging Aboriginal youth to attend university. These include: Aboriginal high school career fairs (Inspire, 2012); Aboriginal summer high school-to-university bridging programs (which range from general to specifically focusing on particular

disciplines); hiring Aboriginal university recruitment officers to visit schools and communities; and cultural camps which emphasize Indigenous traditions, such as connection to the land on which the university is located. An environmental scan of all AUCC-recognized universities shows that 15 high school summer programs are in existence. It is assumed that these initiatives and programs not only provide information about university programs and promote interest in higher education, but also introduce Aboriginal youth to mentors and role models.

4.5 University Transition Programs

University transition programs are the dominant pathway by which most Aboriginal learners enter university. Educational institutions and branches of government give these programs a variety of names: university and college entrance programs; access programs; transition programs; and bridging programs. Holmes (2006) explains that in recent years universities have established transition programs for a number of reasons, including “[to respond] to a perception of social inequities. . .[react] to government promptings, [promote] the search for competitive advantage, [and]. . .[assess] local demographic realities” (p.20). The 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) notes that Aboriginal community learning centres, regional colleges, and universities offer transition programs. Students in these programs are conditionally admitted to university through an admissions process that utilizes personal references and interviews, and also takes the life experiences of the applicant into account. An environmental scan of the (AUCC) (2011) reveals that there are currently 45 Aboriginal transition programs at 29 of the 54 AUCC recognized universities in Canada (Appendix B provides an itemized list of these programs). Most of these programs are designed to attract two different student populations: (a) mature students who have been out of school for a long period of time and may not have a high school diploma; and (b) recent high school graduates who may

not have the academic pre-requisites for university entrance. Little empirical research has been conducted about the population composition of these programs.

The perceived benefit of transition programs is that they allow many Aboriginal students who have been streamed into non-academic high school programs to acquire the qualifications necessary to apply for university. Many scholars (Aman, 2008; Battiste, 2000b; Fann, 2004; Hunt Jannouchi, 2009; Kanu, 2006; Lee, 2007) have explained that the K-12 school system is problematic for Aboriginal learners because it fails to equip them with the skills necessary to satisfy university entry requirements because they have been streamed into non-academic or vocational programs instead. To address this lack, transition programs may include a smorgasbord of required academic courses (such as math, science, English, and computer skills) as well as an exploration of career possibilities – along with Aboriginal history courses designed to enhance students’ cultural knowledge and strengthen their identities (Holmes, 2006; RCAP, 2006). Although the location, delivery and funding of transition programs many differ significantly, their goals and purposes are generally the same.

Government reports note that university transition programs are also considered to be costly, so financing is a constant concern. As Holmes (2006) states:

Depending on location, capitation-based provincial funding programs for universities may not cover all the components of these programs if they are not for credit. The high faculty and staff- to- student ratio in most transition programs is inherently expensive. Some universities rely upon private donors to support the additional costs, while other either pass on the costs to the student in the form of additional tuition fees for the non credit support course or absorb the costs internally (p. 21).

As some programs are still non-credit, they are not supported by the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (formerly fall under the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs) Canada (INAC) post-secondary assistance program. For students, having to pay for them out of pocket is a prohibitive barrier that can ultimately mean they do not have the opportunity to attend university. This leads me to question what might be the true social cost of Canadian institutions' lack of commitment to fund these programs on an on-going and consistent basis.

A few evaluative studies have been conducted about Aboriginal college and university programs in Canada and the United States. First, Pickrell's (2008) research focuses on the Aboriginal Success in Trades and Technology (ASST) program, a post-secondary transition program at the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Knowledge. Pickrell reported the ASST to have only made somewhat of a difference in supporting students' transition into a trades-related program. Second, an earlier research project by Lee (2007) aimed to determine the impact of the North Carolina University Transition Program (NCUTP) on African American and Native American students' university experiences and academic performance. However, the (NCUTP) and Lee (2007) approach university transitions from a deficit perspective. They fail to consider the impact cultural identities and institutional structures have on African American or Native American educational transition. Not surprisingly, the AOTP program made no difference for its participants when they were compared to students who had entered university through the traditional admissions route and then graduated. Third, another evaluative study conducted by Wright (1998) details a transition program initiated by the Squamish Nation (in British Columbia), in partnership with Capilano College (now Capilano University), to improve the success rate of its post-secondary students. This partnership was based upon principles of First Nations self-determination in that it was based on the needs of the Squamish community and

locally controlled. The objectives of the transition program included: a) the assessment of college readiness of each student for college; b) the provision of basic skills necessary for college success; and the close monitoring and supervision of each participant by faculty and community members. Wright (1998) reports a substantial success rate for students in the program even though no formal statistics or qualitative information is provided. A comparison between students who enrolled in the transition program and students who enrolled in university through the traditional enrollment process is needed to distinguish the success rates of this program.

Lastly, Cathy Richardson & Natasha Blanchet Cohen (2000) provide a case study of the Nunavut Sivunkisavut Program, a transition program designed to make post-secondary education more relevant to Inuit youth. The authors report that the program has high attendance and attendees are generally satisfied with it. However, they state that “only a handful [of the students who took the program] have graduated from university” (p. 175).

The vast majority of research on Indigenous higher education emphasizes the struggle that ensues when Aboriginal students enter university. This growing body of literature on barrier and success factors which influence the retention and performance of Aboriginal students in higher education extends beyond Canada to New Zealand, Australia and the United States. In Canada, reports published by RCAP (2006), Malatest & Associates (2002), and Malatest & Associates (2004) concur that the problems faced by Aboriginal students at universities reflect a number of factors: historical, economic, personal, demographic, geographic and socio-cultural (Holmes, 2006). Recent studies also explain how these factors overlap with each other to become persistent and ongoing barriers. For example, Erwin (2009) examines the experiences of Aboriginal students who are currently enrolled in or previously attended an unidentified

Canadian community college. The study finds that barriers to transition include a lack of knowledge and understanding about IK in institutions of higher education; the institution's hegemonic structure; pedagogical values and principles which do not acknowledge the role of spirituality in IK; and ongoing racism. The First Nations Education Steering Committee (2005), Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (2007), and Assembly of First Nations (2011) add that Aboriginal students in higher education also face non-academic barriers, which include: social discrimination, unemployment, poverty, mobility, and urban re-location.

On the other hand, there is also a great deal of literature that focuses on the strengths that help Aboriginal students persist in post-secondary studies. To this end, a number of mixed method and qualitative studies have explored various success-oriented strategies that make college transitions easier (Fleming, 2010; Gilbert, 1996; Heavy Runner, 2009; Jackson & Smith, 2001; Lavendure, 2009; Lee, 2007; Ortiz & Heavy Runner, 2003; Schmidte, 2008). Fleming (2010) examined the factors that eased and impeded American Indian students' retention at a mainstream post-secondary institution in the United States. She found that the most salient factors promoting a meaningful educational experience were institutional/personal support, cultural resources, and financial resources. The barriers to success included institutional barriers, a lack of support, and a lack of opportunities for cultural expression and appreciation. Korkow (2008) examined the factors that are important to Native American student success in higher education and found that they included support systems comprised of family, peers and mentors; culture and spirituality; personal attributes (such as self- confidence, abstinence, persistence, hard work, the ability to ask for help, and the ability to set plans and goals); and the determination to overcome barriers. Interestingly, Korkow's (2008) study did not find that student success was differentiated by gender, academic university level, age, cultural/spiritual

values, or urban versus reservation backgrounds (91). Lavendure (2009) was the only Canadian study to create a quantitative profile of the characteristics of First Nations college students. According to this study, a successful First Nations college student may have the following characteristics:

female, approximately 32 years old, may/may not read more than average, has attended public school, graduated with a high school diploma, withdrew or took a non-linear path during college, entered college with an ACT score of 20, may or may not have felt academically prepared to enter college, attained a 3.6-4.0 college grade average, expects to continue in graduate school, was highly influenced by family and financial security, and attended college close to home (p. 85).

Lavendure's study corroborates findings in the literature that identify other characteristics of successful Aboriginal post-secondary students, including: the ability to think critically; adequate academic and study skills; engagement in campus life; the support and encouragement of faculty; the ability to live in two worlds; cultural competence; and access to spiritual resources and financial support (p.85). Notably absent from these characteristics were: family support and encouragement.

While an understanding of the personal characteristics that help Aboriginal students to succeed in university is important, the literature increasingly addresses the need for higher education institutions to take greater responsibility for Indigenous higher education. This reflects the view that the organization of educational institutions, their formal structures, their resources, and their patterns of association impact Aboriginal learners' retention and success in these institutions (Heavy Runner, 2009). If higher educational institutions want to fully engage the Aboriginal population and better understand the barriers that impede this demographics'

postsecondary success, it is imperative for them to understand that multiple worldviews and knowledge systems coexist (Pickrell, 2008). Pidgeon's (2008 a) seminal doctoral thesis points to the need for postsecondary institutions to support Aboriginal students' success by means of personnel, programs, institutional policies, student support services, educational practices, and culturally relevant curriculum.

The literature for the most part does not identify exemplary early university promotion initiatives or university transition programs. However, a few studies do highlight successful models and practices that enhance Aboriginal transitions to college. For example, Ortiz & Heaver Runner (2003) highlight the success of the 'The Family Education Model' (FEM). They state that FEM:

the paradigm from a focus on drop-outs to a family-centred approach, building on student and family strengths...In FEM the focus is on seeing students not at-risk, but at promise... The FEM offer strategies to help tribal college students develop a sense of connection with the college. Students' families are involved in cultural activities such as social dancing, feasting, storytelling, gardening and cooking. In this way the entire family feels a part of the college experience, instead of resenting the time the students spends on his or her studies (p. 230).

This model is consistent with the previously mentioned success factors for post-secondary transitions, which emphasize the importance of expanding support to an Aboriginal learners' family, culturally relevant activities, and a strength-based approach to the educational transition.

4.6 **Summary**

The literature reviewed illuminates several themes relevant to Aboriginal learners' university transition experiences and the need for my proposed research. First, significant

barriers (i.e., financial, cultural, and institutional) continue to exist in the K-12 and higher education systems. These barriers will need to be eliminated if more Aboriginal students are to complete Grade 12 with the academic preparation and institutional knowledge needed to transition to university. Second, although Aboriginal students face barriers to success in the K-12 system as well as higher education, a number of factors have been identified which help Aboriginal students to successfully transition to university and complete their studies. These factors include support from family, faculty, peers and university staff; a connection to community and culture; and the need for mentoring relationships prior to and during university attendance. Third, new research conducted by Indigenous scholars' calls for higher education institutions to assume greater responsibility for Aboriginal students' persistence and success. Fourth, since the majority of the research focuses on high school to college transitions, there is a need for more research on Aboriginal high school to university transitions. Fifth, current research tends to focus on adaptation to the university environment and pays little attention to the transitional pathways that lead Aboriginal learners from high school to the university. Sixth, the literature tends to examine the transition experience at the point when Aboriginal learners enter a program rather than viewing it as a process that begins long before students walk into the university. Lastly, more research is needed to determine how universities can collaborate with the K-12 system (both on and off reserve), Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal organizations, and Aboriginal governing bodies (i.e.: AFN, Bands, Nations, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, Metis Association) to ensure that Aboriginal students successfully transition from high school to university.

As has been noted, there is a lack of empirical research investigating university transitions in view of identifying exemplary high school to university transition models, practices

or programs. Most importantly, there is a lack of knowledge about how Aboriginal youth and their families understand and experience the various high-school-university transition pathways. The voices of Aboriginal youth are therefore seldom heard in research that pertains to them and can impact their futures.

My study aims to address the identified gaps in the research and both reinforce and extend the scarce body of knowledge about university transitions by listening to the voices of Aboriginal youth and their families, and their communities. I feel that a better understanding of the experiences Aboriginal learners and families go through as they transition from their communities and the K-12 system to university can have important consequences for the educational 'success' of Aboriginal youth in Canadian universities. The next chapter discusses the meaning of Indigenous knowledge and its configuration within the research design.

Chapter 5: Indigenous Knowledge(s)

5.1 Introduction

The top of the box details my exploration of Indigenous knowledge(s) and its configuration into the theoretical and methodological design of the study. I close the chapter with a personal story that details the challenges for Indigenizing the academy so that it is more receptive of Indigenous knowledges.

5.2 Understanding Indigenous Knowledge(s)

As noted above, the theoretical and methodological design of this study is shaped by the epistemology and ontology of Indigenous knowledge(s). Many Indigenous scholars emphasize that advancing an understanding of Indigenous knowledge is critical to innovation in Indigenous education and research as well as to the transformation of higher educational institutions (Archibald, 2008, Battiste, 2000a; Battiste, 2000b; Hampton, 2005; Smith, 1999; Hunt-Jannouchi, 2009; Pidgeon, 2008a). This chapter provides an overview of the meaning of IKs in order to open another entry point into Martin Nakata's (2007a; 2007 b) cultural interface, which will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Indigenous knowledge(s) (IKs) refers to the multiple Indigenous knowledge systems that encompass the technological, social, economic, philosophical, spiritual, educational, legal and governmental elements of particular Indigenous cultures throughout the world. As IKs are context-specific and interwoven within a given community's lived experience, they are dynamic and ever-changing to reflect environmental and social adaptations. Indigenous Knowledges are therefore not a singular body of knowledge, but are multi-dimensional and pluralistic in that they contain many layers of being, knowing, and modes of expression. Although IKs are diverse, they

also share some common characteristics in that they are generally ecological, relational, holistic, pluralistic, experiential, timeless, communal, and transmitted from Elders to youth through oral traditions. This description captures Indigenous epistemologies and accentuates the profound relationship between Indigenous people, nature, and the spiritual world.

As a growing field of inquiry, IKs have garnered national and international attention from scholars interested in educational innovation. According to Marie Battiste (2008):

The recognition and activation of IK today is an act of empowerment by Indigenous peoples. The task for Indigenous academics has been to affirm and activate this [w]holistic paradigm of Indigenous knowledge to reveal the wealth and richness of Indigenous languages, worldviews, teachings and experiences, all of which have [until recently] been systemically excluded from contemporary educational institutions (p. 2).

Aboriginal scholars such as Battiste are asserting that including IKs in the academy strongly supports self-determination efforts. The next chapter considers the nuances, contradictions, contestations, and possibilities that characterize the process of creating places for IK in the academy, while maintaining that different knowledge systems are continually enriched by their interaction with each other.

In the following chapter, Martin Nakata's (2007a; 2007 b) work on the cultural interface provides a theoretical frame for understanding the Aboriginal Early University Preparation Initiatives and Aboriginal University Transition programs (AEUPIs/AUTPs) examined in this research.

5.3 “I”ndigenizing the Academy

I will close this chapter with a personal story about naming my transition experience and one of the challenges that I encountered in “I”ndigenizing the academy.

A door opens and I am brought inside from the white frozen landscape that I have been traversing. I have been fighting a dead battle with no hope of changing history or its collective consciousness. A kind gesture warms my heart and brings with it a rippling effect into my body, mind and spirit. My spirit wonders why did I stay outside so long when the real work starts by being in balance with the self and extends outward to the world. An opened door is all it took to change my perspective, ground me, and put me back into the present. The present is what inspires me because this is where transformation is possible. I reflect about what I learned by being out in the cold so long and realize that I am no longer afraid to journey through alienating places or to give them a name.

Linda Smith (1999) writes that “naming is about containing as much control over meanings as possible. By naming the world’ people name their realities” (p.157). I recently sat down for an interview with a media and communications specialist for Douglas College after a good friend of mine who works for the institution suggested that they contact me. The interviewer wanted to ask me about my experiences at Douglas College and what led me to create an “Aboriginal Survival Guide to Post-Secondary.” It took me two weeks to respond to the email invitation because I did not think that the institution would print my comments about my shaky transition experience. However, after some quiet contemplation I realized it would be disrespectful and unprofessional not to respond to the email. I also realized that this interview

could be an opportunity for me to air my thoughts and feelings about the need for greater institutional supports for Indigenous students within its walls.

On the day of the interview, Tamara, the interviewer, encouraged me to “talk freely” and if necessary I would do some revising at a later time. I let her know that I would be letting myself and my community down if I weren’t honest about my experience. The truth was the only thing that I could tell. The interview was over in 10 minutes, with Tamara promising me that she would be in touch once she had written the article and would send it to me before it was printed. I silently wondered what the article would look like.

After a couple of weeks, Tamara sent the article. Much to my surprise it reflected my words, and the “laundry list of recommendations” that I had for British Columbia’s post-secondary institutions. I made a few minor revisions and sent them back to her. A week later, I received her response which stated:

Thanks for your feedback and changes...I have made some further changes. First off, the powers that be at Douglas found that the story put Douglas in a bit of a negative light. My bad on that one -- my journalistic side kicked in when you and I were talking, and I found your story quite powerful and wanted to tell it as you had told it to me. It seems I forgot that I was working in a marketing department. Oops. The other thing is, we are moving away from long stories and toward shorter, profile-type pieces. So the story has been condensed a fair bit. I think I have managed to tell your story without glossing over anything or attempting to "brighten" things up. I chose to focus more on the positive things: your writing of the guide, your PhD studies and what you hope to accomplish.

About capitalizing "Indigenous" - I get where you are coming from, but we follow Canadian Press style, and the word takes a small "i." (Interestingly, "Aboriginal" takes a capital "A.") Same goes for "Elder."

I was upset after seeing the email and questioned how much had truly changed for 'Indigenous people in higher educational settings. I once again thought about asking them not to print the article. I then decided to give my friend a call and let him know my dilemma. He reiterated my feelings and agreed that they should honour my request to spell "Indigenous" with a capital "I" just like the "B"ritish and the "F"rench. He also told me that the college was reformatting the information on its website and was condensing everyone's stories, not just mine. I told him I didn't mind them condensing my story but that I was irked that "the powers that be" found it too "negative". I let him know that at least I had an email that provided a clear example of an institutional attempt to 'white wash' my words and that it would make a good journal article at a later date. A week later, I received an email from my friend. It stated:

I went into MCO [Marketing and Communications Office] last week and asked them about your story. I said the capital "I" for Indigenous was a deal breaker. I said that it is the same as First Nation's and Aboriginal...they are all Proper Nouns for us. So, they said they would change it back to capital I, just for you. Way to go! (Personal Correspondence, May 23rd, 2011).

Chapter 6: The Seam

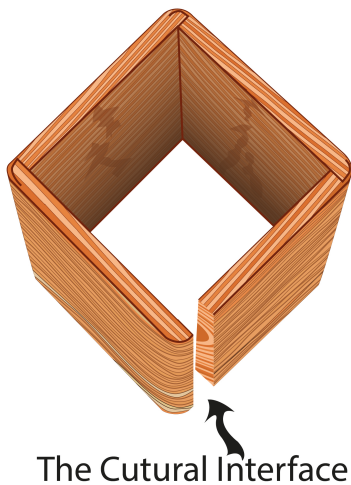


Figure 5 The Seam or “Cultural Interface” of the Cedar Plank After Being Steam Bent

6.1 Introduction

As previously discussed, the seam of the box, which remains after the box has bent visually, represents the cultural interface. Nakata (2007a; 2007 b) invokes the concept of the ‘cultural interface’ as a space that privileges Indigenous interests through the recovery and maintenance of IK systems in higher education. As such, it facilitates an interrogation of Western knowledge systems in order to advance an appreciation of the various gifts that Indigenous peoples bring to the academy. Further, it provides a complex view of how “interwoven, competing, and conflicting discourses and knowledge systems intersect” and must be constantly negotiated or ‘bent’ in an effort to reform or rebalance the unequal power relations, discrepancies in values, and social discontinuities that impact Indigenous learners’ experience of higher education. Throughout this chapter and the analysis of the findings, I have extended Nakata’s concept of the cultural interface to include: wholism, transformation and self-determination as vital elements that are necessary for this space to achieve its positive potential. I construe the in/visible seam as open in this stage of my research design in order to create a space

that enables me to investigate, negotiate and reconcile the characteristics of the cultural interface (see above figure for an illustration of this idea). This chapter begins by detailing the principles that are foundational to the concept of the cultural interface and goes on to show how Aboriginal Early University Promotion Initiatives/University Transition Programs (AEUPIs/AUTPs) are an example of the cultural interface. Lastly, I will examine some of the epistemological and discursive underpinnings of the cultural interface.

6.2 Aboriginal Early University Promotion Initiatives and Aboriginal University Transition Programs as a Cultural Interface

The cultural interface is an important theoretical tool that can illuminate the analysis of the findings from this study. I will demonstrate how the cultural interface can be applied to AEUPIs and AUTPs. Although there are countless cultural interfaces in the world, for the purposes of this dissertation I have focused on the examples of British Columbia educational sites and AEUPIs/AUTPs specifically.¹⁰ Graham Smith (2005) asserts that there are multiple sites of struggle within Indigenous education that must be engaged at the global level in order to transform the current social, educational, political, and economic realities of Indigenous peoples.

In exploring the first principle of Indigenous peoples' location within contested knowledge landscapes, Nakata (2007 b) states:

Indigenous people have a long experience of being located in this space of contested positions at the cultural interface... In this space are histories, politics,

¹⁰ Note that at certain points I have also referenced AUTP's from other universities AUTPs that were not a part of this study to provide further examples for the analysis.

economics, multiple and interconnected discourses, social practices and knowledge technologies which condition how we all come to look at the world, how we come to know and understand our changing realities in the everyday, and how and what knowledge we operationalise in our daily lives (p. 8).

His remarks bring to light the fact that Indigenous peoples have been living in the contested space between European and Western knowledge systems ever since first contact. Most Indigenous students (both rural and urban) who enter a university today will have gained an awareness and understanding about IK in their communities. At the same time, they were exposed to Western knowledge systems as they grew up. Indigenous students have all experienced and understand Western epistemology due to: their K-12 schooling; use of the English language; the intergenerational effects of residential schools; and the influences of media, technology, and pop culture. Consequently, Indigenous students have learned to subscribe to both knowledge systems. As Margaret Kovach (2010) explains:

The relationship with the settler society impacts our world daily, in the supermarket, in neighborhoods, and in educational institutions. In post-secondary education. Indigenous students experience the burn of colonial research [and education] on a consistent basis, most often through the suppression of Indigenous knowledges (p.76).

However, most Indigenous learners possess a degree of understanding of Indigenous epistemology, which Nakata (2007b) claims is usually maintained “via ways of storytelling, art, family, kinship structures, and socializing children etc.” (p.12), as well through knowledge of the land and traditional practices (for those who have access to these practices). Indigenous people

are thus constantly engaged in the cultural interface and continually, often unconsciously, negotiating Western and Indigenous modes of knowing and being in the world (p.110).

When discussing the second principle regarding the tensions Indigenous students experience in the cultural interface, Nakata notes that the experience is shaped by the subjective relationships and interactions that the students have with the various actors who co-occupy this space. According to Nakata (2007 b):

[It] takes into account the various forms of agency created in local sites through the social organization of knowledge and its technologies and brings to life how people engage and participate in and through time (p.12).

As sites of the cultural interface, university systems are the product of the cultural and political agendas that shape their social processes and determine what types of knowledge they circulate and legitimize (the epistemological underpinnings of the various knowledge(s) that circulate and are produced ‘about’, ‘for’ and ‘with’ Indigenous peoples in university transition programs will be explored in the next section of this chapter). For this reason, Nakata (2007 a) is critical of any claim that supports a structural functionalist view of higher educational programming. He states that:

the interface [cannot] be viewed solely in structuralist terms though it does quite clearly have structural elements and effects, and it is in the structures of institutional practice that changes and transformation are sought. It is much more complex than structural conditions suggest or can describe” (p. 198).

Nakata's understanding of the cultural interface infers that the university actors who develop AEUPIs/AUTPs base these programs on subjective language and actions that are collectively deployed in their interactions. These particular subjectivities reflect deeply ingrained epistemological, cultural, and political values and motivations and are perpetuated through various language and knowledge practices (an example of this will be provided in the next section). Interactions between actors within the university system therefore give shape to and reinforce the mandate of university programs. This in turn creates a seemingly coherent structure (similar to the formline analogy discussed in Chapter 2), which creates coherence between university actors and the organization of programs, including programs and curriculums for Indigenous students. When Indigenous students participate in AEUPI/AUTP and bring IK into the institution, it becomes a cultural interface.

With regard to the third principle, that Indigenous people find agency in their history and the present, I argue that transition programs function as a cultural interface that derives meaning from the tensions and contradictions between the 'colliding trajectories' of epistemologies and formlines that mediate Indigenous learners' experience in these programs. Accordingly, Nakata (2007 a) argues that "any analysis of descriptions of [the AEUPI/AUTP] experience needs to reveal the politics of those relations [between epistemologies and discourses] by including the conflicts, the contradictions, [and] the incoherence of contesting positions..." that characterize the cultural interface (p. 209). (Please see findings in Chapter 9, for a detailed description of students' experiential stories about the AEUPIs/AUTPs).

The concept of the cultural interface would clearly be no more than a theoretical construct if it were not understood through the lived experience of Indigenous students who

respond, act, and interact with others within this space. Indigenous students' prior experiences inside and outside the university contribute to the discursive position they occupy in university transition programs. Although Indigenous students will invariably have different accounts and backgrounds due to their individual subjectivities (i.e., gender, Nation, historical grounding, geographical location, age, class, and sexual identity), analyzing their experiences through the lens of the cultural interface reveals that they share in common an experience that is mediated by colonization, educational inequality, racism, resiliency, resistance, withdrawal, and transformation and possibility (Archibald, Pidgeon & Hawkey et al, 2010; Battiste, 2005; Battiste, 2008; Pidgeon, 2008; Stonechild, 2006). The cultural interface thereby helps to reinforce Indigenous students' agency. It is important to examine their everyday interactions within the interface because they enact the theoretical constructions that both constrain and enable them as self-determining individuals. It is through the cycles of 'continuity' and 'discontinuity' that Indigenous students learn to separate, pursue, forget, meld, and add to these theoretical constructions. The findings chapters (Chapters 9 and 10) of this dissertation will discuss students' insights about the AEUPI/AUTP to identify the various ways that Indigenous students conceptualize their lived experience of the theoretical principle and its manifestations via their relationships with other students, faculty and administrators within the programs.

Lastly, Aboriginal university transition programs engage a variety of discourses: colonial, educational, scientific, mathematical, theoretical, political and Indigenous. However, there are preconceived and discipline-specific ideas about the nature and goals of these discourses. As Nakata points out, this reveals the importance of questioning the assumptions and implicit rules

that shape the creation of AEUPI/AUTPs. Chapter 11 will therefore untangle the epistemological positions of the cultural interface.

6.3 Summary

This chapter began by articulating the way in which the cultural interface is configured within the research design. Second, it outlined the three interconnected principles that support an understanding of the cultural interface. Third, it demonstrated how AEUPIs/AUTPs in universities are an example of the cultural interface. Ultimately, this chapter aimed to illustrate that the concept of the cultural interface is an important theoretical tool that can illuminate the analysis of the nature of AEUPIs/AUTPs. The power dynamics that characterize the cultural interface will help to explain how AEUPI/AUTP learners negotiate their agency within the cultural interface to actively pursue wholism and transformation, and ways in which Aboriginal learners are utilizing higher educational institutions to assist with self-determination efforts.

Chapter 7: Research Methodology

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide an explanation of Indigenous methodologies, along with stories about the cultural origins of the bentwood box in Nisga'a culture and the time that I spent with Gitksan hereditary chief and master carver Delgamuukw (Earl Muldon), learning how a bentwood box was made. In addition, I utilized Archibalds's (2008) storywork and Kirkness and Barndhart's (1991) 4Rs as Indigenous methodologies, with an additional 5th R (relationships); the latter also provided ethical guidelines for my research. I have also interwoven key teachings that I have learned from Raven (the trickster) who has traveled with me throughout this journey and has significantly shaped this research story. My methods consist of: the creation of an urban Aboriginal guidance committee; open-ended interviews; document and web analysis; participant observation; and a photo journal. The later part of the chapter focuses on the research sites, participation selection, methods of recruitment, location of interviews and the tools utilized for the analysis.

7.2 Indigenous Methodologies

Methodology is important because it frames the questions being asked, determines the set of instruments and methods to be employed and shapes the analyses...Indigenous methodologies are often a mix of existing methodological approaches and [I]ndigenous practices (Smith, 1999, p. 143)

Research can play a pivotal role in the decolonization of Indigenous peoples. Research methods and methodologies, the theories that inform them, the questions that they generate and the presentation styles they employ (be it writing, film or other forms) require careful and critical consideration. As Linda Smith (1999) states, "we must [centre] our concerns and world views and then come to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for

our own purposes” (p. 39). It is difficult to imagine an Indigenous methodology, then, that will not have a decolonizing impact in some shape or form. As Margaret Kovach states: “Indigenous communities demand a decolonizing outcome from research” (p.86). This decolonizing aspect of Indigenous research can be understood as an integral element that will enable us to heal spiritually, emotionally, physically, and mentally while also moving us closer towards our goals of self-determination, social justice and transformation.

One of the purposes of an Indigenous research framework is to build interconnections between theory and methodology. As Kovach (2010) states, an Indigenous research framework “acts as a nest encompassing the range of qualities influencing the process and content of the research journey” (p.42). Smith (1999) points out an Indigenous methodology represents a convergence of theory, epistemology and praxis which constitutes a localized strategy of resistance to positivist research methods and theories. Indigenous theory and methods are therefore understood to be inextricably intertwined. She states that Indigenous theory “contains within it a method or methods for selecting and arranging, for prioritizing and legitimizing what we see and do” (p.39). While important work is being done to strengthen Indigenous methodologies, for Indigenous scholars to maintain autonomy and create academic space for Indigenous research, I believe they must not only highlight the differences between the Indigenous and Western research processes, but also find convergences between the two.

For Aboriginal peoples the process of collecting knowledge is considered as important as the theories that support it and cannot be separated into a distinct phase of research (Archibald, 2008). Therefore, I do not take my position as an Indigenous researcher lightly. As such, an important consideration that I continually keep in mind is to carefully reconsider, reflect upon and analyze the ethical, cultural, political and personal dimensions of my research. Smith (1999)

reminds me that one needs to always remember whom the research is for and who will benefit from it once it is completed.

To this end, I ask: ‘What constitutes an Indigenous methodology?’ And ‘how can I ensure that my methodology reflects the common beliefs and principles that are embedded in Indigenous knowledge systems without essentializing Aboriginal cultures?’ In my view an Indigenous methodology means that Indigenous knowledge, voices and experiences are privileged in the research process to facilitate a wholistic understanding of the researcher and participants. As such, an Indigenous methodology requires the researcher to be relationally accountable to one’s family, community, Nation and the living world. It is an emergent approach that weaves our ancient knowledge and wisdom into the relatively new realm of academia. There are no quick reference lists or ‘dummy books’ that provide an easy how-to manual for engaging Indigenous methodologies. As Margaret Kovach explains:

Indigenous research design allows flexibility in the manner and extent to which the personal and particular are integrated: there can be no check box approach. In presenting the qualities of an Indigenous research framework, the intent has been to guide not prescribe...the beauty of [Indigenous methodologies] lies in their ability to centre their epistemic roots while not giving way to dogmatic interpretation (p.177)

Kovach goes on to explain that Indigenous methodologies will reveal the following characteristics: “tribal epistemology, decolonizing theory, story as method, self and cultural location, purpose, Indigenous methods, interpretation, and ethics as methodology” (p. 54). I would add that Indigenous methodologies include strong experiential components, translate knowledge between epistemologies, and generally consider the impact of colonization on the relationship between Indigenous people and mainstream Canadian settlers (whether this be

through decolonizing theory or a re-vision of history). However, the ways in which the characteristics of Indigenous methodologies manifest in research will vary in response to a researcher's cultural location, research question, writing style, social position and context.

Historically, Indigenous peoples have been subjected to research practices by outside 'experts' who often misappropriated and exploited us, and our knowledge. These negative experiences accentuate the requirement that research be grounded in the needs, concerns and perspectives of Aboriginal peoples. Indigenous methodologies acknowledge this complex history while ensuring that research is grounded in the specific meanings, places, traditions, customs and relationships that define it. Such research is vital to the identification, examination and resolution of the current challenges affecting Aboriginal people, as well as to the evolution of transformative praxis in higher education.

However, significant tensions inevitably emerge when researchers attempt to apply Indigenous methodologies to a Western context. I have touched upon these tensions in my stories about Raven and Frog, as well as in my attempt to signify the importance of blending my methodology and theory sections of this dissertation. IKS and Indigenous Methodologies' wholistic orientation to knowledge is one source of tension because it can contradict the fragmentation that is often required in Western academic traditions. It is therefore necessary for the researcher to outline how they will attempt to reconcile this contradiction when re-presenting information generated by Indigenous methodologies in a Western written format. Further, it is salient to note that working with the English language can be untidy and problematic for Indigenous researchers. The English language's propensity for linear representation often objectifies phenomena into noun-based cognitive constructs (Little Bear, 2000; Sakej Henderson, 2000). Indigenous languages do not put so much value in linear representations since at their

heart they invoke a verb or process-based orientation to Mother Earth. As Western educational institutions rely on Western languages and the written word, they inevitably devalue the experiential learning that is so fundamental to context-based Indigenous knowledge. Researchers and educators therefore struggle to express Indigenous cultural concepts sustained through oral traditions and Native languages in modern literary and academic contexts. Nuanced details of gestures, facial expressions, and voice intonations are an essential component of Indigenous research and translating these details to written text is particularly challenging (Marker, 2003). Taking a Western-educated academic standpoint therefore requires the researcher to critically analyze ways to express the meaning of IK, acknowledge its many sources (including spiritual experiences, dreams, visions, and stories) and respectfully re-present the teachings they have learned in a way that reflects community protocols.

Although there may be limitations to applying Indigenous methodologies and ways of knowing in Western academic contexts, attempts to do so are useful because they are part of an incremental change that will ideally one day lead to significant structural reform within the education system and other social institutions. In so doing, they may reveal the detrimental impact that Western research practices have historically had on Indigenous peoples and lead to transformative change.

7.3 Making a Bentwood Box

My use of the bentwood box as a wholistic Indigenous research design and guiding metaphor for my study has been explained in Chapter 2. As the bentwood box is an illustration of the wholism that is so intertwined with Indigenous epistemologies, it firmly positions my research methodology in an Indigenous framework. It is imperative that my methodology is culturally grounded and informed by Nisga'a epistemology, protocol, and praxis. Even though I

consider myself to still be a 'learner' (Archibald, 2008) in this regard, I feel a strong resonance with the metaphor of the bentwood box. It provides a suitable medium for my methodology in serving as a visual, symbolic and metaphorical representation of my research design. A similar type of representation was used by Metis scholar Rheanna Robinson (2008), who wove the colours of the Metis sash together for her research design. The colour red was used to represent history; black represented challenges and "dark" periods of history; blue and white (the colours of the Metis flag) represented philosophy; and green represented growth and prosperity (1). Mayan scholar Jimenez Estrada (2005) used the Beiva, or Tree of Life, to honour his Mayan cosmology and visually represent the thinking behind the research design (cited in Kovach, 2010). These two examples indicate that there are many possibilities for incorporating visual metaphors as an organizing principle for Indigenous research methodologies.

The outside design of the bentwood box is frequently painted or carved with elaborate Formline designs that display a family's history and crests. The elaborate carving, etching and graphic arts used in this design are part of our "written" record and visually transmit social, cultural and spiritual meaning. Consequently, bentwood boxes are often highly prized family heirlooms that are passed down from generation to generation (Stewart, 1984).

According to the Nisga'a Tribal Council:

The Nisga'a believed life for the individual began in a steamed and bent cradle; those of high rank progressed to a seat, a three sided box turned inside out. Life was sustained by food kept in bent boxes stacked along walls of the house. At death, bodies of high ranking individuals were placed in coffin boxes; others were cremated.

The lineage of the family group-a collectivity of souls-was contained in a house constructed like a box [a long house]. Living people entered through the front sides and

back sides (after the removal of special planks); the deceased left only through the back of the house; the souls departed through the smoke hole about the hearth.

The house was also a living being as well as a container of souls, with both skin (made of removable cedar planks) and bones (the house posts, beams and rafters, which are considered to be arms, legs, backbones, and ribs). Similar guardian and crest figures decorated the façade and sides of the house.

The ultimate house/box is the universe, through which the sun passes everyday, entering the front entrance (symbolic of life) and exiting from back (symbolic of death). During the night the sun passes over the world and darkens the house but starlight can be seen shining through the holes in the roof.

The unifying symbol of the box as a container of souls and wealth [of the universe] provides a decorative field, used for generations by Nisga'a artists to create complex and subtle designs. It is also a visual record, telling the stories of particular families and clans (as cited in Gilbert & Clark, 2002, p. 4).

The above quote indicates that the bentwood box has held a variety of social and spiritual purposes for the Nisga'a people. It was a storage container for food, a cradle for newborn babies, a seat for high-ranking individuals, a living container of souls, a house, a container of the universe, a medium for the transmission of knowledge and history, and a symbol of wealth. These purposes illuminate the various dimensions of Nisga'a epistemology and culture.

As a storage container of food, the box facilitated the daily survival (a physical dimension) of the Nisga'a people by containing the nutrients of life. A cultural dimension is revealed by the box/chair being used only by high-ranking members of my society. This indicates

that the society had different social distinctions for its members. As “collectivity of souls”, the box/house assumes a spiritual dimension which highlights the central importance of family, lineage, and the clan and house system to Nisga’a culture. The house/box was understood to be a living being in the same way a person is living, and, accordingly, was decorated with “guardian or crest-like figures.” I should reiterate the fact that, in Nisga’a epistemology, people and crests are seen to have a pre-existing ‘supernatural’ relationship with each other. Further, the quote brings to light the Nisga’a people’s strong interconnection with the bentwood box throughout their life cycle: at birth they were placed in a steamed bent cradle and at death they were placed in coffin box to carry them away to the spirit world. It is also interesting to note that the process of making the box traditionally allowed for cedar trees to be harvested without killing the tree, which has spiritual and cultural significance for the Nisga’a.

Perhaps the most striking image in the above passage is the way in which the house/box is understood to be the container of the universe. As such, it can also be understood to function as a parallel of the universe. I was particularly struck by the statement: “The ultimate house/box is the universe, through which the sun passes everyday. During the night the sun passes over the world and darkens the house but starlight can be seen shining through the holes in the roof” (p. 4). To me this passage infers the universe’s ultimate possibilities for knowledge, life, and spirit. Knowledge is everywhere and is very much interconnected with the endless rhythms and cycles of the sun, moon, and stars. These cycles are also what necessitates life for us and determines our pattern of life inside the house/box. Further, the statement indicates that even during times of darkness, it is possible for the light (spirit) to shine through holes in the roof (that which is unknown or missing). However, the darkness also symbolizes how nature can never be fully

known. As a parallel of the universe, the house/box is a living entity which contains the knowledge of life and spirit/interconnectedness that is available for all to experience.

This passage provides a specific cultural example of the way in which my community understands wholism. The various forms and functions of the box and the artwork carved or etched on its outer surfaces both reflected and shaped the wholistic understanding which is fundamental to Nisga'a epistemology and culture. The passage illustrates the Nisga'a perception of the interconnections between people and the spiritual, plant and animal worlds, which are reflected in the natural cycles of life and which highlight the importance of balance. It also reveals the unity between the emotional, spiritual, physical, and mental dimensions, which guides life at the individual, family, and collective levels and alludes to the ways in which knowledge is embedded in our daily practices.

7.4 Another Layer of Learning

This aforementioned story about the bentwood box became a guiding light that drew me into a web of possibilities as I endeavored to learn more about Nisga'a and Gitksan cultures. Shortly after writing my Ph.D. comprehensive exams, I returned to Hazelton (which is in Gitksan territory) to rest and visit family. I was also eagerly awaiting the arrival of my sister's first child. It was shortly after Emma's birth that I was invited to Earl Muldon's (Delgamuukw's) house and carving studio. Earl is the great-grandfather of my niece (Emma), a Gitksan hereditary chief and a master carver. I had wanted to speak with Earl to learn more about the construction of a bentwood box. In our first visit together, I felt it was important to listen, watch and not ask too many questions. I also did not feel comfortable asking Earl if I could record our conversation. He began our conversation with a cautionary story about his daughter who had interviewed him for a research project when she was in university. She had written extensively about the Gitksan

hereditary social system in a paper only to be told by her professor that her family's stories were not a valid form of evidence for her paper. Of course, if one knows Earl's personality or his history of political advocacy in British Columbia, he did not take kindly to this professor giving his daughter a bad grade on a paper because she had used the oral history of her people. So he called the professor and gave him a piece of his mind. Nevertheless, the professor did not change the grade. It was clear by Earl's tone of voice and rhetorical statements of "can you believe that!", he was not impressed with the Western ways of doing things. I drew the implicit message from this story that I should be wary and prepare myself for any potential adverse reactions to the Indigenous knowledge that I was bringing back to the academia.¹¹

Earl gave me a tour of his carving shed and showed me the various cedar planks that would be used to make bentwood boxes. However, he was in the process of carving a totem pole and a number of other projects and was not currently creating any boxes. The key teachings I received on our first visit was that Nisga'a and Gitksan boxes were made differently and that Western educational institutions are not always receptive of Indigenous knowledge. Earl told me that he felt the Nisga'a boxes were more watertight than the Gitksan boxes because the oolichan grease (a by-product of the oolichan oil rendering process) acted as a sealer. There was a great deal of synchronicity with this teaching as I was to go for a visit to the Nass Valley with my mom a few days later.

¹¹ With that being said, I am thankful for having such a supportive Ph.D. committee that has encouraged me to include IK content, methodology and theory into my study as much as possible.



Figure 6 Earl Muldon Showing Me How He Makes Bentwood Boxes in His Carving Studio

As a result, I asked my mom to contact my cousin Calvin (who had recently helped to carve an extraordinary monumental raven for our new museum in the village of Laqualtsa'p) to see if I could sit down with him to learn more about Nisga'a bentwood boxes. After a beautiful drive into the Nass Valley, and getting settled, my mom and I went for a visit to Calvin's house. After I explained to him the purpose of my research, the knowledge that I had received from Earl, I inquired about the Nisga'a method of making the bentwood box. Calvin explained that no one in our house had made a bentwood box since the missionaries had forced everyone to bring their regalia and cultural items to the centre of the village and burn them. He further explained that as a new carver, he was still in the process of learning how to make many things. He shared the Nisga'a name for the oolichan grease that was used as sealer in the box and was happy to hear that Earl had noticed a difference between Nisga'a and Gitksan boxes. He also suggested that I contact a UNBC cultural anthropologist that he knew (I was not sure if this was a joke, or a strange form of irony). On the morning we were to leave the Nass Valley, another cousin,

Dorcus (who is a Nisga'a language teacher in the school district), arrived at my bedroom door excited to share the Nisga'a name for the bentwood box (gal'ink). After having me repeat "gal'ink" four times as loudly as I could, my cousin dashed off to work laughing because I had woken up the entire household.

Once I arrived back in Vancouver, I was at a loss because of what I had learned from my cousin Calvin. I was deeply saddened that the missionaries had forced us to destroy our regalia and cultural artifacts and no one had yet attempted to make a bentwood box in our house. For a short time, I wondered if this meant I should change my research design. I am appreciative of the conversations and words of encouragement that I received from friends, colleagues and my research supervisor who told me that I was also helping to bring knowledge about the bentwood box back to our community. My brother also suggested that my dissertation was another version of a bentwood box, which would mean that someone in our house had made one in contemporary times. I was quick to explain to him that my dissertation was still in the making and I felt that I needed to learn more before this became a reality.

In particular, I felt it was important to see Earl again to learn more about the way the Gitksan make bentwood boxes. Our second visit took place almost a year and a half later on a subsequent journey to Hazelton. After being welcomed into Earl's den, I offered him some brownies and we began discussing the various projects we had begun since our last visit. Earl told me that he had learned about a new machine that would save him a great deal of time steam-bending wood. I shared my story about going to the Nass Valley and learning that no one had made a bentwood box in our house.

I then asked permission to record our interview. Raven intervened for a brief moment to ask me if I was going to be brazen and ask Earl to sign a consent form. I quickly decided that

oral consent was the most respectful, relevant, and responsible method for this interview and let go of my anxiety about the consent process. I offered to bring back the written transcript once it was complete, only to receive a ‘No, that is okay’ (along with a strong intuitive feeling that I was being trusted to accurately record our conversation and I would be a nuisance if I returned with the transcript).



Figure 7 Bentwood Box by Earl Muldon

Earl began by showing me three different styles of bentwood boxes that were sitting in his den. He also had a beautiful, ornately carved chief’s chair sitting behind him that resembled a bentwood box form. After talking about each of the boxes’ different styles, Earl took me into his carving studio where he was in the process of making five bentwood boxes. Each box was in a particular stage of construction. Earl pointed out the differences in the grain of the cedar that was used for the boxes (some of the finer grained cedar comes from Haida Gwaii and is often preferred by contemporary carvers). Earl also noted the importance of selecting the right tree (as

some trees may have too many knots) and the magnificence of the life-giving tree. As he explains:

It was really something what went on with the bentwood boxes. They cut the tree and split them off the tree. They split the planks. Then they adze them eh. Then they split them like that [showing me the width with his hands] and then they adze them again. I got one in the back room where the planks come off the tree, They did that out the valley too. It took an expert or great expertise to really do the bentwood boxes in the old days. Because they were able to read the grain of the wood of the tree from outside the bark. So if you see the tree with the bark that runs diagonal like that, it is not good...Some of these planks that you know are a little off. They are off kilter or narrower or twisted. What they did. They didn't waste wood. They make skewers out of them. Then they use them to hang salmon or sea lion or stuff in the house eh. They don't waste much on the cedar. After they take the boards off the cedar, the cedar still lives eh. Amazing eh! (Personal communication, February, 2013).

After sharing my story about the Nisga'a bentwood box, Earl commented about boxes and their various uses:

Yeah, the box was very useful eh. To them there was a lot of use for it eh. And some of the boxes were used for the regalia that our Elders had. I saw some up the Nass years ago and some up the Kispiox [in Gitksan territory]. They stored the regalia in these cedar boxes, like their blankets and dance aprons, the leggings, the moccasins, all stored in these boxes eh. Being of cedar, nothing no moths or nothing gets in those boxes. It protects the very things that you store in those cedar boxes. If you put it in a box made of

birch or spruce, right away it molds or rots but cedar, it won't rot. We found stuff buried in cedar centuries later and it is still intact. A marvelous tree. When the explorers first came they realized the quality of what the natives were using eh, the trees. They used it for rain jackets, they have these spruce/cedar hats. Everything was based around the cedar eh for years and years (Personal communication, February 2013).

My visit with Earl helped me to learn how the life-giving cedar tree has provided generations of carvers (for thousands of years) the ability to devise and perfect various ways to create daily cultural artifacts that are immersed in a deeply aesthetic tradition. Through our discussion I was able to unfold another layer about the bentwood box to learn about various Gitxsan/Nisga'a values that are attached to the past, present and future.

I also found myself researching missionary and anthropological accounts, as many people informed me that some (not all but rather a very small percentage) of the information was useful. I came across a story cited in Daly (2005) about an explorer named Hortsky who noted in 1874 a vivid (and derogatory account) about the inter-cultural trade and sharing that occurred between the Gitxsan and Nisga'a. In particular he notes the importance of the bentwood box in the oolichan oil trade (p. 117-118). He recorded meeting a number of people walking on a grease trail after attending at a feast in the village of Kitwancool:

More than one hundred people must have passed us, and they were without a single exception, not only the men, but the women and children, laden with large cedar boxes, of the size and shape of tea chests. Which were filled with the rendered grease of the candle fish [oolichan] caught in the Nass [sic] waters... They passed us in twos or threes... little children even, of tender years, carried burdens of thirty or forty pounds weight, and tottered along in silence. One [person] had, in addition to the usual grease,

perched on its summit an old and decrepit woman, perhaps his mother. This man could not have had less than two hundred and fifty pounds of weight on his back; but they are tough, hardy set and good carriers” (as cited in Daly, 2005, p. 220).

Upon reviewing this account, a memory returned to me from when I was a child. I remember my grandfather telling me a similar story about the strength of the old people (the generations that had lived prior to contact). He told me that men could carry two hundred pounds of oolichan grease and women nearly a hundred. As a child, I believed him, but as the years grew on I began to wonder if it was true. Here, once more, Raven has intervened to teach me to believe in the power of this story again.

Throughout the rest of my stay in Hazelton, I had the opportunity to meet with several other Gitksan philosophers whom I met in synchronistic moments. Each person provided me with a deeper spiritual understanding to many of the questions that I had as a result of my queries about the bentwood box. One person told me that on my next visit, the next stage of learning about the bentwood box would be to make one.

During this time, I truly began to believe a statement I had been told as a child: “the right people will come to you at the right time and the right place, you won’t have to look for them, they will be there.” Although the bentwood box has been witness to significant cultural upheaval, it also reflects patterns of intercultural change and transformation. In the next few years, I am confident that the tradition of bentwood box making will be revitalized by members of my house. And when the time is right, my bentwood box will also be complete.

7.5 Indigenous Storywork as a Methodology

Stories are the most ancient Indigenous method for transmitting knowledge in Indigenous contexts. Archibald’s (2008) foundational book on Indigenous storywork methodology discusses

the importance of Aboriginal stories in Indigenous education. She developed seven principles related to using First Nations stories and storytelling for educational purposes, which she has termed storywork: respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy. Each of these principles can be applied as a theoretical/methodological framework in order to make meaning from stories and use them in educational and research contexts.

Throughout the book, Archibald addresses important issues for individuals, researchers and educators working with Indigenous knowledge and content to address, and provides important methodological insight about working with Elders and First Nations communities. Further, she emphasizes the need for collaborative, respectful relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators. Archibald's work is of particular salience for my research because it includes First Nation oral histories and storytelling as a research methodology and embraces a wholistic perspective in furthering the understanding of Indigenous knowledge.

I appreciate the way that Archibald has gathered, applied, evaluated, and passed on her 'bone needle' by showing how storywork methods can be woven into an Indigenous research framework. As she aptly suggests, "showing respect through cultural protocol, appreciating the significance and reverence for spirituality, honouring teacher and learner responsibilities, and practicing a cyclical process of reciprocity are documented [in storywork] for those interested in First Nations/Indigenous methodology" (p. x). Working with stories in this way (by conducting open-ended interviews with my participants) will be fundamental to my research.

Storywork is also interconnected with the wholistic framework I have discussed in the first part of this chapter because it expresses the need for Indigenous stories to be integrated into research in a culturally appropriate manner. Dawn Marsden (2005) explains:

Storywork is a more appropriate term for working with Indigenous stories because the term is more closely and culturally aligned with Indigenous terms, concepts, methodologies; oral teachings, learning and documentation in particular. We are not working to create stories, we are working to convey them. This emphasis shifts from the creation of the narrative to the sources of them...(p. 52).

As stories hold both methodological and theoretical meanings, researchers are required to expend a considerable amount of energy in order to engage them within a Western research context in a way that retains their integrity. To do so, it is essential that I am trustworthy and respectful of cultural protocols through my actions and methodology as a researcher (p.83). I will also be required to recognize the diverse character and purposes of Indigenous stories and know how to derive meaning from the various types of stories my participants share. The meanings I will uncover (from the stories) in my analysis process will relate to themes in the theories I reference and thereby inform my theoretical analysis. For the time being, it is important for me to highlight four of the principles I will use in my storywork methodology – and an additional principle, ‘R’ relationships that I have created –because they will a) form part of my ethical code of conduct for my research process, and b) guide my enactment of the methodology. In the analysis discussion in Chapter 12, the principles of wholism, synergy, and inter-relatedness are key threads that will help to stitch my bentwood box closed.



Figure 8 Earl Muldon Showing Me How to Carve The Top of a Bentwood Box

7.6 The 5 Rs

The principles of Respect, Reverence, Reciprocity, and Responsibility are key principles from Archibald's (2008) storywork methodology. They have also been discussed in Verna Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt's (1991) seminal article on Indigenous higher education. According to Marsden (2005) the four Rs "are increasingly becoming a vital ethical element to Indigenous research and scholarship" and have also been employed by regulatory research bodies (Pidgeon, 2008, Lester-Smith, 2011). I also worked with these four principles in my Master's thesis (Parent, 2009) and added an additional fifth 'R' (relationships) because they served as an ethical foundation for my research and are relevant principles that can be applied to almost any Indigenous learning context. These principles are all interrelated and cannot be understood in

isolation of each other. In combination, they will once again constitute a wholistic ethical code of conduct for this research.

7.6.1 Relevance

Relevance means that all of my research must be relevant to the needs and desires of the Aboriginal communities with which I work. This research is based on my ten years of volunteerism, employment and personal experience as a visitor and researcher in the Coast Salish peoples' territory. Alannah Young (2007) refers to this as the "informal pre-study phase" of Indigenous research. This stage is premised on understanding the cultural, social and historical background of the people and places that one is to do one's research with. The 'informal pre-study phase' of my research involved discussing the relevance of this research with the Executive Directors of Aboriginal community organizations, Aboriginal child and youth advocates, Aboriginal youth workers, various staff from Aboriginal student services in the universities (that are closest to my residence), an Elder, and my research committee to see if there is indeed interest for such research in the community. I have also sought the perspective of my Education Coordinator from the Laqualt'zap village government and incorporated her advice into my dissertation.

7.6.2 Responsibility

Responsibility means that I honour all ethical protocols and community expectations before, during and after the research project. The Canadian Institute of Health Research Ethics Review Office (2006) states that "the [researcher] must understand a broader sense of accountability, in order to understand the responsibility that they have once they enter into the research relationship" (p.2). Due to this understanding and because of my personal location, I feel a great sense of responsibility for being accountable to my family, my community and my

Nation to conduct this study in a ‘good’ way. I believe that understanding the major ethical problems of both Native and non-Native researchers working in Indigenous communities is another integral aspect of this responsibility. To understand these ethical problems I enrolled in the Ts[^]kel program and completed several Indigenous methodology classes, received a certificate for completing the Tutorial for the ‘Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans’ (2007), and participated in the Indigenous Graduate Symposium (2008; 2009; 2010; 2011), where I had many thought provoking discussions with other Aboriginal scholars about the ethical protocols of research. In addition, my on-going pedagogical experiences with Raven will be included to highlight some of the tensions and surprises that I encounter throughout my research process, since they often teach me more about my research responsibilities. Finally, I remain continually engaged in an on-going dialogue with Aboriginal community members, my family, youth and organizations to determine the responsibilities of my research.

7.6.3 Respect

Respect means that I honour my community, my Nation, the natural world and my conception of the Creator. In an attempt to employ respectful practices, I had hoped to gain comprehensive knowledge about my research participants before meeting them and I followed traditional protocols and community guidelines to acquire an in-depth understanding of the community’s needs (Marker, 2003). A first step in doing this was to respectfully acknowledge and show my gratitude to the Coast Salish Peoples for allowing me to live and study in such a beautiful territory. I repeated this process as I journeyed to other First Nations territories on which the universities that I wished to do research were housed. This also meant that I contacted

the Aboriginal Student Services Coordinator at each institution and asked their advice on what other protocols I should follow to show honour and respect to these communities.

As an Aboriginal researcher, I assumed a dual role as an insider and outsider, which represents both benefits and limitations. I may have pre-existing relationships with various Aboriginal student centre staff, faculty and students at some universities. This is not an unusual occurrence for Indigenous researchers and may be seen as a benefit (Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2009). However, this can also be a limitation; I needed to take extra care to ensure that my research remains open and transparent so that there are no conflicts of interest. I also recognize the power dynamic that is embedded in my relationship with my participants as a result of being a researcher in a Western institution. To a certain degree this means that I represent Western institutions when I conduct research. According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), many Indigenous people are suspicious of researchers (even when they are Aboriginal) because they represent these elite institutions. These institutions have not always represented Aboriginal people in a positive light and have advanced inaccurate and insensitive research, which has played an integral role in the colonization of Indigenous people. As an Indigenous researcher who represents these institutions, it was vital that I negotiate my positionality without compromising the purpose and benefits this research entailed. My stories about this negotiation will be discussed throughout this dissertation in my stories about Raven.

Brayboy and Deyle (2000), who are Indigenous researchers, outline the similar tensions they experienced being insider/outsider researchers in Native American communities. They state that “those [individuals] who conduct research must be aware of their positionality in relation to research participants, acknowledge their lack of objectivity in getting, analyzing, and reporting data, and how ‘traditional’ methods may influence their work” (p. 168). In my relationship with

participants I did my best to clearly articulate my position and acknowledge my subjectivity throughout the research process and writing of the dissertation.

I also handed out ‘free and informed’ consent forms to all my participants well in advance of commencing my research. According to Piquemal (2001) “free and informed consent is accepted in most circles, what often goes unquestioned is that free and informed consent may have different meanings and implications in cross cultural situations, particularly when doing research in Native American communities” (p. 65). This has four primary meanings for me as an Aboriginal researcher. First, it means I am required to obtain the collective consent of the institutions that I wish to partner with as well as the individual consent of potential participants (Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 2000; Piquemal, 2001). Second, I must try to clearly convey my intentions to everybody involved in my study. As Linda Smith (1999) argues, there may be dire consequences if a researcher’s intentions are not fully understood by research participants. I therefore tried to demystify the academic knowledge that informed my research so that it was accessible to all who participated in the research process (Meyer, 2000). Third, I understand free and informed consent is an ongoing circular process. This means that I did not conclude that a single piece of paper signified that consent was given. I checked in regularly with my participants to ensure that their consent was on-going through various requests for verification. The fourth aspect of free and informed consent meant that cultural knowledge was only included with the guidance of a respected Elder and authorities in the community (Alaska Native Knowledge Network, 2000). Towards that end, I did not include in the presentation of my research any sensitive cultural, spiritual or personal information shared with me. If any instances arose where I was doubtful of what stories to include, I worked with my Aboriginal advisory committee to help me consider if such information was necessary for the research.

Finally, throughout the process of gathering my participants' stories and information I tried to establish a comfort level with them as indicated in Archibald's storywork methodology. To do so, I respectfully placed their needs at the forefront of my research. To this end I offered all participants food at the beginning of our conversations to help prepare our conversation in a 'good way' (the protocol in Indigenous settings), assured them that they could terminate their participation at any time, and emphasized that they were not required to participate in activities with which they were uncomfortable. I also informed them that they could use a pseudonym or alias instead of their real name in my research and any information that I received would be locked in a filing cabinet and kept confidential after the interviews were completed. I also provided each participant with a transcript copy (transcribed from digital audio-recordings) for her/his approval. Returning the transcripts for prior approval allowed participants to revisit their thoughts and provided them with an opportunity to change, clarify, or withdraw their transcript. Finally, I also invited family members to join my interviews with youth in order to ensure that the youth felt comfortable.

7.6.4 Relationships

From an Indigenous Knowledge perspective, Indigenous peoples view themselves 'in relationship' with all living things and see all things as related to one another; a person's identity is defined through their relationships with others, as well as through their ecosystem, other living beings and the spirit world (Battiste 2000a; Cajete, 1994).

Given that inter-relationships are of utmost importance in Indigenous cultures, they must also be a central feature of Indigenous research and methodologies. Accordingly, I attempted to establish stable and enduring relationships with the youth, community representatives, staff and faculty that were to be involved in my research. For example, I emailed all of the youth

participants educational information that would be helpful for their high school and university studies (e.g., scholarship information, a high school to university transitions website link, an undergraduate to graduate transitions website link, and notices of employment opportunities). For other participants, I regularly provided them with an update of my writing process and passed along any pertinent educational and cultural information and research that could be helpful for them in their professional or personal lives. All of the youth participants were also very interested in learning more about my higher educational experiences. A significant portion of time in my interviews with the youth was spent answering questions about my university experience and sharing stories about some of the hindrances and successes that I experienced as a student, in order to encourage them to continue on their educational journey. My interviews with university students usually involved significant mentoring components (e.g., problem solving, emotional support, and creating connections with new faculty and university supports). I also encouraged undergraduate students to begin attending the Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement initiative in order to meet Indigenous graduate students and learn more about graduate education.

This also meant that I sought the guidance of an Aboriginal advisory committee. This Aboriginal advisory committee is comprised of individuals from various Aboriginal communities, organizations, universities, and my Nation. Kovach (2010) understands Aboriginal advisory committees to be part of a decolonizing outcome of Indigenous research. She asserts that “Decolonizing the research relationship begins with strategies devised in conjunction with an Indigenous advisory committees for specific research projects and tribal ethics review boards, and the integration of university ethics reviews that specifically consider research in Indigenous communities (p. 146)”. My hands are held high to Jerry Adams, Lynda Gray, Dave Seaweed,

Phyllis Clark, and Mario Parent who generously shared their time and expertise as part of my Aboriginal advisory committee.

7.6.5 Reciprocity

Reciprocity in Indigenous cultures is understood in terms of affirming relationships and sharing (Kuokhanen, 2007). Not only is sharing vital to the collective benefit of Indigenous peoples, it also serves as an active form of resistance to the hegemonic forces of research and contributes to decolonizing methodologies. According to Smith (1999), this means that I must “share the theories and analyses which inform the way knowledge and information are constructed and represented” (p.16). All research conducted with the Aboriginal community should be a reciprocal process. As a thank-you, all participants were offered a traditional gift, a twenty-dollar gift card and an opportunity to enter their name into a draw to win an iPad©. I also solicited the advice of my Aboriginal advisory committee as well as my research participants on the best way to “give back” throughout my research process. To date, I have been asked by my government to do a mini-presentation of my current Ph.D. work to our council members. My Aboriginal advisory committee has also asked me to finish completing the Aboriginal Survival Guide to University (ASGU) that I began writing as an undergraduate student. This survival guide will be a part of my knowledge mobilization project that will take place after I have defended my dissertation. I intend to create a comic book based on the stories of transition that I learned from the youth participants in this study.

An Indigenous methodological approach that incorporates a wholistic storywork framework informed my methods and guided me to make meaning from the knowledge I received from my participants. I have used the five Rs to provide a foundational understanding of how I integrated storywork principles into my research process. Archibald’s (2008) remaining

storywork principles—inter-relatedness, synergy, and wholism—were interwoven throughout the findings chapters of this dissertation.

7.7 Research Stories with Raven (Txeemsim)

As Jo-ann Archibald (1997) reminds us, “our Elders first teach us to understand and appreciate our environment before letting the journey begin” (p.68). I therefore began a learning process which highlights some of the methodological considerations and concerns related to being a Nisga’a researcher working in an urban Aboriginal community setting. In doing so, I do not seek to provide all of the answers to the ethical problems and responsibilities of conducting such research; rather, I hope to take you (the reader) on my personal journey as I explore the educational and community landscapes and relationships of my research environment. As such, I hope the details of this research story may contribute to the advancement of a transformational pedagogy that is both practical and useful for other sojourners in similar landscapes.

In a similar vein to Archibald (2008), who writes about ‘Coyote’, the omnipresent and ubiquitous trickster who has traveled on her research journey, I have come to know this Trickster character as Raven. The trickster character in Aboriginal stories has multiple meanings. Trickster has the ability to shape shift (metamorphose) and transform her/himself into other beings. According to Archibald (2008), “The English word “Trickster” is a poor one because it cannot portray, the diverse range of ideas that First Nations associate with the Trickster, who sometimes is a shape shifter, and who often takes on human characteristics” (p.5). In my culture, Raven is called Txeemsim (Clemsum), which means trickster, or miracle worker. According to Bert McKay (1993), “Txeemsim displays the best of what humankind should strive for. But he is an approachable demi-god, full of human failings, even as he demonstrates how these failings can be conquered” (as cited in Rose, 2005). In many of the stories, the trickster character also

teaches us how to create balance and harmony in our lives; in this way Txeemsim demonstrates how I have attempted to create a wholistic research project. Aboriginal stories often have implicit meanings and Archibald (2008) reminds us that it is up to the learner to find the theories embedded in stories (p.16). Thus, I understand Txeemsim to play with different levels of metaphors, reflexivity, and analysis. I leave it to you (the reader) to find and create your own meaning from the tales about Txeemsim that have shaped my research story.

7.8 **Methods**

The specific methods I used for my dissertation research included:

- a) the creation of a guidance committee comprised of various Elders, youth, and community members from the urban Aboriginal community, university staff, and my Nation;
- b) open-ended in-depth individual interviews with Aboriginal early university initiative and Aboriginal university transition program participants, as well as university leaders and staff;
- c) document & website analysis of 54 university websites and AEUPI/AUTP materials;
- d) some observation of Aboriginal early university promotion initiative & Aboriginal transition programs; and
- e) a personal photo journal to trace my reflections and the teachings that I received throughout the research process.

7.9 **Site Selection**

Five research-intensive universities in British Columbia were invited to participate in this project: University of British Columbia (Vancouver), University of British Columbia (Okanagan), University of Northern British Columbia; University of Victoria; and Simon Fraser University (SFU). I purposefully chose these five universities because they were the only

research-intensive universities in B.C. and I felt that they were representative of the regional diversity in this province.

7.10 Access to Sites

The following steps were taken to gain entry into the five research-intensive universities chosen in this study. The steps are listed as follows:

1. Emailed letter of request to do research at each university, sent to University of Northern British Columbia's Office of the Provost, University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board, Office of Research Services University of British Columbia Okanagan, Simon Fraser University Office for Aboriginal Peoples and Institute for Aboriginal Health during the month of May 2011.
2. Explained in the letter why the university was chosen for the study, what would be done at the site during the study: information collection by means of student, staff and faculty interviews about the various early university promotion initiatives and university transition programs.
3. Attached the following documents for background and to demonstrate credibility: university ethics application, Ph.D. proposal, name of my research supervisor and a community report.
4. In most cases I was referred to the Dean's assistant and was asked to repeat my request again (i.e., restate what I needed).
5. In some cases, the university did not want to provide a letter of support for my research until I had my ethics approval certificate. I found myself in a bureaucratic quandary as UBC ethics had issued me a proviso that required that I obtain a letter of support from each site before I was to receive my ethics approval.

6. I contacted each Dean (or their assistant) to explain my ethics requirements. This was done via email so I could write verbatim what UBC ethics had told me. I also attached the proviso statement from my ethics application to support my email.

7. I obtained written letters of approval from three institutions that stipulated that I must send my ethics certificate upon receiving it to their office. These letters also requested that I obtain program approval or consent from the First Nations Student Service Centre before proceeding with my research.

8. One university Dean did not understand my request and emailed me Chapter 9 of the Tri-Council policy statement on Aboriginal Peoples. I thanked him for it and explained that I needed a letter of approval to do research at his institution. This was followed by one and half months of emails, and telephone conversations between him and his assistant. In the end, the Dean did not understand my request, grew tired of speaking to me and told me to discuss the matter with the Vice President of Academics. Upon speaking with this person, I was told that I did not need a letter of permission to research at their institution if I have had an ethics application at another institution. Instead, I was told to ask permission from the First Nations Student Centre and appropriate staff with whom I wished to research. The First Nations Student Centre and the Continuing Education Department had already written letters of support for my research and had no difficulty understanding my request.

9. I then obtained permission from each program that I wished to research with. In one case, this required that I travel to the campus and meet with program staff first (as they did not know me). In another, I made one phone call to discuss my research with the program coordinator. Two program coordinators gave me oral permission to research with their program.

10. I then emailed all my letters of support from the various Deans of Research Ethics and programs back to UBC to receive my research ethics certificate.
11. I then emailed this certificate to each of the Deans' offices.
12. By the end of August 2011, I had secured permission from all research sites.
13. Although I had permission from five universities to conduct research at their institutions, I did not have an opportunity to do research at the University of Northern B.C. due to an administrative error and no student participation (which may have been related to the first item).

7.11 Participant Selection

Participants were selected for the following criteria:

- (a) Aboriginal high school aged students between the ages of 12-17 who have participated in an Aboriginal Early University Promotion Initiative; and
- (b) Aboriginal youth between the ages of 17-24 currently enrolled in an Aboriginal University Transition Program.

Initially, I had written on my recruitment posters that youth participants should have participated in an AEUPI or AOTP in the last two years. After some consultation with program coordinators in the AOTPs I adjusted the selection criteria to state that youth participants should have participated in an AEUPI or AOTP in the last five years. In particular, I hoped to draw upon a diverse sample of youth who represented a range of personal interests, cultural knowledge, urban/rural locations, gender, sexual orientation and engagement with Aboriginal higher education initiatives and community programs.

I also began my research by considering key persons of influence to these students, including: family, education professionals such as counselors, recruitment and support workers, teachers, faculty and staff, education administrators and members of the broader community. I asked the youth in our interviews to identify a person of influence. However, due to time constraints and ethical requirements that stipulated that I had to pass along initial letters of contact and consent forms to youth participants (which meant I could not contact persons of influence directly) this process proved to be too difficult and I was unable to interview them. Nevertheless, during their interviews youth participants provided me with a rich understanding about how persons of influence assisted them in their transition process.

Finally, I also interviewed full-time staff or faculty members who provided direct student services (i.e., instruction, recruitment, advising, or mentoring) in an early university promotion initiative or transition program. I also interviewed an executive director of an Aboriginal youth organization to learn more about community perceptions of Aboriginal youth engagement by research-intensive universities in B.C. Staff and faculty members could be Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal (Please see Table 1 for a list of participants).

7.12 Participants

Table 1 and Table 2 provide background information (pseudonym, Nation, region of residence) about participants in the study. In terms of program participation, there was an even split between students who had entered an Aboriginal Early University Promotion Initiative (AEUPI) for the first time and returning students who had participated in the same AEUPI previously. All returning AEUPI students were in youth leadership and mentorship positions and had participated in the AEUPI for two or more years. The majority of the AEUPI students were

still in high school, with two students currently enrolled in post-secondary education (this means that these students had completed an AEUPI three to four years previous to the study). In terms of program completion for the University transition program participants, two students were currently enrolled in an AOTP, while six participants had already completed an AOTP and were currently enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts or Science program at a research intensive university.

Table 1 Youth Participants by Nation and Region of Residence

Name	Nation	Region Of Residence	Program
1. Amber	Dene/Cree	Okanagan	AUTP
2. Eva	Tsimshian	Lower Mainland	AEUPI
3. Quinton	Tsilhqot'in	Okanagan	AUTP
4. Donna	Okanagan	Okanagan	AUTP
5. Ameilia	Gitxsan	Lower Mainland	AUTP
6. Kylie	Nuu-chah-nulth	Vancouver Island	AUTP
7. Marcia	Comox	Vancouver Island	AEUPI
8. Flora	Cree	Lower Mainland	AEUPI
9. Lia	Cree	Lower Mainland	AEUPI
10. Sheila	Songhess & Micmac		AEUPI
11. Katrina	Stl'atl'imc	Lower	AUTP

Name	Nation	Region Of Residence	Program
		Mainland	
12. Shannon	Nisga'a	Lower Mainland	AEUPI
13. Kaya	Metis	Lower Mainland	AUTP
14. Tonya	Gitksan, Cree	Northern	AEUPI
15. Fawn	Okanagan	Okanagan	AUTP
16. Betty	Sliamon	Lower Mainland	AEUPI
17. Kelly	Haida	Okanagan	AUTP
18. Serenity	Dene	Okanagan	AUTP
60 percent of all participants were youth			

Table 2 Staff, Faculty & Community Participants

Name	Program	Position	University	Organization
1. Adrienne Vedan	ACCESS	Director Aboriginal Student Services	UBC (Okanagan)	
2. Shirley*	Emerging Summer Scholars	Program Coordinator	UBC (Vancouver)	
3. Joyce Schnieder	Aboriginal Bridging/ Pre-Health	Faculty	Simon Fraser University	
4. Daphne *Grant	First Peoples House	University of Victoria	Indigenous Mini University	
5. Lynda Gray		Executive Director		Urban Native Youth Association
6. Melania Alvarez	B.C. Education Coordinator	University of British Columbia		Pacific Institute of Math and Science (PIMS)
7. Rick Ouellet	Student & Community Development Officer	University of British Columbia	Emerging Summer Scholars, CEDAR	
8. Ryanne	Program Coordinator	University of	CEDAR	

Name	Program	Position	University	Organization
		British Columbia		
9. Tim Michel	Faculty/ Program Founder	Simon Fraser University	CEDAR	
10. Dr. Rosalyn Ing	Elder	University of British Columbia	Summer Science	
11. Kerrie Charnley	Education Coordinator		Summer Science	
12. Earl Muldon (Delgamuukw)	Gitxsan Hereditary Chief and Master Carver			
40 percent of all participants were faculty, community members, or administrators				

7.13 Method of Recruitment

I drew upon the knowledge and expertise of Aboriginal student service staff in the universities to aid in the recruitment and identification of Aboriginal students for interviews. I also emailed letters to former colleagues and peers that I worked with through Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (Graduate) and Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (Undergraduate) initiatives & Urban Aboriginal Community list-serves. Recruitment posters were also distributed through a snowball technique on Facebook. I arranged meetings with Aboriginal student service staff and program coordinators at each university to share information about my research and ask the best methods of recruitment at the institution. Most program coordinators encouraged me to broaden my selection criteria for participation in a program from two to five years so that I would have access to a larger number of youth to speak with. I learned that my selection criteria for youth under the age of 24 in a university transition program would severely limit the number of youth that I could interview, as the dominant demographic in the transition programs are mature students. Nevertheless, I was told that there was a new trend emerging in the number of youth entering these programs from high school and that I would find some youth to interview, “just not a lot”. I did not extend the age category criteria in my study because I wanted it to remain focused on youth. I also requested that Aboriginal student centres in each institution post information about inviting students to participate in the study. Because of this, I had to make extra efforts in my recruitment methods. I listened to the guidance from program staff on the best ways to recruit youth. A description of each of the programs will be included in Chapter 8. I will note recruitment methods for each program specifically below.

7.13.1 CEDAR

I was invited to attend the CEDAR program to observe program activities and personally introduce myself to some of the youth. The program coordinator felt that it would be best if she hand selected students for the interview given that many of the youth in the program were under the age of twelve (and therefore did not meet my selection criteria). She also thought it would be best to interview students who had been in the program for more than one year as they could give an in-depth perspective. I attended the program for a cultural activity so that I could familiarize myself with some of the youth, and provide them with consent forms for their guardians. I stayed until the end of the day so that I could share information about my research study with some of the guardians when they came to pick up their children. I also visited the program another two times to discuss my research with interested youth. At the end of the program I was also invited to a special community day celebration that was held to honour the youth for their participation in the program. The program coordinator arranged for me to do interviews with the youth and their families after the event.

7.13.2 University of British Columbia Summer Science

I was invited to attend two of the Summer Science Program's graduation ceremonies (as the program has two intake sessions) by the Director of Aboriginal Health. I spoke to the students as a group while they were eating dinner. I also passed out consent forms and a letter of introduction, and an information poster to all of the youth present. As these ceremonies took place in the evening, I brought my daughter Willow along with me. She proved to be of great assistance in helping me to secure interviews with a number of the students. I also asked program

staff to resend my information poster via email to all students from the 2012 sessions two weeks after the program ended.

7.13.3 Simon Fraser University Aboriginal Bridging Program & Pre-health Program

After an initial meeting with the program coordinator, I was informed that it would be best to have program staff email my research information poster and consent form to all youth that met my criteria. I was told that it might be difficult to find youth this way as there was low number of youth participants in the program and many of them might no longer have the same email address. I was encouraged to also work with the First Nations Student Service staff at the Burnaby campus. The First Nations Student Service staff at SFU posted my research information poster in their centre, emailed it to the board members of the Simon Fraser First Nations Student Organization, and emailed it to their student list-serve. After having no response from these methods, I once again asked the program coordinator and First Nations Student Centre for further assistance. A First Nations Student Centre staff personally spoke with students he knew had participated in the program and asked for their permission to pass their email addresses to me. I then sent these students my research information and asked them if they had time for an interview. I was also invited to attend the First Nations Student Centre 'Welcome Back Feast' to introduce myself to possible students; however, no students who had participated in the Aboriginal Pre-health or Aboriginal Bridging program were present.

7.13.4 University of British Columbia (Okanagan) ACCESS Program

After an initial introductory meeting with program staff from the ACCESS program, I was invited to come back for another visit to conduct my interviews in the First Nations Student Centre. Program staff informed me that they would post information about my research in the

centre and speak to a number of students that they knew personally to see if they would be interested in an interview.

7.13.5 University of Northern British Columbia Northern Advancement Program

I travelled to UNBC in early October 2012 on my way to visit family in Hazelton. Upon my arrival at UNBC, I learned that an administrative error had been made and the meeting that I had booked with an administrator from the program had been canceled due to illness and I had not been informed. Based on an intuitive feeling, I decided to make an impromptu stop at UNBC on my way back to Vancouver. I was fortunate to meet with the First Nations Director of Student Services. I was given a tour of the centre and was introduced to three students who had participated in the program. They provided me with their email addresses and asked me to send them information about my study. Upon my return to Vancouver, I received a telephone call from the First Nations Director of Student Services who informed me that he had spoken with five students who would be interested in participating in my research. I asked if I should plan another trip to UNBC for these interviews but was told that the students all had computers and would be available to Skype. I sent all of these students information about my study and inquired about an interview. I also sent each of these students another follow-up email. One student responded but was unable to schedule a time for an interview. As a result, I did not end up interviewing any students from this university. While I was in Northern B.C., I had the opportunity to interview a Summer Science graduate at my old secondary school in Hazelton (thanks to a number of teachers who became interested in my research and connected me with her).

7.13.6 University of Victoria Indigenous Mini-University Program

After initial emails to the Director of the First Peoples House, I was invited to travel to UVIC at the end of October to discuss my research, interview a program staff member and introduce myself to any youth participants currently attending UVIC. A staff member had posted information about my visit in the First Peoples House and spoke to some of the students who were now attending UVIC but had attended the program as high school students. I interviewed one student on my visit. I also bumped into a faculty member whom I knew from SAGE, who agreed to pass my information out to her students and her partner (who was also a faculty member) at another institution. This serendipitous meeting helped me to secure another interview from this university.

At the end of the recruitment phase of this research study, I truly began to appreciate the ‘work’ involved in storywork.



Figure 9 Ice Road Researcher Driving the Coquihalla on My Way to UBC Okanagan

7.14 Interviews

Interviews were held between the months of June 2012 to April 2013. In total 30 interviews were conducted with youth, persons of influence, and program faculty and staff [see table for more details]. I began by focusing on interviewing high school students and early university promotion initiative (Cedar, Emerging Summer Scholars & Summer Science) staff during the months of June, July and August of 2012. I then focused on identifying and interviewing students, faculty and staff members from the transition programs at UNBC, SFU, & UBC Okanagan from September through to April of 2013. All participants were given a minimum of one to two weeks time to consider participating in the interviews so that they could go over the consent forms in detail.

In my initial meetings with university staff at each campus, I inquired about the best way to follow traditional protocols for conducting research in that territory and followed instructions that were provided to me. Interviews took place at several territories across the province of British Columbia. To honour and respect the needs of participants (as per Indigenous protocol), I offered to meet the students at public locations and times that were most convenient for their schedules. The majority of interviews took place in university settings and coffee shops, with one interview taking place in a secondary school. One interview was also conducted via Skype. At the beginning of each interview, I offered participants food and a beverage so that we could start our interview in a 'good way'. To thank participants for their time, I offered students a 20 dollar gift card of their choice, and informed them that their name would be entered into a draw for an iPad©.

For purposes of analyses, I developed and loosely followed the same semi-structured protocol for Aboriginal youth in the AEUPI (see Appendix C), AOTP's (See Appendix D). My conversations with faculty, staff and community members were open ended with no protocols. All participants were encouraged to ask questions and share any relevant stories about the topic of Aboriginal high school to university transition. Interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and then returned to participants for verification.

7.15 Analysis Tools

In order to interpret all the information gathered from the various sources for this study, I used multiple tools, much in the same way that a carver must use multiple tools to create a bentwood box. As mentioned, I considered early university promotion initiatives and university transition programs as examples of 'cultural interface'. My dissertation engages Nakata's concept of the cultural interface by critically assessing university texts from Aboriginal university transition programs and websites as well as interviews with participants. My other methods included a wholistic pattern, bentwood box metaphor and Archibald's storywork principles, as organizing themes that are congruent with an Indigenous methodology for analyzing interviews. I also created a photo journal of the places that I visited while I conducted my research in order to challenge me to begin to work with the oral tradition to remember my thoughts, feelings and understanding of the research process. I often began my analysis with a prayer, and then a jog into the forest so I could find solitude, inspiration and a spiritual connection with what I was learning. As the study progressed, each interview was analyzed and compared to earlier interviews, then placed in a comparative table to ensure that I was being systematic (Appendix E). I read through each interview, consisting of approximately 350 pages

of transcripts, iPhone memos, and documents I had gathered. I also viewed photos I had taken on my research journey to provide visual reminders from the interviews. I then looked for emerging categories, while remaining open to other relationships and themes as they developed. I also analyzed the transcripts for experiences, elements and concepts that were related to the cultural interface and storywork. Throughout this phase, I adopted each participant's special words to help preserve the meaning of their experiences, and looked for cultural metaphors. Much of my analysis was also 'worked through' in conversations with friends and colleagues (often held under the auspicious gaze of the Elders photo images, in the Elders lounge in the First Nations House of Learning). Finally, the many messages I received through dreams, intuition and synchronistic moments helped my analysis.

Chapter 8: Opening the Door

8.1 Introduction

This chapter expands the discussion of the AEUPIs/AUTPs discussed in Chapter 6 by focusing on the British Columbia (B.C.) context. Although Aboriginal students comprise over 10% of the school age population in B.C (Heslop, 2009), only two percent complete Principles of Math 12, the university pre-requisite math course required to enter most research-intensive university programs (UBC, 2013). In addition, roughly half of all Grade 12 Aboriginal students in B.C. complete the other subjects that are required for university eligibility and some who do attempt these subjects do not receive passing grades (Heslop, 2009). As these statistics indicate, there is a strong need for the K-12 system, Aboriginal communities and B.C. research-intensive universities to make significant efforts to not only promote university education, but also increase the number of high school students who are qualified to transfer directly into those institutions. Research-intensive B.C universities currently offer ten early university preparation initiatives and four Aboriginal transition programs. The early university promotion initiatives aim to promote interest in a range of university subject areas, including: business, sports and leadership, math, museum and cultural studies, and sciences. The oldest AEUPI has been in existence for almost 25 years and the newest was created within the last five years. The university transition programs offered by B.C. research-intensive universities have been created in more recent years as a result of the K-12 system's near total failure to support Aboriginal students in transitioning directly from high school to university

This chapter will address the dissertation's first research question by discussing the origin, purpose, nature and structure of the AEUPIs/AUTPs for Aboriginal learners that are offered by four of the major research-intensive universities in British Columbia. Seven of the

programs were referenced for this study: Aboriginal University Preparation, Aboriginal Pre-health, Access, CEDAR, Emerging Summer Scholars, Indigenous Mini-University, and Summer Science. Each program has a unique origin, purpose, nature and structure. The first section of this chapter will discuss each program individually according to program type (AEUPI or AUTP). The second part will analyze the programs as a collective unit. The chapter references university websites, document and media analysis, participant observation, and nine interviews with university administrators and staff from these programs. It is also worthy to mention, that the title of this chapter originates from the spirit of my interviews with university staff and administrators of the AEUPI's/AUTP's. Almost all of the administrators I spoke with utilized the metaphor of an "Open door" to signify the meaning of university transition program. As result, I thought it was important to incorporate this metaphor into the title of this chapter.

8.2 Aboriginal Early University Promotion Initiatives

8.2.1 CEDAR Program

Origin Story

Tim Michel, the former Aboriginal Coordinator for the Faculties of Science and Land Food Systems, was the leading visionary behind the Cross-cultural Education through Demonstration, Activity & Recreation (CEDAR) program. Tim felt that the entire K-12 school experience was generally difficult for Aboriginal youth, regardless of their economic status or the quality of parental support they received. He also recognized the need for Aboriginal youth to continue their education during summers, as he observed that annual school summer breaks severely disrupted students' learning. He states:

If you are not engaged in [the] neo-liberal market orientated approach to your child's education, where you are hiring tutors for your kids and sending them to education

enriched environments in the summer. You are not going to provide the groundwork that can easily translate into success in the existing schooling system (Personal communication, January, 2013).

Tim goes on to further detail the rest of CEDAR's origin story:

Nigel Haggan arranged a meeting for me with Daniel Pauly, who is a world renowned scientist. Daniel was head of the Fisheries Centre at UBC at the time. During my meeting with him, I was thinking out loud in response to the question posed by Daniel, "What else do you do there?" And I blurted out that 'one of the things I am thinking about doing is this idea of having a summer camp that will attract and build skills with Aboriginal students that are from eight to twelve years of age. What we are trying to figure out is how to partner with different faculties and that sort of thing and provide a really fundamentally sound experience for these kids at UBC. I no sooner said that and he stated "sign us up for half a day". I was shocked. A beat skipped once, twice and then I said 'okay, I will get in touch with you in January. So by the end of May the next year, we had 17 or 18 kids enrolled for our first camp. So... it was really Daniel Polly and Nigel Haggan that gave me the push. Even when we talk about it [the CEDAR program] now. Nigel jokes and says "you know that program has its own creation myth! (Personal communication, January, 2013).

Purpose

The CEDAR Program aims to introduce 8- to 12-year-old Aboriginal students in elementary school to university life by enabling them to develop relationships with faculty members, university volunteers, and staff, and familiarizing them with the campus environment (UBC, 2013 a). It is focused on the primary goal of ensuring that urban Aboriginal youth will

return to the program year after year so that they may receive support and encouragement to attend university from an early age. Tim explains the rationale for the program's purpose and pedagogy, which impacts program staff, student volunteers and faculty members as well as students:

So pedagogically, CEDAR offers the kids things that they should be getting in school but not all of them are. It is also a way for creating space for them so they feel comfortable at the university. More importantly, the university students [who act as volunteers and who will eventually become doctors, college professors, scientists and administrators in society] and faculty and staff members... whenever they see these [Aboriginal] kids they will say "we've seen these faces before, they belong here. We know them. So the CEDAR program provides a way to create a space of possibilities within the kids' minds; the minds of faculty and staff, and with the university students working as volunteers in the programs (Personal communication, January, 2013).

Nature

CEDAR is often the first early university promotion initiative that Aboriginal youth experience before going on to participate in other UBC AEUPIs. According to CEDAR Program Coordinator, RYANNE JAMES, "CEDAR is meant to be a window into the opportunities onto campus. We literally get this group of kids here and go backstage on campus and show them what is happening in the labs, show them what people are doing" (Personal communication, July 2012). The core values of the program are premised on access, equity, and cross-cultural collaboration.

The CEDAR program is free to all participants and provides daily meals, camp gear, and free transportation from East Vancouver to UBC to address barriers that could impede

participation. As Ryanne explains: “Our typical parent pool doesn’t have 200 dollars a week. Most people don’t. They can’t send their child to school for an eight week summer. UBC [is also] really, really far away from the target community being the downtown East-side” (Personal communication, July, 2012). Other unique features of the program are its three-to-one adult-to-child ratio and a ‘Peer Mentorship Leadership Program’ which encourages program alumni to return to the program to serve as mentors and practice their leadership skills. Some Indigenous knowledge and cultural components are woven into the program in various ways, such as: cedar weaving, Elder involvement, pow-wow dancing, visits to the Museum of Anthropology, the presence of Aboriginal staff, and the exchange of knowledge between Aboriginal youth from different nations. Program staff also note that the program reaches a high number of children in foster care. Lastly, program highlights include a field trip to UBC’S wind tunnel, a visit to the Museum of Anthropology, a GPS mapping trek in Pacific Spirit Park, and activities at Science World and Watermania.

Structure

CEDAR’s principle sponsor is the UBC Faculty of Science, with additional funding coming from various government agencies. Over the last six years the program has hosted hundreds of urban Aboriginal youth from the Lower Mainland annually and utilized the contributions of hundreds of volunteers from various UBC departments.

The program ran for 10 days in the summer for its first 8 years of operation and now operates for five days in July; and is currently housed in at UBC’s First Nations House of Learning. Program activities vary from day to day. The CEDAR website (UBC, 2013a) highlights the structure of a typical day:

Each day begins with the option of arts and crafts, reading or recreational activities at the Longhouse. A light breakfast of milk and cereal is available for campers who did not get chance to eat before arriving. Afterwards campers learn about research being done by faculty and students through fun and interactive presentations. Past activities include: making monster masks with functional flashing lights with the help of Engineering and Arts students and learning about the special bar-headed geese from a campus biologist. After lunch, campers will participate in one more session, which could include a visit to the Beatty Bio-diversity Museum, or a visit to the vegetable garden on campus. The day ends with a journal writing session where campers have the opportunity to reflect on their thoughts and experiences from over the course of the day.

The camp concludes with a celebration that honours students and their families and showcases the youths' achievements as well as the activities they participated in during their fun-filled week. Program assessments are based on informal student feedback forms and daily staff meetings.

8.2.2 Emerging Summer Scholars Program

Origin

In 2007, Melania Alvarez, a B.C. Education Coordinator for the Pacific Institute of Mathematics & Sciences (PIMS), was approached by several teachers from Britannia Secondary School who were concerned that no Aboriginal students had completed Math 12 even though the school's proportion of Aboriginal students was double the provincial average (University of British Columbia, 2013b). As Melania explains:

I was approached by certain individuals (a teacher and some people who work with Aboriginal students) because they were working with these young people for almost two years and they wanted them to get Math 10. They believed they had done everything right and then something happened and these kids were not doing well in Math 10. I was approached to do something during the summer and during the year so the kids could catch up and pass Math 10. So we started with five kids that year... Then, this friend of mine contacted me about the UBC Farm. So that first year, they took three and a half hours of math in the morning if you can believe it! Then they took two and a half hours working at the farm. We gave them scholarships because we also understood that some of the kids (especially if you are 17 year old) are expected to work throughout the summer and make some money. So we said "Okay, you can work at the farm and we will pay you. That was eight years ago (Personal communication, August, 2012).

The program has since evolved and transformed due to youth feedback, a new partnership with the First Nations House of Learning, and a new source of funding. In its second year, the youth decided that they would like to expand their work opportunities beyond the UBC Farm, so Melania and PIMS staff introduced an internship program that gives youth paid job placements throughout the campus. It was also decided that the program would expand the skill-building subjects to include both Math and English, since they are the primary core subjects required for university admission. It wasn't until these final changes were made that the Emerging Summer Scholars (ESSP) program was given its current name. As Melania states, "Things don't get set from the beginning. You learn along the way and see what happens" (Personal communication, August, 2012).

Purpose

The goals of the ESSP are to assist Aboriginal youth in Grades 10 through 12 to develop strong academic skills in Math and English, to foster a sense of pride in Aboriginal culture, and to establish a strong sense of community. Students also gain a better understanding of the career opportunities available to them through their job placements and relationships with UBC faculty, affiliated faculty, and staff (University of British Columbia, 2013b).

Nature

The Emerging Summer Scholars Program staff's concentrated effort to break down the learning stigmas and labeling that Aboriginal learners experience in the K-12 system is a central component of the program. Rick Ouellet, an Officer for the First Nations House of Learning Student and Outreach Development, shares a story about an illiterate student who entered the program in Grade 10:

[One of our students] learned how to read in five weeks in this program. Yeah. It is not about identifying the brightest and the best and saying "Hey we are going to bring you here." It is really about saying "Well, we think you didn't learn to read because you were failed by the system not because there is anything wrong with you. If that is where you start from, the kid doesn't feel stigmatized (Personal communication, July, 2012).

Rick's comments highlight the program's philosophy. Its academic curriculum is taken directly from on-line B.C. English & Math 10, 11, & 12 courses. As Shirley¹², EMSS Program

Coordinator, explains:

Say a student is grade 10, going into grade 11 [they] will be taught grade 11 math at the camp. So they don't actually get credit for it, but when they go back to school in September and the teacher starts teaching the student already knows this stuff so they will get an A and their confidence starts out high right away in class (Personal communication, September, 2012).

The program's unique features include: weekly compensation for students who attend the program, opportunities to be mentored by distinguished faculty and staff, the professional training and hands-on experience gained through internships, cultural programming, and wholistic student support. Students receive 25 dollars per week if their attendance is perfect and this compensation is lowered for any days missed. Although this practice is controversial, program staff feel that it motivates students who may be reluctant to dedicate their summer to learning math. The cultural workshops that students participate in include an animation workshop with Cree animator Steve Sanderson and identity workshops with Deborah Martel and Elder Larry Grant. The wide range of inspiring intern positions youth have participated in include: a lab assistant in a nuclear accelerator, a writing assistant to a renowned Aboriginal literary author, and a lab assistant working on fish experiments in the department of biology. One student coordinated an engineering science camp for children and learned how to be a program

¹² A pseudonym has been used for this participant's name.

coordinator. In addition, students have the opportunity to work with leading faculty on a number of exciting research projects.

Structure

The ESSP is a joint initiative that is sponsored by the Pacific Institute for Math and Science (PIMS) and the First Nations House of Learning (FNHL). It is one of many math initiatives that are run by PIMS, which include a K-12 program in East Vancouver, scholarships for outstanding math students and math outreach events in rural areas of the province. Many youth learn about the ESSP program when they attend other PIMS AEUPIs while in elementary school.

The ESSP operates for five weeks during the summer months and is located in the First Nations House of Learning. Approximately 20 students participate and complete the program annually, and many students attend for more than one year. The ESSP is supported by 20 UBC staff and faculty members, Vancouver school board members and volunteers. The program structure is for students to attend a Math or English class each morning and participate in an internship at various university facilities three days a week. Other afternoons are dedicated to IK and cultural activities such as spending quality time with Elders and meeting with a number of Aboriginal professionals who are working successfully in their respective fields. The program ends with a community celebration. Program assessment is based on daily talking circles with students, students' test scores in core subject areas, and staff debriefings.

8.2.3 Indigenous Mini University

Origin Story

The Indigenous Mini University (IMU) was established ten years ago at the University of Victoria. Daphne Grant¹³, a University of Victoria staff member, explains the program's origins:

The original Mini University Summer Camp was an initiative out of the recruitment office [and an Indigenous] student from the Co-Op program coordinated the program initially. The program [in its start-up days] was on a little smaller scale for students to come to campus and I believe their parents had to pay to get their kids here and the costs associated with it. That was ten intakes ago. Then, in 2008, we received funding from the Royal Bank of Canada to fund the summer camp for a six year period until 2013.

Due to program's corporate sponsorship, it is offered at a low cost and has grown substantially from its inception (Personal communication, October, 2012).

Purpose

The IMU is targeted at British Columbia Indigenous students in Grades 8 to 12 who would like to stay on the University of Victoria's campus and participate in a variety of programs and workshops that will introduce them to the university's faculties, disciplines, and services. According to the University of Victoria's website (2013) "During the 'Mini-U', you'll get the whole UVic experience, from joining in academic, physical, social and cultural activities to sleeping over in Residence" (University of Victoria, 2013). Daphne further elaborates on the program's purpose:

¹³ A pseudonym has been used for this participant's name.

It gives them [the students] an opportunity to see themselves here, to feel welcome, to open the door to post-secondary, maybe not UVIC (and that is what we really stress to them)...I think it opens eyes to new programs they didn't even know existed (Personal communication, October 2012).

As indicated, program staff feel that this program allows youth to see university as a place where they belong. The staff aspire for students to leave the program with the goal of attending university, but are not concerned as to whether the youth ultimately choose the University of Victoria or another institution.

Nature

The IMU's unique program features include: its low cost, living in residence, mentorship from UVIC undergraduate ambassadors (many of whom are former program alumni), Elders on staff, a UVIC student card, and a number of cultural activities. Students also receive a 25-dollar bookstore card and a UVic hooded sweatshirt for completing the program. Program highlights include: a computer science workshop on programming and scratch language, a rigorous orientation to the campus's numerous facilities, kinesiology & chemistry workshops, medical school labs, crime investigation workshops, and mock trials at the university's law school. Further, the program incorporates IK and cultural components from beginning to end by offering a number of activities, including: a traditional welcome, a visit to Suke Nation to learn about its solar panel project and attend a feast, an Elders lunch, drum making workshops, and traditional singing and dancing. The program ends with a traditional honouring and recognition ceremony. These cultural activities are particularly vital to the number of youth in the program who are in foster care. As Daphne explains:

The Suke Nation hosted us one year. They said “oh we will do a feast, and we’ll welcome them to the territory and we’ll have some songs and we’ll cater and we said, okay “we will pay for that”. What we didn’t envision happening is that the Metis, urban, and children in care students found it so powerful to have a connection to the land, to a reserve, and to have the chief...and an Elder there to smudge them and welcome them. They all embraced it. So we thought it was really important to have this every year (Personal communication, 2012).

This experience affirms the importance of the program’s IK and cultural components. Program staff are aware of this importance and go to great lengths to ensure that cultural programming remains at the heart of the program.

Structure

The program hosts approximately 40 students from all over B.C. for a one-week stay at the university. It is so popular that there is often a wait list for admission. The structure of the program changes daily to ensure that youth participate in a wide range of wholistic activities. Daphne shares the importance of giving the students a warm welcome to campus as well as providing them with an engaging program structure:

The first day is kind of like all orientation. So they show up bright and early in the morning and they get a registration package and then there’s their schedule and introduction to the chaperones. We do some theatre-based work, as well, so we have a theatre person come in and do an introduction sort of exercise with them and how it feels to be out of their comfort zone and how you know that’s very similar to starting university and leaving home and you know any stuff. And then they have that welcome thing, then the drumming. [We listen] to what the students say on their evaluations, they

are very scared when they get here and by the end of that first night, they are connected, and by the Friday, they're crying because they don't want to leave. So overall the program is a combination of workshops and info stuff, so we try to do as much hands on stuff as we can, cause we don't want them to get bored right? (Personal communication, October, 2012).

The program receives no internal funding from the university, which means that it must depend on corporate sponsorship (at present the Royal Bank of Canada). There is a 50-dollar registration fee, but program staff are willing to waive it if it is a barrier to a selected student's participation. The program is located in the Indigenous Peoples House and UVic residences. Eight staff (3 full-time and 5 part-time) work to meet the needs of the students during their one-week stay in the program. Assessment is based primarily on student feedback forms and the funder's evaluation tools.

8.2.4 Summer Science

Origin

Dr. Rosalyn Ing (former Coordinator for First Nations Health Careers) graciously sat down with me one afternoon to share her memories about the origin of the Summer Science program:

Well, I wasn't the one that started the program. Dr. Madeleine McIvor was the original person who began that whole process. I think that was 1987. I came on board at UBC in 1994, it was the first year that the Summer Science would have been on. Well, you know it was kind of a two-fold experience because we used to hire the students who were already in the health sciences to be the coordinators and the people who would run the program and the recreation supervisor, or you know, well the coordinators as well.

You know they were all in sciences mostly waiting to get into either medicine or nursing or whatever. For the high school students who came into the program, it was more or less an experience for them as an introduction to what university would be like because we expected them to eventually come to UBC or other universities to do sciences or engineering or not just health sciences but other disciplines as well. Then it showed them, I guess, if they felt intimidated at least they could meet professors who were fathers and grandfathers as well. So it made them comfortable when they saw how personally responsible I guess the professors felt towards the students to get them to feel welcomed and to experience university life (Personal communication, April, 2013).

Dr. Ing further discusses the structure of the program when she worked in it:

So it was originally two weeks for the first maybe five or six years but then it got so that I think you know might have been a little long for some students when they were there. So we decided to split it so we could get twice as many students you know in for just a week experience each. So then it was split into grade nine, I guess they had to finish grade eight going into nine. So it was nine and ten and the other group was twelve. They were a little bit older in that age group. Most of them though were just in grade eleven not many were finishing twelve yet. That worked out better, twice as many students for the two weeks. Twenty for one week and twenty the next. Before we had the forty students come in and stayed two weeks. No twenty students came in and stayed for two weeks. It was mainly structured, very structured because you know we had to ensure that they were safe while they were there at UBC. You know protected. We didn't let them do very much on their own. They had to be under the care of their supervisor the whole time. A lot of the [pause]. Well each year, the coordinator (who ever the coordinator was), would

approach different professors to see who would want to participate in the program. They were all very willing and very cooperative and they enjoyed doing it. So we were never short of anyone to help us in exposing students to science. The thing that I guess enjoyed the most was getting the cultural experience because we did try to introduce them to the stories and dances and songs and I think even some of the activities including making drums and working with cedar (actually going out into the woods and getting the cedar roots and stripping them). It was really quite. I thought it was wonderful for them. They enjoyed it and there was always an Elder in the program who was like an advisor culturally but also involved in most of the activities. They lived in residence during their time that the program was going on (Personal communication, April, 2013).

She further shares the importance of promoting science education for Aboriginal youth:

Well, at that time when I was working there weren't many Aboriginal students in any of the Health Sciences. I think when I first went there were only three medical students... And one nurse and another came on board after. So that was only two and nobody was in physiotherapy or occupational therapy until later on. You know, I recruited a couple but we needed to you know build up a pool I guess of our own Aboriginal students to go into the health sciences and any of the sciences really (Personal communication, April, 2013).

Purpose

The Summer Science program is intended for Aboriginal youth (First Nations, Metis and Inuit) in Grades 8 to 11 who are interested in learning more about the health and human services field through first hand service (University of British Columbia, 2013 c). Educator Coordinator Kerrie Charnley notes that the program has a significant impact by “opening the universe for students in many ways” (Personal communication, April, 2013).

Nature

Over the program's extensive history it has boasted a number of alumni that have gone on to be doctors, physiotherapists, Aboriginal nurses, Aboriginal Health Directors, and a number of Aboriginal community leaders in all areas. Students are required to complete an application to the program that requires that they submit high school transcripts, two letters of reference, and a letter of intent. The application process is intended to simulate a university application process and assist students to begin developing their skills to transition to university. The program requires that all students meet a certain grade point average, although Kerrie Charnley notes that "it can be waived if students have a good letter of intent" that demonstrates their interest in the program (Personal communication, April, 2013). This year the program featured both a male Elder and a female Elder, which enabled the inclusion of traditional Indigenous cultural components such as a girls and boys circle, drumming, and singing. A new junior leadership position was also introduced this year. The UBC website states that the junior leadership position enables former Summer Science alumni to "progressively learn leadership, teamwork, and communication skills over the course of the program sessions. Youth Leaders are supported by SSP staff members and volunteers, and act as role models for students participating in the program". A typical day in the program entails: sleeping in until 6:45 a.m., an exercise activity that students can choose from (e.g., yoga, running or stair climbing), a self-serve breakfast, a morning talking circle and check in, a morning workshop, a noon sharing circle, and one to two more afternoon workshops. Students also have the opportunity to attend one field trip per week that has included outings to the Planetarium and the beach. All program activities and outings reflect the interests of students in the cohort.

Structure

The Summer Science program recently celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. Throughout its duration, it has served well over 1000 Aboriginal youth across the province of B.C. with some students participating in the program from as far away as Nova Scotia. The program is currently based out of the University of British Columbia's Institute of Aboriginal Health and is partnered with the First Nations House of Learning. Summer Science students have an opportunity to stay in residence at UBC for one week during the month of July each year. The program has two sessions. The first session is for Grades 10 to 11, and the second is for Grades 8 and 9. Once students are accepted into the program, they are expected to pay a \$200.00 fee for attending the program. The fee helps to ensure student's commitment to attending the program but can be waived for students in financial need. The University of British Columbia website (2013 c) further states "Students are also encouraged to apply for funding from their band or school district. The UBC Institute for Aboriginal Health [provides] limited number of bursaries available for students who do not qualify for Band/School District funding. The registration fee goes towards accommodation and meal costs for the students, which are covered for the duration of their stay at the camp." In the upcoming year, the Summer Science program will have no funding source. Therefore fundraising for the program is a consistent concern and "is a year long endeavor" according to Kerrie Charnley (Personal communication, April, 2013).

8.3 Aboriginal University Transition Programs

8.3.1 Aboriginal Access Program

Origin

Adrienne Vedan, Aboriginal Programs & Service Director for UBC Okanagan, talks about the origin of the Aboriginal Access Program (which is also offered at UBC Okanagan campus):

The program started in September 2007 session. It was before I started. Lyle Muller, was the Director of Aboriginal Programs & Services. The Aboriginal Access started as a pilot program in that year. That year [Lyle] put together a proposal because the Ministry of Advanced Education had made an announcement that they were allocating Aboriginal Targeted Full Time Equivalents (FTES) for institutes for different programming. So he put in a program for Aboriginal Targeted and FTES for the program. So the proposal was successful and they received FTE's...Lyle had worked with English faculty to create an English 114 in Aboriginal Perspectives (English class). It is the equivalent to the 112 which is the university writing course that all students take. So having that curriculum from an Aboriginal perspective be part of the program was developed in preparation [before the start of the program]. So that was developed as well as Math 126 (which is the Aboriginal perspectives pre-calculus). So those were developed here already before I started. So when I started in 2008, it was still a pilot project... So we had a couple of years to look at program results to look at admissions pieces. To look at the internal admission processes once they have completed their year of Access studies. In October, 2010 we went to the Senate with our program proposal. Leading up to that we went through all the consultations with the faculties about the

program (the structure of the program, the courses, what the program entails). It went to the Senate in 2010 and it went through. So we were really excited that it became a permanent admissions piece here on campus (Personal communication, October, 2012).

Purpose

According to the University of British Columbia Okanagan website (2013), the Aboriginal Access program is intended “ to offer a new opportunity for Aboriginal students to access university study while not being required to meet the usual admissions requirements of UBC” (1). The website further states that the program “prepares students for degree studies by allowing them to register in a specific set of university level courses” (University of British Columbia Okanagan, 2013). Adrienne explains that this is important because it provides students with a university transition that allows them to enter any program they choose upon completion and as such, opens doors to future career options:

I think one part of the program (that is really exciting) is to see that when students come through ACCESS Studies some really have definite clear goals that “I want to go into this program” and some don’t know what program that they want to go into. I think what is really exciting for me is once they come through Access studies program they can really go into any direct entry program here on campus. So we have students now who have gone through into visual arts, to science, to management to arts (Personal communication, October, 2013).

Nature

The program’s unique features include: Aboriginal perspective university-level courses in Math and English, wholistic student supports, strong academic advising, open program and admissions (there are no pre-requisites for enrollment). The program has strong community

connections, as it is partnered with the En'owkin Centre, an Aboriginal controlled educational institution. This partnership allows UBC Okanagan to offer the Access program to students in another cohort who would like to begin the program in their home community for their first year of studies by taking classes at the En'owkin Centre. The En'owkin Centre also offers Okanagan language courses on the UBC Okanagan campus and students who complete these courses receive transfer credits for them and can use them towards a second language requirement.

Indigenous knowledge and cultural components are woven throughout the program and are evident in Aboriginal perspectives courses in Math and English as well as the utilization of Aboriginal pedagogy in teaching methods and student support services. In addition, each year the program offers field trips to Okanagan Aboriginal communities, participation in the Okanagan Salmon Feast, and Elders' luncheons.

Structure

According to the University of British Columbia Okanagan (2013) the Access program provides a program overview that explains its academic structure:

Aboriginal Access Studies students register in three university credit courses per term. Each course consists of three hours per week of lecture plus an additional hour of tutorial. In this program, students receive academic, personal, cultural, and physical support. Aboriginal Access Studies students attend classes alongside UBC Okanagan degree students, are evaluated according to the same standards and earn the same university recognized credits. Cores courses include: Writing 098, English 114, Math 126, and Indigenous Studies 100. At the end of the program, students can apply to a degree

program with a minimum of six courses (18 credits) if they earn a minimum of 60% in each course.

Since the program's inception it has served 115 students. There is no cap on the number of students able to attend the program each year. The program is open to recent high school graduates and mature students who would like additional support as they transition into university. Mature students constitute the majority of the program's student demographic, although the number of younger students who enter directly from high school has increased in recent years. The program also features a dual intake process in September and January of each calendar year. Adrienne explains the benefit of this process for First Nations students:

Some students apply for Access studies because some bands consider it a university entrance program. Those students receive less priority on their lists so then they will get notified "we can't fund you for September but maybe money will become available for January so we can fund you then". It is nice for those students who are the bubble for funding so they can start in January (Personal communication, October, 2012).

Since a lack of funding can be a significant barrier that prevents students from attending university, the dual intake process keeps the doors open for students who have to wait for funding.

In recent years, Adrienne has noticed the importance of role modeling to the program and its impacts on student recruitment & enrollment:

Our students go home and some of them when they come back. Maybe a cousin has come back and that is really kind of neat to see a friend. So that is really positive too. That they have been able to be that role model, to show that "you can do it too!" Which is really exciting to see (Personal communication, October, 2012).

8.3.2 Aboriginal University Program

Origin

Natalie Wood-Wiens, Coordinator, Indigenous Programs in Continuing Studies at Simon Fraser University (SFU), explains the origin of the Aboriginal University Prep Program:

I had proposed the idea of an Aboriginal Access Program to the Dean of Continuing Studies in 2005 when I was doing some contract work with the Chief Dan George Centre (the centre was a partnership between the Aboriginal community and the university to provide Aboriginal students with better access to university level educational opportunities). Unfortunately the Chief Dan George Centre closed its doors in the midst of creating the University Preparation program but the Dean at that time wanted to continue work on the program so we did. The University Prep program was piloted in 2007 in partnership with Kwantlen University College (now referred to as Kwantlen Polytechnic University) at Kwantlen's Langley campus. It wasn't the greatest location in terms of easy access for students. We were successful in receiving monies through the Aboriginal Special Projects fund allowing us to continue to offer the program for another two year and later received funding from Metro Vancouver Urban Aboriginal Strategy. We relied on seed and grant funding for different sources to keep the program afloat (Personal communication, December, 2012).

Natalie adds that:

The University Prep program was awarded Bridge status by SFU Senate Preparation Program became accredited in January 2010 and now provides successful graduates with admission to SFU and course credits toward their first year of university. The program

received three years of funding from the SFU Priority Fund (Personal communication, December, 2012).

Natalie is the coordinator for both the University Preparation Program and the Aboriginal Pre-health programs, and describes in detail the process of getting the two programs credited in the “Origin section” for the Aboriginal Pre-Health Program.

Purpose

The Aboriginal University Prep Program is a bridging program that assists students to prepare for university and gain confidence in their ability to succeed. It is open to students of Aboriginal heritage (First Nations, Metis & and Inuit) who are high school graduates or mature learners. Program faculty member Joyce Schneider explains the program’s purpose in further detail:

I know a lot of when we first get to post-secondary, there is a lot of stigma there. You know, we feel like we don’t belong here because of all the stuff from the past from education. You know negative experiences. I think the program really helps to turn that around. Students say “I can do it” (Personal communication, October, 2012).

Joyce’s comments highlight the positive emotional impacts that the program has on students in fulfilling its purpose.

Nature

The program employs a cohort model and small class size which allows for stronger bonds to develop between students and instructors in an extended family environment. Students receive support from Elders and tutors who provide subject-specific tutoring in math and academic writing. Program highlights include potluck lunches, a resident Elder, and Indigenous pedagogical approaches to instruction and assignments.

Structure

The program was established as the result of partnerships between the university and government, local First Nation's Bands, school districts, Aboriginal community organizations. It is currently funded through SFU's Priority Fund. Located at SFU's Surrey campus, the program runs over one term. Tuition fees are \$1485.00 and course materials and textbooks are provided at no extra cost. The program is designed to give students the opportunity to experience and take part in a broad range of courses, including: Indigenous knowledge and culture(s), foundational university-level writing and mathematics, learning strategies, personal wellness that incorporate traditional approaches to health and wellness. Students are required to successfully complete the following: FNST101 Culture, Languages, and Origins of Canada's First Peoples; FALX99 Foundations of Academic Literacy; FANX99 Foundations of Analytical and Quantitative Reasoning in Math, and; LEJ101 Learning Strategies: Launching Your Educational Journey (non-credit).

Students who complete the program will receive academic credit for the courses they have taken and a conditional acceptance to SFU. This means that in order to be accepted into an SFU undergraduate degree program, Aboriginal Pre-Health graduates (see below) are expected to earn a minimum final grade of C in each course, meet attendance requirements, and complete all assignments.

8.3.3 Aboriginal Pre-Health Aboriginal

Origin

Natalie Wood-Wiens, Coordinator, Indigenous Programs in Continuing Studies, illustrates the interconnection between the University Prep Program and the Aboriginal Pre-Health Program and the impact that the former had on the creation of the latter:

In 2007, we received word that Health Canada had put out a call for initiatives that would create supportive environments in health sciences programs at post-secondary educational institutions in an attempt to increase enrolment and success of Aboriginal students in these programs. It was called the Aboriginal Health and Human Resources Initiative. Because we had an existing university transition program we decided to submit a proposal for a pre-health program in 2007/2008. This was such a great opportunity to expand the University Prep and develop a health stream so we submitted a proposal and it was successful. The University Prep & Aboriginal Pre-Health were initially non-credit programs but in 2010 we submitted a proposal to SFU Senate requesting recognition of the coursework that our students were doing (courses were actually SFU credit courses). We also thought we would throw in conditional acceptance and see what happened. As it turned out when the students came back from Christmas holidays in Jan 2010, they returned to a credit program with conditional acceptance to SFU. It was an exciting and interesting experience for students. It took awhile (five years) to get to this place but it was definitely worth all the work. These would not be successful programs without support from the Aboriginal community faculty /staff champions within the university and feedback received from students on program improvements (Personal communication, December, 2012).

Purpose

Aboriginal Pre-Health is a bridging program that provides students with an opportunity to explore a variety of health careers as well as complete the necessary pre-requisites for post-secondary health or health science programs. According to the program website, “In SFU’s eight-month Aboriginal Pre-health program, [you] will get a solid orientation to your career

options, a boost of encouragement and support, and the academic pre-requisites that will set you up to succeed in a university Bachelor's degree program" (Simon Fraser University, 2013). The program is open to students of Aboriginal heritage (First Nations, Metis and Inuit) who are high school graduates or mature learners.

Nature

The program employs a cohort model and small class size, which allows for stronger bonds to develop between students and instructors. Students receive support from Elders and tutors who provide subject-specific tutoring in math, academic writing, biology and chemistry. Program highlights include potluck lunches, a resident Elder, and Indigenous pedagogical approaches to instruction and assignments. The program boasts an overall strength -based approach. As Joyce states says: "We are building the student's strengths. We are not focusing on the deficit based [approach] in any way" (Personal communication, October, 2012).

Structure

The program was established as the result of partnerships between the university and government, local First Nation's Bands, school districts, Aboriginal community organizations. It is currently funded through SFU's Priority Fund. It is a full-time two-semester (fall and winter) program at SFU's Surrey campus. Tuition is \$2970 and there is no application fee. Course materials and textbooks are provided at no extra cost to the student. First semester courses are: HSCI130 Foundations of Health Science I; FNST101 Culture Language and Origins of Canada's First Peoples; FALX99 Foundations of Academic Literacy; FANX99 Foundations of Analytical & Quantitative Reasoning, and; LSAS101 Learning Strategies for Academic Success. Second semester courses include: HSCI130 Foundations of Health Science II; BISC100 Introduction to Biology; CHEM109 Introduction to Chemistry for Health Careers, and; HLTH110 Selected

Topics in Indigenous Peoples Health. In order to be accepted into an undergraduate degree program at SFU, Aboriginal Pre-Health graduates are expected to earn a minimum final grade of C in each course and meet attendance requirements, and complete all assignments.

The program has also been the catalyst for another initiative called the Training of Aboriginal Youth in Biomedical Labs, an initiative providing entry-level training and mentorship for Aboriginal Pre-health graduates who are currently enrolled in biomedical science programs at SFU. Further, The Aboriginal Pre-health program is also closely connected to the Aboriginal Math Catcher Program, an inter-institutional collaboration and early university promotion initiative that aims to inspire Aboriginal youth to pursue a mathematics education at university. Many Aboriginal Pre-Health students volunteer with the Aboriginal Math Catcher program as student mentors and visit Aboriginal communities across B.C. in that capacity (Simon Fraser University, 2013 b).

8.4 **Summary**

Understanding the nature, purpose, and structure of AEUPIs and AUTPs advances an understanding of the various ways in which they serve Aboriginal learners within the larger university structure and how they contribute to Aboriginal communities. Six of the above-mentioned programs were established because dedicated university staff members applied for internal or external funding to enhance Aboriginal persons' participation in university. Two programs were created as a result of pivotal chance occurrences. Almost all of the program administrators interviewed for this study commented that the AEUPI/AUTPs they worked for had evolved significantly since its inception as a result of the input provided by youth participants and the community at large, changes to funding structures, and on-going efforts to strengthen program objectives. All of the programs have very clear purposes. In general, they all

aim to promote university education, career exploration, and the attainment of academic university pre-requisites in a caring environment. “Opening the door” was a common metaphor that the administrators used to describe the purpose of these programs. This metaphor will be analyzed in further detail in Chapter 11. The importance placed on acquiring the academic pre-requisites necessary for university increased with the age level of participants. In addition, AEUPIs place more emphasis on skill-building through fun activities than AUTPs do and equip participants with knowledge and information about the large array of university programs available to them. In contrast, AUTPs place a stronger emphasis on acquiring the necessary academic courses needed for university education in a chosen field.

Demographically, the AUTPs served two different age demographics (recent high school attendees and mature learners) and all the AEUPIs/AUTPs were inclusive of Aboriginal people with diverse heritages (First Nations, Metis, Non-status, and Inuit). However, there was some variance in the AEUPIs’ target populations. For example, two of the programs welcomed Aboriginal students from across the province, with administrators working to ensure that the student population was regionally representative. The other two AEUPIs focused exclusively on urban Aboriginal youth residing in East Vancouver. One of the AEUPIs targeted elementary school children, while the other three were designed for high school students. All of the AEUPI administrators stated that they made a conscious effort to include Aboriginal children in foster care and tailored specific program supports to meet their needs. Females comprised the majority of students in all of the AEUPIs/AUTPs.

The nature of AEUPIs varied, with 1 of the 4 focusing on science education and science-related professions. One AEUPI program emphasized the development of both Math and English academic skills, in conjunction with paid internships that allowed students to explore careers

related to these two subject areas. The second encouraged students to explore a variety of disciplines. The remaining two introduced students to university life through a variety of academic and social activities. The nature of the AUTPs also varied, with two being general programs that provided students with the necessary pre-requisites for the university programs of their choosing and one focusing specifically on the health sciences. All of the AEUPIs/AUTPs employed a strength-based approach that incorporated Indigenous knowledges and cultures in the curriculum, pedagogical instruction, student supports, and community activities. However, the level and importance of Indigenous content varied considerably between the programs, which will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 11. Further, most of the AEUPIs/AUTPs did not make a concerted effort to promote critical consciousness or Indigenous self-determination goals amongst their students (this will also be discussed in further in Chapter 11).

The structure of the AEUPIs/AUTPs varied in terms of time, daily schedules, the number of employees and volunteers involved, and the level of program assessment that was conducted. This reflects differences in funding structures, program goals, staff members' backgrounds and personal foci, and the extent of the participant university's commitment to the programs.

In general, the AEUPIs strived to balance academic and recreational activities in order to maintain students' interest. The cost of the AEUPIs varied from free to approximately two hundred dollars. Three of the four AEUPIs received internal ongoing funding from the university, while one program was corporately sponsored. Two of the programs operated on a 24-hour basis as the students who attended them came from all over B.C. and lived in university residences. The other two were day programs. All of the AEUPIs operated in the summer months and employed a youth leadership model that encouraged former program alumni to serve as role models in order to support program participants. Most of the AEUPI administrators of these

programs collaborated with the alumni/youth leaders as part of their recruitment strategy to promote the program to family and community members. Although some administrators spoke about expanding the programs to other locations, none have yet done so.

None of the AUTPs had specific pre-requisites, although some students were expected to write letters explaining their academic goals, professional area/areas of interest, and reasons for wanting to attend the AOTP. The AOTPs varied in terms of time, cost, number of employees, and number of required courses needed to graduate from the program. All of the AOTPs had recently been accredited by university boards of governance, which signaled a shift in universities' perception of the importance of these programs. All of the AOTPs were offered at a cost, which meant that students were expected to seek outside funding sources such as band funding or Canada student loans to attend them. The time frame for attending these programs varied from 4 months (1 semester) to two years (six semesters). The courses offered within these programs also varied, although all of them emphasized major academic subjects (Math, English, Science) and endeavored to offer wholistic student supports, with some programs featuring an Elder in residence.

All of the program administrators noted a need to improve student tracking, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 12. Finally, all of the administrators emphasized the importance of inter-institutional collaboration and relationship-building with colleagues at other institutions in order to ensure that Aboriginal students experience optimal success at the university of their choice. The AEUPIs/AOTPs discussed in this chapter are committed to improving university transitions for Aboriginal learners as well as promoting IK and Indigenous cultures. The next chapter will examine Aboriginal youths' experiences within the AEUPI/AOTPs in further detail.

Chapter 9: Walking Through the Door, Heads Held High

9.1 Introduction

This chapter will address the dissertation's second research question by exploring how Aboriginal learners experience challenges and successes in early university preparation and university transition programs. I have extended the metaphor from the title of the previous chapter to illustrate the stories and lived experiences of participants who walk through the 'open door' of the university with a positive sense of identity and pride in their Indigenous cultures. The chapter references 18 interviews with youth in Aboriginal Early University Promotion Initiatives (AEUPIs) and University Transition Programs (AUTPs). It is divided into the following themes: visioning, belonging, wholistic student success, and generosity; which are linked to Indigenous theoretical understandings and the participants' own words. These themes are interrelated and combine to facilitate a better understanding of the two primary Aboriginal high school-to-university university transitions pathways. I have attempted to note the successes and challenges that characterize each theme and made the decision to combine the AEUPI and AOTP responses, despite differences in the two groups of youth who attended these programs.

9.2 Visioning

Heavy Runner (2009) defines the concept of visioning as "a creative exploration of choices [that assists] students to begin their journey into higher education, particularly for first generation students" (p.126). Similar to Heavy Runner, I have decided to name the mental images that the youth presented so vividly in their stories as 'visioning' because it reveals AEUPIs' & AUTPs' capacity to facilitate learners' success by prompting them to gain a greater awareness and understanding of their future higher education and career goals. This visioning process is integral to the discussion put forth in the chapter because it not only augments

learners' interest and commitment, but also helps them to build confidence in their capacity to transition from high school to university. The visioning process is shaped by: prior K-12 experience, persons of influence, exploration, experience, transformation, and role models. Each of these will be discussed.

9.2.1 Prior K-12 Experience

In my discussions with them, the youth briefly touched on how the K-12 schooling experience had impacted their vision of university. High school students in AEUPIs reported that they had found the K-12 experience (especially in the later years) to be challenging; only two students reported that they felt good about their high school studies. However, all of the students noted that their commitment to doing well in high school in order to attend university increased after being in an AEUPI. Concurrently, their academic performance improved. Shannon, an AEUPI participant details how the program helped her to improve her mathematical skills and ensure that she would enter into Calculus 12: "It's really good, like it helps me with my future with math and stuff, like if it weren't for this my grades wouldn't be up, like I think throughout the year school I've managed a to keep a B or higher" (Personal communication, August, 2012). Some youth also noted that university volunteers in the programs 'pushed them' and inspired them to do better in their high school studies. As AEUPIs and AUTPs are different transitional pathways to university, it is not surprising that there were significant differences in students' responses. The AUTP students reported experiencing significant challenges in their K-12 schooling, including systemic racism, a need for more motivation, classism, bullying, and poor teaching. Unlike the AEUPI participants, these students did not have the benefit of a guided transition that could lead them to change their thoughts or feelings about their high school studies. Although previous negative K-12 experiences significantly hindered these students'

initial vision of university, they emphasized that it was more important to focus on what was working for them in university, rather than what had not worked in high school.

9.2.2 Persons of Influence

The youth's visioning process was most often initially facilitated by a family member. AEUPI program participants reported learning about the initiative from a family member, high school counselor, Aboriginal support worker or an AEUPI staff member (with family members making the most program referrals). Donna, an AEUPI participant shares how her mom and a high school counselor influenced her to attend the Summer Science program:

[My high school counselor], told my mom, because she works with him. She is a math teacher's aide, and she takes kids out of the class and like helps them with their math and stuff. Yeah, she heard it from [my counselor] and then she told me and then we went through the whole process of signing up and writing essays and all that kind of stuff. It was really cool (Personal communication, August, 2012).

AUTP participants likewise shared stories about family members encouraging them to apply to a university transition program. For many, the encouragement and personal interest of AUTP staff, peers and community members were turning points in their decision to attend university. Amber, an AUTP participant, shares how peers in her former high school influenced her decision to attend university:

All those students from my [private school] pretty much went straight into university and they had a seemingly seamless time. But that definitely influenced me to want to also do the same. If I am ever going to some reunion, I can say I also went and did what I wanted to. It just helped me to realize, why couldn't I? Because a lot of the times, I wasn't

feeling the right confidence like, yeah, I am capable of going and being successful at university (Personal communication, October, 2012).

Like the majority of the youth in this study, Amber went on to share how her father also played a pivotal role in influencing her decision to attend an AOTP.

9.2.3 Exploration

The AEUPI participants frequently stated that they wanted to learn more about university and particular careers. To this end, some students who had participated in more than one AEUPI were strategic in their program choice. For example, they attended one initiative that included an introduction to university life in its objectives and another that highlighted the science professions. An unexpected finding was that the two youngest AEUPI participants (who were in Grade 7 at the time of interview) chose to attend these initiatives in order to get a better understanding about high school from older youth participants and volunteers. As Angeline, an AEUPI participant shares:

I just wanted to kind of experience what it was like to go to university and learn from the older kids because most of them are older than me. I wanted to know from them what it is like to be in high school (Personal communication, July, 2012).

As Angeline indicates, elementary-school aged AEUPI participants felt that exploring how to be a successful high school and university student was an important educational step that would be of great benefit when they looked beyond high school to the future.

All of the AOTP participants had chosen their academic Bachelor's degree programs as a result of participating in the program, which had assisted them to learn about diverse future

career options (including medicine, teaching, dentistry, arts, and First Nations politics). AOTP students spoke about the ways in which faculty and program staff had helped them to explore various academic and career pathways. Only one AOTP student was undecided about her future career goals. However, she was using her time at university well by exploring her interest in a general Bachelor of Arts program.

9.2.4 Experience

The youth attending AEUPIs highlighted aspects of the programs that they valued, including learning about the university community, achieving high grades, and securing internship placements. They also accentuated a number of relational experiences that made the AEUPIs particularly enjoyable, including making new friends, receiving mentorship from staff and faculty, working with younger children, learning new social and communication skills, and participating in youth leadership development activities. Shannon, an AEUPI participant explains the impact of her internship placement in a science lab at UBC:

It was really interesting. Like, people think that the rat brain is gross. But it's not. I was actually working on the rat brain over and over again (I guess it is repetitive, but it's not). I really never got bored, like I learned so much stuff that the rats go through. I remember I was talking to this guy and he had to spend about fifty grand on one lab. One lab! I was like wow! That's insane. But you learn the little procedures about it. And it's like they are mastering it. So the girl that I was helping she's been doing that for like six years now, which is really cool and I got to work with baby rats. We were studying fetal alcohol syndrome to the rats, which was really cool (Personal communication, August, 2012).

The AEUPI youth also experienced several challenges, including; interpersonal difficulties due to shyness and a need for better communication skills, reticence to participate in academic activities due to inhibition, and the loneliness of being away from family. In addition, those who were youth leaders reported difficulty dealing with the behavioral challenges of younger children in their programs. However, it should be noted that youths' reluctance to participate in academic activities, shyness, and communication difficulties with peers diminished after their initial transition into the AEUPI, which the youth considered to be major accomplishments. Donna, an AEUPI participant was among those youth who clearly stated "I felt challenged in the program in a good way" (Personal communication, August, 2012).

Some youth who had not grown up in a First Nations community felt that the AEUPI positively challenged their perspectives of Indigenous culture(s) by relating Indigenous knowledge to academic and social experiences. As Lia, an AEUPI participant shares:

It definitely made me a little more proud to be Native American like to be Indigenous because usually like before I had always been like the only Native person in my class, in my school there were only like 20 Native kids out of like 1500, so it definitely made me a little more proud and it made me a little more curious to see, to learn more about the past and how it's changed. We watched the movie "Reel Injun" it made me really interested to see how Hollywood made us look (Personal communication, July, 2012).

Donna's initial challenges were similar to those of Lia:

I don't know, it was just culture shock because everyone was talking about, some grew up on reserves, and others they just like different things that I did which is totally fine

but weird to hear about their experiences growing up on the reserve. It was hard to connect with some of the kids on that level. But by the end of the camp, that all kind of faded away because I found anything to connect with them. It was really cool because no matter how differently we grew up and how different we turned out to be, we could all kind of connect on like some kind of level. I definitely took away from that camp that no matter, like how different you are, like, from people you can always find something to connect with, which was cool (Personal communication, August, 2012).

The AEUPIs helped youth to gain a number of skills, knowledge about academic subjects, youth leadership and program coordination, and vocational knowledge and certification, while developing their cultural and communication skills. Kylie speaks about her enhanced communication ability and the career-related skills she learned in her AEUPI:

I learned some public speaking skills because we did do a few little presentations and I always hated those but I felt really comfortable with everybody and I learned it is not scary as they make it out to be. And I got some law skills, cause we did a moot court, which was a lot of fun, so I pretended to be a lawyer for a couple of hours (Personal communication, November, 2012).

Regardless of whether or not youth felt challenged by the activities they participated in, they took pride in the new skills they developed and felt that the AEUPI experience supported their vision of what they could achieve in higher education. The AOTP participants shared a number of experiences that supported their visioning process. Even though the AOTP youth became university students upon acceptance into the program, many said that their subsequent experience in the program clarified their overall vision of becoming a full-time university student

(which will be discussed below under the theme “Belonging”). Most AOTP youth felt that they had learned important writing and learning strategies, which helped them to gain emotional confidence in their academic abilities as a university student. Many of the youth also felt that they enhanced their public presentation and communication abilities, while a few also noted that the AOTPs taught them time management skills.

9.2.5 Transformation

A significant aspect of the AEUPI youths’ visioning process involved transforming their perceptions and feelings about university as result of their experiences in the initiatives. All of the AEUPI students felt that their perceptions and feelings about university had changed and reported that they saw university as a future option for them. Eva, an AEUPI participant explains how her thoughts about university shifted away from the stereotypical representations of it she had seen on television:

Before I didn’t like school but since being in program, I like it. I thought university was a lot of studying and being in class. Going to university is kind of opening your minds to new ideas. It is sort of teaching you the different things you can be (Personal communication, July, 2012).

Similarly, Flora explains that participating in an AEUPI awakened her desire to attend university: “I hadn’t thought about going to university until attending the program but now I would like to go. I thought university would be tough academically and being away from family” (Personal communication, July, 2012).

Students also reported changing their perceptions about the university community they discovered after enrolling in the program. As Lia shares:

I like how many resources [at UBC] there is. Not just for Aboriginal students, but for everyone. It's very, like integrated and kind of like an enhanced community. Like it is just not a school. It's an entire community (Personal communication, August, 2012).

And Donna comments:

I liked dorm life more than I thought I would. I liked staying in dorms, it was really nice. It is just kind of nice because by the end of it, you kind of get a sense of community and I didn't expect that to happen (Personal communication, August, 2012).

The strong sense of community students felt at university gave many of them more confidence about attending it. As Kylie shares:

Before I went into the program, I saw university as a big scary thing and only like insanely smart people went. I felt like I could never fit in and I couldn't see myself there... Then I went to the program and I discovered that wasn't the case at all, and I could totally picture myself there. And staying in dorms really helped too, because then you know you're there for a while and you know it was only five days right. So if we were staying somewhere else and then we came back for a few hours, it would be a bit of a different feel. I think so yeah, being there and seeing all the different programs and seeing the entire campus and all the different awesome things it had to offer really changed the way that I viewed it (Personal communication, August, 2012).

Other students noted how the AEUPI assisted them to explore their future career paths. For example, Lia discusses how an AEUPI changed her mind about her future professional goals:

I wanted to be become a music teacher before I came here, but I interned with Daniel Heath Justice at the English Department, and he definitely sparked my interest in English and writing. So I am kind of shifting my goals to becoming a novelist (Personal communication, August, 2012).

The youth noted a number of diverse future career options that interested them as a result of their engagement with an AEUPI. These included teacher, computer technician, artist, nurse, doctor, novelist, physiotherapist, lawyer, and principal of a First Nation immersion school.

Lastly, a few students also noted that they changed their minds about which university they wanted to attend after participating in an AEUPI. AOTP students were not directly asked whether the program changed their choice of institution. However, an analysis of their collective stories reveals that all of the AOTP youth experienced some level of transformation in terms of their thoughts and feelings about becoming a university student. This is evident in their comments, which are noted below under the theme ‘wholistic student success’.

9.2.6 Role Modeling

Many AEUPI students formed very strong connections with program staff, which ensured that they returned to the initiative year after year. A number of the students felt that their interactions with volunteers, presenters and faculty members positively influenced their higher educational aspirations. The students perceived these individuals to be ‘happy people’ and attributed this happiness to their university education.

All of the older AEUPI students who had acted as youth leaders reported that role modeling to the younger youth in the initiatives helped them to develop confidence in their abilities, which supported their vision of attending university. When students are placed in positions of responsibility (such as youth leadership positions) that require them to ‘give back’ to the next generation, it appears to help them build the confidence and strength necessary to attend university. Marcia speaks about the importance of learning youth leadership skills in her AEUPI in stating: “When I was an ambassador, I was still a participant. It was just kind of helping facilitate in a way and just being a voice of semi-experience about what happens in the program” (Personal communication, October, 2012). Another student, Kylie, shared how being a youth ambassador in her AEUPI helped her to overcome her shyness and piqued her interest in becoming a university student. Kylie continues to be an Aboriginal youth role model for the university she now attends by speaking at local elementary and high schools along with the First Nations recruitment officer from her institution.

My interviews with AOTP youth leaders also emphasized that positive role modeling assisted younger students with their visioning process. Many of these students felt that younger youth such as themselves needed to be able to ‘see’ people who had successfully attended university. In making this observation, the AOTP youth noted that an absence of positive Aboriginal role models could constrain a youth’s capacity to envision attending university. This is a particularly salient point, as many Indigenous university students are often the first person in their family to attend university and the presence of role models in the Aboriginal community inspires more students to consider higher education.

Fawn suggests that one means of supporting Aboriginal students would be for universities to provide “more visual representation of role model stories” on their walls (Personal communication, October, 2012). Serenity explains why Aboriginal mentors are important and should be better promoted in the university:

They have to show that there are students just like them who came and went through the program and are now graduating with a bachelor degree and are going for their Ph.D and stuff. Like actually show the success stories, cause it’s easy to just say on paper oh, yeah, our success rate is this high and um, so many students come through and some many people come out. Right? People on the reserve, they hear a lot of statistics, and it goes in one ear and goes out the other ear. For them to visually see something and actually experience it will make them want to come and do it right?” (Personal communication, October, 2012).

Kaya, an AOTP participant, beautifully summarizes the value of role modeling to Aboriginal students. She shares a heart-warming story about an AOTP math professor who inspired her and invited her to volunteer with an early promotion initiative as a role model to a number of Aboriginal youth across the province of B.C.:

I do volunteer work with my math professor from the AOTP and I absolutely love him. We have one of the best connections that I could have had, he’s almost like another dad. When we travel, and he always makes sure I’m okay and he helps me with tutoring in my math class that I’m in now. He wants to make sure that I succeed. He also has a volunteer, non-profit organization called “The Math Catcher” where we go to reserves and we talk to mostly primary (well, I guess from grade 2 to grade 7). He does a

presentation about math and talks about you know kind of makes it fun and then he shows them about [our university] and kind of talks to them about it a little bit and then my part is I talk to them and tell them about my experience and how I had a really hard time with math and science classes and now I'm in my second year and doing all that. So we're promoting university and math at the same time, then we do a fun little activity with them (Personal communication, November, 2012).

9.3 **Sense of Belonging**

Greg Cajete (2000) writes that we come to know what it means to be a people of a place and to have a sense of belonging by being part of a community:

The community is the place where the forming of the heart and face of the individual as one of the people is most fully expressed. It is the context in which the person comes to know relationship, responsibility, and participation in the life of one's people (p. 175).

Having a community to identify with and receive support from is critical if students are to feel that they belong in university, which in turn enhances their likelihood of persisting in the institution (Heavy Runner, 2009). As illustrated in the previous section, AEUIs provided many of the youth participants with a new understanding about the university as another community that could provide them with support. The AOTP youth spoke highly about the important relationships that they fostered with faculty, peers, Elders, and local First Nations community members. These relationships helped them to gain a strong sense of belonging within their respective programs. Half of the youth also felt that the Indigenous social gatherings offered by the university were particularly valuable, as these gathering gave them an opportunity to form relationships with peers and mentors outside of their transition programs. Several youth at one

campus also noted that the design of their AOTP program gave them a strong sense of belonging at university because it offered smaller class sizes, a cohort model that simulated an extended family, and strong integration with Aboriginal student services. Katrina explains the outstanding support that she received from the faculty in her AOTP:

I liked the program. I think the teachers in the program are different than high school teachers. I feel like all the teachers in the program really cared about the students. I was really impressed with their teaching ability (Personal communication, October, 2013).

Serenity highlights the strength of her AOTP's design:

Being an Aboriginal student, sometimes you feel as though you're a little bit more hindered because people look at you a different way or they tend to. Being an Aboriginal student, you have a different way of learning than a lot of other students do, so having a program that's geared towards the specific needs of an Aboriginal person. Having those things available to you, like the extra tutoring and the sessions. Having all the help and even the centre where you can like come and hang out and feel comfortable with everybody (Personal communication, October, 2013).

However, interviews with AOTP students revealed that there were differences in the Aboriginal services provided by the campuses offering the initiatives. AOTP students at one university stated that there was an overwhelming need for more Aboriginal student service space on their campus. Kaya explains:

Maybe it's just at the campus [where our AOTP is located on], because the [other] campus has a lot more resources for First Nations, and they have an area where you can

hang out and sit together and print off free stuff, but there's nothing at [this campus] for Aboriginal or Metis or First Nations people to come together (Personal communication, November, 2013).

Further, youth in both types of programs also felt that the presence of IK and cultural components within the programs and the larger university promoted a strong sense of belonging. The IK and cultural components offered by the AEUPIs that the youth attended included: ceremonies; arts activities; traditional dancing; involvement with the local First Nation; the physical design of the building (long house) that the AEUPI was located in; a visit to local cultural institutions; the involvement of Elders; an inter-cultural knowledge exchange with other Indigenous students; Indigenous community chaperone; and community speakers. Although Shannon referred to Aboriginal cultures in saying, "I didn't really see it" (Aboriginal cultures), she later acknowledged that she had participated in a number of Indigenous knowledge activities and noted that "it is rare [but special] to go to school with only Aboriginal kids" (Personal communication, August, 2012). Lia, another youth in the same program, was strongly affected by the cultural teachings about Indigenous knowledge that she received:

I was very unaware of the fact there were still reservations in B.C. before the program and I met a lot of kids who lived on reservations here so I kind of got to know them and know how life on like a reservation is, cause most of these kids are all First Nations but I myself am Cree, so it was definitely interesting to see how they still kept the traditions alive in their own families (Personal communication, August, 2012).

The IK and cultural activities offered by the AUTPs that the youth attended included: ceremonies, outings to local First Nations communities; academic course content that focused on

IK Math, English, and First Nations studies; learning from their Aboriginal peers; Aboriginal pedagogy and faculty members; program social gatherings; Indigenous language classes; and integration with the university's Aboriginal Student Centre. As was the case for students in the AEUPIs, the AOTP students most impacted by program cultural components were often those that had not grown up within an Aboriginal community.

As Kaya , an AOTP participant explains:

I went in with my own idea. I had my own personal opinions about how things happen on reserves and certain things just you know, I guess maybe I was a little bit naïve. I didn't really understand. I knew the history of what happened in residential schools but I guess the program made me realize better how like the domino effect and how it all kind of comes together. I guess it opened my mind a little bit. Even though I am Metis, I still had this outsider's opinion on what happened because I didn't grow up close to my roots. I was judging and now I am definitely more open minded about how things work (Personal communication, November, 2012).

Kelly, an AOTP participant further reiterates the importance of learning Aboriginal content in the program when she acknowledges that she "had never read a book by an Indigenous person before" (Personal communication, October, 2012).

Finally, all of the students wanted their classes and universities to offer more Aboriginal cultural activities and Indigenous knowledge in order to enhance their sense of belonging at their universities. A small percentage of the AOTP youth felt that the Indigenous cultural components in their programs could be expanded to include broader perspectives of Indigenous cultures. For example, one youth felt that too much emphasis was placed on the local First Nation that housed

the university, which did not give him much of an opportunity to learn about his own Nation's cultural background. Serenity would have liked the First Nations class in her AOTP to have been more challenging, as her family had already given her considerable experience and knowledge of First Nations political events. Nonetheless, in the following statement she indicates that the program had a positive cultural impact on students: "this program makes you want to feel deeply connected to Aboriginal cultures" (Personal communication, October, 2012).

9.4 **Wholistic Success**

Wholistic success was a key theme in the youths' stories about their successes and challenges as AEUPI and AOTP students. A wholistic understanding of success denotes that students' physical, intellectual, emotional, and cultural needs are met by their schooling and life experiences (Pidgeon, 2008). Participants presented a range of experiences that facilitated their wholistic success in the programs they attended. These experiences extended from gaining a sense of accomplishment by completing an arts and craft activity to a more nuanced sense of success that encompasses all of its wholistic dimensions. In addition, the students encountered a number of hindrances that prevented them from feeling wholistically successful.

The wholistic accomplishments that excited AEUPI students included emotional dimensions such as learning how to be role models to younger children and acquiring new social and communication skills. Kylie explains how the AEUPI helped her emotionally:

I am proud that I made a bunch of new friends through the program which was nice cause all through high school I had social anxiety, so it was always hard for me to connect with new people and both times I went to the [AEUPI] I walked out with new friends, so that was awesome (Personal communication, November, 2012).

Shannon, an AEUPI, participant highlights the academic and emotional accomplishments that helped her to focus on attaining the necessary prerequisites for university:

They made me feel really good about my math skills, which really helped boost my confidence... It made me feel like a successful person, it was a really an eye opener cause I guess I was hanging out with bad influences, so it made me think wow, I've got to change I've got to get on task of like going to post-secondary. I've got to finish school with great grades and stuff...(Personal communication, August, 2012).

Wholistic accomplishments that emphasized intellectual growth included program coordination for youth leaders and the general enhancement of academic knowledge. Donna, an AEUPI participant, expressed how excited she was about acquiring specific career-related knowledge that prepared her to transition to university:

I think it was when we went to a dentistry demonstration. I have no interest in being a dentist at all or an orthodontist or anything like that. But it was really cool because they asked us questions and I knew something I could put up my hand...And it was cool to know if maybe one day I was interested in that I could go into it. And it kind of made me realize, that I shouldn't keep my options so closed (Personal communication, August, 2012).

Lastly, AEUPI students' spiritually focused accomplishments included learning about Indigenous knowledge and culture(s) from program staff and Elders.

When AOTP students were first asked about their wholistic accomplishments in their program, most of their initial responses aligned the standard definition of success at university,

which focuses on external measures, performance outcomes, and academic achievement. Grade point average, course completion and graduation were these students' primary measures of success. However, for Quinton (AUTP participant), success also meant "just being present in the university". Similarly, Summer (AUTP participant) also considered it an accomplishment "to [just] come to campus and be a university student" (Personal communication, October, 2012). She also shared Quinton's pride about "getting good grades" and was pleased about "never feeling alone and always feeling supported by staff" (Personal communication, October, 2012). Like Quinton, Summer felt encouraged about the high grades she received in a science course, saying, "[I] was so excited, it kind of gave me that okay, I can do this. I want to take more science. I want to go ahead and do all that."

Many AUTP students emphasized that learning about IK and cultures was foundational to their success as university students. Further, in light of the literature's recognition of how important First Nations student support services are to Indigenous students, it is unsurprising that many AUTP youth in this study felt proud of the spiritual and emotional support they received from Aboriginal program staff members. Such support is also strongly connected to the aforementioned sense of belonging. One particular AUTP student, Amber, largely attributed her accomplishments in the program to the emotional and spiritual support that she received from staff members:

Just the fact that the staff here know exactly who all of AUTP students are by first name and that just having that especially for me I'd been out a semester and I wasn't quite sure. It was just comfortable to know that all those people were there to help you if you needed it. But it wasn't like, I didn't know them. So you have to cross that first step of like

“okay, I might as well go and introduce myself and get help. You already knew them because they made such an effort to get to know you and greet you anytime they see you and stuff. So just knowing they were there to support you through your coursework or whatever challenge you came across in terms of the university and courses and work (Personal communication, October, 2012).

The intellectual challenges that impacted AOTP students’ transition into a degree program included a need for more structure. For example, many youth felt that their AOTP needed to have stricter assignment deadlines with consequences for late delivery because the program had not prepared them for the strict timelines and long work hours required by their degree programs. As Roxanne, an AOTP participant, points out:

It kind of gave me the sense that ‘oh university isn’t that hard. I can do this. But now that I am struggling with my grades right now. It is just nothing that transitioning into a university is. But it did help me get into university since I didn’t do good in high school (Personal communication, November, 2012).

This study’s finding that the participants did not maintain the feeling of wholistic success they experienced within their transition programs when they entered a degree program is significant. Roxanne’s comments highlight the need for AOTPs to provide a clearer understanding of academic expectations in Bachelor’s degree programs. This is critical to fostering wholistic student success, which will be inhibited if students transition poorly into degree studies. The students who had successfully completed an AOTP and were currently enrolled in a degree program at a research-intensive university consistently reported that their transition had been academically difficult. After a lack of structure, program length was the

most commonly noted hindrance to wholistic student success, although it should be noted that AUTPs have varying lengths. Roxanne was among those students who were enrolled in a four-month AOTP, which may be too short to adequately prepare students for a full-time course load. This would invariably make the transition to full-time degree studies more difficult. On the other hand, youth who attended a two-year AOTP may have felt no less hindered because the program stipulated a three-course maximum and as such, could not prepare them for full-time studies. As Kelly, an AOTP participant explains:

I felt like one or two semesters was definitely good enough to introduce me to the university. But I ended up spending three semesters in it. My grades were good enough after two semesters to get in but they decided to keep me in the program...I felt it was limiting because you can take a maximum of three courses. I think if someone decides to stay in the program for a third semester, they should be able to take another course (Personal communication, October, 2012).

Amber also felt that increasing her course load in the AOTP could have been beneficial, but her reason was that it would have allowed her to take fewer classes in her Bachelor's program, which would alleviate the stress she was experiencing:

The [program] only allowed you to take three courses so that is what I did and I felt I did really well. I had lots of extra time but this year, the challenge now is figuring out the time management sort of thing. Because, before, I could get away with taking breaks and days off and this semester has been like constantly just trying to get everything done before the deadlines (Personal communication, October, 2012).

Amelia shares similar anxieties-about becoming a full-time Bachelor of Science student at the university she entered after leaving her AOTP:

Just the real university experience where our attendance isn't taken, it is up to us to go. It is a lot of self-study instead of assignments or quizzes. We had a lot in the [AOTP] program. Tests are harder. Less one on one. So, we have to find our own resources to get help (office hours and stuff like that). Just better prepared for real university instead of feeling like it is really easy. It felt easy (Personal communication, November, 2012).

Kaya explains the challenges she experienced in transitioning into her degree program:

To be completely honest, [my transition from the AOTP was] absolutely terrible. There, it's like you are so sheltered in that program...It was a like a reality shock. There's no one there to be almost baby you along, to hold your hand through. I think that was one thing that hindered me because my expectations were so off balanced for what university is really like. I am thankful that it got me through my first year and it got me those credits, but I am not doing very good this semester and it's not because of the program, but because I think my idea of what it was going to be like was a lot different. I don't know, it's a lot harder than when at the end of the program I saw my grades and I was like "okay, I can do this. I don't know what happened from there to this semester. I still study the same amount. I probably try harder [now]and I am not doing very good in my classes (Personal communication, November, 2012).

Only Kelly felt that her transition into her degree program was successful as a result of her participation in an AOTP:

I think it went a lot smoother than it ever would have been if I had just jumped in right away without the program. Because at this point, I've taken biology in the program. I took psychology, English. So coming in and doing chemistry, physics, and math all in one semester. I am like 'oh my god, this is overwhelming. But at the same time, if I didn't have the program to help me out, I would have no idea how to write an essay. I would have no idea how to write a formal lab write-up or anything like that. Because I am used to doing three classes, and that was hard when I started, but now I am doing four. It's like stepping stones. It really places that stone there for you so that it's just a little higher to the next step.

9.5 Generosity

Giving to others and giving back to the community (reciprocal generosity) are fundamental principles of all Indigenous cultures (Brendtro et al., 1991). Generosity is not only vital to the collective survival of Indigenous people, but is also a beneficial practice that allows researchers to counter the hegemonic structure of academia and decolonize their methodologies (Smith, 1999).

This final theme reflects the study participants' collaborative effort to 'give back' to the larger Indigenous community by honouring their responsibilities as role models and mentors for the next generation of youth. I engaged that intention by asking the youth to help me create a comic book about high school-to-university for elementary school aged youth (between the ages of 8 and 12 years old). This was the phase of the research that elicited the most creative and earnest responses. The youths' ideas for the comic book were rich in imagery and helped me to better understand the successes and challenges experienced by AEUPI and AOTP students.

The participants were asked to describe the main characters that would be featured in the comic, as well as the types of characters, the characters' families, class backgrounds, and places of residence. Further, the youth provided a number of storylines and key messages, and raised several considerations pertinent to the construction of the comic book. Their ideas, which are detailed below, will contribute to the first phase¹⁴ of the comic book's development that will be produced as part of the knowledge mobilization project associated with this dissertation.

The youth participants felt that there should be more than one main character in the comic. They wanted the book to include characters that had diverse builds, skin colours, hair colours, heritages, and ages. The youth envisioned a cast of "real life" characters as well as Twilight-like 'tween' vampires, and a Native superhero archetype. One youth felt that the comic book should include a chameleon character to illustrate how well youth adapt to different settings. Further, the main characters' families were to represent single parent families, nuclear families, and extended families. The youth also favoured diversity for places of residence, asserting that the characters should represent all the different regions of B.C. and Canada, as well as both urban and reserve settings. Class background was not for the most part a strong consideration for the youth. The youth were in overwhelming agreement that the characters should be very involved in sports and pop culture activities.

The youth provided five primary story lines. The first story is about a character that is afraid to attend university. The main character is an elementary school aged boy who goes to his

¹⁴ As so many of the youth participants were interested in the development of the knowledge mobilization project, I would like to create a rough story board of the ideas they shared in the dissertation and invite them to participate in a number of other sharing circles where we can come together collectively to finalize our ideas and decide upon a final format for the project.

band office to read comic books and ends up reading a comic book that suggests university is an excellent place to meet new people and tells him what he needs to do to prepare for university (a secondary story line). The second story is about a Native superhero from a small community who helps Aboriginal youth through all their educational transitions from elementary school onwards. This superhero witnesses the positive and negative aspects of all the youths' transitions. The third story line is about a girl attending an early university promotion initiative who learns about different careers and professions. The fourth story line features a cohort of youth participants in a university transition program. The fifth story line is about a chameleon that participates in many activities. Even though the chameleon had a positive high school experience, she/he must go out and adapt to the world. This story would promote travelling as an important means of learning.

The youth identified a number of messages that could be woven throughout the five stories. These messages are: “be realistic—not everyone is going to be a hockey player but you can go into sports medicine”; “make sure you know your academic end goal” “keep your options open”; “transitions are like a river, they can flow everywhere”; “the more you learn-the more doors open to you”; “things are not as hard as you think they are”; “try hard and you will be fine in university”; “it is okay not to be a ‘traditional student’”; “university is a good idea”, and; “find balance with your studies and personal life”.

The youth also felt that it was important for the comic to incorporate a number of additional ideas. They wanted it to illustrate gender parity between the characters and cooperation between the sexes, highlight the important role that Aboriginal university support staff should play in students' lives, and provide examples of successful programs and role models. In general, the youth felt that the comic should use simple, straightforward language.

One youth suggested that the comic book idea could be presented to youth through the Tumblr website, which would allow them to co-create their own stories about transition.

I am grateful for the youths' generosity and keen interest in promoting the importance of successful, wholistic transitions to university for future generations. All of the youth indicated that they would like to continue working with me on the knowledge mobilization project, and I very much look forward to continuing our collaboration.

9.6 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to explore the successes and challenges youth experienced in AEUPIs and AUTPs. Overall, the youths' stories encompassed a number of themes that influenced their visioning process. This visioning process not only helped the youth to develop knowledge and skills that enhanced their high school endeavors, but also inspired them to believe that they could complete university and to make a commitment to doing so. For those students already in university, the visioning process helped them to persist academically. However, the youth commonly considered their prior experience in the K-12 system to be a hindrance to the visioning process because it limited their abilities to see themselves as future university students; this was particularly true for the AUTP youth. At the same time, the youth acknowledged a number of persons within the K-12 system who encouraged them to attend university and helped them with their applications. This support strengthened their capacity to handle the negative experiences and remain focused on their vision of attending university.

The successes identified in the chapter are as follows. First, the youth indicated that learning about university through real-life experience offered by the initiatives/programs was meaningful. In this sense, the AEUPI and AUTPs are very much aligned with Indigenous

pedagogies that favour direct experience and ‘learning by doing’. Second, the AEUPI youth reported that their participation in the initiatives posed very few challenges. Most youth overcame any initial challenges by the end of the initiative and saw this as a major accomplishment that facilitated their growth and learning. Third, both the AEUPIs and AUTPs provided youth with concrete opportunities to explore future academic and career pathways. All the AEUPI youth noted a significant transformation in their perceptions of university and felt that university became a future option for them as a result of their participation in an initiative. These initiatives can therefore claim to have met their primary objective of promoting university education. Fourth, ensuring that the youth were provided with opportunities to develop relationships with positive Aboriginal role models in the university was seen as a success factor by AEUPI youth. Fifth, the AEUPI youth shared stories about the important leadership skills they developed as role models and mentors to younger youth in the initiatives, which in turn assisted them with their visioning process for university. This form of intergenerational learning also coincides with Indigenous pedagogical techniques that have been used to transmit knowledge and leadership values to younger generations for countless millennia. However, it is also salient to note that most of the AUTP youth reported a lack of visible role models, which hindered their participation in university.

Sixth, students’ sense of belonging at university was fostered by relationships with AEUPI and AUTP staff, Indigenous student support staff, Elders, and faculty members who showed a genuine interest and concern for their well-being. To this end, activities and supports that integrated Indigenous knowledge and culture(s) were seen to have a positive impact on student’s sense of belonging. Students in one AUTP were an exception. In this case, the students

felt that their sense of belonging was hindered because the university they attended did not have a central gathering place for Indigenous students. Further, all of the students in the study felt that the inclusion of more IK and Aboriginal cultural activities could help strengthen their sense of belonging to a university community.

Seventh, the AEUPI youth overwhelmingly agreed that the experiences they had in these initiatives led them to feel wholistically (emotionally, physically, spiritually and intellectually) successful. Unfortunately, the AOTP youth had a conflicting experience. During the AOTP most of the youth felt that their wholistic needs were well met. However, they also felt that there were a number of academic challenges that prevented them from being wholistically successful as they transitioned from an AOTP into a degree program (which will be further discussed in the analysis presented in Chapter 11). The youths' conflicting experience in AOTPs also raises an important issue about the onus for accommodation that is placed on Aboriginal students. It is not my intent for this research about the programs to be cast in a negative light, so much as to question what the universities' responsibilities are in assisting these learners to have a smoother transition experience from these programs into the university. Questions remain about what university policy and practices are needed to facilitate Aboriginal high school to university transitions, which will be addressed in Chapter 11.

Finally, the youth demonstrated the importance of assisting the next generation of Aboriginal youth to transition to university. As mentioned, they were tremendously enthusiastic about contributing to the production of a comic book about high school to university transitions, which they felt would enable them to 'give back' and express their generosity. This was heartening to me as an Indigenous researcher. Although the study identified inconsistencies,

challenges and shortcomings in both types of initiatives, it also highlighted their strengths and potentialities for growth. Ultimately, the quality of the youths' stories in my study and the insights they offered suggest that the future of AEUPIs and AUTPS is a promising one if universities take heed of the comments made by the participants.

Chapter 10: “Let the university fit us, not us the university”



Figure 10 Carving by Clint Work with Copyright Permission from the Lattimer Gallery (2013)

Raven had been noticeably absent. I was nearing the end of my dissertation and wondered if and when she would appear again. As it happened, she decided to make a grand display while I was writing this chapter. Her presence first brought forth feelings of fear and anxiety about writing on the topic of higher education. She taunted me by asking me how I could write about the structure of the university with any authority, given that I had not taken any ‘formal’ classes in higher education in my Ph.D. program. At the time, I had thought I was resisting these classes because they did not offer any Indigenous content or critical perspectives. However, as I sat behind my desk, worrying about how to write about university practices and policies, I began to question if this resistance had served me well. Perhaps the knowledge I had missed acquiring due to not attending these classes did in fact limit my ability to critique the higher education system. I therefore found myself returning to literature on Indigenous higher education that I had previously touched upon and rereading as much as I could to make up for

any perceived gaps in knowledge on the subject. Raven also led me to initiate a discussion about higher education practices and policies with Graham and Linda Smith one warm spring afternoon. It turned out to be one of those synchronistic moments that led to a shift in my consciousness. We had been discussing the restrictive hiring policies and standards that were enforced by some major research-intensive universities. I asked if it was the policies or the people that implemented these restrictive policies, and Linda responded that it was both, but pointed out that policies can't exist without people to create and interpret them. The people she was referring to had all been educated to promote the educational standards endorsed during their schooling. Thus, the people who make decisions and policies for higher education continually reproduce the system. Although I understood this on a theoretical level and had written about it intensively in other sections of this dissertation, Linda's example clarified how university policies reproduce institutional formlines to become embedded in daily practices and normalized in the minds of students. Like Rigney (2001) I am still unraveling the multi-layered 'colonial encounter', as I come to understand the racialised and ethnic character of the university's policies and practices through my lived experience. I realized that my acute awareness of this process had significantly impacted my experience of higher education. There was a disconnect between my conception of what it should be and view of what it was, and this led me to be fearful of what were considered 'legitimate' Western knowledge traditions. Even though I utilized them, I needed to bend the box of my own thinking on a variety of levels. One of the outcomes of this was my acknowledgement that my perspective of the institution I am attending had limited me by leading me to engage in negative thinking, when I needed to think expansively and creatively in striving to also bend the box of the institution. Raven's appearance has taught me that I can speak from a position of authority on the subject of higher education,

given that I have attended university for 14 years and am nearing completion of my Ph.D. studies. Exercising this authority requires me to explore the institution/human interface that I negotiate when I participate in institutional practices and am impacted by institutional policies. This will enable me to expose the prejudices and restrictions that reproduce the status quo of higher education. To this end, I am grateful to the participants in my study. They were the true teachers who helped me to write this chapter. Their inspiring comments uplifted me when I was feeling anxious and their criticisms of the university system gave me energy to push beyond my own limits in believing that we could collectively pursue transformation within higher education one practice at a time.

My encounter with Raven also helped me to revisit a conversation that I had with my Aboriginal advisory committee in the first year of my Ph.D. studies. I had asked the committee (comprised of respected Aboriginal community members) to help me create a community-based research design that would help Aboriginal learners transition from high school to university. Elder Jerry Adams commented that the “university needs to fit us, not us the university” (Personal communication, November, 2011). His statement reiterates the viewpoint of many Indigenous scholars who have called for universities to become more accountable for ensuring Aboriginal student success (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Pidgeon, 2007; Stonechild, 2006). This would constitute a radical and much needed shift in university policies and practices that would enable Indigenous students to collectively bend the box of higher education for the purposes of self-determination.

10.1 Introduction

This chapter will address the dissertation's third research question by examining the university policies and practices that hinder and facilitate Aboriginal learners' success as they transition into a university from AEUIs and AUIPs. In doing so, it also aims to fulfill one of the primary purposes of this study, by critically discussing how Canadian universities can apply a wholistic conception of the 4Rs as well as a 5th R (Relationships) to Indigenous high school to university transition programs (Archibald, Pidgeon, & Hawkey, 2010; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). This chapter is divided into the following themes: Respect, Relevance, Responsibility, Relationships, and Reciprocity. These themes are interrelated and combine to facilitate a better understanding of what wholistic success means to Aboriginal youth and communities.

10.2 Respect

Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) suggest that universities must offer useful educational initiatives that respect and build upon Aboriginal students' cultural integrity. Participants in this study indicated the opposite was in fact actually occurring pointing out a number of historical assimilationist educational policies that were perpetuated by higher education institutions. Participants related these enduring colonial policies to the systemic issues of social class, poverty, and access to education that continue to impact Aboriginal learners in AEUIs & AUIPs. All participants were firm in asserting that the university must continue changing current policies and practices in order to overcome their deleterious effects and ensure a respectful environment for Aboriginal learners.

One policy area that the participants highlighted is universities' determination of whether to include B.C. First Nations languages in their language admission requirements for B.C. high

school students and in university language programs. The University of British Columbia's Faculty of Arts First Nations Language Program has recently made an arrangement with the Ministry of Education to allow high school students to take First Nations language courses. These courses not only fulfill the secondary language requirements for university admission, but also give students a post-secondary credit towards a degree (AUCC, 2010). Rick Ouellet (UBC Aboriginal Student Community and Development Officer) explains that these changes have both hindered and promoted the recruitment of Aboriginal high school students:

So a lot of the policies are changing...One until last year was the non-recognition of First Nation language [policy]. Which has now changed. So, historically...like last year! If you wanted to have a language included, you couldn't use an Aboriginal language. So, if you were one of the people who learned your own language, we didn't give you credit for that. Even though they are completely endangered! So that has changed! That has changed thankfully. And I think things like that are really important for recruitment because then when you are recruiting because often the language keepers (the younger ones) are the ones that live in villages. It gives us the opportunity to give them six credits for knowing your language and it facilitates that kind of a thing. I actually think that there is still a bit of a hindrance here. I think we can do a lot more around language (Personal communication, July, 2012).

Although UBC has broken new ground in terms of language requirements and credits, most Canadian universities have not yet implemented First Nations language policies. Until this happens, the non-recognition of First Nations languages will continue to be a hindrance that prevents many Aboriginal learners from entering university directly from high school.

Four participants also felt that universities could be more respectful by focusing more research on urban Aboriginal peoples as well as urban Aboriginal high school to university transitions. One participant, Tim (Simon Fraser University Faculty member/CEDAR Founder) was particularly critical of one university's Aboriginal strategic plan because it promoted existing initiatives that serve First Nations on-reserve communities and targeted the local Aboriginal community located next to the university. Tim felt that this university's strategic plan completely excluded urban Aboriginal people and he argued that "there needs to be a focus on research [in urban areas]. This is where the majority of Aboriginal people are. If we are going to make a difference, then we are going to have to focus on urban Aboriginal kids" (Personal communication, January, 2013). However, little empirical research has been conducted on urban Aboriginal people by universities to date, and, as the participants pointed out, this cannot help but hinder Aboriginal high school to university transitions for urban youth.

One participant also suggested that universities need to develop ethical media policies for Aboriginal outreach initiatives that are targeted towards Aboriginal youth. Tim explains that the marketing and communications staff of the university he has experience with is not currently required to follow any ethical policies when they discuss Aboriginal outreach initiatives such as AEUPIs in the media:

I think there is a need to really talk about more of a commitment from the universities and more commitment and research on outreach initiatives. I think on the outreach initiatives in particular, there needs to be development of ethical boundaries. So for researchers there is ethics but when it comes to outreach programs, there isn't. So outreach ethics is really something that needs to be

cultivated. It goes way beyond what they are doing now. The only thing that they do now is go and get a check mark from the chiefs (from the chief and council) [First Nations Band]. So the relevance of current ethics practices don't mean anything to us that live in the city. If you go to any of the chiefs in this area, and they don't necessarily know what is going on in this city. Well, they don't have to know anything that is going on in this city. They certainly don't have any responsibility. So ... if you are doing Aboriginal research and if you have to get approval from an Indian band, that is problematic in my mind, especially if it is in the cities. Then if you propose that we should if you have to get approval from service agencies, that is even more problematic as they have no mandate to represent and speak on behalf of urban Aboriginal people (Personal communication, January, 2013).

Finally, all participants were unanimous in stating that the university must be willing to renounce some of its power in order to make genuine commitments to change and practice the 5 Rs when working with Aboriginal communities.

10.3 **Relevance**

Universities must strive to ensure that their programs incorporate Aboriginal peoples' histories, values, and worldviews in order to remain relevant to the lives of Aboriginal youth. If universities are to respect the cultural integrity of Aboriginal youth and communities they must ensure that institutional policies and practices are created that legitimize Indigenous knowledge and skills as well as meaningfully connect to the lived realities of Aboriginal peoples and their needs (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). One participant felt that university policy must guarantee

the continuity of successful Aboriginal outreach initiatives and AEUPIs in order to be relevant to Aboriginal youth. Lynda Gray, Executive Director of the Urban Native Youth Association, states:

I think universities or colleges use the word ‘program’ loosely, or they think they have an initiative, but it is just a temporary thing of making a little bit of an extra effort to reach Native youth but not necessarily engage with them and help make it interesting. They don’t try to help them to see how it is relevant to their lives and how they might be able to actually to pull it off and go to university or college. So, the programs that work seem to have dedicated staff that are doing something for an extended period of time and staying engaged with Native youth (Personal communication, October, 2012).

All of the administrators I interviewed for this study agreed that more AEUPIs and AUTPs were needed to ensure that higher education remained relevant and accessible to Aboriginal youth. However, the small size of these programs was seen as a hindrance to the goal of ensuring that higher numbers of Aboriginal youth participate in university. As Rick explains, the small size also impacts the number of youth who are selected to participate in them: “We can probably take a couple of thousand and we end up taking thirty or something. I think those are always going to be issues. Who are the thirty are our issues?” (Personal communication, July, 2012).

Within educational settings, institutional racism is often embedded in practices or policies and that serve to reinforce the predominance of Western knowledge systems and are tailored to white middle class learners (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011). As this predominance has become normalized, learners may not be aware of it and tend to accept it rather than question it. The

criteria used to accept or reject students are one example of a policy that can entrench the status quo. Some program administrators spoke about the need for AEUPIs and AUTPs to be aware of the selection criteria used for admission into these programs as they may maintain systemic biases and power asymmetries between students. The participants felt it was important that AEUPIs and AUTPs challenge the inequities created by institutionalized selection criteria, which limit the diversity of Aboriginal youth accepted into the programs. In their view, failing to do so could replicate the biases that are already in place.

The selection criteria utilized by AEUPI programs was seen to both hinder and facilitate the relevance of AEUPIs to Aboriginal youth and communities at large. Tim explains that some AEUPIs for children may inadvertently favour the selection of those who are middle class and have high grades:

That is part of what you kind of need to talk about I think. The selection criteria for these programs, it is apparent. You know they are selecting, cherry picking. That might not be a word that you would necessarily use! But I mean even with Summer Science they are aware that there is that tendency but they are always looking to try to get a balance. So the majority of kids in Synala [an AEUPI no longer in existence] could get those marks. They were doing at least B work...So it is that sort of middle ground where they have a tendency to choose more middle class kids (whose parents are sort of leaning that way anyways). Unless there is a specific intention within the program to bring in some other kids. It is usually just a small percentage of other kids. Whereas CEDAR is a little bit different is that we encouraged all kids to come in (Personal communication, January, 2012).

Four administrators emphasized that there was a need for AEUPIs to create specific program selection criteria for Aboriginal children in foster care. Daphne (an administrator from the University of Victoria) shares an important lesson that her university learned about ensuring AEUPIs' provision of culturally relevant education to Aboriginal foster children in care:

One thing we found last year that hadn't really involved and an Elder pointed it out to us, is we had higher number of kids in care in the program and they were really needed additional supports. Especially at the end, because they felt a part of something and they felt a cultural connection and they felt a family connection, and that last day was really hard on them, to let that go, because they're searching for that, right? So we thought maybe we need some extra supports for the chaperones, maybe some workshops or something to help those kids understand how to help those kids more, cause they're like, what do we do, they're really sad, and now we know why. So I think that would be something to think about in transitions. And, also, you know, empowering versus hand-holding (Personal communication, October, 2012).

The selection and grade criteria specified in university admission policies also impact high school to university transitions for older AEUPI alumni and all direct entry Aboriginal high school students. In 2012, UBC and SFU moved to a "broad-based" admissions policy that considers criteria other than high school marks. Applicants are required to submit a profile detailing their personal experiences and backgrounds. These questions give applicants an opportunity to detail their learning, experiences, and future career goals, which count as criteria for admission. In acknowledging the value of non-academic attributes such as leadership skills and life experience, broad-based admissions policies aim to ensure that a more diverse body of

students has the opportunity to attain a university education. Rick speculates about the impact that these recent changes to university admission policy could have on Aboriginal youth:

I think that the historic policies around using grades are a problem. Now that we have moved to broad based admissions, that is another area that may improve. There needs to be more work on how to recognize youth who are particularly strong in the community [PAUSE] and acknowledge that because they will succeed here. I am thinking about the work I have done in East Vancouver, where you will have these young people in their early 20's and they are coordinating meetings and they are liaising with the police. They are doing all this stuff and they have grade ten. They are really important people in the community. They are essentially doing the work of people with BA's but there is no way for them to make that happen (Personal communication, July, 2012).

Although UBC and SFU have moved to a broad-based admissions process, Rick notes that UBC (like most universities) has maintained grade restrictions that continue to significantly hinder its acceptance of Aboriginal learners. At the same time, he acknowledges that there is another transitional pathway for Aboriginal learners to enter university:

We probably reject half of the students who apply. Now we can say 'your grades are a little off'. And it is a real concern. 'You are going to struggle in your first year classes. They are big. You don't have an opportunity to talk to your instructors. Maybe you could start at Langara for two years, so you can build up your skills'. So the conversation then, is never really a rejection, there is another route to get here (Personal communication, July, 2012).

While this new pathway may create more opportunities for Aboriginal learners to access university, it does not facilitate direct entry from high school to university for Aboriginal learners.

It should also be noted that almost all universities in Canada have implemented a special Aboriginal admissions policy (either institution-wide or at the faculty/department level) for Aboriginal students who do not meet regular admissions criteria. Prospective Aboriginal students whose grades are near but below the normal admissions cut-off are reviewed by a special university committee. Prospective students may be required to submit a letter of reference from a teacher or community member as well as a letter outlining their educational goals and life experiences. Some universities such as UBC and SFU utilize both broad-based admissions and special Aboriginal admissions policies. More time and research is needed to determine how far-reaching the success of these efforts is, but they certainly appear to be a step in the right direction. For the time being, grade-restricted admission policies will continue to be seen as a barrier that prevents Aboriginal high school students (particularly some of the AEUPI alumni) from directly transitioning to university.

Finally, as discussed in Chapter 9, many AOTP students reported that their transitions into degree programs were difficult. They noted that academic timelines, program structures, and pedagogical methods retained the standard university Eurocentric orientation. Their stories clearly indicated that the mainstream education provided by the various Bachelor's programs they attend did not meet their needs or serve their interests, which undermined the relevance of these programs. University policy and practices need to be transformed in order to make AOTP

students' transition into Bachelor's programs smoother, more successful and more relevant. (Please see Chapters 11 and 12 for an analysis of and recommendations to this issue).

10.4 Responsibility

The theme of responsibility encompasses the university's responsibility to fulfill the imperatives of the other 4Rs. Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) claim that within higher education, institutional responsibility towards Aboriginal learners "is a matter of shifting to a policy, posture, and practice of actually working with First Nations people" (p.13). Further, universities should assist students to "exercise responsibility over their own lives" and in so doing, work with Aboriginal communities to determine the policy and practice priorities and approaches that best serve Aboriginal youth (Kirkness and Barhardt, 1991; p.2).

All participants unanimously agreed universities had responsibilities to higher education for Aboriginal learners. They identified a number of ways that universities could carry out these responsibilities. For example, Rick states that universities have the important responsibility of encouraging Aboriginal children and youth to create a vision of themselves as participants in higher education:

I think that is really what we have to do is create this environment where post-secondary is the expectation of Aboriginal students. It is if like you learn from grade one 'we expect that you guys are going to post-secondary'. It doesn't have to be UBC but it could be whatever. Something beyond high school. I think that the more we build those networks, the better off we will be. It is also the model that works for community. If you start doing something where you are picking and choosing or you are saying 'we only want your best students'. You are kind of somehow sifting through, it just doesn't work. It doesn't work

in the urban community and you really get a bad reputation and people don't want to work with you and it becomes very difficult to do stuff. It has to be this inclusive thing and also really open to consistent dialogue with the families that are participating and the schools and community. I am not painting it as being really rosy it actually a lot of work (Personal communication, July, 2012).

Rick's comments about participant selection reiterate similar comments which were presented under the previous theme of relevance. I understand Rick's comments to mean that the university should be responsible for promoting higher education by involving Aboriginal youth, their families and the general community. More importantly, this education should assist with the youth and community's goals for self-determination.

Lynda (in her role as Executive Director of the Urban Native Youth Association) believes that Aboriginal communities and universities share the responsibility of promoting university education to Aboriginal learners. She uses a beautiful cultural metaphor to explain why this shared responsibility is necessary and to describe the challenges that Aboriginal university students face on their learning journey:

I think that everybody has a responsibility to make sure that every child has all of the opportunities that are afforded or are available in the community whether they be Native or rich or just your average person. I believe we all have that responsibility...I think we all have a responsibility but within the confines of what is realistic and what we can do. We all wish that we could do more. I can't imagine being the parent of a Native youth or say a social worker who has never been to a university here and has a huge, huge, caseload. How do you even try and start to try to make those connections with the

university and it is a huge system? You have to try and make your way through. I think about the struggle of a salmon going back to spawn. And all of the perils it overcomes and it just feels like something is pushing it backwards, but it keeps on struggling to make its way through. I think that is kind of like what the university experience is like or a high school experience is like for many of our children. Sometimes you feel like you are just flying and you are getting somewhere and you just hit another barrier and it pushes you back. It could be a teacher; it could be a professor; it could be funding, it could be anything. But once you get up there [laughing]. You lay those eggs! (Personal communication, October, 2012)

Lynda also felt that current university accountability practices (usually defined in the literature as measurements of retention and attrition) were one-sided and suggests how universities can be more responsible towards Aboriginal youth. She states:

The university wants to benefit from successful Aboriginal students. They would love to be able to say "oh yeah, we graduated 10 Aboriginal students this year". But they would also have to say "we supported them or we gave them a scholarship and we helped them through a rough time". It would probably get an 'A' grade for grading or a 'D' or something for not supporting us, or recruiting us. Maybe that is the way they should have to report on their work with First Nations people, it is not just how many you graduated but how many you supported them on the whole road to graduation (Personal communication, October, 2012).

In addition, the participants were asked what the university's responsibility was in terms of creating a youth-friendly educational environment for Aboriginal learners. The AEUPI and

AUTP students gave very different answers to this question. AEUPI youth felt that the university was youth-friendly enough. However, one of these youth suggested that better Aboriginal student service availability was needed to make the university youth-friendly, while another felt that the university should increase its number of AEUPIs to serve more Aboriginal youth. On the other hand, Shannon (AUTP youth) stated “The university shouldn’t be youth friendly. It should be a serious place to learn” (Personal communication, August, 2012).

AUTP youth presented a number of ways that the university could improve its responsibility to be youth-friendly. First, two youth felt it was important for more bursaries and scholarships to be made available to AUTP students as most of them have to take out Canada student loans or acquire limited band funding to pay for the cost of the program. Second, the students in one AUTP program stated that their campus needed to create a First Nations student gathering place. They found that the absence of such a space was isolating and, as a result, they didn’t feel a sense of belonging to the university community. Third, two youth felt the university should hire more Elders to work as AUTP advisors and Aboriginal student service center staff. Fourth, almost all the AUTP youth felt that the university should be more responsible for the recruitment of Aboriginal learners into higher education. They stated that the university should increase its strategies for recruiting Aboriginal youth and suggested including more Aboriginal role models in program promotions would be one such strategy. This last responsibility will be discussed further in the section below (Relationships).

10.5 Relationships

Pidgeon (2007a) recognizes “The relational nature of sharing knowledges within Aboriginal contexts” (p. 104). Universities need to nurture the development and maintenance of

relationships that facilitate this fundamental Indigenous practice. To do so successfully, the individuals working within the institution must examine and adjust how they relate to Aboriginal peoples.

It is not surprising that participants felt that relationships were the “R” most in need of transformation. They identified the need for the university to be further Indigenized in order to promote stronger university-student and faculty-student relationships and ensure institutional responsiveness to Indigenous issues, concerns, and communities (Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004) Two participants felt that university leadership required further Indigenization in order to create better relationships with Aboriginal communities and develop effective programs that meet the needs of Aboriginal youth. As Rick explains:

Sometimes just the way that the university works can be challenging. Especially a place like UBC because it is completely decentralized. All the faculties are separate from everyone else. The heads have a lot of authority, especially if it is just their own department... For some people who are holding the purse strings and decide whether a program happens or not. There are sometimes, there is some education that has to take place. Not always but that is part of it too, is that there are you know people who end up as heads of faculties who don't have to know any of this stuff right? They never took it in high school and they never took it in university right? Then it almost becomes like this philanthropy thing. It is just that model again doesn't work as well. It has to be [PAUSE]. I think if you spend the time in developing whatever program you are going to do in collaboration with the community or the youth or the families, then you end up saving

that time dealing with stuff when the program is developed. Because people will come back at you with the same issues anyways (Personal communication, July, 2012).

Lynda further highlights the need to Indigenize institutional leaders (i.e., sensitize institutional leaders to Aboriginal perspectives and concerns) when she shares a scenario in which leaders had neither consulted Aboriginal people nor been responsive to their needs:

It often comes down to leadership right. Because if the leadership is not on top of it, departments are really busy and have other things to do. They have their paperwork and they have their things that they have to do and they also have to do their research. I understand that they are busy. They are not trying to doing anything what they consider extra, which is recruiting people who don't traditionally come through unless they are forced to at some level; they just won't. They won't even try to do it unless they feel there is some sort of really great connection to it or a vested interest in it. I have heard of schools that have a non-Native person heading up the Native department or initiatives and how that has been the biggest nightmare ever as they think they are the experts who will tell Native people what is the important thing to focus on and they don't talk to community (Personal communication, October, 2012).

Joyce, who is a faculty member at SFU, also felt that university faculty – including the instructors for teacher education programs – needed to be better educated about Indigenous issues in order to be more responsive to Indigenous learners' needs:

I also think the instructors and the profs need to go through training for that type of thing [to learn how to engage and build community]. The teachers' programs. The

teachers Ed needs to sort of. I don't know. They need to shift their thinking. I guess it is an overall thing that needs to be shifted right. Just to get them to start thinking about making connections between students and with themselves and the instructors with the students. If all the instructors and all the teachers did that; it would be a much more welcoming and safe place for youth (Personal communication, October, 2012).

Tim and Lynda further noted that Indigenizing university leadership would help universities to ensure that Aboriginal strategic plans are implemented and do not sit on the shelf collecting dust. As Tim points out, "UBC's [Aboriginal] strategic plan is not a large commitment, but it is still a commitment" (Personal communication, January, 2013). The two participants were cautiously optimistic that the university's engagement of Aboriginal communities would strengthen relationships between the two parties and smooth transitions for Aboriginal learners.

Participants highlighted that the absence of strong connections between universities and secondary schools impeded the recruitment of Aboriginal students into university. As Melania, an administrator for the Emerging Summer Scholars Program details:

I think there is an issue with recruitment...The university people send email from campus and think that everybody at their schools is going to yield to that. That is not how it works...We used to have a recruiter who would go there show a movie and answer the questions and then leave. Many times, the students who were supposed to be there, they were not there and so what I think needs to be a little bit more in contact with the high school (Personal communication, August, 2012).

Fawn (AUTP participant) adds that university staff and faculty need to be visibly active in Aboriginal communities in order to more successfully promote university education to all Aboriginal learners:

I really think that the university needs to work on recruiting definitely and letting not only the youth know about it but the mature students because a lot of you know Indigenous mature students out there are who are only now realizing at twenty-five, twenty-six, or even older that, this isn't what I want to do with the rest of my life. So, going into the schools, and but also going into the communities as well (Personal communication, October, 2012).

Participants also recognized a number of positive practices that assisted university staff and faculty to develop relationships with Aboriginal youth and promote university education. The Aboriginal Advisory Committee consulted for this study felt it was important for Aboriginal youth to be in contact with role models, university support workers, and mentors who knew how to successfully navigate university bureaucracy. Daphne, a University of Victoria administrator, explains that taking the time to develop long-lasting relationships with youth and their families is crucial if university staff are to facilitate successful university transitions:

It's a relationship, that trust, I think, is the foundation of it all for indigenous students. And, it's not going to be an instant payoff, right? I mean, it takes time to build relationships and real relationships, not a relationship where I'm out in Nisga's and saying you should come to mini university, and never seeing that student again or never talking to that student again or never caring about that student again. It's different. It's about a connection and a commitment. I'm committing to you to ensure that you have a

good experience, to ensure that you see the value of post-secondary, right? And, it's so, the relationship, I think, is huge and that takes time and money to build. Because those students can't necessarily come here. It might start there. It might be two or three years of seeing that same student and then they come, right? You know what I mean? It's like here you come, I recognize you. You're still there, you know? So I think that that's a huge part (Personal communication, October, 2012).

Lynda, in her role as Executive Director of the Urban Native Youth Association, highlights the importance of reciprocal relationships and joint program initiatives between the university and Aboriginal community organizations to the recruitment of youth:

Some of the things that seem to work well with programs is if it is in the community as well as bringing youth out to the university. They need Native staff and they need to be really engaging. Youth also like it if it is more interactive and fun learning rather than just sitting in lectures and that sort of thing. I know that the Aboriginal Youth Program at the Museum of Anthropology is a good example as youth usually have a really good experience there overall. I am sure there are things that they struggle with too being in a museum. [Laughing]. But because they have been making really concerted effort to try to engage the youth and make it interesting and partner with UNYA, they are doing good. We've done a lot of partnerships with them in the summer time in the last two years especially. Really, it has been beneficial both ways. It is a much more reciprocal relationship (Personal communication, October, 2012).

In her role as an advisory member to UBC's President's Aboriginal Advisory Committee, Lynda also discusses a successful recruitment strategy that the university is implementing from within to enable it to be more responsive to First Nations students' funding needs:

What we have been doing at UBC is that the coordinator and others are making a huge effort including phoning individual applicants to ask them 'are you going to get your application in? You said you were interested? Then, they have been keeping track of how many people started the process; and who started the process and didn't finish.

Another issue is that some might have finished the process but they didn't come to UBC because they have a different acceptance period. Because if someone is fortunate to get (limited) band funding that they would really have their acceptance letters in to their Band by March or a little later. So if you don't hear from the university until June, or July, or August then your opportunity for funding may have passed, especially if you are relocating (Personal communication, October, 2011).

Joyce pointed out that although more community building is needed to generally facilitate more successful transitions to university for Aboriginal learners, it was imperative for universities to build relationships with urban as well as rural Aboriginal communities. Lynda likewise felt that university staff and faculty needed more engagement with urban Aboriginal community organizations:

I think that universities and colleges really need to be supporting youth in that transition to high school and during high school so that they finish high school and have the opportunity to pursue post-secondary education. This is especially important in Vancouver because there is such a high push out rate (or drop-out) rate from high

schools. They need to do either outreach or programming on site in community organizations so youth can be more comfortable. They could also do something here at UNYA and the Friendship Centre and part of it out at the university, so the youth get comfortable there also (Personal communication, October 2012).

Connecting with Aboriginal parents was another relationship that the administrators considered essential to strengthening ties between the university and Aboriginal communities. Melania felt that more AEUPIs could involve parents:

The problem unfortunately, is what we do is at the end of the program is that we invite them for lunch and it is a nice way to acknowledge everybody. I would like to do something more with families. I don't know, it would be nice to be able to think "what is it can we do?" So we can really have parents working with us; or being involved. We have some parents who are really involved but this is not for everybody (Personal communication, October, 2012).

Daphne shares an innovative parental engagement initiative that her university undertook to help Aboriginal youth experience smoother university transitions:

One of the things that we did for one of the communities a few years ago, for one of their ASP initiatives, successful transitions forum. And we've done it here, it's usually adults going in, but Port Hardy wanted something for the parents. How do you prepare your kid, so it's involving the kids and the parents, to say you know what, you might want to send some money here and start saving for this, you might want to think that December's really tough for them cause Christmas is coming so send care packages and these are

where you can find information and these are months where your kid's going to be really stressed out with final exams and so forth, right? So, to really prepare that way they had door prizes of like pots and pans for kids and starter things, housing workshops, cultural workshops with the elders to say how do you keep that cultural connection away from home, and yeah. So parents absolutely, I mean I talk to parents so much about mini u, I mean I would never let my kid just go away from me, so I have to sell them that it's safe and that it's, that they'll be well looked after (Personal communication, October, 2012).

Interestingly, all the university administrators felt that universities needed to involve more staff members in Aboriginal recruitment endeavors in order to increase community and parental engagement. As Rick explains:

I actually think it could be a job at another university. Just having a community person who is on the ground and who is able to develop programs that may be needed and sort of coordinate all of that. I think that would be valuable for everyone. The problem is that I don't have enough time (Personal communication, July, 2012).

Lastly, the administrators emphasized the need for greater institutional collaboration. Several felt that AEUIs and AUTPs could be better developed in key areas such as nursing, fine arts and engineering if universities, colleges, and other post-secondary institutions began collaborating to offer different components of these programs. As Rick explains:

I think that there is ways that working across campuses to do some really interesting stuff. For example, there is no reason why if you are a student at SFU you could maybe do a morning there and do work here as well. There is no reason why we can't figure that

stuff out. Or if you are interested in being an artist and you could do some work at Emily Carr (Personal communication, July, 2012).

The expansion of transition programs will also be discussed in the section below.

10.6 **Reciprocity**

The final theme in this chapter accentuates the need for university policies and practices to ‘give back’ to Aboriginal communities in order to create successful high school to university transitions. Policies on Aboriginal student funding were identified as a key issue that signified universities failure to ‘give back’. Rick explains the need for universities to provide better funding opportunities for students:

Again, I think the biggest barrier is funding. It is massive. It is a huge, huge problem. Even for students who receive band funding, their funding has not been increased in 20 years. It is crazy what students are expected to live off of in Vancouver. Sometimes, a family cannot be expected to find a place to rent what they are expected to live off of. They are still having to get student loans off of that. They are still expected to find bursaries. They are still expected to work. And so, especially the work and that. A lot of students tend to work, especially in the first couple of years drastically impacts your grades and drastically impacts your ability to get funding and all these things compound (Personal communication, July, 2012).

As noted in the previous section, AOTP students also felt that universities must provide more scholarships and bursaries for students.

At the program level, most administrators acknowledged the challenges of securing on-going funding for AEUIs and AUIPs. One AEUI that was corporately sponsored for five years was about to lose its funding and the administrator of this initiative was desperately seeking new funding opportunities outside the university to ensure that the program could be continued. Another AEUI administrator noted the challenges she had encountered when she sought pilot funding from a provincial government initiative. Although her university had decided to commit to funding the program after the pilot was completed, obtaining funds for the pilot had not been easy. Rynne, a CEDAR program administrator shares:

The idea behind Aboriginal Special Projects [fund] is that they give the seed money and you can start a beautiful program, then the institution should take over the responsibility for that. That transition hasn't worked out very well. So when the money dried up from Aboriginal Special Projects, it is not like UBC was like "Oh great, now we will pay for it because it is a great program." They were like "lets find more money". They continued to run the program, Sciences started to contribute like the lions share but not to the same extent of funding that we had when Aboriginal Special Project. I think that happens all over campus. It is not a bad comment about UBC, it is that everybody's money is doled out to each unit. Nobody wants to help right? Like, it is like almost 'who touched it last syndrome'. Maybe this unit who works specifically with staff, why would they give \$10 000 dollars if there was already 10 000? Just that kind of stuff (Personal communication, July, 2012).

Lynda discusses a new approach that UBC has taken – implementing a priority taken from its Aboriginal Strategic Plan. This is a strategy that other universities could adopt as a

means to overcome some of the funding challenges identified by most of the AEUPI and AUTP administrators:

So even if there is not money in that department right now, like core funding or grants, they must submit a plan about how they will embed it into their overall plan in future years. People are beginning to understand that it is a priority from the president's office. They are trying to show the departments how this focus is a benefit to everybody. I think that they have to keep telling people that they don't want them to have just have one-time or short-term grants, they want them to actually build it within their budgets. So departments actually have it within their core budgets for a specific program or course. It might not be a full-fledged program, but at least one specific initiative (Personal communication, October, 2012).

Further, almost all participants noted that universities could better 'give back' to Aboriginal communities by supporting, strengthening and expanding early university promotion initiatives and transition programs in various faculties and program areas, as well as across institutions. As Daphne explains: "I see it just increasing the number of intakes [in the current AEUPI], maybe. You know? Maybe four different weeks, because there's such a need, right?" (Personal communication, October, 2012). Tim describes his intention to utilize the best aspects of current and former AEUPIs in designing another AEUPI that includes social groups traditionally excluded by universities:

So that is one of the things that I am looking at to expand and include groups that haven't traditionally engaged in the university too. What I would like to see is to reinvent Synala [a former AEUPI]. To reinvent Synala so that it becomes. Yeah, CEDAR goes up to

about grade eight. What I would like to see, to do the transitions similar to what [Emerging Summer Scholars] is doing. But to do it not from grade seven to eight, but eight to nine, nine to ten, eleven to twelve. So we take the Synala idea and the Emerging Summer Scholar idea and make it something that is a comprehensive support program that can be applied to Aboriginal kids across the province. There is a capacity with community colleges or places that used to be community colleges to do adult basic education, so they have the materials, they have the courses. You can use the same materials and the same instructions for that matter for kids across the province. So that is an idea that I would like to follow up on. Because the more kids that you can really get that idea cemented. Because a lot of those places that exist right now are university colleges or universities outright. They still have the capacity to run those types of courses and I would like to sort of repurpose that so we could have a Synala like program but not from grade 11-12 but from grade 10-11 and 11-12 (Personal communication, January, 2013).

10.7 Summary

This chapter identified university policies and practices that both hindered and facilitated Aboriginal learners' success as they transitioned into university from an early university preparation initiative or a university transition program. The university's obligation to ensure successful transitions for Aboriginal youth was critically examined within the context of Kirkness & Barnhardt's Four Rs and an additional fifth R. As Canadian universities inevitably rely upon, invoke, and perpetuate Eurocentric knowledge traditions and the biases inherent to these traditions, they must continually strive to foreground Indigenous knowledge and

epistemologies in their programming in order to remain relevant to Aboriginal communities and learners. Participants felt that university policies and practices must incorporate Aboriginal youths' identities and cultural backgrounds in three key areas: language admission policies, research on urban Aboriginal peoples, and the development of ethical principles for outreach efforts. In their view, universities were responsible for: improving their promotion of higher education to Aboriginal youth; reframing current measures of accountability within a culturally relevant framework; and recognizing the numerous suggestions offered by the youth in this study (as well as the suggestions of other Aboriginal learners and faculty). The participants identified relationship building as one of the key ways for universities to fulfill the five Rs. To this end, they felt the university needed to implement policies for Indigenizing university leaders, hiring more Aboriginal faculty to serve as role models, and educating university staff about Aboriginal students' needs and orientations. A number of methods for engaging Aboriginal students, parents, and communities in recruitment were discussed. Finally, funding was seen as a significant hindrance that could prevent successful high school to university transitions. Participants felt that current funding should be increased and that additional monies should be allocated to the creation of more AEUPI and AUTPs.

It is clear that the university has much work to do in order to ensure that increasing the number of Aboriginal youth transition to university 'successfully'. Essentially, it must make a commitment to changing how it thinks about Aboriginal learners. This change must be guided by a wholistic understanding of the interrelationship between the 5Rs if universities are to promote Aboriginal learners' involvement and honour Aboriginal peoples' contribution to the academy. Put simply, this means that universities need to make space for Aboriginal peoples, as opposed to requiring Aboriginal peoples to fit themselves into the existing space.

Chapter 11: Is the Cultural Interface an Open Door or a Façade?

11.1 Introduction

The prior three chapters explored the study's research questions from the perspectives of the participants and prepared a pathway for analyzing the research. This chapter begins with a research story from Raven. Second, it discusses the findings from the previous chapters in light of the study's theoretical framework. The research questions will be addressed sequentially in order to connect the corpus of my findings to the cultural interface. Third, I will delineate a number of questions to extend the cultural interface as a philosophical framework.

Raven Writes on the Wall

A frustrated Raven began cajoling me as I tried to write this analysis. I had spent several days in exile (away from my family and the outside world) locked in my office, trying to organize the content of my study into tidy categories – as I had been taught to do – in order to make prescriptive connections with Martin Nakata's work. Late one evening, I began to feel distinctly uneasy. I had felt the same way many times before when I was working on academic undergraduate papers that required me to utilize political and legal rhetoric. Writing in this way made me feel cold and detached, as if I were an omnipresent observer of my own reality. Although these papers impressed my professors, I felt that I was not authentically expressing my own voice and was pretending to be somebody I could never be. However, I was taught that the academy often prefers us to reproduce the same knowledge over and over and over again. Further, I was to articulate my understandings of the world through the lens of Western knowledge systems, which are based on hierarchies, linearity, objectification and abstraction. Employing the conventions, categories and classifications of Western knowledge required me to ignore my voice in order to honour the assumptions, beliefs, and opinions of 'experts' in the

field, even if they had no experience working with Indigenous peoples. This experience taught me more about how power relations are reproduced both overtly and covertly within in the academy. Many years later, I came to realize that the experience reflected my own personal struggles in the cultural interface. As the stories about Raven woven throughout this dissertation demonstrate, the power dynamics that are encountered in the cultural interface are felt intuitively before they can be expressed in words and conceptual understandings. Although I have utilized expository, analytical and narrative writing styles in this dissertation, I have realized that it is essential for me to write my theoretical analysis in the first-person voice because my Ph.D. project has been a wholistic personal journey and process. Assuming a third-person stance and organizing the learning and wisdom I have gained into conventional Western categories of knowledge would ultimately detract from the value of my research. As Kovach (2009) points out, “Using first person voice honours the experiential while engaging the abstract and the theoretical” (p.22). It is also my way of showing how this endeavor has unfolded.

Writing in the first person has also helped me to begin reconciling the intellectual challenges put forth in the cultural interface with the storywork methodology (which honours and affirms the importance of wholistic meaning making through storytelling). It has allowed me to take responsibility for my words, thoughts and feelings as I tell my research story and avoid superimposing an intrusive analysis onto the lives of the participants. I feel that I am honouring the principles of storywork by letting my participants’ stories speak for themselves as much as possible and that focusing on the wholistic dimensions of my analysis highlights the social and political forces that have shaped my participants’ lives.

Finally, this analysis can be read as both a confession and an explanation for some of the problems that I have encountered trying to “fill up the content” of the cultural interface in my

analysis (Doyle, 2013). At moments I have felt constrained, confused or stymied in pursuing a greater understanding of the concept of cultural interface because it demands that I negotiate different domains of knowledge: the body of knowledge within the academy, my personal experiences of and with Indigenous knowledge, knowledge in the field of education, and the deep wisdom of the participants in this study. In essence, I have come face to face with one of the paradoxes of the cultural interface. That is, as a researcher and author, I am considered an 'expert' who has been granted 'authority' and privileges to write and draw conclusions about my research participants' views of knowledge. I attend a university that is predicated upon a Western understanding of knowledge and without my status as 'expert', I would not be a Ph.D. candidate. I am therefore struggling to uphold Indigenous principles (respect, honesty, truth, strength, courage, wisdom, and power) while working within the Western system of the academy. It is necessary for me to balance the expectations and requirements of the academy (an external site of authority) with my internal experience of Indigenous knowledge (personal authority). In so doing, I must grapple with two distinct epistemologies that have dissimilar conceptions of power and explore how they can coexist on the cultural interface in a manner that enriches both.

11.2 Epistemological Configurations and Formlines in the Cultural Interface

In aiming to increase access for Indigenous learners, universities in Canada face the challenge of redressing past and continuing inequalities in higher education. AEUPIs and AUTPs are one way to accomplish this. However, it is important to acknowledge that the very terms 'early university promotion' and 'transition program' denote broad and interconnected formline contexts that include: economics, technology, neo-liberalism, Indigenous knowledge, multiculturalism, law, politics, psychology, and science. All of these formline designs other than

IK are derived from Western modes of thinking. This is certainly not surprising, given that the academy to a large extent remains rooted in Western epistemological practices and traditions (as discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation). This section will reexamine the study's first research question in order to untangle the epistemological positions of the cultural interface of university transition programs and identify the values, beliefs, and norms that they convey as well as the dynamics they set in motion. To that end, the first research question is reframed as: How do the origin, purpose, nature and structure of AEUPIs/AUTPs function in the cultural interface?

The previously mentioned origin stories of the various AEUPIs/AUTPs examined in this study revealed that liberal, neo-liberal and IK self-determination formlines influenced the organizational contexts in which these initiatives were developed. This functioned to both restrain and support the visions of the individuals who played a pivotal role in designing and implementing the initiatives. All of these individuals are of Indigenous ancestry and are familiar with the challenges that the higher education system poses to Indigenous learners. As such, they are firmly located in the cultural interface. The origin stories clarified the individuals' dissatisfaction with the K-12 system, which did not provide Aboriginal youth with a quality education that would enable them to successfully transition into university. However, levels of dissatisfaction varied. For example, one visionary who created an AEUPI vividly recalled an overt attempt to resist and challenge the neo-liberal discourse that dominates K-12 and post-secondary institutions. Another story revealed how an individual created an academic supplement to the K-12 system and inadvertently countered the system's neo-liberal orientation by providing students with academic programming that would support their secondary studies. There were more similarities in the AOTP origin stories than the AEUPI origin stories. The AOTP stories highlighted how particular government funding (largely neo-neoliberal) policy

priorities as well as the decisions of key leaders in the university shaped the development of these programs. As a result, the individuals who developed these programs took a top-down rather than bottom-up approach. Nonetheless, I was struck by all of the visionaries' keen passion to create meaningful educational change in the lives of Aboriginal youth and thereby promote their agency, which is the third principle of the cultural interface. Most importantly, the time that I spent with these visionaries helped me to see the ways in which their efforts to create transformative change within the institution were strongly connected to self-determination formlines.

11.3 University Texts That Shape the Cultural Interface

I found that there was a contradiction between the individuals' visions of the AEUPIs/AUTPs and how the university outlined the nature, purpose and structure of the programs on their websites. I therefore felt it was instructive to examine how these university texts regulate, govern, and legitimize lexical and symbolic knowledge practices in the AEUPI/AUTPs. Nakata (2007a; 2007b) would argue that such practices reflect the epistemological orientations of those who produce the texts. In other words, the ideas, attitudes, beliefs and practices that are articulated or embedded in the academy's institutional discourses are evident in its written materials and texts, and are communicated both lexically and symbolically. Consequently, written materials systematically convey and reaffirm institutional values and norms. Institutional language is thus not only socially shaped, but also 'constitutive' in that it reconstitutes itself.

11.3.1 Liberal Formline

Nakata argues that "any analysis of descriptions of [the AEUPI/AUTP] experience needs to reveal the politics of those relations [among epistemologies, discourses and texts] by including

the conflicts, the contradictions, [and] the incoherence of contesting positions...” that characterize the cultural interface. When I examined the websites of the AEUIPs/AUTPs, I discovered that they were informed by a number of competing formlines that essentially made their purposes difficult to ascertain. For example, all of the AEUIPs/AUTPs took an ‘Access to higher education approach’, which is rooted in a liberal discourse that views Indigenous learners as individuals who are being given ‘equal access’ to various educational opportunities. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, liberalism (and its later trajectory, neo-liberalism) does not aspire to ensure equality of outcome since it assumes that individuals are responsible for capitalizing on the equal educational opportunities presented to them. Equality of opportunity is also a prerequisite for another tenet of the liberal-based meritocracy standpoint, which holds individuals personally responsible for the wealth, power, and educational attainment that they can achieve. Aboriginal learners’ educational inequality is perceived to be the consequence of their ‘failure’ to take advantage of the opportunities available to them, rather than an outcome of the larger historical inequities and legacies that have been produced by society. This is a strong example of how the tenets of liberalism both mask and reproduce power imbalances within the educational system. Although liberal assumptions such as equality of opportunity are framed in a positive light, they are often buried in what critical scholars have labeled ‘deficit approaches’. In essence, neo-liberalism is the newest manifestation of the old liberal formline in academia, which is based on colonial and racist viewpoints.

11.3.2 Deficit Formline

As indicated, deficit formlines assume that Aboriginal learners’ ‘difficulties’ and ‘problems’ in higher education are the result of individual deficits and deficiencies. Not surprisingly, I noticed that websites inferred that students would benefit from making an effort to

‘fit’ into the institution. In other words, Indigenous learners are expected to ‘acculturate’ to the university and ‘assimilate’ the values of the institution. If they fail to do so, they are responsible for their general under-representation in university.

When I initially began this study, I thought that the deficit formline would be readily apparent, as is evident in the following text from the University of Northern British Columbia’s Northern Advancement Program (AOTP):

Because of cultural and sociological differences, traditionally, First Nations students from smaller and rural communities have had the most difficulty adjusting to university in a larger centre. The First Nations Centre, in cooperation with the Faculty of Arts and Science, offers a transition year studies program to students who wish to attend the University of Northern British Columbia. The intention is to create a program of study that is relevant to First Nations students from smaller and rural communities and will support students from initial enrollment to graduation. This program allows students to take full advantage of the educational opportunities offered, and prepares them for subsequent employment. This program will also ensure that a higher percentage of students will successfully complete their degrees as a result of an easier adjustment to, and enjoyment of, university life in a larger centre (Retrieved, June 10th, 2011).

Even though I did not include the Northern Advancement Program in my research, this statement provided an example of the deficit approach. It infers that First Nations learners’ difficulties are the result of their inability to ‘adjust’ to the university, which could be the result of cultural and social deficiencies. It is implicitly assumed that students need prerequisite knowledge and skills in order to succeed and adjust – or assimilate – into the university’s system. The statement fails to consider how the academic preparedness of Aboriginal learners for university is heavily

impacted by the legacy of colonial policies that have systematically perpetrated inequalities in constructing the above-mentioned ‘cultural/sociological differences’.

However, the deficit approach was trickier to identify when I looked at the stated purposes of the AEUPIs/AUTPs that were part of my research. This was because the language used was more affirmative and less stigmatizing than the language used by the Northern Advancement Program. For example, one AOTP website states that the program is “for those whose grades do not reflect their academic potential” and may need “additional support as they step into the university” (UBC, 2013). Another states that the program “assists students to prepare for university and gain confidence in their ability to succeed” (SFU, 2013). Nevertheless, the hidden and long-standing agenda of the deficit approach inform such university texts to a certain extent even if they cast Aboriginal learners in a positive light.

Supporters of the deficit approach may claim that such a programming bias is necessary to encourage greater numbers of Aboriginal students to attend university, especially given that Aboriginal high school graduation rates remain significantly lower than non-Aboriginal high school graduation rates (Clement, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2010; Penney, 2009; Statistics Canada, 2005). As noted by the literature reviewed for this research, advocates of the deficit approach provide abundant examples of Aboriginal learners who leave high school ‘without the academic skills they need to thrive in a university environment’ (Canadian Millennium Foundation; Heslop, 2009). In emphasizing individual responsibility and adjustment to the university environment, these advocates fail to comprehend the larger collective problems that colonialism has entrenched in Indigenous communities, which has in turn impacted Aboriginal learners’ academic preparedness for university and cultural/sociological identity. Further, individualizing Indigenous learners does not consider that families and Aboriginal communities

support these learners in persevering through their post-secondary studies. A significant amount of research has highlighted the integral role that families and communities play in supporting Indigenous post-secondary students (Fleming, 2010; Kovach, 2010; Korkow, 2008; Malatest & Associates, 2002; Ooshawe, 2008; Ortiz & Heavy Runner, 2003; Pidgeon, 2008a; Steinhauer, 2012;). Deficit approaches to transition programming are thus further limited by their failure to recognize that Indigenous learners' families and communities need to be supported if the learners are to have an optimal chance of 'succeeding' in their university studies. They also do not recognize the need for the realization of self-determination goals that are expressed by Aboriginal communities.

The bias inherent in the deficit approach is excellently highlighted in "Raven's reversal" of the following text from Carleton University's (2011) website: (see next page)

Raven's Reversal

"Are you:

An Aboriginal high school student whose grades don't represent your academic potential?

An Aboriginal student interested in a supported transition to post-secondary education?

An Aboriginal adult learner interested in academic support in your first year at university?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you should consider Carlton's Aboriginal Enriched Support Program (AESP)"

Ravens Reversal

Are you: A university who can't retain Aboriginal learners?

A faculty member who is interested in supporting Aboriginal learners in their transition into post-secondary education?

An administrator interested in learning more about Indigenous epistemology to help you re-design your current programming for Indigenous learners?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you should consider participating in First Nations 101.

****Please note, due to neo-liberal restructuring, you will be required to pay for this program yourself.***

As Raven's reversal suggests, at present there are no widespread, institutionally implemented programs to educate university staff and faculty about Indigenous learners' needs, interests, motivations, and cultural sensibilities.

11.3.3 Neo-liberalism Formline

I also learned that the deficit formline became more nuanced when it intersected with the neo-liberalist formline. This formline was more pervasive in the AUTPs' purpose section of their texts than in those of the AEUPIs. As mentioned in Chapter 2, neo-liberalism has restructured the realm of higher education. In so doing, it has significantly influenced the predominant discourse of transition programs and informed their overall function within higher education. For example, I identified neo-liberalism in transition program texts that highlighted the economic importance of higher education as a means to gain economically viable employment. This sentiment is evident in the UNBC website, which states: "This program allows students to take full advantage of the educational opportunities offered, and prepares them for subsequent employment", as well as SFU's Aboriginal Pre-health Program website, which notes: "In SFU's eight-month Aboriginal Pre-health program, [you] will get a solid orientation to your career options, a boost of encouragement and support, and the academic pre-requisites that will set you up to succeed in a university Bachelor's degree program" (emphasis added). The underlined passages in the examples above reflect the common perception of Indigenous learners as an 'untapped pool of labour' who need education to prepare them to enter the workforce. As McClean (2007) states, "neo-liberal frameworks understand education as one prong of an empowerment to work strategy that encourages individual attachment to the labour market" (p. 33). While gaining employment after completing university is certainly a worthwhile goal for many students, it is not the only goal for Indigenous learners, as most wish to use their post-

secondary learning to help their communities expand and pursue self-determination (Brayboy, 2013; Pidgeon, 2008a; Pidgeon 2008b). Finally, as the primary formline that currently structures the organization of higher education, neo-liberalism promotes a business model of education. As it is unlikely that a business model can truly remediate educational (and other) inequalities, neo-liberalism ultimately impedes the advancement of Indigenous programming at universities, including transition programs. For example, all of the AUTPs required students to pay significant tuition fees. Having to pay for transition or other university programs out of pocket is a prohibitive barrier that can deny Aboriginal people the ‘opportunity’ to attend university.

When neo-liberalist policies structure university transition programs for Indigenous learners, it becomes imperative to ask: What qualities, values, and social relations are deemed economically efficient or desirable? Whose interest does the information and knowledge disseminated in the programs serve, and who controls that information and knowledge? What forms of knowledge and skills are most important within a neo-liberal framework? How does this knowledge and skills students learn within a neo-liberal framework within these programs impede or advance Indigenous goals of self-determination? Attempting to answer these questions is troubling because the fundamental principles of the neo-liberal project can largely undermine IK epistemologies and the goal of self-determination that is so important to most Indigenous learners, scholars and communities.

11.3.4 IK Formline

I noticed that most of the AEUPI/AUTP websites attempted to ameliorate the negative impacts of the liberal (deficit) and neo-liberal agendas by incorporating IK and Aboriginal culture(s) into their educational pedagogy, course content, workshops, and support services. This aims to alleviate students’ feelings of alienation when they transition to the university and to

promote a sense of pride in their identity. These websites led me to recognize that incorporating IK formlines into promotional program text was a complex endeavor, especially given that it often contradicts Western discourses and approaches. When IK formlines and Western formlines intersect, the former responds to and contests the latter, which creates the possibility for a new formline to emerge at the cultural interface. Within this study it is critical to note that none of the university texts specifically discussed or even encouraged students to attend university in order to enhance the health and well-being of their communities for self-determination purposes. This observation is surprising given the importance that many participants placed on attaining a university education in order to strengthen the political, social, economic, and educational processes within Aboriginal communities. The absence of the self-determination formline is also considerable given the political and policy developments that were noted in Chapter 2.

As demonstrated in the example from the University of Northern British Columbia's Northern Advancement program, Indigenous learners are commonly seen through the lens of 'cultural difference'. In contrast, the Emerging Summer Scholars Initiative positively reframed cultural difference in stating that its purpose was to "foster pride in Aboriginal culture and build a strong community through the university" (University of British Columbia, 2013b). Including Indigenous cultural content in programming makes Indigenous students' transition to university more familiar and comfortable. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that framing Indigenous learners' 'difficult' transition to university as a cultural issue can deny the value of IKs and obscure the larger issues of colonialism and racism that impact the cultural interface in higher education. This is particularly important given that the cultural interface is heavily influenced by the predominant Canadian discourse of multiculturalism, which is imbued with liberal values and could marginalize the Indigenous understanding of cultures.

However, neoliberal formlines persist even when IKs are recognized and included in the program as course content (which most AUTPs and AEUIs make efforts to do). The “mixed” or “hybrid” approach to Indigenous culture or knowledge systems for programs tailored to Indigenous learners should therefore be regarded with caution (Richardson & Cohen, 2000). As Nakata (2007 b) argues:

Indigenous knowledge systems and Western knowledge systems work off different theories of knowledge that frame who can be a knower, what can be known, what constitutes knowledge, sources of evidence for constructing knowledge, what constitutes as truth, how truth is to be verified, how evidence becomes truth, how valid inferences are to be drawn, the role of belief in evidence, related issues (p. 9).

Given the differences between the two knowledge systems, it is not possible to legitimize one system’s ‘claims to truth’ according to the other’s standards and justifications. Consequently, the inclusion of IKs in all university transition programs has been subject to on-going negotiation and debate as scholars struggle to maintain IKs’ internal integrity while allowing it to remain open to change and remain responsive to Western academic traditions.

Although many of the university texts did not mention Aboriginal culture(s) and knowledge, the Indigenous administrators, faculty, and staff involved in the AEUIs/AUTPs articulated a perspective of pedagogy, curriculum, and support services that was very much aligned with IK formlines. As stated previously in Chapter 7, the “interactions between actors within the university system therefore give shape to and reinforce the mandate of university programs. This in turn creates a seemingly innocent and relational structure (similar to the formline analogy discussed in chapter two) between university actors and the organization of

programs, including programs and curriculums for Indigenous students” (Chapter 7). Further, I now recognize that it is important to differentiate amongst the various actors in the university because they may have very different and competing roles within the institution’s hierarchy. The values and principles of the individuals involved in the transition programs can directly contradict the liberal and neo-liberal discourses (both positive and negative) favoured by key university leaders and the larger university structure. For example, all of the AEUPI/AUTP program staff have gone to great lengths to counter the deficit approach and employ a positive strength-based approach that integrates IK formlines in their pedagogy and daily interactions with students. During their interviews with me, many of the administrators of AEUPIs/AUTPs also shared innovative recruitment strategies where they clearly articulated a self-determination formline in order to pique students’ interest in attending their respective programs and obtain a university degree to assist their communities with self-determination efforts. It is clear that AEUPI/AUTP faculty, staff, and administrators are very critical of the overall university system and hold it accountable for Indigenous learners’ unequal educational outcomes. They affirmed this by the information that they shared with me about the ‘nature’ of AEUPIs/AUTPs in their interviews (noted in Chapters 9 and 11). It is therefore critical to explore whether the relationships between individuals working within the cultural interface intensify or reconcile conflicts between knowledge systems and facilitate or impede the potentialities of this space.

The structure of the AEUPIs/AUTPs described on the university websites varied in terms of program length, daily schedules, the number of employees and volunteers involved, and the level of program assessment that was conducted. This reflects differences in funding sources and program goals as well as staff members’ backgrounds and personal foci. Despite these differences, it was clear the AEUPIs/AUTPs replicated the organizational structure of the

university, which is premised on Western principles. Further, this limits program staff members' capacity to call for institutional changes that allow them to assume greater responsibility for the design of AEUPI/AUTPs. Although AEUPIs/AUTPs are based on a cohort model, the larger Western orientation of the programs requires program staff members to continually reassert the model. As indicated, the texts I studied not only give information about AEUPIs/AUTPs to the public, but also reinforce and maintain power asymmetries and hierarchical relationships within the university. In short, it remains to be seen whether IK formlines have effectively been incorporated into AEUPIs/AUTPs because these initiatives are based on Western principles. Given that the university is predicated upon Western formlines, the concept of the cultural interface demands that we ask critical questions about what we 'know' as Indigenous peoples and how we are located on the interface. In examining the character and potentiality of the cultural interface, it is also important to ask: Whose standards of knowledge are accepted as the key standard for comparison? Whose ways of living and being are privileged in the university? What are the implications of imposing Eurocentric standards for knowledge production on Indigenous learners attending AEUPIs/AUTPs? Why is the formline of self-determination not expressed in official university texts of the AEUPI/AUTPs? How does this erasure impact Aboriginal learners? Given of all these considerations, is the cultural interface an open door, or simply a façade? The next section will provide further insight into these questions by examining learners' experiences.

11.4 Aboriginal Learners' Experience in the Cultural Interface

As previously mentioned, the second principle of the cultural interface is that Indigenous people live the tensions encountered in the interface as embodied subjects. This section will

discuss how the youth in my study articulated their lived experience of Nakata's second principle of the cultural interface. In doing so, it will answer my second research question:

Which university policies and practices hinder and facilitate Aboriginal learners' success as they transition into a university from early university preparation and university transition programs?

In answering this question I do not intend to review the findings from Chapter 10 in detail. Rather, my aim is to highlight key points that will contribute to a new theoretical understanding of the cultural interface and relate the findings to previous literature and research on the cultural interface. However, I will retain the themes from Chapter 10 to ensure continuity. These themes are congruent with the Indigenous theoretical concepts that I have drawn upon in attempting to position IK formlines of self-determination more prominently in the cultural interface.

11.4.1 Visioning

The youths' stories about their visioning process for attending university confirm the argument I made in Chapter 2 that students' transition to university starts long before they actually enroll in higher education. In fact, some of the youths' visioning processes began in elementary school and continued until they entered university. This finding directly challenges institutional/psychological viewpoints that prevail in the literature (and have been discussed in Chapter 2). Finally, the youth indicated that their visioning processes actively shaped their long-term aspirations for university.

11.4.2 K-12 Experience

Students' K-12 experience was seen to both hinder and facilitate their transition to university, which confirms findings in the literature (Aman, 2008; Avison, 2004; Blair, 2000).

For the most part, the youth in this study had few positive experiences of the K-12 system. It was clear that the AEUPIs were very successful in providing the youth with new skills and resources that could help them navigate their high school studies in a way that enabled them to directly transition to university. In this sense, the AEUPIs functioned as an intervention that addressed negative schooling experiences. The AOTP youth did not have this benefit and reported that negative secondary school experiences led them to enroll in their respective programs. The AOTP students' experience also brings a paradox to light. That is, although the AOTP youth did not perceive systemic racism to be an issue in their university education, most of them acknowledged that they had been subjected to some form of systemic oppression in the K-12 system and that this had impacted their school experience. This highlights the important role that transition programs play in Aboriginal learners' lives.

I cannot overstate the importance of the K-12 system's function as a gatekeeper to university education. Its policies and practices contribute to whether or not students envision attending university and whether or not they are likely to attend. It can erroneously push students out of the system entirely, or direct them away from university and encourage them instead to attend vocational schools or community colleges. To be clear, I am not denigrating the importance of vocational or college education so much as raising an issue about the way that the educational system directs students away from entertaining the possibilities of attaining a university education. The former happens to a disproportionately high percentage of Aboriginal students. Unless more is done to assist Aboriginal learners to do well in their K-12 studies, high school completion rates will remain the same and Aboriginal participation in university will not increase. Further, if Aboriginal communities are to be self-determining, all levels of education and professions are required.

11.4.3 Persons of Influence

Persons of influence – parents, teachers, high school counselors, First Nations support workers, and program staff – were vitally important to the youth interviewed in this study. This was particularly true for family members, who were cited as the most influential people within the youths’ circle of influence. This supports my initial argument and complements findings in the literature (Braybody, 2013; Pidgeon, 2008; Steinhauer, 2012). In particular, my research affirms Steinhauer’s (2012) finding that Aboriginal parents are very much involved with their children’s education. As families have always played vital roles in the social organization of Indigenous communities, their involvement in their children’s K-12 and university education needs to be acknowledged. This is particularly important because it will assist institutions to gain a more wholistic understanding of Aboriginal learners’ lived realities and, ultimately, enrich their transition into the university (Archibald et al., 2010; Pidgeon, 2008a). Parental involvement will not only support learners, but also ensure that the K-12 and university systems integrate IK formlines and Aboriginal culture(s) and experiences in multiple ways. Parents must be meaningfully included in transition programs and the overall university system, and the resources that they need to help their children transition to university must be considered. The next section of the dissertation and the recommendations list will discuss ways in which this could be accomplished.

Finally, it is clear that high school counselors, principals, and First Nations support workers also shape Aboriginal youths’ higher educational aspirations. However, their influence can be limiting or beneficial depending on their view of education and the support they provide to students. Further research is needed to determine the level of support Indigenous learners receive from high school councilors, principals, and First Nations support workers for their high

school to university transitions; as well as what types of training, knowledge and skills these individuals need so that they can educate Aboriginal students about the cultural interface in a meaningful way.

11.4.4 Experience

As mentioned in the previous section, the textual production of knowledge conveyed by university websites about AEUIs and AUTPs implicitly assumes that students needed prerequisite knowledge and skills in order to succeed in the university's system. The education that these programs provide to youth is deeply informed by a number of competing and contradictory formlines (colonial, racist, liberal, neo-liberal, and IK). This inevitably shapes learners' experiences, as was brought to light in the participants' accounts. The study anticipated – and found – that because AEUIs and AUTPs have different purposes, structures, and intents, the groups of learners who attended each type of program had different personal locations and different experiences of the transition process. The study found that AEUI youth spoke positively about community and relational experiences that emphasized IK, but also appreciated getting high grades (invoking liberal assumptions about success) and obtaining information about their future careers (invoking neo-liberal assumptions). I learned that the AEUIs' provision of IK and cultural understandings to youth who had no prior knowledge about their rich heritage(s) had a significant impact. This finding contradicts Nakata's assertion that most Aboriginal learners will have had some prior experience with IK. In my view, the youths' experiences in AEUIs highlight the diverse standpoints that Aboriginal people bring to the cultural interface. Although Indigenous peoples at large share many common denominators, our prior historical experiences are varied and nuanced, which has positioned us differently in the present (a point which Nakata acknowledges elsewhere in his argument). In contrast to AEUI

students, AOTP students felt that their experiences in the program solidified their sense of belonging to the university and helped them to develop academic and personal time management skills. To this end, their experiences seemed to be conditioned more by program objectives and the outside structure of the university than the experiences of the AEUPI.

11.4.5 Transformation

The AEUPI youths' stories revealed how the programs transformed their perceptions and feelings about university, which very much reflects Nakata's ideas about the "cycles of continuity and discontinuity" that can limit or support endeavors to navigate the cultural interface. To this end, it seemed that the youths' experiences of the AEUPI/AOTP's led AOTPs to 'take up' new visions about the possibilities of higher education and to 'discard' the stereotypical notions of university that they had previously held (Nakata, 2007a). Further, their stories helped me to understand that individual viewpoints of higher education at an institution vary, which suggests that it is not a static, one-dimensional entity. As a result, I had to question what formlines were most prevalent in their minds and how this had impacted their transition to university.

11.4.6 Role Modeling

The stories of all the youth in this study conveyed that role models were of key importance to their visioning process for university. To this end, all of the AEUPIs offered the youth leadership opportunities which helped them to hone their leadership skills and, more importantly, to act as role models for younger youth in the program. It was not surprising for me to learn that the AOTP youth were more critical of the university and its lack of visible Aboriginal role models than the AEUPI youth. This finding corroborates the few studies in the literature that have noted the importance of providing Aboriginal youth with strong Aboriginal

mentorship and visible role models to support their higher education endeavors (Archibald et al, 2010; Pidgeon, 2008 a; Kenny & Ngaroimata Fraser, 2012).

11.4.7 Sense of Belonging

When participants shared their feelings about belonging to their respective AEUPI/AUTP, their appreciation of Indigenous AEUPI/AUTP administrators, faculty, and staff was clear. A sense of belonging to the university community was seen as integral to the feelings of comfort and safety that eased their transition into the university, which confirms a number of findings in the literature (Kirkness, & Barnhardt, 1991; Hampton, 2000; Heavyrunner, 2009; Pidgeon, 2008 a; Pidgeon, 2008 b). Many of the students mentioned that forming vital relationships with faculty, staff and peers provided them with positive support and encouragement. In addition, participants particularly appreciated staff, faculty, and volunteers who helped to ensure that their AEUPI/AUTP supported and nurtured their Indigeneity.

As stated, the students' stories also confirm that Aboriginal learners are not homogenous, as has been noted by Nakata and a number of other researchers. They are rural, urban and suburban; traditional and modern; deeply entrenched in their culture(s) and understandings about IK, or only beginning to discover their Aboriginal identity. As a result, it was unsurprising that some participants expressed both appreciation and concern about the ways in which their programs interacted with the local First Nation community near which the university was located. I have noted my observation that both AEUPIs and AUTPs were extremely beneficial for Aboriginal youth who had not been previously connected to their Aboriginal culture(s). This highlights the paradox of education for Aboriginal peoples: historically, education aimed to take our IK and culture(s) away from us, and now it is seen as a tool to revitalize our IK and

culture(s). This is particularly true given that IK content is being delivered within a Western institutional context.

The youth drew strength from their communities of origin as well as the community that was created for them on campus. This affirms findings in the literature suggesting that most Aboriginal youth pursue higher education to assist their communities with self-determination efforts (alongside a variety of personal goals) (Brayboy, 2013; Pidgeon, 2008; Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013)

Finally, the IK that AEUPIs/AUTPs conveyed to students helped to open their minds, bodies, hearts, and spirits. The programs incorporated IK content to varying degrees. I was surprised to learn that the AEUPI that was most resistant to neo-liberalism – a sentiment that was expressed in its origin story – was ambivalent about the delivery of IK content and instead emphasized the importance of building cross-cultural relationships between students, faculty, and staff as a form of resisting the hegemonic structure of the university. Program staff felt that students were exposed to IK simply by being in each other's presence and that it was very important to change how university faculty, staff, and volunteers perceived Aboriginal peoples because it would change how they interacted with Aboriginal youth in their professional roles. The youths' stories demonstrated that this program's staff gave cross-cultural knowledge a priority over IK. Three AEUPIs seemed to make a more concerted attempt to teach IK by introducing students to it; connecting students to the local Aboriginal community that the university was located or; giving students opportunities to interact with Indigenous university support staff, Elders, or faculty in order to cultivate or enhance their understandings of Indigeneity. These three AEUPIs also took the youth to cultural institutions, heritage sites, or museums (e.g., the UBC Museum of Anthropology) that held particular significance to

Indigenous peoples. Students in AUTPs reported that program staff made very clear efforts to include IK in course content, pedagogical methods, support services and staff interactions. Two programs were not located near the university's First Nations Student Support Services (which were provided at another campus location) and this was seen to hinder students' ability to receive wholistic support for their university endeavors. However, these two programs were unique in that they hosted an Elder who visited the program on a regular basis to interact with and support students. For the most part, IK remained outside of these two programs' curriculums. The exception to this was the First Nations studies course offered by both programs. The third AOTP in this study was fully integrated with the First Nations Student Support Service Centre at its university, but did not have funding to hire an Elder. This AOTP was unique compared to the other two in that students reported that its course content included Aboriginal perspectives and worldviews. I was not surprised to learn that all of the participants agreed that they would like their programs to have more IK content.

This study confirms findings that culturally-based educational initiatives can make the academic world more hospitable and relevant for many Indigenous students (Archibald et al 2010, Battiste, 2000b; Kaukohhen, 2007; Shotton et al, 2013; Martin & Thunder, 2013). However, it is salient to note that IK should also be taught in the K-12 system. How can the system's exclusion or failure to integrate IK not have a negative impact on Aboriginal youths' likelihood of successfully transitioning to university? Even more significantly, how do transition programs address the K-12 and higher education systems' ignorance of IK? These questions highlight the necessity of distinguishing between 'formal access to higher education' and 'epistemological access' and determining whether the latter enhances students' transition. Further, program delivery of IK needs to consider how it is "re-presented and re-configured as a

part of the corpus ‘about’ us. . . [which] is discursively bounded, ordered and organized by others and their sets of interests” (Nakata, 2007b)

11.4.8 Wholistic Student Success

The youth had different understandings of wholistic success, which makes an important contribution to the literature and provides insight into the youths’ experience of the transition program as the cultural interface.

AEUPI youth were quicker to acknowledge wholistic accomplishments than AOTP youth. This may be due to the fact that most of the AEUPIs’ program objectives and structures did not include external measurements of academic success. As noted previously, most of the AOTP students expressed the conventional understanding of ‘academic success’ in their comments to me. However, they also shared the wholistic accomplishments they had experienced in their programs. Although this surprised me initially, it made sense to me when I considered that the Eurocentric understanding of success circulates through these programs and deeply informs the formlines that AOTPs engage. As a result, students are immersed in a system where the Eurocentric understanding of success is constantly reinforced through academic assessment and students are encouraged to adopt this method of evaluating their own success (Dei, 2010).

AOTP curriculums have been designed to emphasize qualities seen as necessary to ‘succeed’ in the system, which include study skills, academic literacy, and time management abilities. Liberal thinking (i.e., notions of autonomy and merit) was thus very evident in most of the AOTP students’ conceptions of success, which were individualized and based on performing self-defined actions and achieving specific goals in a competitive environment. It follows that it is the individual student’s responsibility to acquire the qualities needed to ‘adjust’ well to the

university's structure and institutional practices. This standpoint inevitably pursues assimilation by strongly encouraging Indigenous learners to adopt the institution's natural and undisputed orientation in Western academic values. The broader family and community influences that contribute to Aboriginal students' wholistic understanding of success are excluded from the liberal conception of success. Consequently, students had conflicting understandings of their identities as learners in the cultural interface. Wholistic understandings of success include knowledge of IK and cultural backgrounds, as well as strong ties to family, kin and/or community. Indigenous peoples, communities, and scholars have problematized the criteria for 'success' that has been established and imposed by Western institutions and argued that the criteria should be expanded to take Indigenous conceptions of wholistic wellbeing into account (Pidgeon, 2008). According to IK, wholistic wellbeing is more important than externally-defined conceptions of success. Further, wholistic wellbeing is measured throughout the course of a person's life as they maintain pivotal interdependent relations with their family and community in order to 'live a good life' (Newhouse, 2009). As the youths' visioning process revealed, their notions of individual success and competition are often somewhat at odds with their primary goals for participating in higher education. Aspiring to help their families and communities to achieve self-determination is a goal that is predicated upon a wholistic definition of success. Further, wholism opposes the neo-liberal conception of success because its 'bottom line' is how well a community thrives as a whole, not how well a few individual members do (Gosnell, 2003).

Understanding how liberal, neo-liberal and Indigenous formlines shape Aboriginal youths' understandings of 'success' and wellbeing is important because it also provides insight into why most of the AOTP youth reported that their transition from their program to full-time

studies was ‘unsuccessful’. It was clear that the conceptions of success held by most of the students who had completed an AOTP and transitioned into degree programs did not adequately reflect their wholistic experiences in the programs, and, as a result, they considered their transition to be inadequate. Wholistic understandings of success were notably absent from their stories about the transition experience. I feel it is important to acknowledge that this absence is not attributed to the student participants themselves. Rather, their responses demonstrate that the university is not equipping students with a critical understanding of the cultural interface between IK and WK. This would in turn help them to deconstruct the power relations that operate within both society and the education system and influence how they construct definitions of success. In other words, students were not provided with the tools they need to explore or question their conceptions of success, and the predominance of WK negated their experience and understandings of IK. Even more importantly, all of the students who reported challenges transitioning into a degree program also stated that there was no IK content in any of their courses.

The divide between IK and WK encompasses clashes between Indigenous and Western understandings of time and learning, as well as ‘success’ in AOTPs. In institutions of higher education, students are expected to adhere to the time frames and schedules of programs that have been designed by the larger organizational structure of the university. If a student does not acquire the skills and information that program curriculums and pedagogies expect them to within the specified time frame, they are considered unsuccessful. In contrast, IK is seen as a process of learning and living that occurs throughout the course of an individual’s lifetime, within many Indigenous contexts. An individual’s learning outcomes are not measured according to external criteria and concrete segments of time, but instead reflect the internal understandings

and meanings the individual has derived from the teachings she or he has received.

Consequently, many Aboriginal students may unconsciously struggle to negotiate the competing conceptions of success. If higher education institutions are to serve Indigenous communities better, they must provide students with knowledge about how 'success' is framed within IK. Finally, previous research has indicated that many Indigenous learners will take breaks from their higher education studies before completing a degree or attend a number of institutions for their degree rather than just one. As Bryan Brayboy et al. (2013) have argued, "As long as success along the 'pipeline' continues to be defined as completing a degree within four to six years, full time enrollment at a single institution, Indigenous students will continued to be framed as failures in the education system" (p.28). It is therefore helpful to re-frame high school to university transitions as an on-going continuum with no pre-determined time frame in which 'success' is expected to occur.

11.4.9 Reciprocity

The notion of reciprocity reflected the IK discourse that informed (to varying extents) the AEUIPs/AUTPs. I was heartened by the youths' keen interest to 'give back' to younger generations of youth by providing them with new understandings of the cultural interface. This study coincides with Pidgeon's (2008 a) research, which found that most Indigenous students emphasized that 'giving back' to the larger Aboriginal community was both an important future career goal and a marker of wholistic success. This created a degree of resistance to wholly embracing an individualistic perspective of success and achievement. The youth were actively pursuing self-determination goals by pursuing higher education. Further, an analysis of the comic book story lines created by the youth revealed the tensions that they encountered at the cultural interface as well as some of the useful strategies they learned for navigating it. However, not all

of the story lines reflected an Indigenous strength-based perspective. For example, one of the youth chose a chameleon character to teach other youth how to ‘adapt’ to new situations. Although this made me sad because it inferred assimilation, it also reflected the diversity and unique characters of my participants. The story also provides an impetus for us to think about how we might begin providing youth with stronger Indigenous identities and thus challenge the ideology of assimilation that Canadian society has historically imposed upon us. For the time being, I will use my researcher superpowers to detail the complexity of this story from a trickster perspective that highlights the mishaps that occur for Raven as she/he tries to assimilate into higher educational contexts.

11.4.10 A Better Fit

This section reflects Nakata’s final principle of the cultural interface, which suggests that Indigenous peoples have agency both historically and currently. I analyze my final question in light of this principle:

Which university policies and practices hinder and facilitate Aboriginal learners’ success as they transition into a university from early university preparation and university transition programs?

To begin with, it is salient to note that I prefer working with the concept of transformation rather than the concept of agency. From my perspective, the concept of transformation engages Indigenous theoretical understandings that have the potential to create a better future for Indigenous learners and is closely aligned with a self-determination formline. I therefore look forward to analyzing participants’ comments so that we may collectively transform and bring to light key elements of the cultural interface that will assist Aboriginal youth to have a more

meaningful experience in university (Smith, 2003). Once again, I will organize the analysis according to the same themes that arose from the same themes utilized in Chapter 10.

Chapter 10 attempted to articulate a number of university policies and practices that needed to be transformed in order to facilitate successful high school to university transitions for Aboriginal youth. Therein, participants highlighted a number of recently implemented successful practices and policies that had the potential to re-dress a number of ongoing historical inequalities and in so doing, improve learners' transitions. All of the participants (irrespective of their roles as administrator, student, faculty member or community member) were impacted by the constraints and possibilities of the various formlines that shaped the institutional settings that they participated in. My intent is to expand upon their suggestions based upon my observations in order to highlight new facets of the cultural interface as well as forge connections with available literature.

11.5 The 5 Rs

Even though it has been twenty-two years since Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) asserted that universities must “respect Aboriginal students for who they are; engage knowledge relevant to their worldviews; foster reciprocal learning and teaching relationships; [and] assume responsibility for students ‘success’ within their walls” (p.14), the participants’ responses clearly indicate that much work remains to be done to transform relationships amongst the university, Aboriginal communities, and Aboriginal learners. In order for the university to transform itself, it must facilitate a wholistic understanding of the interrelationship between the 5Rs, promote Aboriginal learners’ agency, and honour Aboriginal peoples’ contribution to the academy.

11.5.1 Respect

Participants highlighted a number of university policies and practices that could engender deeper respect for Aboriginal communities, learners and IK. In acknowledging that two Vancouver universities had recently changed language admission policies by giving credit for Indigenous languages, they emphasized that these changes should be implemented on a province-wide basis. Some participants also felt that universities needed to better respond to the needs of the province's ever-increasing urban Aboriginal population and urban Aboriginal youth in particular. The diversity of British Columbia's Aboriginal population affirms Nakata's assertion that Indigenous people within the cultural interface come from a diversity of places (rural, urban, suburban) and have various subjectivities that will impact how they interact in this space. It is therefore imperative that universities do not homogenize the Indigenous students that comprise its corpus. Further, one participant felt that the university needed to improve its outreach ethics (i.e., university media relations) in order to better respect the rights of Aboriginal youth interesting in attending these programs. To date, little research has been conducted that focused specifically on the issue of respect as one of the five Rs.

11.5.2 Responsibility

From the participants' viewpoint, universities needed to exercise more responsibility for Aboriginal learners by improving their promotion of higher education to Aboriginal youth and reframing current measures of accountability within a culturally relevant framework. I feel that the application of the 5Rs is a critical Indigenous response to the neo-liberal formline of accountability (Pidgeon, 2008a) that is present in the cultural interface. A number of Indigenous scholars are currently challenging and reframing neo-liberal notions of accountability by clearly outlining how universities can carry out their responsibilities to Aboriginal youth in a culturally

relevant framework. To this end, I identified one way in which all the programs could extend their responsibilities to Aboriginal learners. There is a dire need to track AEUPI/AUTP students in order to record what institutions they attend afterwards and determine the short- and long-term outcomes of their attending transition and subsequent post-secondary programs. However, all the university administrators that I interviewed noted that at present there is no system-wide method of tracking students in this way, nor any institutional commitment to doing so. Tracking AEUPI/AUTP students would also help Indigenous communities, Indigenous learners and Indigenous advocates working within the university to reframe universities' responsibility for ensuring students' success. This reframing should focus on students continuing on at the institution and achieving 'wholistic success', which would recognize that wholistic success extends beyond grade achievements and motivates students to remain in the program. A close reading of the cultural interface would suggest that the 5 Rs are key to reframing the notion of responsibility, especially given that a number of Indigenous scholars have positively utilized this framework already (Archibald et al 2010, Pidgeon, 2008 a; Pidgeon 2008 b).

11.5.3 Relevance

In the participants' view, relevance required universities to ensure that institutional policies and practices were created that legitimized Indigenous knowledge formlines, skills and meaningfully connected to the lived realities of Aboriginal peoples (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). Program selection criteria, university selection criteria, and the youths' stories about challenging transitions into their degree studies became the foci for our discussion about whether or not the university was providing Aboriginal learners with a culturally relevant education in AEUPIs/AUTPs.

Participants' comments about program selection criteria were particularly poignant for me in that they issued a challenge to the university to create student selection policies that would enable a diverse group of Indigenous learners to gain access to these programs. As stated previously, this is important given that the university system generally promotes student selection practices that reinforce the predominance of WK systems and which are tailored to privilege white middle-class learners (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011). As the predominance of Western Knowledge systems has become normalized, learners and university staff may not even be aware of it and tend to accept it rather than question it. The criteria used to accept or reject students are one example of a policy that can entrench the status quo of liberal and neo-liberal formlines. This means that the learners who have been the most harshly impacted by historical colonial policies are often not permitted entry into the university. As previously mentioned, participants pointed out that program selection criteria tended to overlook Aboriginal children in care, while favouring students from more privileged backgrounds. The selection criteria thus re-produces the institutionalized and systemic inequalities perpetuated by the university. This partially explained why the participants in one of the AUTPs in this study largely came from middle-class backgrounds. However, most of the AEUPIs/AUTPs had broad diversity with their participants coming from a range of different economic backgrounds. This may suggest that AEUPI/AUTP staff have been making an active effort to make their programs more inclusive and accessible to a broader group of youth. Nevertheless, critical questions about program selection need to be addressed in discussions about the AEUPIs/AUTPs.

A number of participants also noted that grade-restricted admission policies acted as a barrier that prevented Aboriginal high school students (particularly some of the AEUPI alumni) from directly transitioning to university. They felt that the implementation of broad-based

admission criteria or special Aboriginal admission policies would positively counteract the grade-restricted policies of previous eras. However, the AOTP students' experience of transitioning to full time studies indicated that such policies would have a short-lived impact when they open the door to students only to then impose strict grading standards on them as a criterion for remaining at the institution. I therefore feel it is helpful to reframe transitions as an on-going and continuous experience for students, who reflect a myriad of experiences. Furthermore, the majority of the AOTP students reported that their transitions to degree programs were challenging, which suggests that it would be helpful for the university to consider adopting broad-based grading criteria for all learners. I am cognizant that this idea is radical and will be subject to considerable debate and criticism in the academy. Nevertheless, implementing broad-based grading criteria merits serious consideration, as it would help Aboriginal learners to truly thrive in the university once they have walked through its doors. It also appears that AOTP students need on-going support as they endeavor to earn their degrees. Providing such support would require more funding for additional staff support, especially given that the AOTP administrators had many responsibilities and therefore found it difficult to remain connected with students.

It should also be noted that even if students successfully transition to university after completing a transition program that includes IK or Aboriginal cultural content, there is no guarantee that they will continue to engage in culturally relevant learning. IK and Aboriginal course content has yet to be infused into the entire higher education system at large. As a result, some students may be disappointed to discover that IK is not included in their degree studies. Because many students in the study attended university for the purpose of attaining skills and knowledge that would enable them to work in Aboriginal communities, the exclusion of IK from

degree curriculums could diminish the relevance of their education (and undermine efforts for self-determination). Clearly, there is a call for meaningful and substantive change at the institutional level. In addition, all students should be made aware of the cultural interface and taught how to navigate this complex space as well as how to employ a critical lens that helps them identify its discursive underpinnings and develop a critical interface consciousness.

Finally, the curricular inclusion of IK formlines should not be treated as a door prize to attract Aboriginal learners into university if the institution is not going to also make a sincere effort to ensure that IK is interwoven throughout its entire system. AEUPI and AOTP staff have certainly attempted to include IK, to some degree of success, and their efforts to this end must be acknowledged.

11.5.4 Relationships

I was not surprised to learn that participants felt that the “R” in most need of transformation was relationships. As Bryan Brayboy (2013) poignantly states: “when relationships are pervasive and profound, they require attention. Proper attention to relationships requires effort toward their maintenance and it requires reciprocity” (p.16). In particular, participants identified the need for the university to be further Indigenized in order to promote stronger university-student and faculty-student relationships and ensure institutional responsiveness to Indigenous issues, concerns, and communities (Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004). In light of the students’ stories and experiences in the AEUPIs/AOTPs, I feel this Indigenization process could be further enhanced if university leaders, faculty, staff and educators learned about the cultural interface. As Nakata (2007b) suggests, those working in the realm of higher education need “to develop their scholarship in the contested knowledge spaces of the cultural interface and achieve for themselves some facility with how to engage and move students

through the learning process” (p.12). This would also help them create policies that enhance the wholistic wellbeing of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners in this space.

Participants also highlighted a number of practical, parental and community engagement strategies that illuminate the process of re-envisioning the cultural interface. Their suggestions will be incorporated into the next section of this chapter.

11.5.5 Reciprocity

Policies on Aboriginal student funding were identified as a key issue that signified universities failure to ‘give back’. Funding was seen as a significant hindrance that could prevent successful high school to university transitions. Participants felt that current funding should be increased, that additional monies should be allocated to the creation of more AEUIs and AUIPs, and that bursaries and scholarships were needed to support youth in AUIPs. Universities must implement multiple funding strategies and options in order to enhance AEUIs/AUIPs. For me, this also highlighted the influence of external social and political institutions that shape and determine the funding policies and priorities for Indigenous education. As stated previously, neo-liberal policies have significantly determined what skills and knowledge are seen to be of value within the current education system. Therefore, Aboriginal transitions to university should not be relegated exclusively to the educational realm. For the cultural interface to truly achieve the possibilities that Nakata envisions, it is essential for governments to seriously not only consider but meaningfully consult with Aboriginal communities and learners about the practical impacts of social and economic policies on their educational endeavors.

It is also important to note the reciprocity that all the participants demonstrated during the course of my research project. Many of the youth acted as role models for their AEUI, all of the

youth were keen to participate in the knowledge mobilization aspects of the study, and the university administrators, faculty, and community members generously shared their experience and knowledge of working to change the system one degree at a time and better support the higher educational aspirations of Aboriginal youth and our communities.

In order for the university to transform itself, it must facilitate a wholistic understanding of the interrelationship between the 5Rs, promote Aboriginal learners' agency, and honour Aboriginal peoples' contribution to the academy.

11.6 **Re-envisioning the Cultural Interface**

I have come to understand that 'filling up' the content of the cultural interface is part of my responsibility as a researcher and community member who aspires to transform some of the educational issues that impact Aboriginal high school to university transitions. My analysis is not only a critique, but also re-envision the possibilities that emerge when transitions are viewed from the lens of the cultural interface. In this sense, I am drawn to the words of Homi Bhabba, who states (as cited in Haig Brown, 2008):

I think theory should go beyond illuminating the deep structure of an event, object or text, should do more than establish or embellish the framing discourse within which this object of analysis is placed. What the theory does first of all is respond to a problem
(n.p.)

Bhabba's words resonate with me because they allow me to respond to a problem that exists rather than looking for new ways to categorize it within an established discursive realm. Theory thus becomes a generative process as I attempt to positively re-envision the issues that I have come across in my research. It may raise potential questions that help to untangle the complexities, tensions and possibilities of the cultural interface. These questions could also be

seen as the entry point to building a philosophical framework that supports Aboriginal youth while they are in the K-12 system in a manner that increases their capacity to transition to university.

Utilizing the concept of the cultural interface has generated important insights into Aboriginal high school to university transitions. As Nakata (2007a) contends, when the character of the cultural interface is viewed in a positive light, it is important to question “what aspect of IK gets represented and how they are represented in this space reflects a complex set of intersections, interests, and contestations” (p. 9). Just as importantly, it is also necessary to question the negative aspects of the intersections, interests, and contestations that exist in this space. As Nakata (2007a) states: “what remains marginalized at the peripheries and is at risk of being written out, not recognized as valid knowledge, or forgotten...” (p. 9) is seminal. The cultural interface’s capacity to function as a transformative space raises a number of key questions that can address both its positive and negative aspects:

1. How can the K-12 system and the university re-frame transitions as ongoing and continuous for Aboriginal learners in the cultural interface? What texts need to be re-written to support this process?
2. How can the K-12 system and higher education institutions and the AEUIs/AUTPs meaningfully incorporate the family and community dynamics that have shaped Indigenous learners’ experiences and goals? What texts need to be re-written to support this process? How can transition program providers increase their level of participation in the Aboriginal community?
3. How can the university teach students critical literacy skills that will enable them to understand how knowledge is produced and legitimized in institutional settings? What

types of pedagogy would empower students to use their classes as a means to engage the cultural interface?

4. How can the university promote awareness and knowledge of institutional racism?
5. How can the university ensure that goals of self-determination are included in university texts that aim to recruit Aboriginal learners? How can self-determination be taught as a vital principle of the cultural interface?
6. How can universities support Indigenous learners to explore their experiential knowledge beyond the classroom and use it to analyze how particular positions are contested via their engagement with the corpus of Western knowledge?
7. How are students to learn how to question their professors (Indigenous or Non-Indigenous) when they identify inherent contradictions in their professors' arguments?
8. How do we equip professors with the knowledge, skills and training needed to integrate the divergent elements of Western and Indigenous knowledge systems?
9. How do we challenge institutions when they use Aboriginal culture(s) and IK as door prizes rather than a genuine means to create deep institutional reform that incorporates Indigenous self-determination formlines?
10. How do we educate all students, faculty, administrators and staff about the cultural interface?
11. How can the university broaden current conceptions of 'success' to include a wholistic understanding of success for students?
12. How can the university establish program selection criteria that ensure a diverse range of Indigenous learners (particularly first-generation Indigenous university students) gain entry into the AEUPIs/AUTPs.

13. How can the university maintain and strengthen its funding commitment to current AEUPIs/AUTPs?
14. How can the university provide more funding to support the expansion of AEUPIs/AUTPs into much-needed subject areas such as nursing, science and engineering?
15. How can the university, federal and provincial governments, and Aboriginal communities collaborate to provide more bursaries and scholarships for Indigenous learners in the AUTPs?
16. How can the university provide access to more Aboriginal role models for youth in
17. AEUPIs/AUTPs and for Aboriginal youth who are targeted by general university recruitment efforts?
18. How can the university work with the K-12 system to support Aboriginal learners and improve their likelihood of successfully transitioning to university?

These questions reiterate the need to re-envision ‘Aboriginal high school to university transitions’ through the lens of IK. This re-visioning is critical if the cultural interface is to empower Indigenous learners and encourage them to reinvent themselves in response to competing and changing knowledge traditions. It will demand a number of responses from all actors who are involved in transition programs: university faculty and administration, Indigenous communities, and Indigenous learners and their families. A first (and perhaps the most pivotal) response is for the university to not only challenge, but also change, its current organization and practices with respect to Indigenous learners. Higher education institutions need to implement the 5 Rs (respect, relationship, reciprocity, and relevance) of IK in order to facilitate Aboriginal

learners' wholistic success. For most university staff and faculty, this will involve a significant process of un-learning and re-learning about Indigenous peoples.

Universities also play a key role in influencing the K-12 system by educating teachers and school administrators about Indigenous knowledge and culture(s). Consequently, they can change the landscape of the cultural interface by providing teachers with a more critical understanding of this space that includes an awareness of the colonialism and racism that is systemic to liberal and neo-liberal formlines. Once teachers are aware of racism, they can take steps to eliminate it. Further, as Jill Lawrence (2004) has suggested, "there is a need to develop educational processes which enable individuals and groups [within the cultural interface] to jointly identify and analyze complex problems in depth, to jointly generate solutions, to influence the other side in beneficial ways" and to create supportive environments wherein problem solving is seen as a primary focus of education. To this end, problem solving about 'Aboriginal high school to university transitions' should be seen as a continual process of ongoing debate, deliberation and learning.

Another key response is to ask Aboriginal communities to identify university staff and faculty who have a good track record of working with Indigenous learners. This information is vital to helping establish a network of relationships that run between the university and Aboriginal communities. In addition, Aboriginal organizations will also be asked to create space for the delivery and promotion of AEUPs/AUTPs to learners (if they are not already doing so).

It must be acknowledged that for all students to 'succeed' in the cultural interface, they must take a certain degree of responsibility. In this sense, they will be required to engage in the ongoing negotiation of the multiple epistemological, discursive and cultural differences they encounter. I also think a great deal of personal, cross-cultural, academic, pedagogical, and

institutional unlearning, relearning and transformation will be required to accomplish this. This negotiation will help Indigenous students to flourish in a university environment by challenging the way knowledge is traditionally produced and legitimized, encouraging non-Indigenous students to think in an ‘alter-Native’ manner, and enabling the cultural interface to become a transformative space that will assist Indigenous goals of self-determination. Again, it must be emphasized that for this to happen, universities need to remedy structural, curricular, and textual imbalances that diminish IK and self-determination formlines. As public institutions, universities are responsible for providing students with a culturally and academically safe space that inspires them to reflect and exchange their lived experiences and perspectives, which will in turn foster connections between various epistemologies and discourses. As Nakata notes, the re-envisioning that this process represents requires all actors:

to problematize the major theoretical concepts and pursue intersubjective mapping of the many relationships at the cultural interface because these demand the explication of a broader set of discursive relations beyond the literal interpretation of texts, or the theoretical framings of a particular approach to a topic (p.10).

Therefore, the bar has been raised high for universities’ responsibility for providing Indigenous learners with opportunities to truly balance and integrate their knowledge and skills as they strive to expand discursive boundaries as well as reform institutional practices that will support Indigenous goals of self-determination.

11.7 Summary

The engagement of the cultural interface is an important pathway that can help transform higher education institutions, Indigenous communities, and Canadian society. In issuing a powerful challenge to the status quo, it brings to light the tensions and conflicts that have

resulted from universities' ostensible attempt to be culturally inclusive while still largely adhering to a foundation of Western practices, discourses and policies. The knowledge, discourses, theories and narratives that universities employ about and 'for' Indigenous learners in higher education generally, and university transition programs specifically, create such tensions and conflicts. To resolve them and enable the cultural interface to fulfill its potential for transformation it is necessary to re-envision and redesign Aboriginal university transitions. There must be a shift away from designing transition programs as simple programs 'for' Indigenous learners. Instead, transition programs should aim to include all stakeholders so that mainstream university curricula, policies, and pedagogies are transformed, which will in turn effect change in professors, administrators, staff, and non-Aboriginal students. This will help to galvanize a process which pursues the development of strategies that critically engage a dialogue between Indigenous and Western knowledges. In facilitating the sharing of perspectives and lived experiences, the dialogue will allow Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous learners to examine and challenge the limitations of conflicting discourses, thereby creating new meanings and understandings. Learning to view Indigenous peoples in a manner which is not pathologizing, alienating, or 'frozen in time', would be an aspect of this learning and growth.

Certainly, the re-envisioning and reconstruction of the cultural interface will pose significant difficulties. However, all the tensions in this space do not need to be ameliorated, since it can exist as both a generative and contradictory place at the same time. Some of these tensions should instead be seen as positive. Highlighting the contestations and inherent contradictions that separate Indigenous and Western formlines makes them visible. And once they are visible, they can be seen for what they are, their boundaries can be challenged, and new expanded formlines can be created. All contradictions should be dealt with openly and be treated

as political questions (Davies, 2004). We can resolve some of the contradictions, but should not expect to eliminate them. Contradictions thus serve as a current, enabling us to synthesize different ways of thinking about a situation so we can move forward to meet and deal with the new contradictions that arise.

A greater challenge to re-envisioning Aboriginal high school to university transitions is the need for educational reorganization at the systemic level. This reorganization is essential to laying the foundation for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to forge new ways of relating to each other, foster new connections, clarify discursive dilemmas, and deliberate about how to move through the potentialities of the cultural interface in order to realize the goals of self-determination for Indigenous communities. The word ‘transition’ is key to Aboriginal high school to university transitions, as it infers a move away from the status quo and towards a new way of living and learning. Finally, an intergenerational educational strategy is needed to enable all Indigenous learners to exercise their rights and responsibilities as they journey through life – before and after they enter university. In so doing, they can resist subscribing to the narrowly prescribed orientations of neo-liberal and deficit formlines. In restricting the definition of academic success, these approaches discourage Indigenous people from pursuing higher education because they all too often diminish IK and non-economic academic goals such as self-determination and community revitalization. Although the current economic climate is increasingly neo-liberal and universities continue to rely on the deficit approach, some university administrators have supported Indigenous scholars in their pursuit of curricular and institutional reforms. The cultural interface thus remains a site of transformation. This possibility may seem remote at times, but this dissertation has demonstrated that the dynamics needed for its fulfillment are within reach providing that all the pertinent actors play their part. To this end, I

will finish this chapter with a quote from Graham Smith (as cited in Kovach, 2010) who calls for Indigenous scholars to engage with the academy and conceptualize their position within these institutions through their engagement with the ‘politics of truth’. He asserts:

the politics of truth is about knowing the limits and the capacities of what we as Indigenous scholars can and cannot achieve in the university context. It challenges us to stop B***.S***ing. ... We need to know the limits and capacities of what can be achieved in particular sites. I think we need to make strategic concessions to win what we can, but the critical understanding here is that this is only one site of struggle. We ought to be developing transformation in many sites (p. 90).

I understand Smith’s assertion to mean that the ultimate goal of all these struggles in these multiple sites is to ensure that Indigenous people exercise their rights to self-determination in all spheres of life.

As such, it is my hope this research has generated solutions for Aboriginal learners who transition to university through AEUIs and AUIPs, which is one site of struggle for Indigenous peoples. My aspiration, in essence, is for Indigenous learners to continue to bend the box of higher education, a number of degrees at a time, and for the cultural interface to function as an open door, not a façade. As I continue to journey through the cultural interface, it will be essential to continually emphasize the prevalent and dominant formlines that carve the parameters of the Canadian higher education institutions and the ways in which they circumscribe Indigenous transitions within these institutions. It is also necessary for me to translate the findings of this research into practical applications that advance the epistemological, economic, political, educational, social, and cultural interests of Indigenous communities. Some

of these practical suggestions and the difficulties they entail will be examined in the next chapter under 'Directions for Future Research and Recommendations'.

Chapter 12: Closing the Box

12.1 Introduction

Although my research process was much like a web of inquiry, I will present it sequentially. I began my inquiry on Coast Salish territory, working with the metaphor of the bentwood box as a way of thinking about challenging the structures of higher education. The bentwood box shaped my research design as well as my theoretical inquiry and my methodology. First, I detailed my personal location and interest in the study, and provided an entry point into Martin Nakata's (2007a) concept of the cultural interface. Second, I drew an analogy between the structure of higher education and Northwest Coast Formline design. Therein, I delineated the colonial, racist, imperial, and liberal underpinnings that have re-enforced this structure historically and continue to do so at present. Third, I conducted a review of existing knowledge and research about Aboriginal learners in higher education and Aboriginal high school to university transitions. I positioned my research in relation to this body of work and identified gaps within it. Fourth, I explored the meaning of Indigenous Knowledge and its various discursive dimensions in the academy and beyond. Fifth, I further explored Nakata's concept of the cultural interface in order to support my argument that Aboriginal early university promotion initiatives (AEUPI) and Aboriginal university transition programs (AUTP) are a real-life example of the concept. The cultural interface also constituted a critical space for investigation, negotiation and reconciliation, which I incorporated into my bentwood box research design. Sixth, I discussed Indigenous methodologies and storywork to enrich the bentwood box research design. My methodology also included personal experiences of learning about the bentwood box; and stories of Raven, a familiar friend. My methods included: interviews; a photo journal; an Aboriginal community guidance committee; extensive document and website analysis; some observations of

Early Aboriginal University Promotion Initiatives and Aboriginal Transition Programs; and a knowledge mobilization project. Seventh, the findings chapters sought to answer the research questions from the participants' perspectives and were thematically organized to reflect an Indigenous theoretical framework. Eighth, I analyzed the findings in light of the cultural interface, which generated another relevant philosophical framework.

This chapter will provide my reflections on the research process. I will discuss the insights I have gained and the teachings I have absorbed, the relationships I have developed, my aspirations and commitments, and the triumphs and challenges I have experienced. I will also identify the study's limitations, offer suggestions, and discuss the significance of the research. Lastly, I will offer the reader a gift.

12.2 Coming Full Circle: Research Reflections

To say that closing this box was challenging would be an understatement. For well over two months, I pondered how my research story would end. Intuitively, I knew that I would have to be patient (which has not always been one of my greatest virtues) and let the story reveal itself to me. What I did not know was that I would have to wait until after September 8th for the story to come full circle. The timing of this is interesting to me, because the start of the school year has always felt like the beginning of a new year for me because of the seasonal change from summer to fall. September 8th also happens to be my birthday and marked my first day of college – and my experience of that day was the introductory story that I shared at the beginning of the dissertation.

On September 8th, I enjoyed a beautiful day with my family on the beach in Tsawwassen. I returned home exhausted and excited to start a new week of school. As I lay in bed about to drift off to sleep, my husband, Dennis, came to my side of the bed and put his hand on my back

and whispered, “Aim, are you awake?” To which I responded, “maybe?”. He then whispered, “I forgot to give you your birthday present. Do you want to see it now or wait until later?”. To which I responded, “I am too old for birthday presents”. But then I asked, “do you want me to open it now?”. To which he replied, “Yes” in an excited and loud whisper. After stumbling out of bed, I was taken to our foyer where my husband revealed a very strange looking object wrapped in a black garbage bag. Upon opening the bag, I discovered a beautiful ornately carved Northwest Coast yellow cedar plaque, carved by Dale Alexander, of a mother wolf and her cub looking up towards a large sun, its rays extending all over all of the carving. Dennis explained to me that the carving was titled “The Teacher” and thought it was a nice way to mark my next transition in higher education – becoming a professor. I also understood the wolf and her cub to be a reminder that my work must benefit younger and future generations and that I should take on this important responsibility with great care, drawing upon the love and support I receive from my family and my community. In addition, Dennis saw the sun as representing the knowledge, teachings, and light that I have been gifted with on my life journey. The timing of this gift was uncanny, as I had just begun instructing a teacher education class at UBC and had been deeply reflecting on my teaching pedagogy and beliefs. As I gazed at this carving, I felt that I had added the next layer on my “circle of learning” as Jo-ann would say. I felt deeply appreciative of my husband’s belief in me and the encouragement and support he gave me for my current transition. And of course, I was very touched by his beautiful and meaningful gift.



Figure 11 "The Teacher" by Dale Alexander

As the story above indicates, my transition into the realm of higher education continues to be a cyclical process of growth, understanding, and transformation. It has now been 15 years since I transitioned to post-secondary school and I continue to experience a number of personal transitions that cannot be separated from my educational and professional transitions. These include receiving a Nisga'a name, getting married, and becoming a mother and an aunty. All of these transitions wholistically interconnected and built upon each other to shape my life journey as I pursued my Ph.D. – and will continue to guide me through the next steps of my journey.

I will now summarize the multiple teachings and insights that I gained from my research process and writing my dissertation.

12.3 All My Relations

Many of the relationships that I formed in the Synala program and in my first days of college have been strengthened, deepened, and expanded as a result of my Ph.D. research process. Two of the participants in my research were former teachers and mentors from when I was in the Synala program; two members of my Aboriginal community guidance committee were community mentors whom I met after I had withdrawn from college and who inspired me to return in order to advocate for the needs of Aboriginal youth. One participant was a former mentor and friend whom I met after returning to Douglas College, my brother, who happily acted as a mentor and sounding board for my ideas and challenges, was another participant. I have also formed many new relationships with a number of dynamic, engaging and passionate people who have enriched my understandings of IK, Indigenous methodologies and storywork. I believe that conducting my study in a setting occupied by people I care deeply about gave me a far greater understanding of the 5 Rs of research than I would have gained in a different setting. As a result, the setting provided me with an amazing opportunity to enact the principles of the 5Rs in practice.

Due to my ongoing personal and professional relationships with the school and members of my Aboriginal community guidance council, I took my responsibility to my participants very seriously and gave great care and regard to all the information they shared with me. This concern led me to ensure that I accurately transcribed participants' words, diligently shared my transcriptions with all of the participants, allowed participants to read chapters in order to see their words in situ, and had many conversations with them to verify that I understood the meanings and nuances of what they had said.

12.4 Understanding High School to University Transitions

The process of writing this dissertation has affirmed and expanded my understandings of high school to university transitions. For example, when I began the research project I anticipated that high school to university transitions would be an on-going cyclical process that included multiple institutions for most learners. I saw it as a process that would begin long before a student enters their first year of university and is influenced by the people and communities that form a youth's circle of influence. My interviews with AEUPI participants were particularly informative in terms of affirming my beliefs and giving me new and important insights. For example, the AEUPI youths' stories about their visioning process revealed that the stories provided a set of coherent stages that can assist many in the field of Indigenous higher education to conceptualize this visioning process. I was surprised to learn that some of the younger youth who chose to attend AEUPIs did so in order to learn more about high school and university. This is an impressive and effective strategy that speaks to the interconnection of transitions from elementary school to high school to university. At the same time, I was troubled by some of the stories that the AOTP participants shared with me about the challenges of moving from their transition program into university studies. These stories signal a need for universities to provide Indigenous learners with better support and resources; as well as knowledge about the cultural interface. To this end, it would be instructive for universities to practice the 5 Rs, which the participants considered critical to their learning and discussed with considerable insight.

12.5 Self-determination Formline

More importantly, this study revealed the value of framing high school-to-university transitions within the formline of self-determination which is a vital component of the cultural interface.

Although, Nakata did not include self-determination in his explication of the cultural interface, I extended the concept to include it. I am thankful that my committee encouraged me to do so because as my research journey unfolded, it became very clear that almost all of the participants felt that higher education institutions should engage the complexities associated with questions of Aboriginal self-determination, that is if these institutions are committed to their claim over an emancipatory social agenda. This observation resonates powerfully with Grand Chief Shaun Atleo's (2010) words, who so aptly states that:

universities have a great role to play. They have the potential, not only in relationships, but also to be a great transformer and to unleash the human potential and to unleash the potential of Aboriginal [and all] learners in Canada (p. 1).

In short, universities must begin to explicitly promote the goals of self-determination for Aboriginal students as part of their recruitment strategies, and do so long before an Aboriginal student walks through the doors of the institution. This will challenge and help decolonize the colonial, liberal, racist, and neo-liberal formlines that have until recently permeated the structures of these institutions in perpetuating the systemic oppression of Indigenous peoples. As this research has clearly demonstrated, universities in B.C. prefer AEUPIs/AUTPs that reflect their Eurocentric orientation, which is entrenched in their organizational structures. This finding suggests at the organizational level of the university, the status quo is maintained, and as such, intrinsically contradicts Indigenous people's goals of self-determination. It is therefore essential for all students, staff, faculty, and administrators to learn that self-determination is a vital principle of the cultural interface. If this does not occur, the cultural interface will be unable to fulfill its potential for positive transformation.

It is salient to note that my learning would be incomplete and the findings of my study unbalanced if I left the reader with no more than a binary conception of the cultural interface of AEUPIs/AUTPs. The cultural interface is composed of multiple layers. Its complexity as a real space extends beyond theoretical musings, especially in regard to self-determination. This is evident in an important contradiction that I identified in the cultural interface of AEUPIs/AUTP – a contradiction between the organization of these programs within the overall university system and the actions taken by the programs’ Indigenous staff members. It was clear to me that most of the AEUPI/AUTP Indigenous faculty and staff members were actively challenging the racist, imperial and colonial formlines of university policies and practices and striving to transform them. For example, most of the administrators who created these programs intended for them to support Aboriginal communities’ goals of self-determination. However, their capacity to fulfill this purpose is limited because (as the origin stories demonstrate), many AEUPIs/AUTPs were initially created on the perimeters of the university and some AEUPIs still do not receive on-going funding from the university. Further, most administrators and other staff members have participated in the development of curricula (and/or pedagogies) that are infused with Indigenous perspectives and epistemologies in order to ensure that learners feel a strong sense of belonging within their program. All of the staff members also aimed to facilitate better Indigenous wholistic student support practices and pursued recruitment and retention practices that served this purpose. By utilizing Indigenous epistemological formlines, Aboriginal faculty, staff and administrators are contributing to self-determination efforts, and thus striving to improve the social, economic, educational, political and cultural conditions of Aboriginal and Canadian communities.

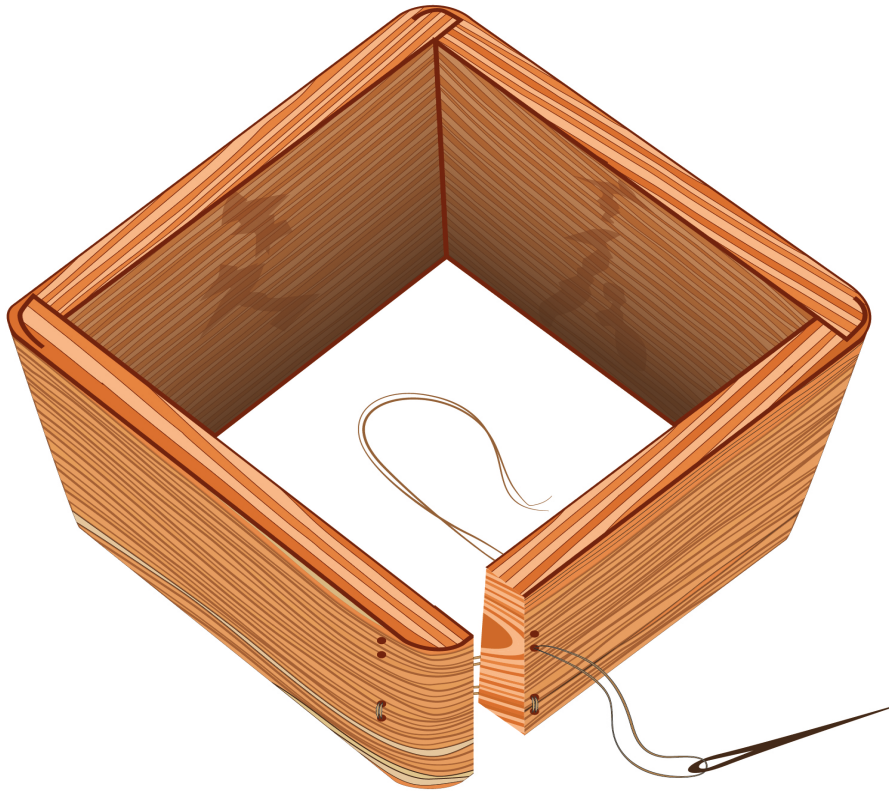
It was also heartening to listen to the youth participants in the study talk about self-determination. This was evident in their keen desire to produce a comic book about high school-to-university transitions. I saw that the youth felt a great responsibility to ensure that future generations of youth benefit from the stories they shared about their transition experiences. In aiming to enhance the future experiences of Aboriginal university students as well as the wellbeing of Aboriginal communities, the youth exhibit a commitment to both survival and revitalization of IK. They are an example of “Indigenous epistemologies in action” and represent the way that Aboriginal communities rely on their cultural values and knowledge traditions to move towards self-determination (Brayboy, 2008). In so doing, they are clearly operating within the cultural interface. This points to the necessity of providing students with adequate knowledge of the cultural interface in order to help them connect the knowledge and skills they have acquired in university with Indigenous epistemologies and practices, which will in turn benefit their communities.

It is important to re-emphasize that the university education that Aboriginal youth receive should be relevant to the political, economic and cultural struggles that their communities are facing. To this end, universities should re-structure and transform their epistemic approach to creating learning spaces in ways that ground university education through an Indigenous self-determination formline. This would ensure that all learner are taught the history and rights of Indigenous peoples, as well as the impact that governmental and educational policies have had on them. Universities also need to ensure that collaboration with Aboriginal communities and Nations ensures that Aboriginal learners acquire culturally appropriate skills and knowledge. This will enhance learners’ understanding of the day-to-day operations of Aboriginal controlled institutions, communities, and values (Brayboy et al, 2013). If Aboriginal students are to help

their communities pursue self-determination, it is critical for all who attend university to acquire culturally relevant skills and knowledge about the cultural interface, as well as a comprehensive understanding of Indigenous perspectives and affairs (Shotton et al, 2013). One way that universities can achieve this end, is by employing the philosophical framework of the cultural interface that was detailed in the previous chapter.

It has been personally enriching and fulfilling to include an Indigenous self-determination formline in my work because it has enabled me to critically read, write and speak back to the hegemonic knowledge system that have attempted to frame Indigenous positions and epistemologies within the “Western order of things”. Working with an Indigenous self-determination formline has also allowed me to generate new understandings about the cultural interface amongst B.C. research-intensive universities, Aboriginal communities and Indigenous learners. More importantly, it has led me to ask all those who work within the university to reflect upon how the university is carrying out its responsibility to ensure that Aboriginal learners are receiving an education that will allow them to support their communities and express the goals of self-determination. In so doing, universities can identify the concrete steps they need to take in order to transform their responsibility into meaningful change.

12.6 Storywork Methodology



Storywork needle stitching the principles of synergy, inter-relatedness and wholism to close the cultural interface

Figure 12 Stitching Together Storywork Principles

Engaging the storywork methodology was a meaningful experience for me on many levels. It has allowed me learn more about finding meaning in participants' stories as well as my own stories, helped me to honour the 'synergizing' principle of spirit, and functioned as a vital heartbeat that has directed me towards – and sustained – a wholistic understanding as I attempted to reconcile the complexities of the cultural interface. It would have been nearly impossible for me to provide a respectful critique of the cultural interface without utilizing this methodology. I learned that including a photo-voice methodology in storywork was useful for working with

young participants, particularly when they found it difficult to open up and share. In some of my later interviews, I asked the youngest youth to bring along a photo of themselves in the AUEPI or something they had made while attending the program. This prompted them to open up and share stories with me about their experiences. In addition, working with the storywork methodology reaffirmed my awareness that many Aboriginal people grow into storytellers in the course of their lives. The experiential learning that I have acquired from using storywork has been personally meaningful because it engaged Indigenous knowledge. That is, Indigenous cultures understand true education to begin from the day an infant is born, evolve throughout her or his lifetime to the very end, and arise from all dimensions of life as its myriad meanings and connections become manifest. This learning refreshed and enlightened me throughout the rigorous process of researching and writing my dissertation. As such, it helped me to remain committed and inspired in my pursuit of an endeavor that has truly meaningful transformative power.

12.7 Learning from Participants' Voices

I am particularly grateful for the insights shared by the participants. All participants shared their time generously and helped me to understand their educational experiences in unique and illuminating ways. I was deeply enlightened and moved by each interview. Participants' perceptiveness about the complexities of the high school to university transition experience gave me much to reflect upon. Each interview with the youth brought forth a unique understanding of the transition experience, and I felt a spiritual connection to the stories that they

shared with me. This feeling is hard to describe in words¹⁵. To say the least, it is more important to share the feeling than to discuss the youths' particular social, demographic, and geographic characteristics. However, I was impressed by the youths' great diversity of interests and the range of cultural/academic disciplines that they considered pursuing. I look forward to crossing paths with the participants frequently in the near future, as I am certain I will have the great honour of working with many of them as we work towards assisting our communities to achieve self-determination goals.

I also realized how extremely important it is to include the voices of youth in research that will directly impact them if we are to truly transform the full educational landscape that they navigate – beginning in their communities, onwards through K-12 and university, and then, (often) back to the community. They can tell us everything we need to know about the needs of Aboriginal learners in transition programs if we are open to listening with our 'three ears' (the two on our head and the other in our heart) (Archibald, 2008).

12.8 **Bending the Box: An Integration of Formline Design & the Cultural Interface**

Writing this dissertation has been a fascinating journey in many ways as I learned how to bend the structures of the academy and my own thinking. It not only deepened my vision of my dissertation research but also made me aware of the some the challenges I will face when I strive to integrate Indigenous and Western ways of thinking and methodologies in my future teaching endeavors and research. My use of Northwest Coast Art Formlines and the bentwood box as conceptual frameworks were particularly poignant because they led me into a quandary. I chose

¹⁵ I allowed this feeling to guide me in my analysis of their transcripts and to choose appropriate quotations to highlight pertinent themes that I found that were particularly important in addressing the study's research questions.

to work with them because they added an Indigenous dimension to my work, but they proved to be unwieldy at times. Explaining how they metaphorically connected to my analyses as I followed a Western process of scholarship created layers of abstraction and required a process of significant theoretical deconstruction that was not necessary from an Indigenous standpoint. After all, the formlines and the bentwood box are wholistic expressions and, as such, are complete within themselves – no explaining is really needed. It felt like I was trying to fit round pegs into square holes, and that I boxed myself in, which is interesting given that the bentwood box is a square that expresses a circular, non-linear philosophy. At times, this has led me to ask, “why did I open this box?” This questioning compelled me to find ways to ‘bend the box’ of my own making.

Nonetheless, my inclusion of these and other Indigenous elements (stories, passages, and a personal narrative) in my research are essential elements that will help me to prepare for future research journeys (Kovack, 2010; Wilson, 2009). At the same time, it highlighted the difficulty of integrating Western and Indigenous ways of thinking and seeing. The difficulty may reach a level of near impossibility at some moments, but it is also exciting in that I truly am positioned at the cultural interface of possibility. As the cultural interface is relatively uncharted territory, I am working to understand and explore the knowledge of Indigenous scholars who have begun to clear a path through it, and to apply this knowledge while I seek out new territory. As my first trysts with Raven indicated, I should anticipate that the process will be characterized by growing pains. I will also seek greater clarity and wisdom about the cultural interface. Nakata’s language is unwieldy and often needlessly verbose and overly abstract. The cultural interface is a real space occupied by real people, but Nakata approaches it as a metaphor or theoretical construct. To pursue the transformative potential of the cultural interface, it must be understood in more

concrete and pragmatic terms; the relationships, dynamics and formlines that characterize it must be succinctly delineated in nuanced and simple language.

12.8.1 Traveling and Learning with Raven

Several times throughout the research process, I was deeply aware and concerned that I was exposing an academic challenge that could potentially remain invisible. This challenge reflected my dual role as an Aboriginal community member and a researcher concerned about some of the potential unanticipated responses to the research findings. Most non-Indigenous researchers' work will be critiqued, but they will not be held personally responsible for the information they disseminate or the fact that it could be used against a community in some way. More importantly, the information will not be used as evidence to maintain the status quo or, even worse, close a program. In contrast, the information presented in my study will constitute such evidence and could potentially have a direct influence on university policies and practices for Indigenous learners. Readers of this study will most likely judge my arguments and agree or disagree with some of the conclusions that I have made. Their judgments and views could be important with respect to the future approaches that universities take to Indigenous learners. I am therefore grateful to have learned from Raven that it is important to pay careful attention to troubling feelings. This led me to understand that that my fear reflected the responsibility and accountability that I assumed as a researcher. I need to be able to defend my arguments and give astute answers to judgments and criticism of my work. As a result, I reviewed the methodological processes and steps that I had taken, and made necessary methodological changes in order to ensure that my work was rigorous. I also recognized that the fear of exposure was a sign that I had arrived at a critical insight and/or particularly illuminating level of

description. I think I will revisit this fear often in my future work, since the pursuit of transformative change within the academy by definition positions me outside of the status quo and I cannot help but encounter resistance. However, as Raven has reminded me, the flip side of the fear is courage and determination—without which educational change and self-determination for Aboriginal peoples cannot occur.

12.9 The Common Bowl (“Saytk’ih Woo’osim”)

Throughout this research journey I have also had the opportunity to return to my homeland in the Nass Valley (as well as the Gitxssan territories that I had the privilege of growing up on). These visits gave me an opportunity to learn more about the knowledge that informs our rich cultural traditions and practices. The Nisga’a people have always organized their lives and society around a concept called “Saytk’ih Woo’osim, which means “Our Common Bowl”. According to Chief Joe Gosnell (2003) “understanding this concept means that since everyone relies on the same resources and community, all must contribute. It is about sharing energy, wisdom, spirit, joy, sadness, and it touches all aspects of life” (para. 52). I am eternally grateful to all those people that I have encountered on my research journey who have given me a feast of wisdom, guidance and knowledge from ‘Our Common Bowl’ in my times of need. When the time is right, I will give back to others in the same way. My hands are held high to Delgamuukw (Earl Muldon), Laurel Wilson Smith, Melanie Smoke, Danny Yunkxs, & Marissa Nahanee.

I will now identify the significance of the research, examine the study’s limitations, and offer suggestions for future research.

12.10 Significance

It is my hope that this research will make a valuable contribution to the field of Indigenous higher education. It has expanded understandings of high school to university transitions for Aboriginal learners by challenging institutional conceptualizations of transitions and success. In so doing, it has viewed the multiple pathways and complex circumstances that inform Aboriginal youths' visioning process, which in turn shapes their higher educational aspirations. Therein, it has critically examined how transition programs can be improved and how universities need to be transformed in order to support Aboriginal learners' participation in university. In addition, the wholistic research design of the bentwood box provides an innovative and insightful Indigenous epistemological framework for exploring Aboriginal experiences of transition programs and higher education. The re-envisioning of the cultural interface through the philosophical framework provided adds a significant and original contribution to the creation of new knowledge in the academy, and, more importantly, for Aboriginal communities especially with regard to self-determination.

12.11 Directions for Future Research

There is much to be learned from the stories and information presented in this dissertation. However, the dissertation also generates many questions that could be pursued in further empirical studies. First, such research could examine how students' relationships with high school staff influence their decision-making regarding higher education as well as their educational or career aspirations. Second, it could focus on the types of information and resources that public schools provide to Aboriginal learners and their families, as well as determine the resources and information that Aboriginal families may need to support their children's higher educational goals. Third, it could pursue a more comprehensive understanding

of the demographical make-up of Canadian AEUIs and AUIPs. Fourth, it could determine the best methods for tracking Aboriginal students as they transition from high school to higher education and pursue their educational goals. Fifth, it could explore promising initiatives/models for early university promotions. Researchers who take this direction would benefit from referencing the “College Horizons” Initiative and “Native American Serving Early Career College High Schools” programs in the United States (Brayboy et al., 2012). Sixth, it could determine whether or not the relationships between individuals working within the cultural interface intensify or reconcile conflicts between knowledge systems and facilitate or impede the potentialities of this space. Finally, the question of why Aboriginal males are less likely than Aboriginal females to pursue higher education merits investigation.

12.12 Limitations

The limitations of this study are as follows. First, it was a challenge to secure a large number of University Transition Program alumni participants because program staff do not have current contact information for those participants and universities do not formally track where these students go after completing the program. However, I did my best to contact as many as I could with the numbers that were provided. I also sent out a number of emails through popular student list-services and posted notices in Aboriginal community centres.

Second, I felt it was important to provide a description of each program’s origin, purpose, nature and structure so that interested parties could gain a better understanding of them. Yet, a program provides many different opportunities on both tangible and intangible levels. I was unable to provide complete information about all program activities, curriculums, and pedagogies due to the time constraints of the study. It was also difficult to locate information

about the Summer Science Program, because it has had such a long history and involved so many different staff.

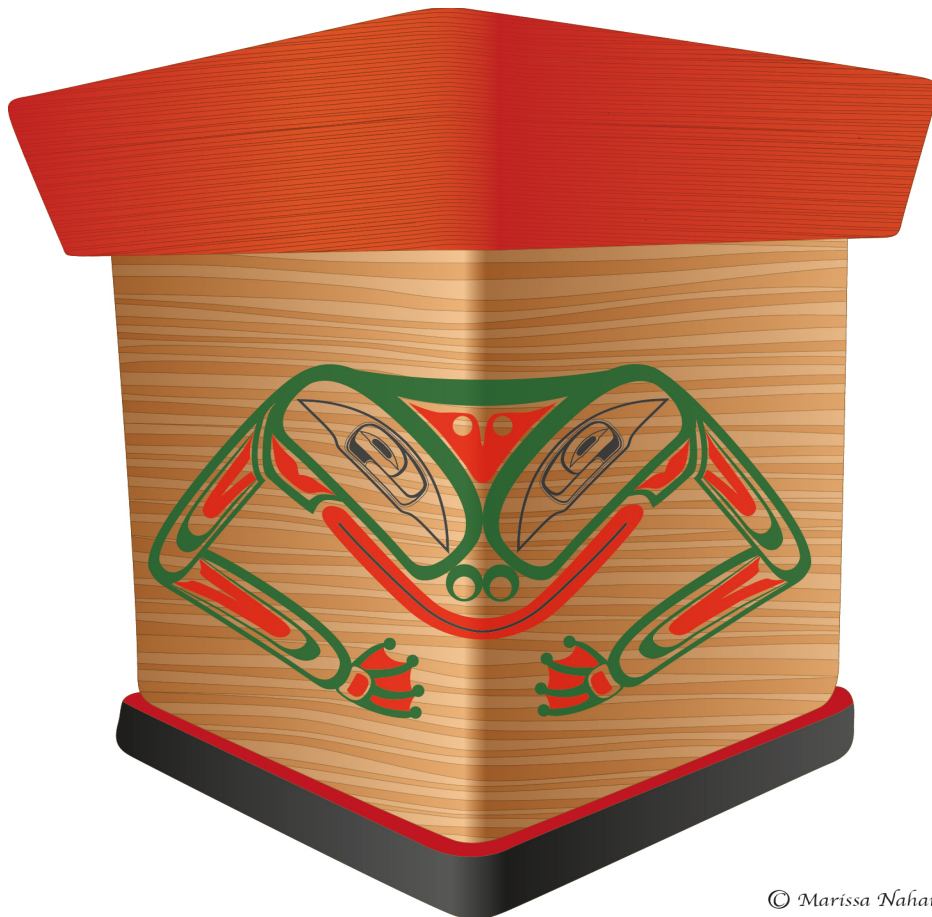
Third, I would have liked to have more participants representing the northern region of the province. Due to various logistical challenges that I encountered in the research, I was unable to do so. It should be noted that a handful of youth participants, administrators, and First Nations community members who are now attending or working within universities in the Lower Mainland come from northern British Columbia.

Finally, the gender composition of this youth study was unequal, as all but one of my participants were female. This is not surprising, given that there are significantly higher numbers of Aboriginal females than males in all Canadian universities. Although I initially queried some of the youth about the significance of the gender composition of AEUPI/AUTP's, their responses were uncertain about the difference between male and female participation in the programs. As such, I chose to focus on the themes and topics that they identified as most relevant to their transition experience. Since, this was a largely exploratory study on the topic of AEUPI/AUTP's, I felt that conducting a gender analysis of AEUPI/AUTP attendance was far beyond the scope of this research, but, as has been mentioned, certainly merits further consideration in follow up studies.

12.13 A Gift Box

In sharing my concluding remarks for this dissertation, I will once again return to the research design. I followed the lead of my mentor, Jo-ann, who placed her research in a storywork basket. In order to close the seam of the box that was left open for the theoretical analysis of the findings, I will now take her storywork needle and begin stitching this bentwood

box together by utilizing the remaining storywork principles of wholism, synergy and inter-relatedness. This is by no means a perfect box, as it is the first time that I have endeavored to make one. According to Archibald (1997), “Amongst First Nations culture, one is taught to pass on what she/he has learned to those who are interested. This passing on of knowledge is one way of perpetuating it” (p.198). This bentwood box research design is my attempt to offer participants’ stories and my research findings as a gift box for all those who wish to open it and learn from its contents. I leave it to you to take the contents of the box and create your own meaning from them.



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A Gift

Figure 13 A “Gift Box” by Marissa Nahanee

I finish writing this final chapter of my dissertation high up in the mountains, peering down onto the Salish Sea and the city of Vancouver extending below its coast. I am beginning to envision what life will be like after my Ph.D. is completed. Suddenly, a blue jay swiftly swoops down on a Douglas fir tree beside me. She has come to say hello. Her mere presence is a message in itself. I continue to learn about the important messages that animals deliver within Indigenous knowledge(s), and understand blue jays to signify vibrancy, spiritual visioning, and connection to others. Raven is nowhere to be seen. I think it is my signal to bring my writing to a close.

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Appendices

Appendix A Aboriginal Early University Promotion Initiative Summary Chart of AUCC

Universities

University	Program(s)	Aboriginal Specific Y/N	Youth Focused Y/N
University of Northern British Columbia	Northern Advancement Program	Yes	No, open to all Aboriginal students
Simon Fraser	Aboriginal University Preparation Program	Yes	No, open to all Aboriginal students
UBC Vancouver	Summer Science	Yes	Yes, high school
	Cedar Program	Yes	Yes, high school
	Native Youth Program	Yes	Yes, high school
	Chinook Aboriginal	Yes	Yes, high school
	Business Education	Yes	Yes, high school
University of British Columbia (Okanagan)	Aboriginal Access Program	Yes	No, open to all Aboriginal students
Vancouver Island University	Aboriginal University Bridging Program Certificate	Yes	No, open to all Aboriginal students
University of Victoria	Indigenous Mini- University Summer Camp	Yes Yes	Yes, high school No
	Indigenous Adult		

University	Program(s)	Aboriginal Specific Y/N	Youth Focused Y/N
	Orientation Program		
University of Alberta	Transition Year Program	Yes	No, open to all Aboriginal students
University of Calgary	Access and Transition Programs		No, open to all Aboriginal students
University of Saskatchewan	Summer Transition Program for Aboriginal Students	Yes	No, open to all Aboriginal students
University of Manitoba	Aboriginal Focus Programs- Transition Year	Yes	No, open to all Aboriginal students
University of Winnipeg	Transition Year Program	Yes	No, open to all Aboriginal students
Carleton University	Aboriginal Enriched Support Program	Yes	No, open to all Aboriginal students
Guelph University	Native University Program*	Yes	Six Nations Polytechnic, in cooperation with a consortium of six universities (shown with

University	Program(s)	Aboriginal Specific Y/N	Youth Focused Y/N
			*), facilitates a community-based Native University Program - First Year.
McMaster University	Native University Program*	Yes	No, open to all Aboriginal students
Brock University	Native University Program*	Yes	No, open to all Aboriginal students
University of Waterloo	Native University Program*	Yes	No, open to all Aboriginal students
University of Western Ontario	Native University Program*	Yes	No, open to all Aboriginal students
Wilfrid Laurier University	Native University Program*	Yes	No, open to all Aboriginal students
Lakehead University	Native Access Program	Yes	No, open to all Aboriginal students
	Summer Science Camp	Yes	Yes, high school students
	Native Nurses Entry Program	Yes	No

University	Program(s)	Aboriginal Specific Y/N	Youth Focused Y/N
University of Ontario Institute of Technology	University Transition Program	Yes	**Has an Aboriginal resource centre and website that cites it offers a university transition program but does not provide any details about it.
Royal Military College	Aboriginal Leadership opportunity Year	Yes	No, open to all Aboriginal students
University of Toronto	Summer Mentorship Program Mentorship Program Pre-University Academic Enrichment Programs Mentorship Program	Yes Yes No, but has pictures of all Native students to advertise program Yes	Yes, high school students Yes, high school students Yes, high school students Yes, high school students No For students over 20 years

University	Program(s)	Aboriginal Specific Y/N	Youth Focused Y/N
	<p>Girls Rock Science Program</p> <p>Transitional Year Program</p> <p>Academic Bridging Program</p>	<p>No</p> <p>No</p>	<p>of age</p>
Trent University	Foundations for Indigenous Learning	Yes	No, open to all students

University	Program(s)	Aboriginal Specific Y/N	Youth Focused Y/N
	(not really a transition program as it offers a diploma but it seems to have components of transition program built in to it)		
University of Windsor	Aboriginal Outreach Program (website states that the Aboriginal outreach officer coordinates “transition initiatives)	N/A	N/A
York University	No specific programs but does have an interesting website. In particular its suggestion that Aboriginal students may want to consider college before attending university. See	No	N/A

University	Program(s)	Aboriginal Specific Y/N	Youth Focused Y/N
	Summary of Transition programs for example.		
McGill University	Eagle High Performance Camp	Yes	Yes, high school students
University of Quebec at Chicotimi	Science Camp	Yes	Yes, high school students
Unama'ki College of Cape Breton University	Elmktek One year transition program Science Advantage Program - MSAP	Yes Yes	No, open to all students Yes, high school
Dalhousie University	Transition Year Program	For Aboriginal and African Canadian Students*	No, open to all students
Nova Scotia Agricultural College	University Access Program First Year Program Non-Credit Introductory Studies	Yes Yes Yes	No, open to all students No, open to all students No, open to all students

Appendix B Interview Protocol (Early University Promotion Initiative Youth)

1. Where are you from?
2. What has your K-12 experience been like?
3. What transition program did you attend?
4. Why did you choose the program?
5. What was the most exciting part of the program? Think of a time when you felt good about an accomplishment that you experienced in the program. Think of a difficulty that you experienced in the program and how it handled.
6. How is school going for you? Have your thoughts about school changed since being in the program?
7. Had you thought about going to university before taking the program and what did you imagine university study would be like?
8. How have your thoughts and feelings changed about going to university since being in the program? What do you think you will need to do in order to attend university?
5. Who are the people that can help you apply for university?
6. What kind of support do you think you will need to apply to university?
7. What would you like to do in the future?
8. What did you like/dislike about the program?
9. How was Indigenous knowledge and culture(s) been incorporated into the program? How is this similar or different than your own cultural background?
10. What skills did the program teach you? What activities did you like best?

11. In terms of the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of a person, what does a successful 'transition' to university look like to you? What does an unsuccessful transition to university look like to you? [Prompt-Transition has been described as an event or experience that can evolve into transformation for a person. University transitions often involve moving, meeting new people, enrolling and participating in academic classes ect)
12. In what ways can the university improve to meet the needs of Aboriginal youth?
13. Pretend we are making a comic book on transition to university for Aboriginal youth? What would the characters look like? What activities do they participate in? What are their family members like? What kind of story would you tell? What important message would you share?
14. What would you like to do in the future?

Appendix C Interview Protocol (University Transition Youth Participants)

1. Where are you from?
2. What was your K-12 experience like?
3. What transition program did you attend?
4. How did you hear about the program?
5. What was the most exciting part of the program? Think of a time when you felt good about an accomplishment that you experienced in the program.
6. Think of a difficulty that you experienced in the program and how you handled it.
6. How was Indigenous knowledge and culture(s) incorporated into the program? How was this similar or different than your own cultural background?
7. What skills did the program teach you?
8. What faculty and program did you enroll in after completing the transition program? How did the transition program help you move in a university program? Were there limitations of the transition program? Would you recommend this program to a family member? Why?
8. Who are the people that have influenced you to attend university? How?
9. In terms of the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of a person, what does a successful transition to university look like to you? What does an unsuccessful transition to university look like to you? (A transition involves a
10. In what ways can the university improve to meet the needs of Aboriginal youth?
11. Pretend we are making a comic book on transition to university for Aboriginal youth? What would the characters look like? What activities do they participate in? What are their family members like? What kind of story would you tell? What important message would you share?
12. What would you like to do in the future?