

**ENGAGING FIRST NATIONS YOUTH THROUGH RECIPROCAL
INTERCOMMUNITY EXCHANGE**

by

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Abstract

This phenomenological study of a First Nations to First Nations reciprocal student exchange elicited and explored the meanings of a reciprocal intercommunity exchange for grade 7 and 8 students in two First Nations schools. Representative student research participants from one of the schools shared their pictures, stories and memories of their experiences through photo-story (Truchon, 2007; Wang & Burris, 1997) and in a sharing circle (Lavallee, 2007).

The students' journeys were not only physical and geographical, but also emotional and cultural. I also journeyed to an acceptance of my outsider/insider status growing up in a First Nations community. As a non-Aboriginal researcher, I negotiated a space between the demands of the academic institution and the First Nations community; and chose research methods that were congruent with Indigenous Research Methodology (Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999).

The four themes that emerged from the data: community and relationships; culture and ceremony; connections with place, and confidence building are congruent with AFN's vision of "reciprocal inter-community exchanges promoting sharing of culture" (AFN, 2007) and with Cajete's (1999) vision of "igniting the sparkle." These students said that: "learning about another culture made me want to learn more about my own." Listening to these students share what was gained through this exchange and their dreams for the future revealed their hope and persistence. The example of a practice such as a reciprocal exchange which encouraged and

engaged these youth could stimulate other First Nations communities to seek out similar educational practices that would benefit their youth.

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A special thanks to Dr. Elizabeth Lee who has graciously guided me through the writing of this thesis. Your direction and support helped me to finish.

My husband and sons may not have understood why I took this journey, but I thank them for waiting in the wings. Thanks mom and dad for sharing your vision and living what you believe all these years.

Thanks most of all to the Creator who has given me the gifts and opportunities to finish this research journey. Meegwitch to all.

Dedication

This writing is dedicated to the students and staff who shared their year and the exchange experiences with me. May your voices and visions be heard and seen throughout this text.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

My Research Story

It has been said “that all research is autobiographical” (Cole & Knowles, 2007, p. 7). This research story was an examination of journeys both literal and metaphorical. One was my journey from my childhood and schooling on a First Nations reserve in Northwestern B.C. to teaching in a school on a First Nations reserve in northern Ontario. Another was the journey of First Nations students from their First Nations reserve in northern Ontario to visit a First Nations reserve in urban, southern British Columbia. There was also my research journey; learning to balance the demands of the institution and ethics review boards within the context of building relationships, earning respect and creating research with the First Nations students and community I was involved with.

Throughout this process I was conscious of the need to recognize my role and my perspectives so that the understandings and stories of others would be revealed clearly. It is not possible to share, analyze and interpret the stories of others without including one’s own biases and position. The field notes and my “emotional recall” (Ellis, 2003, p.230) were used to contextualize the themes and interpretations of the data from the participants. Richardson (2003) discusses “writing as a method of inquiry” and suggests writing data in different genres as a way of understanding and presentation. To share and explore my field notes, I was inspired to write them in narrative form as “You can canoe without a paddle.” That the writing of the narrative flowed effortlessly, speaks to how

these experiences captured my personal journey and revisited memories deep within. This narrative is not only an objective account of the preparations and hosting of the exchange, but it also includes my perspectives and interpretations. By making these as transparent as possible the readers should be able to distinguish my thoughts from those of the participants.

As Indigenous research is relational, it is of crucial concern that the researcher becomes known by the community, participants and the readers of the research. As part of protocol a speaker introduces herself by telling you where she is from. I will briefly share some of my story. If your identity is bound up in the places that you have lived and the experiences that you have had, it has taken me a lifetime to uncover the meanings of the places that shaped my childhood.

A child lives in the moment without much awareness of the bigger picture. I moved to a First Nations reserve, on the northwest coast of B.C. when I was 3 years old and subsequently lived in two different First Nations communities for more than 8 years. This early life shaped who I am today, my values, beliefs, and understandings. From early on I was reminded by my peers that I was not one of them. I was an outsider, an amksiwah, Tsimshian for white person from the Sm'algyax Living Legacy Talking Dictionary (<http://smalgyax.unbc.ca/>).

My public school days were at the federal day school on the reserve as one of five or fewer white kids in a school of 200. Yet there were moments and days when this

outsider identity was largely forgotten and I was just another child biking down the path, playing in the bush with friends and walking on the driftwood by the beach. Though these First Nations communities were my homes, I did not really belong. For many years this marginalized space left me frustrated and resentful. I felt like I did not belong anywhere, for when we went south, I was also unaware of the understanding and practice of current fashions and social graces. I blamed my parents for creating these identity crises, but buried these feelings underneath a brave and people pleasing exterior.

This identity of growing up in First Nations communities was buried deeper when I graduated from university and moved to Ontario to marry into a very conservative and traditional Ottawa Valley family. I conformed to the expectations of others and did not often comment when others made derogatory remarks about First Nations peoples in order to fit in; however, this also left me conflicted and hurt. Acknowledging and exploring these personal conflicts have also shaped this research journey.

In 2003 I began teaching in a school with a significant population of First Nations students. Seeing the brown faces in the playground and in the classroom in front of me started my heart singing. Memories from childhood resurfaced. Memories of friends, fun, and school flashed before me. I had a strong desire to reconnect and to give back. I began to realize the many positive aspects of my early years. This school had a teacher on staff from the local community who initiated extremely successful Aboriginal education programs in the school. Aboriginal culture became a part of the school environment.

Teachers participated in a professional development day with a First Nations elder; the whole school enjoyed a drumming group and did the circle dance; First Nations literature was used in classrooms; and a First Nations theatre group was invited to perform. The academic achievement, participation in extracurricular activities and self confidence of the First Nations students improved (Alexander, Hewitt & Narbonne, 2010). The success of these initiatives, along with the renewed focus by the Ontario Ministry of Education towards Aboriginal education provided the impetus for my exploration of further studies in this area.

Choosing a research focus.

During my searching for relevant educational experiences I found the pilot online course for Queen's Aboriginal World and Indigenous Education Studies graduate program. I signed up for the program and started my present day research journey. The professor was a leader in education research with Aboriginal communities. She used critical ethnography to study effective indigenous schools in Canada and North America. She inspired me to continue my studies in postcolonial Aboriginal education which led to my full time studies as a master of education student in culture and policy studies at Queen's university.

Initially, I wanted to focus on Ontario's new Aboriginal Education Agreement. This policy, although developed in consultation with Aboriginal educators, was very much a top down approach (Cherubni & Hodson, 2008). Mandating self-identification of

Aboriginal students for the purposes of segregating data for program monitoring and evaluation was one of the cornerstones (Ontario Ministry of Education (OME), 2007). While data may be useful in driving instruction that raises achievement, many times it can be used indiscriminately by the public to perpetuate negative stereotypes. I decided to research and compare the practices of this policy with the one developed in B.C. I wrote a paper comparing the B.C. Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements, that each school district develops and signs with the Aboriginal partners within its boundaries, and the Ontario policy framework. I felt comfortable dealing with policy papers rather than speaking about or for First Nations communities, schools, or students. This approach seemed safe. I read Ministry of Education documents, school board documents and policy papers put out by the Chiefs of Ontario. The Internet allowed access to the B.C. documents from the different school boards. It also seemed timely as 2008 was the year that the Ontario framework was being initiated. I would be able to seek out a school board and examine the process of implementing the new framework and explore its implementation.

However I soon found that developing a critical study, although relevant, did not really mesh with the path I wanted to travel. I had found fulfillment as a teacher when engaging students and watching them develop into successful learners. At heart I was much more interested in countering deficit thinking (Shields, Bishop & Mazawi, 2005) by focusing on strengths, engaging First Nations students and researching their perspectives, than I was in analyzing policy and critiquing the status quo. It is common

for academics and educators to discuss problems and research solutions (Richards, 2008), but few of them (us) acknowledge the students, the community or the social and historical context involved in First Nations education. Given my background, I felt that I might be able to balance and negotiate between the two realms of the academic institution and First Nations students and community while also exploring a practice that would “nourish the learning spirit” (Battiste, 2009) of First Nations youth.

This change in focus was also encouraged by my advisor who invited me to partner with her in professional development in a First Nations school in northern Ontario. During work with teachers to build capacity for literacy teaching, I was invited by the principal and education administrator to continue working with the school the following year to assist in building teacher capacity and to encourage student engagement. Although, my experience and expertise were in teaching early literacy, the principal identified adolescent students in grades seven and eight for the research focus. These classes had experienced a high teacher turn over, the students were very resistant to academic work and they were also beginning to disengage from school. I shared my philosophy of building on strengths rather than focusing on deficits (Cleary, 2008; Shields et al., 2002) with her. We discussed possible options which would fit curriculum expectations, increase student engagement and would add to the capacity of the teachers, school and community.

I was reminded of an experience our family had with the Nunavut Youth Abroad Program (now Northern Youth Abroad, www.nyap.org) where northern students from Nunavut (and now the Northwest Territories) come to southern Canada for 5 weeks in the summer. These students participate in volunteer work experience placements as well as share their culture with their host communities. Some students participate for an additional summer where they participate in volunteer work placements in Africa. Students in these programs have a 90% rate of high school graduation which is much higher than the norm for northern students (www.nyap.org). Other programs run by non-profit organizations, such as the Society for Educational Visits and Exchanges Canada (SEVEC), facilitate student exchanges between Canadian provinces. Perhaps this type of experience would help these students to connect the curriculum to their experiences, broaden their understanding of culture and community, and become more engaged with education. The principal and I decided to research this option further. The principal applied for the exchange through the Society for Educational Visits and Travel (SEVEC, www.sevec.ca) and requested an exchange with a First Nations school in B.C. She also offered me a part time teaching position at the school for the coming school year so that I could be a participant observer of the reciprocal exchange.

I discussed this new research focus with my advisor and other faculty members at Queen's. Some of them were intrigued by the idea, while others expressed reservations at researching such an exchange experience with such young students. They were concerned

about the physical and emotional safety of the students while travelling. Clarifying the dual roles of teacher and graduate student/researcher made the writing of the research proposal more complex. As a staff member at the school, I could be involved in the planning and production of the exchange experience. As a graduate student/researcher, my role was limited to observation and collecting research participants' (students) perspectives. My experiences of growing up in B.C. helped me to understand the geography and socio-historical context of the area targeted for the planned exchange. I discussed with my committee members the untangling of these various roles and prepared a coherent research proposal.

Negotiating the research.

The research journey took place in the space between the demands of the university and the demands of the First Nations community. This ongoing negotiation added to the complexity of this research and needs to be acknowledged. Some of the issues involved are described in this section.

Many Indigenous peoples worldwide have expressed that they have been “researched to death” (Brant Castellano, 2004, p.98; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). They argue that, as part of colonialism, the settlers often expropriated not only Indigenous lands, but also their knowledge. The dominant Eurocentric anthropologists, scientists, educators, social scientists and health researchers determined the research agenda, the methods and the use of the knowledge obtained. During the last twenty years postmodern

thought has begun to open up space for research by and with Indigenous people. Indigenous research methodologies which were presented and discussed by Smith (1999) have found a place within and alongside qualitative research methodologies (Kovach, 2009; and Wilson, 2008). However, Indigenous researchers and those researching within First Nations communities continue to negotiate a contested space. The rival demands of the institution and the dominant research paradigms continue to overshadow the need to respect Indigenous research protocols and to build long lasting relationships as part of the research design. Many researchers working between these competing demands continue to face obstacles and challenges while researching. This was also true during my research journey.

Developing relationships and negotiating ethics approvals.

I was confident that an experiential culture-based program such as a student exchange could have an impact on these students and on the community. Expanding their understanding through travel, friendships and new experiences was a focus on positive, enriching experiences rather than on problems and deficits. I was also excited to be going back to a First Nations community to live and to teach. It was important for me to have a context for building relationships and to earn respect before presuming to research with them.

I met with my supervisor and committee members to fine tune the ethical application. Little did I realize that obtaining ethical approval would become a six month

process. Shortly after submitting my ethical application, I received an email with pages of required revisions. Many of the revisions they had asked for did not make sense to me given the First Nations context I was living and researching in. They were concerned with the issues of authority and power and recommended a double blind study. I was concerned with separating my roles as teacher and researcher, but knew that the issue of authority as a teacher was not a major obstacle. I was much more concerned about whether I would have time enough to build respectful relationships that would allow space for me to conduct my research. Would the students speak to an outsider such as myself?

I knew from my personal history that the insider/outsider relationship influenced whether I would find research participants who were willing to share openly with me. Too often in this context what is said to those in authority was only what they assumed you wanted to hear. Given the students' history with transient teachers and discrimination by "others" it could be a challenge for me to develop relationships with the students in the school. I knew negotiating written consent could also be an obstacle, as First Nations participants have been noted to be distrustful of signing forms (Hanohano in Wilson, 2008, p.116) and many parents were reluctant to engage with adults and programs at school (Pushor & Murphy, 2004). To be allowed space to observe and research, I believed it would be much more important to the students that I had the backing of the chief and council, school board, other teachers and their parents and community than it

would be for them to know that the research had been cleared by the academic ethics review boards. It was a challenge to build relationships and negotiate the paperwork required by ethics review boards. I made the requested revisions, but also sent emails trying to clarify the need for research protocols that would be feasible in this First Nations community and that were congruent with Indigenous Research Methodologies.

Meanwhile, I moved to northern Ontario and prepared for the beginning of another school year. As the special education resource teacher for the school, working part time (so there would be time left for my research), I was very busy meeting students and organizing their Individual Educational Plans. It was a challenge to get to know the students and to provide the resources and supports needed with the limited time available. The teachers were also excited to have me there as a mentor and colleague. I was surprised and encouraged by the positive reception I received at the school.

I continued to revise the ethics application. I was more than a ten hour drive away from my thesis supervisor, other faculty members and graduate students and the university resources. It was a lonely and seemingly unending process. I had hoped to have two phases to the research so that the students could share their perspectives both before and after the exchange, however, it took until November for the application to pass the first stage and move to the second stage of ethical approval. I was surprised in December when I received a notice from this second stage that my application needed further revision. An Aboriginal faculty member had been finally consulted and he

suggested that some of the changes requested previously were not in keeping with respectful research with First Nations communities. He requested more transparency in identifying research participants so that those without consent were not recorded indiscriminately. I made these changes, which returned my application closer to its original state, and the application was finally approved. Now I was able to return to the school board, chief and council with the research proposal and then proceed to recruit research participants.

Though it resulted in changes to my research timeline, the time delay created by the delays in ethics approval resulted in additional time for me to earn respect and credibility, and to build relationships within the school and community. In an indirect way, the delays enabled me to more truly follow an Indigenous Research Methodology. During the time waiting for ethical approval, I built the relationships that were a factor in the positive informal meetings that were held, and the backing I received by the band and school board.

I provided the chief and council with the research proposal and copies of the letters of information and consent forms for their perusal before the meeting so that we would have time for discussion. One of the councilors asked me where I was from. When I mentioned that I was not aboriginal but had grown up on a reserve, he said, "That's why you sound so Indian." It was quite a joke as we discussed mannerisms and patterns of speech among different First Nations communities.

The chief and council looked forward to hearing about the student exchange and hoped that this was not to be another singular phenomenon. They related that, because in the past many funded initiatives for youth were only short term opportunities, now it was difficult to sustain enthusiasm for new ventures. We discussed the different avenues available for funding reciprocal exchanges and the value of researching such programs. The chief and council expressed their focus as their youth's preparation for participation and success in the broader economy. I shared how this exchange could be an experience that could give them confidence and broaden their understanding of the world. It would be valuable to study this experience with their youth to help them for future planning and to benefit other communities contemplating similar ventures. The chief and all members present signed the consent forms, encouraged me to pursue the study and wanted feedback when the study was complete.

One of the school board members asked an insightful question: "How will you help us build research capacity?" This relevant point revealed the desire of the school and community to move forward. This exchange was initiated by the principal, organized by the school's child and youth worker, and implemented by the grade 8 teacher and her students. The four of us learned together as the exchange experiences unfolded. These First Nations allies partnered with me in this research study. Their knowledge of the students and community was invaluable. I was able to share with them how to design a research study and how to use a method such as photo voice with students.

With the endorsement of the chief and council, school board, and the support of the school staff I was now able to present the research study to grade 8 students and their parents and begin recruiting research participants for the study. Note, the grade 7 and 8 students were involved in the exchange experiences, but only the grade 8 students were invited to participate as research participants. This process will be described in chapter three, Research Methodologies.

Foundations for Research Design

I focused on developing a clear purpose and vision for the research beyond giving these students a trip to look forward to for the next school year. What kinds of questions should shape the research? Could a small qualitative study speak to some of the broader issues in First Nations and Indigenous education, if so how? What methods would be respectful of the students and allow their voices a platform? Was this possible or was I just another white researcher exploiting First Nations people for my own purposes (Bradford, 2007, p. 71)? Would these students or anyone in the school or community share meaningful thoughts and opinions? Was a student exchange just a fun trip or could it have deeper educational and personal significance? What literature could provide the context for this research? So many questions and the need for focus and direction...

I found key references and previous research which became central to the development of my research. The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Youth Accord 2008-2012 (AFN, 2007) proposed that one of the keys to social development was the use of

“reciprocal intercommunity exchanges to promote sharing of culture and heritage.” This proposal meshed with the principal’s and my idea of using a reciprocal student exchange to promote student engagement. It also guided us to seek a First Nations to First Nations student exchange rather than a rural to urban, or First Nations school to public school exchange.

A pivotal study in formulating my ideas was “The Seventh Generation, Native Students Speak About Finding the Good Path” (Bergstrom, Cleary and Peacock, 2003). In this qualitative study they interviewed 120 Native and First Nations students across North America about their educational experiences. This study was organized by themes and shared the perspectives of students through stories. Cleary (2008) later used this data for additional research. Her resulting article, “The Importance of Literacy Motivation when Native Students are Left Behind,” highlighted the need for holistic education congruent with students’ experiences and included a relevant quote: “often the more emphasis there is on testing and achievement, the more native students fall behind” (p.97). These studies emphasized the value of First Nations students’ perspectives and the need for a culturally relevant and strengths-based pedagogy. Recently, Crooks, Chiodo and Thomas (2009) have published the resource “Engaging and Empowering Aboriginal Youth: A toolkit for service providers,” which features proven strength-based approaches and resilience among Aboriginal youth. I wanted to align myself with focusing on

motivation and engagement rather than on the previous problems and issues the students in this First Nations community faced.

I read extensively about Indigenous knowledge and research methodologies and learned that the Eurocentric model of analysis and categorization does not mesh with the relational, holistic frameworks of Indigenous thought (Absolon, & Willet, 2005; Battiste, 2000, 2002; Cole, 2004; Fleras, 2004; Wilson, 2008). They argued that the academic and institutional definition of research and knowledge need to be questioned and countered in practice. The use of Indigenous Research Methodologies (IRM) defined a different paradigm and way of approaching research. These works challenged me to use IRM to frame my research. Was it possible as a non-Aboriginal to research using IRM in a First Nations community? What would respectful, relational and decolonizing research look like in practice?

I sought for a research method that would link to the school's goals, be engaging for students and reflect these values. Some researchers have noted that qualitative research methods are congruent with the IRM framework (Kovach, 2009). The goal of qualitative research is to explore the meanings that participants make of particular experiences (Creswell, 2009). The use of participant photographs for research was becoming common practice in working with children, youth, minorities and for discussing social issues (Wang & Burris, 1997). This type of research had also been used successfully with First Nations participants (Castleden, Garvin & Huu-ay-aht, 2007; Ip,

2007; and Truchon, 2007). These studies inspired me to use this method in my research. Having the participants share their visions should allow them to show and tell their stories in a way not possible with words alone (Mitchell & Allnut, 2007). I wanted to explore these students' thoughts after participating in a First Nations – First Nations reciprocal student exchange. I ordered a manual (Blackman, 2007) on using the photo voice method, written for researchers, to help guide my research design.

This phenomenological study focused on one First Nations to First Nations reciprocal student exchange. Phenomenological studies share an in depth description of a phenomenon in a specific context (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). This description and discussion could further our understanding of the value of reciprocal intercommunity exchanges between First Nations students as well as highlight their representations of this experience. These areas of researching reciprocal exchange, a practice which the AFN is promoting; highlighting First Nation student voices and promoting student engagement in education; and using Indigenous research methodology and the photo voice/photo story qualitative research method became the foundation for this exploratory research study. My three questions were: 1).What would First Nations students share about their participation in a student exchange? 2).How did their perceptions match the goals of the stakeholders (school, community, SEVEC, AFN) promoting reciprocal exchanges? 3).Could a small qualitative study speak to some of the broader issues in First Nations and Indigenous education and if so, how?

Chapter 2. Foundations of this Research Study

Definition of Key Terms

It is a challenge to choose appropriate and acceptable terms when writing about First Nation issues. As a writer I do not want to offend, patronize, or homogenize, but rather to write in a respectful and thoughtful way. A useful glossary of terms related to the First Nations context is found at <http://www.reconciliationmovement.org/resources/glossary>. The terms used in my study will be defined based on this resource as the glossary was representative of current understandings common to First Nations peoples and government.

There are many terms used to describe Canada's Indigenous population. The terms Aboriginal, First Nations, Indigenous, Native, Indian, and American Indian are commonly found in texts and articles. Warry (2007) gives a lucid explanation of the terms and their historic and current appropriate and inappropriate usage (pp. 9–11).

These terms have evolved over the last forty years due to the political climate in Canada and globally among indigenous peoples. The term First Nation peoples refer to status and non-status Indians as defined by the Indian Act. The term Métis refers to those of mixed First Nation and European ancestry with ties to a specific group of people. The term Inuit refers to Indigenous peoples from northern Canada. The term Aboriginal is often used by governments because it is inclusive of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples (OME, 2007, p.36). Some of Canada's Indigenous population resist the labels

given them by the dominant society and prefer to use the name of their nation in their own language to describe themselves (Alfred, 2009; Iseke-Barnes, 2003). However, due to the confidentiality promised for this research I did not use these names, but instead I chose to use the term First Nations to describe the students from B.C. and Ontario. When referring to the literature I used the terms used in the works cited.

The students that participated in this exchange lived on reserves, which are lands designated by the federal government for a specific band of status Indians and the population on their band register. The Indian Act defines a band as the organizational structure which represents a specific group of Indians. The reserves, many of which are part of traditional homelands, are administered by the band with funds received from the federal government as well as other resources that the band may have. The department of the federal government responsible for administering the Indian Act is Indian and Northern Affairs of Canada (INAC).

All students that participated in the exchange attended band operated schools. The kindergarten to grade 12 schools are located on the reserves and are administered by the band, but receive their funding from the federal government. With these funds they are mandated to provide an education which aligned with provincial standards. The bands have freedom to hire their teachers and staff, choose their curriculum and operate their schools, however, there is inequity in the amount of funds allocated per pupil and in the support and services the schools receive compared to the funds allocated by provincial

governments for similar off reserve schools (Carr-Stewart, 2009; Fulford, 2007; Mendelson, 2008).

Literature Review

To situate this research I reviewed the academic literature for relevant research and information. This was an ongoing process, as I searched prior to planning the research to become aware of the issues in First Nations education as described in the previous chapter. I explored the literature during the research design phase to investigate methods that would match the research questions and that were congruent with researching with First Nations people. While I researched in the community I continued to revisit the literature to ground the study. During data analysis and the writing of the findings I reviewed the literature I had collected to verify my understanding of the themes that emerged. I sought additional literature that spoke to the issues that emerged from the findings for the interpretation and discussion.

There are a growing number of First Nations researchers and academics in Canada. When reviewing the results of the literature searches, I consciously looked for their research and texts. This focus did not preclude my study and examination of other research pertinent to this study; however, I took care to include relevant First Nations work. The three broad topics of the current status and challenges of First Nations education; student exchanges; and appropriate research methodology and research methods were the focus of this literature review.

First Nations education: status and challenges.

The state of education for First Nations students is an issue of concern for First Nations people (Atleo, 2010) and for different levels of government (Richards, 2008; Cherubini, Hodson, Manley-Casimer, Muir, 2010; OER, 2009, CMEC, 2005). The rate of academic achievement of First Nations students, as measured by high school graduation rates, post secondary accomplishments and in various provincial wide testing initiatives, is well below the levels of other students in most jurisdictions (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Wotherspoon, 2007). This “achievement gap” (Richard, Vining & Weimer, 2009) is only one of the crises affecting First Nations communities. The media has referred to Canada’s First Nations communities as being “third world,” with ongoing issues related to housing, health, clean water, unemployment, addictions, and poverty. The numbers of First Nations youth as a percentage of the total Canadian population continues to rise (Steffler, 2008). With these demographics, it is crucial to improve the academic achievement levels and the employment prospects of First Nations students currently in school so that this next generation will have a productive future (Taylor & Steinhauer, 2008).

Bell (2004) and Fulford (2007) have used case study research to explore factors which influenced successful schools and programs for First Nations’ students. Their research identified that strong leadership, innovative and cultural programs, staff, funding and resources, school climate, and community collaboration were six critical factors

among the schools studied (Fulford, 2007, pp. 323-324). Governments have attempted to address the achievement gap of First Nations students in various ways. Their approaches reflect their different understandings of the causes of this gap. A common reason for First Nations students lack of achievement cited is the lack of cultural congruence between Eurocentric schooling and First Nations cultural knowledge, learning styles and teaching practices (Ledoux, 2006; OME, 2007; Toulouse, 2008). Government policies have advocated for the inclusion of First Nations content, pedagogy and learning styles in the classroom (Cherubni, 2009; OME, 2007). For example, Ontario developed 10 Native Studies courses for secondary schools (Godlewska, Moore, Bednasek, 2010) and has authored an Aboriginal toolkit (Toulouse, 2008) to help teachers integrate Aboriginal content in the subject areas. Other provinces show similar initiatives, (B.C., 2006; Saskatchewan, 2005; Nova Scotia, 2008). Fulford's (2007) studies showed that exemplary schools had strong cultural and language programs, and hired First Nations teachers and staff. However further studies showing how this cultural focus influences achievement are needed.

Richard's (2008) study of the aboriginal/non-aboriginal gap in B.C. examined disaggregated assessment data from all B.C. school districts. His study was possible because B.C. has collected assessment data on Grade 4 and 7 students since 1999 (p.3) and has disaggregated the results for self-identified Aboriginal students. The results showed a continuing gap among aboriginal and non-aboriginal students especially in

terms of a larger standard deviation for aboriginal students and a greater gap in the lower percentiles. His analysis found that aboriginal students in “good” schools, those with the highest achievement scores, performed better than aboriginal students in other schools (p.8). Statistics also revealed that in schools with a higher concentration and number of Aboriginal students, the performance of the Aboriginal students was lower (p.8). There was also a variation in Aboriginal achievement among school districts (p.10). Those school districts with a demonstrated focus on collaboration with Aboriginal stakeholders, inclusion of Aboriginal cultural content and initiatives, and focus on high expectations for student performance (using assessment data to drive instruction) had schools which exceeded the average Aboriginal achievement levels (p.11.14-16).

Provincial practices and initiatives do not directly affect First Nations students in band operated schools as the federal government has jurisdiction over education on the reserves. Local bands have taken control over the provision of education since the pivotal paper by the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations) “Indian Control of Indian Education” in 1972 (Powless, 2004, p.10). This situation is complex and problematic as there is a disconnect between the provincial jurisdiction of education and the unique situation of students on the reserves. Although the bands are in control of local education, they are dependent on the federal government for funding which is inadequate and less than that provided by the provincial governments for similar services (Carr-Stewart, 2006). The small local band operated schools struggle to provide effective

education for their students; often with administrators who are politically motivated rather than suitably educated (Powless, 2004). First Nations at all levels: national, provincial and local, are protesting this inequality and underfunding (www.afn.org; www.chiefs-of-Ontario.org).

The Canadian Council of Learning mentions other limiting factors in Aboriginal learning such as “intergenerational trauma” as a result of the years of residential schooling, high school mobility and ongoing issues of racism and discrimination (Tunison, 2007; CCL, 2009). Residential school experiences have recently been in the forefront of media attention. The abuses of the residential school continue to haunt survivors and their descendents. Ball (2009) noted the continuing effects of residential school experiences on early language development of many First Nations children due in part to the effects of past first language loss, lack of confidence in language use, and family dysfunction (p.24). Many reserves have high levels of violence, suicides and substance abuse which have been attributed to intergenerational trauma and the legacies of residential schools (Thomas & Green, 2007). Previous experiences with residential schools and other assimilative practices may contribute to parental and student disconnect from schools (Pushor & Murphy, 2004).

School mobility is much higher among the Aboriginal population. Many families commute between their home reserves and nearby towns and cities for family and employment reasons. In urban populations high mobility is often due to poverty and

housing issues. This frequent mobility negatively impacts student learning and achievement (Aman, 2008). In the northern Ontario First Nations school where I taught, there was evidence of high mobility. In some classes there was a movement of 10-20% of the students over the school year. Some students attended for a few months, moved to another location for a few months and then returned before the school year ended. There were often gaps in their schooling because of this.

The importance of family relationships and engagement with school also influence student success (CCL, 2009). Pushor and Murphy (2004) discuss the marginalization of Aboriginal parents from the schools and share that continued “shaming and blaming them for how they are or are not involved...continues to keep Aboriginal parents on the margins of the school landscape.” (p.227). I heard, during school meetings and conversations with staff in our First Nations school, parents blamed for their students’ behaviour problems and lack of academic achievement. Rather than focusing on the deficits, efforts must be made to go to the parents as Murphy did and to honour their strengths (Thomas & Greene, 2007). Educators also blame students for their lack of achievement. In “The Myth of Laziness,” Levine (2003) examined many of the underlying reasons why students were unsuccessful in school. He encouraged educators to explore students’ learning profiles to build on their strengths and to seek alternative methods to develop basic skills. Perhaps it was not that the student failed in school but that school had failed the student.

Systemic racism and discrimination, though rarely acknowledged, continues in Canadian society (St. Denis & Hampton, 2002). The Canadian Council on Learning's 2009 report on Aboriginal learning cites a previous INAC report which found that "systemic racism, racist remarks and racist attitudes have a profound a [sic] affect on academic success" (p.59). The way that First Nations people are characterized by the media, in texts, and by people on the street often include stereotypes which "embed the idea of inferiority" (Monture, 2007, p. 207). Racism hurts in many ways, and can subtly influence the thinking and self image of those exposed to prejudice and discrimination (Bergstrom et al., 2003, p. 29; Monture, 2007, p. 211; St. Denis, 2007).

A positive approach is important to progress towards the goal of success for First Nations students. Many researchers are now focusing on resilience and nourishing the learning spirit (Feinstein, Driving-Hawk & Baartman, 2009; Fleming & Ledogar, 2008). The Canadian Council of Learning, in partnership with First Nations people, pictures Aboriginal learning as a tree drawing strength both through roots feeding on the soil of wisdom of past generations, the rain of opportunities and the leaves drawing strength from facing the sun (www.ccl-cca.ca). As part of this initiative, Battiste leads a study on "nourishing the learning spirit" (www.aerc.usask.ca) and shares this goal: "We have studied and know much about what happens when people fall off the good path but few have studied the *learning journey* that youth engage in (italics mine). " Each person

walks their own path, but the stories and lives of others will help them on their way (Archibald, 2008; Bergstrom et al., 2004, p. 153).

Place-based and experiential education practices align with First Nations values and cultural practices (Aylward, 2007). Some communities are developing methods to engage the hearts and minds of their students. Roue (2006) reported on how northern Cree are taking at risk and troubled students back to the land with elders to restore their vision. They were able to respond to traditional teachings even though they had disconnected from school. Other successful projects have taught science holistically and taken students into the environment to learn about science as well as traditional teachings and history (Hindelang, 2004; Baydala, 2007). Opportunities for experiential education that will engage the hearts and minds of students should be created and sustained (Bissett, nd). Successful practices should be examined and shared with other First Nations schools so that a wide range of possibilities are available to the students. When the school decided to include a reciprocal student exchange for the grade seven and eight students, I decided to research the topic so that, if the practice was valuable for the students and staff, it could be sustained and expanded to other communities.

Reciprocal student exchanges.

There are few published studies relating to adolescent reciprocal student exchanges. There is literature relating to bilingual exchanges (Mady, 2009; www.sevec.ca), postsecondary exchanges (Calhoun, Wildcat et al, 2003; Sowa, 2002)

and surveys of participants who have participated in exchanges (SEVEC, 2006) but there are only a few relating to Canadian high school students' experiences. Cumming, Mackay and Sakyi (1994) published a study relating to exchanges and their value in anti-racist education. This was a three year multi-method case study of 120 high school students from twelve school boards across Canada. They found that there were five common topics of learning among the participants: geographical and historical information; leadership skills; racism and discrimination; cultural and language differences and immigration issues. They also identified six learning processes that were related to these exchanges: increasing personal awareness; learning personal skills; learning facts; learning concepts; awareness of others; and improving capacity for social organization. Barnes (1995) wrote her thesis on the "Effects of a Cross-cultural Exchange on Junior High Students." Her study involved students involved in a reciprocal exchange with students from Japan. Data was collected by interviews, questionnaires and student journals to determine the effects of the exchange. She discussed the assumption that "contact between societies leads to greater understanding" (p.84) among participants; and she examined the development of students' empathy and tolerance towards difference. One of her conclusions was that the students made friends and gained knowledge of a new culture (p.86). She noted that the success and sustainability of student exchanges depended on the need for adequate preparation of students to support positive experiences, and the strong leadership of committed staff in both schools.

Recently Saitow (2009) completed her doctoral research on “Educational Travel and Adolescent Learning.” She studied many types of educational travel experiences to develop a theory of the learning processes involved. She also reviewed the literature on experiential learning and the benefits of exchanges for at-risk populations. Relevant to my research were her comments related to at- risk and Native American youth:

Educational travel may introduce positive experiences to at-risk students, and diminish the influences that negatively impact their abilities to succeed in school. (p.4) Educational travel may address some of the learning needs of Native American adolescents because part of the immersion process involves reinforcing one’s own culture through a developing awareness for other cultures (p.26)

These statements were congruent with this school’s purposes for this First Nations to First Nations exchange. Rather than focus on the problems and seek remediation the staff sought to enrich the lives of the students with these exchange experiences. One of Saitow’s significant findings was that the novelty of educational travel enhanced learning as the students assimilated these experiences (p.243). The students involved in my study certainly fit this category as the travelling and experiences encountered through participation in the exchange were new to them. There were some in the group who previously had limited opportunities to travel off reserve and only one student had been on a plane before this trip.

Ongoing reciprocal exchanges between community centers in East Vancouver and Fort Good Hope, Northwest Territories were assessed and reported on by Hern (2009). He was involved as a leader in the East Vancouver center and participated in three

reciprocal exchanges between the two communities during 2003, 2004 and 2007. The exchanges were designed to bring native and nonnative youth together to build relationships. Hern's research attempted to "examine critically their intersections" (p.320), and to explore whether the students were able to move beyond tolerance to build lasting relationships (p.322). He conducted exit interviews with participants from the 2007 exchange as well as with members of both communities who had been involved in previous exchanges. He found that, although the exchanges increased awareness and understanding among the students, few lasting relationships were formed. Hern noted that the northern participants, with their limited opportunities and circles of friends, had hopes of continuing the relationships formed, but even with the availability of Internet contact, few friendships endured (p.330). Though this seemed surprising to him, the context of youth is one of fleeting friendships. Considering the cultural differences and distance between parties it would be surprising if these relationships were lasting. Strong relationships take commitment and effort which is not often a part of busy young lives.

He wondered if these excursions into the north were another example of "tourism" which added to distrust rather than experiences that built trust and understanding. His research pointed to the importance of building ongoing relationships between communities involved in exchanges rather than limiting the experience to one time meetings. Clear goals and limitations need to be understood by both parties. His

research also showed that native to nonnative exchanges had the potential to break down barriers and increase the understanding between parties.

Connections with others across the country or around the world can now be achieved with the click of a button. With the availability of Facebook, email, Skype and other web based technologies, are face to face reciprocal exchanges still necessary and valuable? Drebot (2007) proposed that online exchanges between Indigenous and non-Indigenous schools could help to develop intercultural competence for Indigenous students who often live in isolated and disadvantaged communities. His article included recommendations based on common assumptions; but though encouraging of collaboration, it was not based on research of existing partnerships.

O'Dowd (2003) of Germany researched a yearlong email exchange between English and Spanish university students to ascertain which email exchanges led to greater intercultural understanding and their characteristics. His literature review drew attention to the research that countered the assumption that intercultural contact led to greater cultural awareness and understanding. Too often assumptions such as this are accepted without question or evidence. He echoed the findings of others; just because the Internet can facilitate intercultural collaboration, it does not follow that the students involved will have the motivation, understanding, or skills to be able to do so (p.138). His study found that the results of the email exchange were mixed depending on the dialogue between the partners. Some students had receptive partners and were able to learn through the

dialogue, while other students were not able to create a productive discourse and this only created or reinforced negative perceptions of the other culture. He suggested that the teacher plays a key role in guiding the students in how to communicate across cultures in a meaningful way so that intercultural learning occurs. His study and others showed that even though student exchanges have been proposed as beneficial and conducive to student growth and learning, the planning and organization of the exchange was crucial for a positive experience. Reviewing the research related to student exchanges provided the impetus for this exchange and study. Reflection revealed that the voices of First Nations students could add to the literature and knowledge in this field.

Indigenous research methodology.

Indigenous scholars worldwide have begun to articulate a framework for Indigenous research based on Indigenous values, philosophy and history rather than on Eurocentric values and philosophy. In her seminal work, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Smith (1999), a Maori scholar, laid the foundations for a new approach to researching with Indigenous Peoples. She articulated a new agenda of research designed by and for aboriginal researchers purposed to understand, critique, heal from the past and to move forward with a vision for transformative change. This agenda has been used by researchers and scholars to plan and articulate a new framework of knowledge gathering and understanding for Indigenous Peoples globally. Researchers work with and for the community rather than research about them. The research should

benefit the community and fit their agenda instead of only benefitting and fitting the agenda of the researcher. Some researchers find a model such as community based participatory research (CBPR) fits with the IRM paradigm (Castledon et al., 2008; Chow, 2007).

Many Canadian scholars have joined this conversation. Wilson (2008) in *Research is Ceremony* proposed that the primary difference between the Indigenous paradigm and the Eurocentric position is that “knowledge is relational” rather than objectified and quantifiable fragments pieced together to create a broader understanding (p. 56). Castellano’s (2004) illustration (Figure 1, p. 101) of Aboriginal research ethics as a tree, showing individual actions based on protocols and customs governing relationships deeply rooted in Indigenous beliefs and spirituality, illuminated these relationships. The themes of respect and relational accountability including reciprocity and relevance were central to these authors’ characterizations of Indigenous research methodology. A holistic transformative and relational framework with examples of practice should ground discussion of any research with Aboriginal communities (Letendre & Caine, 2008). The researcher maintains a relationship with the community and participants throughout the research process and beyond (Chow, 2007; Kovach, 2009). Cultural understandings, traditional understandings and the wisdom of the elders are the foundation of the research rather than (or as well as) Eurocentric academic knowledge (Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 2002; Fleras, 2004).

Indigenous researchers have struggled to define IRM and to create a space for its inclusion in academic settings. Although in many ways the debate seems similar to that between the proponents of the merits of qualitative research versus the merits of quantitative research there are significant differences. Researchers advocating IRM seek to include grounding in the world views of the communities that they are working with. Their research seeks to build upon ‘traditional knowledge’ to help communities and not just to add information to the knowledge of the academic world. Methods such as storytelling, walking the land, and listening to elders may be employed as well as quantitative methods, such as surveys and questionnaires, or qualitative methods, such as interviews, and sharing circles.

The work of Indigenous researchers has also been subject to critique and evaluation by their peers within First Nations communities and within academic institutions. They often need to satisfy the requirements of both of these cultures to gain a voice. This small study did not attempt to face all of these challenges, however, to work and study in a First Nations community, it was important that I used the framework of Indigenous Research Methodology, as well as the ethics requirements of the institution, as guidelines. I was a participant observer in the community, the school and during the exchange experiences. The perceptions of the research participants were the focal point of the study. The methods were chosen because they were engaging, respectful and gave space for the understandings of these students.

A review of the literature revealed two promising qualitative methods which have been used effectively with First Nations participants, photo voice, which uses participant photography to reveal realities and share stories (Prossley & Loxley, 2007) and a sharing circle (Lavallee, 2009), similar to a focus group, where participants share their understandings in a small group format.

Photo Story.

The use of photos in research is not without its problems. There are particular concerns with ownership, confidentiality and dissemination. Since the use of digital photography has become cheap and widely available and the dissemination of photos accessible by cell phones, iPods, and the Internet; issues of consent, confidentiality and ownership become more problematic. When using traditional photographs, the photographer could keep the original and the negative with the researcher only getting a copy of the image. With modern technology there is less control over the dissemination photos. The photos can be posted online and then accessed by anyone. Persons and places identified in the photos could cause the loss of anonymity for subjects in the research study. Conolly (2008) tried to mitigate this issue by blurring the images of persons included in photographs. However, Truchon (2007), in her work with Innu students found that the participants and subjects wanted to be seen, heard and identified (p. 270). Her position reflected the concerns of the community she worked in, that blurring their images and removing their names would contribute to the dehumanizing practices of

being erased and objectified. The exhibition of the photographs through various media, rather than just using them for research, was significant and valuable for the participants and this community (p. 273).

The issue of informed consent when using photographs is complex (Weber, 2008). In addition to consent from research participants (student photographers) to participate in the research study, permission from the subjects found in the photographs is needed. Care must be taken to insure that the participants and the subjects of the photos understand how these images could be used. The signing of a consent form for a review board before participating in research or sharing photographs with a researcher is not adequate. Continual reflexivity by the researcher and transparency with the participants throughout the study is essential. Consent may need to be revisited when the photos will be published or displayed. With public access to the Internet, photos included in published material can easily be disseminated, as well as seen, by the public. The participants' desire to withdraw from publication the use of photos that they may have shared for research needs to be respected. I revisited the issue of consent throughout my research by discussion with advisors, community members such as the chief and school principal. I had separate forms for consent to use the photos for the students and their families.

When working with vulnerable populations such as children, issues of 'power' need to be considered. Simply giving the participants the camera does not negate the

possibilities that the researcher's agenda may misrepresent and manipulate the participants' data. Joanou (2009) argued that having the subjects take pictures of places where a researcher could not go could be a form of exploitation. For example, in his study on street children in Peru, he found that even though the subjects created and shared photographs with him of illegal activities, they were later embarrassed that these were in his possession. They did not want others to see them as drug users. He also mentioned that many of these street children were used to being the subject of research and often told or showed the researchers what they expected to find (p.216). The "truth" presented in visual images may not be as objective as it appears.

In spite of the complexities and challenges, using visual images is a powerful way for participants to communicate with researchers, and also for researchers to share their findings with others. Images seen on television or the Internet capture the emotions and context of the news stories with an immediacy and intensity not obtained with words or text alone. It is often assumed that because we have seen the pictures that we know and understand what they portray. The angles of viewing and the process of representation and interpretation (Frith, Riley, Archer, Gleeson, 2005; Weber, 2008) must also be considered when studying visual images.

Pictures, like windows, open to the visual landscapes of others. They are also mirrors and reflect the interests, values and culture of the viewer as well as that of the photographer. Reflexivity on the part of the viewer as well as exploring the

understandings of the photographer uncovers the meanings of what is seen (Daniels, 2008, p. 129). Questions that should be considered are: How are we using the photos in research? Whose interpretations are important: the researcher's or the participant's? Are the visuals a starting point for discussion, as in photo-elicitation, or will they be used to create a visual narrative, as in photo story?

Sharing Circles.

Researchers have used methods such as journals, photo captions, one-to-one interviews or conversations, and focus groups to capture the participants' perceptions of the messages of the images. The focus group is a "research method that focuses on the multivocality of participants' attitudes, experiences and beliefs" (Madriz, 2003, p. 364). Participants answer questions, share in a guided conversation or simply interact with each other. This approach is used for a variety of reasons and with diverse groups of people. Researchers have used this method because some participants find it less intimidating (Madriz, 2003, p. 376); other participants, such as students, find it a familiar way to interact with adults and peers (Darbyshire, P., Macdougall, C. & Schiller, W. 2005, p.420).

Many First Nations cultures include the practice of sharing circles. Lavallee (2009) describes clearly how and why she used this method in her research. Like a focus group, participants participate in a group discussion; however, the sharing circle may also become a spiritual and transformative practice. In addition to sharing ideas and opinions, it offers a space for the sharing of emotions and spiritual insights (Brendtro, Brokenleg &

Van Bockem, 2005). The community and school where I researched used sharing circles to discuss important issues. The students understood the protocols of speaking and listening respectfully. I felt that with a community member facilitating the circle, this method would be an acceptable way for the participants to share in a discussion about the exchange and their photos. Four open ended questions to guide the session, previously reviewed by the chief and council, were provided to the facilitator. This circle, with a familiar facilitator should be a safe space for the students' voices to be heard. I observed the sharing circle; this would ground the transcribed information that would be analyzed for the study. I could also include the nuances of interaction between the students during the session (Madriz, 2003, p. 373).

Reflecting on the literature and the research stories of others provided many ideas for my research journey. Building on their understandings I designed a plan for this research study. However, just as a trip outlined on a map may deviate from the original plan or run into unexpected detours, this research journey did not proceed exactly as I envisioned it would. The next chapter will recount the research design and methods used in this study. The particular ways that the methods of photo story and a sharing circle were employed; the selection of the research participants; and a description of the data will also be included.

Chapter 3. Research Methodology

This chapter will outline the research methodology that framed this study. I chose to follow Indigenous Research Methodology (IRM) and used the qualitative practices of photo story and a sharing circle to collect data from student research participants. This chapter also describes the data and the method used to discover relationships, patterns and themes which emerged from the data.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research was to elicit and explore the meanings of a reciprocal intercommunity exchange between two First Nations schools by having representative student research participants from one of the schools share their pictures, stories and memories of their experiences. 1. What would First Nations students share about their participation in a student exchange? 2. How did their perceptions match the goals of the stakeholders (school, community, SEVEC, AFN) promoting reciprocal exchanges? 3. Could a small qualitative study speak to some of the broader issues in First Nations and Indigenous education, and if so, how?

Research Design

I was invited to research with a band run school in a northern Ontario First Nations community. Though this community is near a major highway, it is isolated as it requires hours of driving to reach larger centers with access to an airport, shopping, movie theatres, and post secondary education. The community is mainly English

speaking and the surrounding non-native communities are largely Francophone. The community has positive features such as many new houses and a kindergarten to grade 12 school which is less than six years old. Most of the teachers and staff at the school are from the community or have a First Nations background. The band council is working to attract economic development and has focused on improving housing and infrastructure in recent years. However, there continue to be many challenges such as lack of employment for most adults and social problems such as abuse of drugs and alcohol. Many of the children and youth are also struggling as a result of these issues and this is seen at school in attendance issues, emotional and behavioural challenges and parental disconnect from the school.

I approached this research study with the understanding that I was a guest in this First Nations community. It was important to research respectfully with the community and to provide information that would help their students and school (Smith, 1999). I negotiated a space for developing relationships in the community and school by accepting a part time teaching position in the school. This gave me the opportunity to be a participant observer of the exchange activities. Throughout the year, I kept a journal and notes of activities and anecdotes relating to the SEVEC exchange.

The school found out that their application for an exchange was accepted on the first day of school. The grade 7 and 8 students were told of the upcoming exchange with the B.C. school and this experience was used by the teachers to shape teaching and

learning experiences. For example, they had a purpose in learning to write a proper letter as they wanted to correspond with the students from the exchange school. In geography, they explored “how where you lived influenced how you lived” and in history, they studied the history of western Canada. I was involved with the grade 8 teacher in fundraising, e.g. calling Bingo on the community radio network, and in planning for when the students from B.C. came to our community. I also participated as a chaperone with the students’ exchange visit to B.C.

The research design involved observing during the exchange experiences and collecting data from four students who had volunteered to be research participants. The students documented their learning journey through pictures and then shared them with their peers and myself. Photo story (Castleden et al, 2007; Truchon, 2007) and a sharing circle (Lavallee, 2008), qualitative research practices compatible with IRM, were chosen as the method for data collection from the participants so that their voices and visions could be highlighted. The juxtaposition of pictures, captions and conversation provided multiple data sources for this study.

I explained the purposes of the research and provided 3 digital cameras for the class to use. All students took pictures during the exchange experiences using either their personal cameras or the digital cameras available for loan. After the exchange experiences the students were expected to produce a PowerPoint of the experience. Research participants (those who gave consent and had parental consent) met in a small

group with the child and youth worker and the researcher to share their PowerPoint presentations. Their presentations and the discussion were digitally recorded for transcription purposes. I transcribed the data verbatim and explored the transcriptions and the PowerPoint presentations for common themes. These themes were used to address the research questions. The pictures, narratives, discussion and researcher observations were also examined for patterns and connections to synthesize (Webber Pill Wax p.121 in Wilson, 2008) the context and relationship of this experience with the contemporary realities of First Nations youth and education in Canada.

Choosing research participants.

Parents of grade 8 students were invited to several meetings to discuss the SEVEC exchange and the research study. This proved to be a major challenge as we had limited attendance at all scheduled parent meetings. These meetings were called by the grade 8 teacher, who is a member of the community and is familiar with strategies which should appeal to parents and fit in with their schedules. In fact, she also had to go door to door to the parents of her students to collect the signature required for participation in the exchange. This disengagement did not appear to be related to the exchange itself as all parents, when asked, were excited about the possibilities of travel for their children. It seemed to be a disconnection between them and the school. Few parents attended school meetings or parent-teacher evenings and it was a challenge to have consent forms signed and returned.

After discussing the issue with the teacher, I decided that all students who expressed a desire would have access to the digital cameras during the exchange experiences. The consent process for research would be revisited when it came time to prepare and present the PowerPoint presentations after the exchange trip to B.C. Twenty students between the ages of twelve and fifteen from the northern Ontario First Nations community participated in the SEVEC exchange of 2010. This included nine girls and eleven boys. Eighteen of the students were from the band community school and two students were from the church operated Christian school; both schools were under the same band education authority. Students from grades seven and eight in both schools were involved in the exchange activities. This included students of various academic levels, including those identified with intellectual and learning disabilities and behavioural challenges. The final list of students was drawn up three weeks before the exchange.

The research participants.

The students from the band school's grade 8 class were invited to become research participants. This grade 8 class had lessons on photography and access to digital cameras before the exchange experiences in Ontario and in B.C. After returning from Ontario they were given instruction in creating PowerPoint presentations by the computer teacher and were expected to create a PowerPoint presentation of the exchange experiences as a class assignment (see Appendix # 1). When we returned from B.C. I

presented the letters of information and consent to the grade eight students. The students took home the parent information and consent forms. Four students signed the forms and they either brought back the signed forms from their parents, and/or I met with the parents on an individual basis to explain the study. The parents/guardians of these four students all signed the parent information and consent forms.

This convenience sample of four students that consented to participate was representative of the twenty grade seven and eight students who participated in the exchange. Two male students and two female students volunteered to be research participants. They represented the spectrum of academic ability and achievement, school attendance, and family composition. The perspectives they shared were likely similar to those of other students who participated in the exchange. I will not describe the individual students in depth as it may compromise confidentiality, but their personalities will become evident as the data is shared and discussed.

Capturing the data.

I had a lunch hour meeting with pizza for the participants to review ethics, consent and the research study. The research sharing circle was also scheduled during a lunch hour so that it would not interfere with academic lessons. The students were reminded again of the voluntary nature of the research and of their option to withdraw at any time. The students wondered why it was necessary to sign forms and have their parents sign. I explained that their written consent was necessary because in research

someone else was using their information and that this information could be shared publicly in a paper or a conference. The public needed to know that they were in agreement with sharing this information. Since they were not of legal age, their parents' consent was also necessary. I noticed during the year that adolescents and children in this First Nations community seem to have greater autonomy and independence than adolescents in the community where I raised my own children. Young children were often outside playing with minimal supervision and teenagers seem to come and go freely.

The child and youth worker facilitated the session. She was involved in coordinating the exchange and also knew the students and community. I hoped that her presence and leadership would minimize the insider/outsider barriers between the students and me. It turns out that my fears were unfounded. The students spent a few minutes practicing/playing with the digital voice recorder and then began sharing their PowerPoint presentations. One student mentioned that she did not bring her USB drive with the presentation on it but that she wanted to be present for the discussion. I hoped that she would share this privately at a later time, but she never did. The students passed each other the voice recorder in turn, and then seemed quite comfortable and willing to use it for their presentations and the discussion.

Data description.

There were three sources of data used in this study. The students' PowerPoint presentations and the transcribed presentations were the first set of data. The second set of data was the transcription of the sharing circle discussion facilitated by the child and youth worker after the PowerPoint presentations. The third set of data were my field notes, photos and memories from having worked at the school and participated in the exchange activities with the staff and students. These notes also included anecdotes from conversations held with staff and community members throughout the year as well as the researcher's observations. The first two sources of data were analyzed to discover patterns and themes and to answer the research questions. My data from participant observation was used to contextualize this information and to add relevant material to the themes discovered.

Pictures.

Three of the four research participants created PowerPoint presentations in response to a class assignment (see Appendix # 1) to share their memories of the exchange experiences. The students were encouraged to use their own photos of the exchange for these presentations, but they also had access to the class database of photos taken during the trip. The assignment was open ended and the students freely chose the photos, sequenced them and added accompanying text. They presented these PowerPoint presentations at the lunch meeting which included the four research participants, the child and youth worker (CYC) who facilitated the presentation and discussion, and the

researcher as observer. The students controlled their PowerPoint presentation and held the digital voice recorder while narrating. The order of presentation was voluntary. The students were also a respectful audience for each other: they made some comments on each others' presentations and they also applauded as each one finished.

Discussion transcripts.

As mentioned in the methodology, the child and youth worker (CYC) facilitated the sharing circle discussion. I asked her to take on this role because she was part of the staff and community, she was experienced in using sharing circles with students, and although she did not go with the students to B.C., she had coordinated the SEVEC exchange for the school. The CYC and I met prior to the sharing circle to go over the questions and protocol for the session and she signed a confidentiality form. I hoped that the students would feel comfortable and free to share with her.

She introduced the sharing session by reading the discussion questions aloud. These 5 open ended questions framed the discussion which took place immediately following the PowerPoint presentations:

1. What were the highlights of your trip?
2. What have you learned from this experience?
3. Would you recommend this type of experience to other students and schools, and how could it have been improved?
4. What have you learned about yourself through this experience?

5. What is your vision of learning in the future/where do you see yourself in the next 3-5 years?

The discussion was formatted according to the protocol for sharing circles. Each question was presented and then each student had an opportunity to respond to the question in turn. Students had the “right to pass” on any or all of the questions. They spoke into the digital recorder and passed it to the next person speaking. The students did not often elaborate when they answered. They usually responded with very short phrases and they often commented and concurred with the previous student(s) answers.

The feeling in the room during the discussion was relaxed. The students passed the digital recorder to each other, listened respectfully and interjected comments and laughter appropriately. At the end they said goodbye and left the room with smiles on their faces.

Field Notes: photos, journal entries, observations, anecdotes, and conversations.

I kept notes of conversations with school and community members as well as observations and records of planning meetings related to the exchange and the exchange itself. I also took photos during my year in the community. These notes and photos are doors to memories of people and events. My memories of these events contextualized the pictures, presentations and discussion with the research participants. Ellis (2003) shares

how exploring your own thoughts, feelings and emotions is a legitimate form of research data.

My field notes and photos were a record of the realities of life in this community for these students as well as to record the insights shared by others. Through ongoing reflexivity I also attempted to untangle my own understandings, biases and perceptions from those of the research participants.

I worked at the school, lived in the community and participated in all of the exchange activities with these students from September until June. This allowed me the space to build “relational accountability” with the community, school and these students. I was conscious of the fact that as an outsider, establishing these relationships was the only way that I would be able to gather credible data.

Timeline.

The school began the application process for funding from SEVEC to participate in a reciprocal inter-community student exchange in July. The application received approval from SEVEC in September. The grade 7 and 8 students and the grade 8 teacher, the child and youth worker and I were involved in the planning prior to the exchange visits. The exchange visit from B.C. to the community took place in early March and the exchange visit from Ontario to B.C. took place in April. I tried to carry a notebook with me, but often notes were jotted down in whatever notebook was available.

I would like to thank the community members for allowing me to participate in the community and for sharing their thoughts with me through the course of daily events. The school staff was also aware of my role as a researcher and offered background cultural information and observations and gave verbal permission for these to be included in my notes. I gathered the notes into a file folder. These field notes were used to contextualize the themes and interpretations of the data from the participants and did not stand alone as data to be analyzed separately.

Data analysis.

Shawn Wilson (2008) discussed in his book that Indigenous Research Methodology (IRM) is not based on linear and compartmentalized analysis like dominant quantitative and qualitative methodologies; however IRM may use dominant forms of data collection and data analysis (Kovach, 2009) within the context of respect, relational accountability and reciprocity (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). I chose to analyze the data in this study to uncover themes and patterns. (Bergstrom, et al., 2003). Categories were derived from repeated viewing, listening and reading of the data to discern meaningful chunks. Then I synthesized these categories into broader themes.

I re-read the transcripts and re-viewed the PowerPoint presentations with the themes to gain a deeper understanding of the data. The Indigenous paradigm of relational accountability directed the style of logic that I utilized when analyzing the data. I sought to highlight the relationships among ideas across the different data sources. Webs of

relationships connected the researcher, research participants who are co-researchers, community, and the stories and photos shared. Analysis needed to examine these relationships as well as to define the threads of meaning within the data. Indigenous Research Methodology asserts that to break any piece of the topic away from the rest will destroy the relationships that the piece holds with the rest of the topic.

An analogy that Peter (Hanohano) once used is that the data and analysis are like a circular fishing net. You could try to examine each of the knots in the net to see what holds it together, but it's the strings between the knots that have to work in conjunction in order for the net to function. So any analysis must examine all of the relationships or strings between particular events or knots of data as a whole before it will make any sense. (Wilson, 2008, p.120)

I hoped to involve the research participants and some significant community members in the data analysis process to enhance trust in the findings. Due to the fact that the students' presentations and sharing circle did not take place until June this was not feasible. The school staff was busy with end of the year assessments and report cards and the cultural staff members were heavily involved in planning the community Pow Wow. I did keep in contact with community members and I was able to visit the community in late September, 2010. During this visit I completed a community report which was a synopsis of the data and findings. I gave copies of this report to the school, the grade 8 class, and the chief and council to review. I received favorable verbal feedback from community members on the report. The chief also suggested that I send a copy to the Chiefs of Ontario to share the research story of our exchange experience with them.

Although this review process was not the collaboration I had envisioned, it was an opportunity for the community to review and corroborate the findings before the presentation and dissemination of the research study.

Chapter 4. Findings

The students' PowerPoint presentations and their responses during the sharing circle answered the first research question: What would First Nations students share about their exchange experiences. Throughout the year my greatest apprehension was that the students would not reveal their feelings and opinions to me. This chapter will begin with a description of the data they shared and then lead into an exploration of the themes which emerged.

After repeated readings and reflection on the data four broad themes emerged. These themes reflected the representations of the research participants and also spoke to the goals of the exchange activities. The themes of community and relationships; culture and ceremony; connections with place, and confidence building are congruent with other researchers' understandings of First Nations education (Aylward, 2007; Bergstrom, et al., 2003; Gruenewald, 2003; Redwing Saunders, 2007). Each of the themes that emerged during analysis will be defined and described in this chapter. This discussion will help to further explore the first research question, "What would First Nations students share about their participation in a student exchange?" After the themes are described, the second research question, "How did the participants' perceptions match the goals of the stakeholders?" will be addressed.

To complete this chapter, I offer a narrative, "You can canoe without a paddle," as an alternative way of sharing my field notes of the preparations for the exchange

experiences and the hosting of our exchange partners. This narrative shares direct quotes from my field notes and my perspectives of the events described in order to contextualize the research participants' experiences and the themes that emerged from that data. The third research question requires a more interpretive answer and is shared in the discussion chapter, chapter five.

Quotations and pictures will be used to illuminate the findings. All of the photos included in the study are used by permission of the students, parents and chief.

Throughout the presentation of the findings and the discussion of the data in this study I was conscious of honouring the stories of the research participants and the communities.

As Ellis has said, "I am fearful of inadvertently hurting my participants by what I write about them. I know that they, like I will change over the time their story is told." (p. 134, Ellis & Scott-Hoy, 2007)

Research Question One

What would First Nations students share about their participation in a reciprocal intercommunity student exchange? In this section I will describe each student's PowerPoint presentation, the pictures, text and oral narrative, as well as the responses to the questions asked during the sharing circle. Although the students did not often elaborate on their pictures or answers to questions, their presentations and comments revealed humour, insight and connection to the people and experiences encountered during the exchange.

Pictures

Student A's PowerPoint consisted of 13 pictures with minimal accompanying text. The pictures took up the slides and the text captions, usually a phrase or a sentence, flashed onto the pictures briefly. His first statement seemed to capture his organization strategy: "Let me tell you a story, a little of this and a little of that." The pictures were not arranged in chronological order. His first picture was of the Ontario students in front of the bus just before leaving on their trip. His last picture was a picture of a tidal stream that we hiked to during our first afternoon in B.C. The pictures in the middle included times before and after these two pictures. He also interjected humour into his presentation and included a picture of one of his peers sitting with a statue and called it "R... and his grandmother."

Rather than only using pictures that he took, he chose to use pictures that others took looking at him during the exchange activities. There were ten pictures with people in them, three of them included B.C. students and six of them included him. There were almost as many pictures of the Ontario students travelling as there were pictures of people and nature in B.C. Five of the pictures were of the Ontario students travelling: by bus, plane or waiting in the airport. Six of the pictures were taken in B.C. He also included close up pictures of a sea anemone and a starfish.

Student B's PowerPoint consisted of five pictures with the accompanying text giving a description of the daily activities while in B.C. The slides appeared on the screen

with the paragraphs of text first and then the pictures zoomed onto the right side of the screen beside the text. The pictures were arranged chronologically and represented the text and narrative of each day except for the fourth picture which related to the text from the last slide. All of the pictures were of events and scenery in B.C. Only two of the five pictures showed people. B.C. student(s) were in both pictures and he was in one of the pictures. The pictures without people were taken outside: seals on rocks in the ocean, a tall tree and a totem pole at the B.C. legislature grounds. Student B presented in the most formal manner sharing the highlights of the time in B.C. from Monday to Friday.

Student C's PowerPoint consisted of an extensive diary with 6 pictures. The text appeared first and then the picture zoomed onto the right side of the screen. She chose a picture to match the recount of each day. The first picture chosen was the same as Student A's and showed the Ontario students in front of the bus beginning their journey. Five of the 6 pictures were taken in B.C. Two of the six pictures included people in them. One was of the Ontario students and one included a mix of Ontario and B.C. students. Three of the pictures were related to nature – one was of an island in the ocean, one was of fish at the marine center and one was of a crab under a rock. One of the pictures showed the mall and included a mall banner which read, "Live your dreams."

The students took turns answering the open-ended questions asked by the child and youth worker. These responses add insights not shown or shared during the PowerPoint presentations.

Narrative texts and transcriptions of presentations.

Student A's written captions and verbal narrative were both minimal. He let the pictures tell the stories. From time to time he commented on the pictures in an informal, "remember when," "here we are," or "look at this" format and the other participants laughed with him as they recalled experiences shared together. He also shared personal feelings such as "I don't know what this is, but it sure felt weird" and "imagine this (a starfish) on your face." His sense of humour was evident both in his choice of pictures and particularly in the stories he related. He seemed to relive the experiences during the presentation.

Student B's written text was a chronological description of the activities in B.C. At times it read like a diary, "we had breakfast, "we went to..." "we went back to the school," "we went to bed." His text and pictures began on the first day in B.C. and ended on the last day in B.C. His narration reflected recognition of an audience and was more formal than the other two presentations. His statements included appraisals positive and negative, of the daily events. "Their school was beautiful, the spaghetti was delicious, the marine science center was pretty awesome, and the talent show was not that great..." He began and ended his presentation with a comment on friendship: slide one- "we made lots of new friends and we really bonded" and slide 5-"after dinner the students left and that was the last time we got to see them."

Student C's written text was a detailed diary of the B.C. exchange. During her presentation she read aloud the text on the screen. She began with the travelling experiences, "smudging and waiting for the bus," and ended with, "we went for a walk to the beach and found little crabs and shells." As well as including the list of daily activities, her narrative included extensive descriptions of cultural activities such as "We went for a trip up the mountains and the elder was telling some legends of the trees there." She also shared personal feelings about travelling; "I was so excited and nervous."

Sharing Circle

Question 1: What were the highlights of your trip?

All of the students mentioned "making friends" in their answers. Only student D elaborated on the answer to say that "I never thought I'll make friends 'cause I'm not really good at making friends, but that was happening to me." They did not mention specific people or whether these were friends of the same or opposite sex. They did not elaborate on the expectations or meanings of these friendships.

Two of the students included "discovering a different culture;" one student mentioned, "discovering new things;" and one student said that "it was a long ride for me."

Question 2: What have you learned as a result of this trip and this whole experience?

The first answer from all of the students was learning about “another culture.” One of the students elaborated on his answer with examples about their stories and drawings. Three of the students mentioned how “their culture is way different than ours.”

One of the students repeated her previous assertion that “it took a long time to go over there” while another student mentioned that “when you go on a trip there’s more to discover and it was just an experience for me.”

Question 3: Would you recommend this experience to other students and how would you make it better?

All of the participants wholeheartedly recommended it verbally and through body language. “It’s a good experience; you meet a lot of new friends.” Their suggestions included staying longer, more activities, and staying in hotels instead of gyms. The students mentioned that it was a “one time thing in your life” and “it’s really a good experience and ...it’s like an opportunity to go to a different province and meeting a different culture.”

Question 4: What have you learned about yourself through this whole experience?

Two of the participants immediately answered that, “I need to start learning more of my culture.” One of the students spoke about developing a positive outlook, “there’s more to life and they gave me confidence.” Another student mentioned making new friends and how she was “happy to see them again.”

Question 5: What is your vision for learning in the future; say in three years from now, what do you see yourself doing?

All four research participants mentioned “I see myself going to school.” The two male participants also described their dreams of starting their own businesses. “I see myself in 5 years time doing something for my community like a grocery store.” “I would like to be an architect and design and build my own building and then own my own business.” The girls did not articulate their dreams past high school. One of them mentioned “going back to B.C. again.” The other student said, “I don’t think that far, ‘cause it might not work out...On the way, finishing school, I will think about it so if I want to be a doctor and if that’s not right for me than I’ll go try something else.”

Between the third and fourth questions I asked the students if they would have got as much out of this experience if they would have gone to a public school instead of a First Nations school. The unanimous response was that they preferred a First Nations-First Nations exchange. One of the students shared about personal experiences at the school in the neighbouring community, “in...like everybody stares us down, ‘cause like we might steal or something, or like I’ve heard stories about us...like in a white school I feel awkward and nervous...” He continued by recounting his grandparents’ and his mom’s experiences with discrimination and racism. He tied it to his identity in a very moving way. The other students did not carry the discussion further, but all agreed that they would feel more comfortable with other “native” schools.

“How can we bridge the gap?” I asked.

The student who commented on racism answered, “Start small I guess, start hanging around if they want to make friends if they still want to hang around with you, start small, don’t be afraid...”

The child and youth worker responded to this dialogue by discussing her own experiences in living with “white families” in foster care and that now she is comfortable in both worlds. She also mentioned the need to appreciate the non-native teachers who have come to give to the community and to not judge others by the colour of their skin. She related it to the Medicine Wheel and the teaching to respect all people.

After the fourth question, I asked if they thought video/Internet exchanges would be as useful as going somewhere. (I asked this question, as there has been recent work on creating Internet exchanges to promote student engagement (Drebot, 2007)). The students all agreed that they would rather go there. “I would rather go see in person than talking far away.” All students acknowledged that they were still communicating with their B.C. friends via the Internet. We also commented on the depth of feeling, the tears shed, when the students left Ontario and when we left B.C.

Themes from the Data

The four themes of Community and Relationships; Culture and Ceremony; Connections with Place; and Confidence Building are themes which are related to a positive model of First Nations education. The pictures, textual and oral presentations

shared by the participants as well as their responses during the discussion revealed these themes. The themes are not easily compartmentalized because they intersect and overlap and seamlessly flow into each other.

These themes are mapped onto the Medicine Wheel, which is a cultural and sacred symbol for the Ojibwe and Cree, the nations represented in the northern Ontario First Nations community. The four quadrants, the four colours and the four directions incorporate many layers of teachings and understandings. According to the Ojibwe Medicine Wheel Teachings by elder Lilian Pitawanakwat (<http://www.fourdirectionsteachings.com/transcripts/ojibwe.pdf>), “yellow and east represent birth and where we come from;” “red and south represent youth, spring and growth;” “west and black represent continued growth and learning; and “white and north represent wisdom and the elders’ teachings.” I did not want to expropriate a cultural symbol, but I wanted to portray the findings in a way that would resonate with the students and the community. This symbolism was chosen and reviewed by a knowledgeable community member.

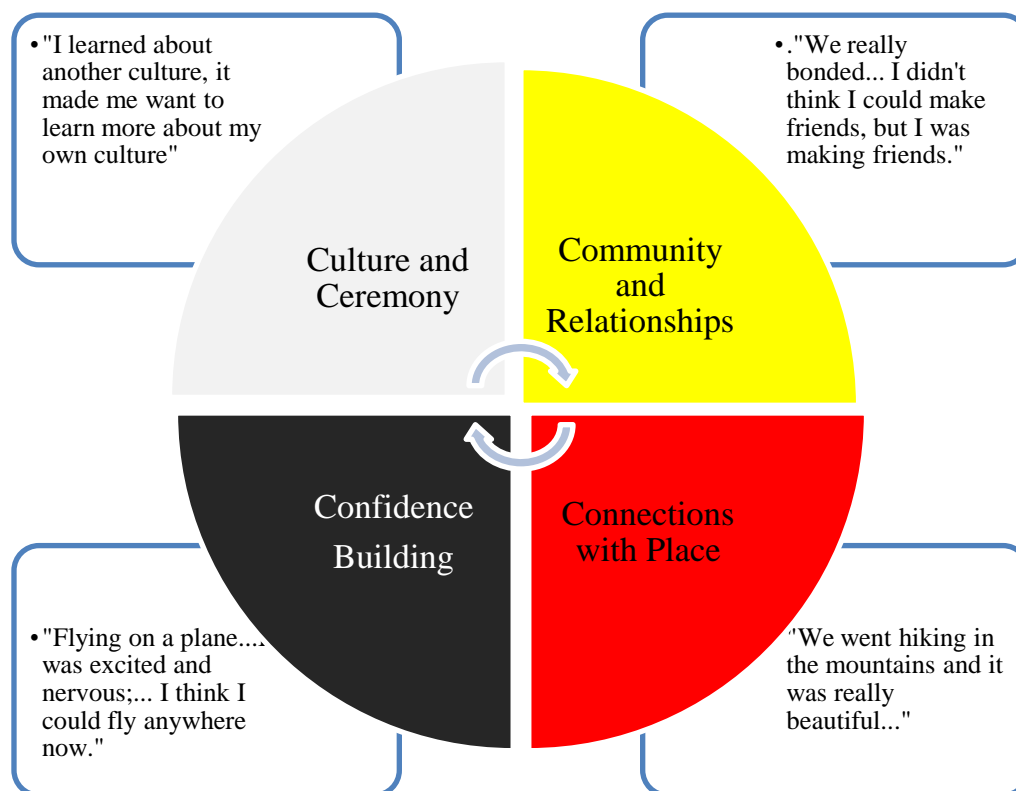


Figure 1. Findings from the journey.

Community and relationships.

The theme of community and relationships has many facets. This theme includes the relationships that the students shared with their classmates and teachers and the community involvement in planning for the exchange activities. It also includes the theme of making friends with the students from B.C. This theme speaks to the importance of family, community and relationships for many First Nations people. The teachers involved in the exchange activities and the trip to B.C. all noticed change in how students

treated each other. The students were much more supportive of each other and there was no evidence of arguing, fighting or teasing. One teacher noted that “the students bonded as a group.” There were many instances of students encouraging each other and helping each other during travelling and in B.C.

When the students shared their PowerPoint presentations, this feeling of community with their peers was evident. Their texts and presentations were written from the point of view of “our class” and “we.” As they shared their PowerPoint presentations there was a sense in the group of reliving the experiences together, they laughed, commented and reminisced. Out of the 24 pictures shared, 14 of the pictures included people. Most of these pictures were of Ontario students, only 6 of the pictures included B.C. students, and none were only of B.C. students.

In the discussion all students mentioned that the highlight of the exchange was “making friends” and this was part of their learning; “...made new friends, like happy to see them again.” The students’ narratives also included references to friendship with B.C. students: “Our class made lots of new friends and we really bonded.” Friendship was spoken of in general terms. The students did not use names of specific individuals or share details of their personal relationships. They recalled the depths of emotion shared when goodbyes were said in Ontario and in B.C. They all mentioned that they were still in touch with their B.C. peers via the Internet and that perhaps when they finished school they could go back there.



Figure 2. B.C. and Ontario students playing ball hockey in the community in early March.



Figure 3. Ontario students leaving the community.

Student A used this picture as an opening to begin to reminisce about the trip to B.C. “I just look at everybody in that picture. Uh I will tell you all about the story. We were just taking off, we were about to go.”

Connections with place.

Place, culture and identity are strongly connected. Where you live influences the stories you tell and the culture and identity you create (Archibald, 2008; Shultz, Kelly & Weber-Pillwax, 2009). Our students from the community are surrounded by nature and most have been involved in fishing, hunting and other outdoor activities. One of the

volunteers at the marine centre commented on the enthusiasm of our students to spend time touching the marine creatures such as sea anemones in the experiential part of the exhibit. This was in contrast to the students from B.C.'s reluctance to touch, discuss or participate in skinning the snared rabbit when they visited us. This may have been related to the fact that the students from B.C. lived near a large urban centre and may not have had the same day to day experiences with hunting and fishing as the students from Ontario.



Figure 4. A sea anemone.

As he showed this picture, Student A laughed and said, “I don’t know what this is, but it feels weird.” The PowerPoint presentations revealed the students’ fascination with nature, both scenery and wildlife. Four of the twenty-four pictures were of scenery, and

four of the pictures showed marine life. These pictures were interesting because of their focus on particular marine life – a starfish, a sea anemone, a crab and the scenery as they experienced it, such as views of the ocean taken while they were on their whale watching trip.



Figure 5. Seals and sea lions on the rocks and in the ocean.

Student B began his presentation with this picture and discussed the events of the first morning in B.C. “We went whale watching...no luck, but we saw a sea lion and some seals.” After leaving the marine center, one of the students said to me that it would be neat to see the ocean wildlife out here. I said, “If you go down to the beach, and turn over a rock you will probably see some crabs.” Our students wandered on the beach

collecting shells and turning over rocks to find crabs while the B.C. students visited nearby shops.

On Friday afternoon, the last day, they walked to a beach near the school and continued looking for shells and crabs. Student C talked about the experience during her presentation. “We went on a walk to the beach and saw little crabs and shells.”



Figure 6. Lifting rocks to look for crabs.

Confidence building.

This theme encompasses a diversity of subjects such as expanding horizons through the experience of travelling, participating in new activities, seeing other parts of Canada, and learning social skills before and during the exchange activities. Taking part in an exchange with the opportunity of travelling across Canada by plane, going to

restaurants, museums, malls and movies and also planning and hosting a group of youth in their own community provided many opportunities to develop the skills they need to succeed in life and to expand their dreams for their futures. All of the PowerPoint presentations had pictures of students engaged in activities that were not possible on the reserve. They showed pictures of travelling on a plane, eating at a restaurant, going to the movies and playing at the arcade. Their narratives mentioned the activities they participated in each day. During the discussion one of the students mentioned, “over there they were positive and here they are so negative and I became confident.”

Living in a small and isolated community limits the opportunities to participate in activities taken for granted by most Canadians. Although, television and the Internet exposed the youth to mainstream culture, it was a challenge for some of them to feel comfortable outside of the reserve community. For example, in order not to be exposed as ignorant of social conventions, one of our students did not order his meal at Subway but said he was not hungry. During our trip to the movies, some of our students did not understand how to navigate the ticket, food and line up process. They relied on us (school staff) to support them during the process. On the flights to B.C. the students were nervous and apprehensive, but on the way home they were relaxed and confident. After we returned to the community one of our students told me that now he felt that he could fly anywhere, even by himself.



Figure 7. Looking to the future.

Figures 7 and 8 capture students' views of new experiences that led to confidence building and this led one of the students to say, "I learned there's more to experience, new places, and different activities."



Figure 8. Live your dreams.

Culture and ceremony.

The theme of culture and ceremony was a topic of discussion during the sharing circle. When asked, “What did you learn through these experiences?” all four research participants mentioned “learning about another culture.” One of the students went into a detailed explanation of some of the stories and art experienced in B.C.:

...over there what I learned about their culture is their stories about the big people and how they stick to the ground... and how they respect their animals, whatever and their culture about their spirits whatever, compare our drawings, our drawings are like way different, each animal in theirs if it is an upside down face someone passed away and if it's a straight up face it's still with them or something, but their culture is different it's not really similar to ours so I just learned a new culture.

Culture was also seen in the texts and pictures of the PowerPoint presentations. One student included “smudging before we left; we went to their lodge and they were singing and telling us stories.” Another participant showed the picture of the tall tree where the elder told stories and a picture of a totem pole to represent what had been learned at the carving shed. It was surprising that all of these students highlighted the importance of culture because at times during the exchange experiences, in Ontario and in B.C., some students were talking among themselves and did not appear to be engaged during the cultural activities.

Two of the students said, “I learned about another culture and it made me want to learn more about my own culture.” This profound comment will be revisited during the discussion on the significance of an exchange for First Nations youth. These 13 and 14

year old students experienced more than just friendship, travelling on a plane, and enjoying activities in another province, they also grasped the cultural significance of the trip as captured by Student B's photos (Figures 9 and 10) and in the comments about these photos. "We went for a hike up the mountains and the elder was telling us some legends of the trees." "After the lunch we went to carving shed, and wow did their cedar trees smell good. Right after the carving shed we went back to the school and had arts and crafts with the elders."



Figure 9. A tall tree in B.C.



Figure 10. A totem pole in B.C.

Research Question Two

How did the research participants' perceptions match the goals of the stakeholders (school, community, SEVEC, AFN) promoting reciprocal exchanges? The AFN Rebuilding Our Nations Youth Accord 2008-2012 (presented November, 2007) includes "intercommunity exchanges of youth to promote traditional culture, practices, healing" as one of the keys to social development. One of the key findings of this study was that all of these participants highlighted discovering another culture. "I learned about another culture and it made me want to learn more about my own." This statement was significant as it shows that the experiences in B.C. also fueled their desire to expand their

own cultural knowledge. Strengthening ties between First Nations communities across the country would not lead to a “pan-Indian” culture, but could increase students’ understanding of the cultural identities of their own communities.

The B.C. students displayed pride in their culture when they were in Ontario: singing their songs, speaking their language and talking about their big house (this was the term used by the B.C. students; the usual term found in the literature is *longhouse*). Both of the exchange experiences included cultural activities each day. In Ontario, the Cree teacher had elders help her translate the students’ names into syllabics. She shared not only language lessons, but also cultural stories. The outdoor cultural coordinator shared a hike with the students and explained how to skin a rabbit. In B.C. an elder went on hikes with the students and shared cultural stories connected to the places. Traditional food was also shared in both locations: moose and rabbit in Ontario and seafood in B.C. Both communities were involved in this cultural sharing. In Ontario, the Rangers contributed by cooking and preparing outdoor activities, and community members presented songs and dances at the talent show. In B.C. community members shared stories, songs, dances and ceremonies and led workshops teaching traditional crafts. The AFN goal of sharing cultural practices and traditions could only be realized by the participation of the communities, particularly the elders. The research participants’ focus on cultural understandings gained showed that these exchange experiences provided the opportunities for cultural sharing and social development that the AFN envisioned.

We were able to receive funding for our exchange trip through the Society for Educational Visits and Exchanges Canada (SEVEC; www.sevec.ca). This nonprofit organization has been in operation for 75 years and receives funding from Heritage Canada to facilitate bilingual, cross cultural and other educational exchanges.

SEVEC's mission is to create, promote and facilitate enriching educational opportunities within Canada for the development of mutual respect and understanding through programs of exploration in language and culture ... inspiring in youth a stronger sense of self and confidence,...in building the Canada of tomorrow (www.sevec.ca).

The research participants displayed confidence during their visit to B.C. One of the participants mentioned in the discussion that “I gained confidence.” Another student mentioned to me that he felt that now he could fly anywhere. One of the teachers said, “Now that we have come here, I think that I would like to take a group of students to a different country.” Before the students from B.C. came to our community we held many class meetings and planning sessions. Some of the questions raised were, “What if we don’t like the students? How should we treat them?” The exchange experiences gave the students opportunities to develop their social skills in a supportive setting.

All of the students mentioned that the highlight of the trip was making new friends. The opportunity to make these connections opened up their world. Although making friends was mentioned by the students as a highlight and the short term results seemed to be new friends to call or connect with via Facebook, it was inevitable that these contacts would wane with the passage of time. Hern (2009) has documented that

friendships made during reciprocal exchanges may not endure. Even if the friendships were short term, these connections enlarged the students' capabilities. Students also wondered why anyone would want to come and visit their community. As we reflected on what we could do and share with our visitors while planning, the students were able to catch a vision of the positive attributes of our school and community.

The school and community applied to participate in the student exchange as a means to encourage and engage this group of youth. These youth, many of whom were "at risk," had faced challenges at school with limited academic achievement, a high turnover of teachers and a reputation for challenges (personal conversations with the principal spring, 2009). The exchange was only one aspect of a focus on promoting positive classroom environments, increasing academic achievement and providing emotional support. Travelling to a First Nations community in B.C. also was an opportunity for experiential learning which connected with the geography and history curriculum. The school and community also viewed this exchange as an opportunity for their youth to travel and enjoy new experiences.

When the students found out that they were accepted into the program, some of them were immediately engaged and looked up the location on Google Maps and started thinking about where they were going. The students focused on learning to write proper letters so that they could communicate with their exchange partners, and the special education students wanted this skill included as a goal on their IEPs. Some students

mentioned that they were “trying to be good.” The grade 8 teachers disclosed that during the time before the B.C. students’ arrived and also before our students left for B.C., the students engaged with academic activities and the class attendance improved.

The grade 8 students fundraised for the trip by hosting Bingos and shared their enthusiasm with the community. Planning to host the exchange visitors gave the teacher and school counselor the opportunity to address leadership and social skills that are not a part of the academic curriculum. Students learned what was required when organizing sports and activities, planning menus and buying food, and being good hosts. The staff also connected the exchange visit with the curriculum by organizing lessons on Treaty 9 for our students and visitors. We planned stories, discussions and web based activities. The students displayed behaviour typical of many adolescents by resisting lessons requiring reading, writing and class participation. We then attempted group work around the topic, “How does where we live(d) influence how we live(d)?” We wanted to connect history and geography by having the students share their knowledge of their own environments with their exchange peers. Some groups were more engaged in learning activities than others. With better planning and more coordinated adult facilitation these lessons could have been more productive; however, these ideas may have created a foundation for the lessons learned through their experiences. Our students demonstrated through their pictures and discussion a greater understanding of these concepts after the trip to B.C.

During our visit to B.C. one of their elders told stories of their history and culture to the students within the environment; on a walk beside an ocean stream, and on a hike to big trees on a mountain. Some of the research participants shared these lessons in their PowerPoint presentations and during the discussion more than 6 weeks later. Though it was not always apparent by observing their behaviour; the information they shared during the presentations and the sharing circle showed that these students remembered the teachings and discovered much about culture and history during the exchange. As can be seen in the photo and in Student A's comment, "Look at this nice little stream, what was that you were telling me about it goes high or low every 6 hours..." the information shared during the exchange activities in Ontario and in B.C. endured.



Figure 11. A tidal stream near the B.C. school.

You Can Canoe Without a Paddle

I wrote the following narrative as an addition to the findings as the form allowed me to separate my subjective personal response to the study from the journeys taken by the students. Reflecting on the experiences showed me that my presence and expectations sometimes interfered with the expectations and experiences of others involved. I had to learn to let go and enjoy the journey. The title of this section refers to an experience I shared with another teacher in the school. We drove down a bush road to go canoeing and when we arrived we found that we had forgotten the paddles. This did not stop us from enjoying the blue green lake. She had an ax and cut down some cedar poles. We continued “canoeing” until a thunderstorm stopped us.

This anecdote describes my perspectives, during the Ontario portion of the exchange. It was a journey into the unknown, and even though careful preparations were made, there were many challenges. The humour and flexibility of my co-workers were crucial to the success of the exchange and the research study. Understanding my journey, both metaphorical and real, in becoming a part of this community that planned the exchange experiences and travelled to B.C. was part of this research study.

You can canoe without a paddle.

A narrative in several voices telling the story of the planning and hosting of the exchange experiences in Ontario and recounting a portion of the field notes. The plain text between the stanzas will add information about the timeline and my perspectives to provide the reader with the context needed to understand this narrative. This recounting of the year leading up to the visit of the research participants (students) to B.C. provides a background to the data shared after the exchange.

March: I was invited to work in a First Nations school and conduct a research project with the grade 7 and 8 students.

The Invitation:

We need you to come and help;

Share ideas with the teachers;

Help our students learn;

Some can't read

Or write

Or multiply

They fight

They talk back

They won't sit still

April: My considerations and reflections: should I begin this research journey?

The Reply:

"Me, how can I help?"

Why look outside for someone to fix the problems

You want another expert?

Whose school is it anyway?

Indian control of education

How far we have come

New buildings on the rez

*Dream catchers hung on walls
 Cree syllabics on the posters
 Aboriginal teachers at the front of the class
 But
 Bells ring
 Subjects and texts from outside persist
 Provincial expectations are the gold standard
 EQAO testing is mandated
 Students are measured,
 Problems identified and described.*

*The invitation:
 Our students are failing?
 They are acting up
 They are frustrated
 They don't listen
 They aren't learning
 They can't learn?
 We can't teach?
 Please help us?*

May: My reflections as I made my decision to undertake the journey which included examining my personal history and educational philosophy.

*The reply:
 "Who me?"
 I'm no miracle worker
 I have taught students to read
 And to believe in themselves,
 But they were young, not adolescents;*

*"Problems are possibilities"
 "All students want to learn"
 "Are students failing school, or has the school failed the students?"
 "To engage students, schools need to be engaging"
 Are these empty platitudes?
 Can we move beyond blame?
 Can we move beyond deficits and test scores and disabilities?
 You don't need me*

*The elders, the teachings, the environment have much to teach
 But
 Since you have asked
 I will come and share the struggle
 To “ignite the sparkle.”*

*Choosing to live on the rez
 To share friendship, laughter, loneliness
 While remembering childhood hurts
 When being white was different, suspect, a curse.
 Tension
 Should I go?
 Put myself on the line
 Again.
 To teach, to mentor, to research
 What will we learn?
 Haven't they had too many whites be experts?
 I don't want them to do it my way
 What is their way?*

June: Reviewing the literature to make connections to the research topic.

*Serendipity
 Reading the AFN 2008-2012 Youth Accord
 One of the keys to social development is reciprocal intercommunity exchanges to promote
 cultural sharing.
 Could such an opportunity connect experiential learning and place?
 Enrichment for these students?
 Encouraging, engaging, expanding
 Constructive, connected, creative;
 Changing direction
 Traversing the unknown.*

*A First Nation to First Nation student exchange
 To highlight culture
 To link learning to life
 The principal, the education committee, the child and youth worker, the teacher
 Explored, reflected, decided and applied.
 SEVEC accepted.*

July: The ongoing search for reciprocal First Nations school group.

*We want to go, but who wants to come?
Searching online directories of First Nations schools
Waiting for replies
None come
In a culture where relationships open doors
Not opportunities or credentials
A chance encounter, a quick connection
Finally a B.C. First Nations school applies to SEVEC.*

September: New beginnings as I moved to the community to live, teach and research.

*Black spruce and tamarack line the highway
Rivers flow north,
Unloading furniture, left alone;
Swimming in cold northern lakes,
Canoeing past beaver dams and mossy trees
Finding joy in nature with a friend.*

*School starts
The school receives notice of the application approval
The grade 8 students will be going to B.C.
“Did you check out where we’re going on Google Earth?”
“Come here, I’ll show you...”
“How long will it take to get there?”
“What’s the weather like?”
“Help me learn to write a letter.”
“I can be good, Miss.”
“I’ll come to school every day.”*

October: Planning sessions with the staff involved in the exchange as well as involving the students in fundraising and in planning activities and meals.

*“Who would want to come to our community?”
“What do we have to share?”
This is not traditional homeland
We have been transplanted
To work, to live, to become*

*Our people were not always here
 We've come from different places,
 And cultures and languages
 What's there to see?
 What's there to do?*

*"What an opportunity for our students."
 "What if our students mess up?"
 "Sell those Bingo cards; we're raising money for the exchange."
 "You want me to call the Bingo?"
 "Who's that calling Bingo? Tell her to slow down."
 "Did my dad come to the meeting?"
 "I want to go to B.C."
 "Time to go door to door to get those SEVEC forms signed."
 "I don't know if my son/daughter should travel that far."
 "I've never been that far."*

September to January: As the preparing for the exchange continued, my other responsibilities related to professional development and special education had to be maintained.

*Teaching, assessing, professional development
 "What happened in other schools when you faced these challenges?"
 "I've never dealt with this before."
 How to sustain positive learning for all students?
 I'm overwhelmed.
 "Judy, each day is a fresh start."
 "We will try again."*

November to January: We had many classroom sessions which taught life skills. The students contributed ideas and helped to prepare for hosting the B.C. students.

*Class meetings, planning activities
 "What will we do when they come?"
 "Why would they want to come here, to the rez?"*

*Where is your pride?
 What brings you joy?
 Look around*

*See the lakes, the fish, the moose, and the beaver
 See the friends and family.
 They are your age.
 What do you do?
 What do you like to eat?*

*Basketball, ball hockey, volleyball
 Skidooing, ice fishing, snow shoeing
 Video games, war craft, Bingo
 Music, dancing, drumming
 Hanging out, walking, talking, laughing;
 Can all this fit in a week?
 Pizza, bannock, Indian tacos, spaghetti
 Will they eat moose meat?*

*“Students, we need to review the Code of Conduct before you sign.”
 No smoking, no drinking, no drugs.
 How do we treat guests?
 This is all about friendship, not meeting boyfriends and girlfriends.
 “What happens if they do something to make me mad?”
 “No smoking for a week?”
 “Miss, I went online, but they haven’t posted yet.”*

February: Last minute preparations for the weeklong visit by the B.C. students. This also included the teacher and I preparing materials which would add academic content to link the activities to the school’s goals and curriculum.

*“Will we ever be ready?”
 “Who will get the wood for our campfires?”
 “Are the shower rooms clean, they haven’t been used in awhile?”
 “Can you help set up the cots
 Wash sleeping bags
 Get groceries
 Organize ice breakers and activities?”
 What should we learn together?
 How can we teach 40 students each day?
 What is important for all to learn?
 “How does where we live affect how we live(d)?”
 Check out the website, *The Path of the Elders...**

March: The B.C. students arrive in the community. The B.C. students stayed in the school, the boys on the stage and the girls in a classroom. Both groups agreed that this arrangement would put all students on equal footing because of housing and social issues.

*It was a cold, sunny day
The bus pulled up in front of the school
They rolled suitcases and carried backpacks.
Some even wore shorts.
Shorts – it was -20, we told them it was winter!
“Ever young”
“That boy looks cute.”
“Those girls look more interesting than the ones in class”*

*Choosing places to sleep
Unpacking pillows and teddies
Students arriving to meet the guests;
The bleachers and the stage,
Uncertain about crossing the gym floor,
Balls bounced,
“Let’s play floor hockey”
“What about soccer?”
Spectators outnumbered players
Ontario students kept arriving to check out the new arrivals.*

We all experienced first day jitters.

*A welcome circle
“Thank you for inviting us to your territory”
This is not a territory, or a village,
It is our community, the rez,
“Will this be fun?”
“Will these kids like us?”
“Like being **here**?”*

*To the atrium for icebreakers
Where we have to talk
To them
Get acquainted bingo, fill in the squares
Twins, birthdays, sports, movies, music, family*

*Laughter, giggles, the whole room buzzing;
Spaghetti supper
It is still easier to watch than to interact
A room divided-
B.C. students at one side and Ontario students on the other*

*Give them time,
Let them get comfortable
Reminded of my impatience
And desire for perfection
“Will this work?”
Who defines success?*

Monday: The school’s welcoming activities for the B.C. visitors.

*Monday, a school breakfast to introduce our visitors,
Then, 40 students in one classroom
Reviewing rules and expectations and boundaries
Where’s the freedom and fun?
Time for Cree, and culture
Singing the syllabics song and Oh Canada in Cree
Names in syllabics
“What’s for lunch?”
“Can we play out in the snow?”*

Misunderstandings: There was a disconnect between the teachers’ goals of using the activity to familiarize the visitors with the community and the students’ understanding of the activity as a game to win.

*The community scavenger hunt;
Teams formed, eyes gleamed, “we can win this.”
Adults sat back to enjoy some rest and coffee.
Back so soon-
“How could you have been everywhere already?”
“Well, we sent our fastest out with the camera,
See our pictures show all the places.”
“You were supposed to show our guests, the community”
Another team in,
“We had 3 cameras and sent 3 off in different directions”*

“Didn’t anyone understand?”
“Miss, I’m last,”
“They were so slow, they didn’t know the way.”
“I had to wait for them to catch up.”
The last shall be first
All were to be in the pictures
How would you feel in a strange place?
“I was alone, I was left behind, and I didn’t know where to go?”
So much to learn, will this week work?

Unexpected obstacles: This incident and my reaction to it revealed to me how my values could interfere with maintaining a positive atmosphere.

“Did you sleep well? “
“Enough food?”
“Coffee?”
-“what no coffee? But we stocked the shelves.
-taken?!
Why am I so upset by this minor transgression?
Reminded of my impatience
And desire for perfection
Don’t take it personally
Let go of the frustrations

The challenge of engaging students in a classroom contrasted with the experiential learning accomplished by the outdoor cultural coordinator. The B.C. students also experienced the joys of a northern Ontario winter.

“How does where we live influence how we live?”
Now what?
A carefully prepared folder of materials
“A lesson?”
“Reading and writing?”
“This was supposed to be fun ”
“Boring”
40 students, a captive audience anxious to be doing, playing, hanging out
Listening to the creation story
What does that matter now? Or Here?

*Lunch,
 Playing in the snow
 Time for snowshoeing and skiing
 Setting rabbit snares,
 Falling in the snow
 Laughter,
 Skidoo rides?
 Hair blowing in the wind "This is fun"
 "I can hardly wait to ski"
 Hot chocolate by the fire.
 Talking, sharing,
 New friends, new possibilities.*

Examples of community pride and involvement in the experiences.

*Canadian Rangers shared their movie
 How the wisdom and practices learned through time
 Help the army learn survival skills and navigation,
 Patrolling and search and rescue in the vast northern areas
 Students wore their Junior Ranger gear with pride
 The community talent show
 The gym is full
 Traditional dancing, karaoke, hip hop,
 Young students singing in Cree;
 Students and community members shared their gifts.
 Our girls included B.C. friends and one was brave
 And danced on stage to loud applause.*

Technological malfunction added to the challenges. The key to providing a successful exchange is flexibility.

*Another morning to fill
 Cree, culture and academics
 Not enough supplies for all to make their dream catchers
 What does it all mean?
 Writing in syllabics, let's help each other.
 "Oh no, the computers are down, so much for the interactive material on the website;
 What shall we do?"
 Reminded of my impatience*

*And desire for perfection
We improvise, students accommodate.*

A perfect day: the students had fun and helped each other.

*The sun shines across a frozen landscape
A perfect day?
Learning to cross country ski
Some of our students are so patient and encouraging
Not the ones you would expect.
B.C. students ski to the sliding hill
Our students carry the sliders.
Enjoying speed and fun, they are just kids after all
Spills and laughter and attempted tricks
We are all friends.
Time for our big trip to town
More shared laughter on the bus, bowling and eating out.*

Boundaries and rules are made to be tested.

*Friendships too close?
Boundaries and rules to contain the thrill of new relationships
And hormones;
“Miss, I just want to be friends, I won’t choose a girl friend.”
They sit out one night, miss the campfire
But tomorrow will be a new day.
The fire casts shadows and dancing images
We huddle around the warmth and light
Skidoos roar by and the guests are offered rides
Thrilling rides in the dark, bouncing over the snow
Soon the marshmallows are finished and another day is done.
I go to sleep in peace, not worried over details or approval.*

Laying to rest academic expectations and trusting that the students are learning through their activities and interactions.

*How does where we live affect how we live?
Reluctance, resistance, few keen to participate
But, posters are created and shared*

Groups display climate, geography, animals, housing, culture, transportation, food and clothing

Of both B.C. and Ontario;

This topic is laid to rest.

Are my ideas so foreign, or unrealistic?

Our culture teacher brings in frozen rabbits that got caught in snares set Tuesday.

The soft fur is touched tentatively.

Instead of preparing the rabbit, illustrations are drawn on the board –

How to skin it and cut it up for the pot.

Our students are curious, B.C. students squeamish

Will they eat the rabbit stew on Friday?

The sun shines across a frozen landscape;

Ice fishing in the afternoon:

There are holes in the lake,

Minnnows in the bucket and hooks on fishing line.

Jigging takes patience.

Most students wander off to the fire and food with friends.

Teachers and chaperones enjoy the sunshine and peace,

“I caught many fish in the ocean, but now I caught one through the ice!”

I could have sat there all day, all week even, it was a perfect day.

They have become friends.

The memories of the last days blur.

The noise level increased as students conversed.

No longer were there two distinct groups as they had all “bonded”

Ball hockey in the snow and

Indoor soccer enjoyed together.

Movies, music and video games,

The common youth culture of the nation, North America, the globe

The highlight of the evening, BINGO; and the grand prize an IPOD Touch!

The room hushed with anticipation.

“I feel so old,” said the student beside me.

“Why?”

“My granny plays Bingo.”

“Watch your language.”

“All the old ladies swear at Bingo!”

It was hard to say goodbye to new friends, but the students had much to look forward to as the trip to B.C. was only weeks away. The teachers and I reflected on a successful week.

*Later it was time to say goodbye.
The students had bonded,
Made friends,
Shared experiences.
Tears flowed, hugs all around.
We had survived a week with 40 teens.
Time to put away the army cots and get back to routine;
Time to reflect on the lessons learned;
Time to prepare to take our students west.*

This narrative was written to provide a snapshot of the preparation and hosting of our exchange partners. The students' PowerPoint presentations and discussion revealed their understandings of the trip to B.C. Together, the findings and the narrative share some of the exchange experiences of the Ontario students. The next chapter will discuss the data and findings and explore the limitations and recommendations arising from the research.

Chapter 5. Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter considers the journeys taken during this research. The students' perceptions of the journeys taken during the exchange were shared in the previous chapters. They travelled, discovered a new place, made friends, learned about another culture and also learned about themselves. The school staff also expanded their capacities as they planned, hosted and travelled with their students. The narrative, "You can canoe without a paddle," offered a glimpse of my personal journey to the community. My experiences with these students allowed me to journey to an acceptance of my outsider/insider status growing up in a First Nations community.

This chapter also discusses the third research question which asked how this study could connect with current issues in First Nations' education. This study showed that a practice such as a reciprocal inter-community exchange has the possibility to enrich First Nations students and communities. This chapter concludes with the limitations and recommendations arising from this research.

Journeys

The students' journeys were not only physical and geographical, but also emotional and cultural. They left their familiar surroundings and ventured across the country. They went from a northern Ontario community to a community located on the coast of B.C. They ventured from relative isolation to an urban environment. For many youth this would not be a risky undertaking, but for most of these students it was an

uncertain and unpredictable experience. They were comfortable in their community of 800 and they were familiar with hunting and fishing in the bush; but navigating airports, city streets, malls and movie theatres was intimidating. Students were disoriented and temporarily separated from the group and items were misplaced, but they overcame these challenges. Their insecurity at leaving the safety net of the reserve probably led to the group cohesion that the staff observed when the Ontario students were in B.C. There was no teasing, put downs or fighting among the students. Faced with the unfamiliar, they were drawn to their friends, the chaperones and the outdoors.

The students were very interested in meeting other First Nations students. During the sharing circle all participants said that they preferred a First Nations to First Nations exchange. I observed that when the B.C. students arrived in the Ontario community there was an affinity between the two groups of students; once they got past the initial nervousness they were comfortable with each other. Student A mentioned during the sharing circle that he felt that the other First Nations students understood them. He explained that this meant that they understood the social issues such as family problems, poverty, drug abuse and discrimination. He also disclosed personal and family stories of prejudice and racism. He related how he felt that students from the school in town “stared down” those from the reserve and that they treated them as if they were going to steal or were involved in drugs and prostitution. The journey to a First Nations community

thousands of kilometers away may have been closer for these students than a journey to a mainstream school less than a hundred kilometers down the highway.

Many writers, researchers and elders have noted the connection that many First Nations peoples have with place (Guilar & Swallow, 2008; LaDuke, 2005; Wildcat, 2009). Their history was tied to the land; to the geography, resources, animals, birds and fish; these relationships also influenced their culture and spiritual understandings; and they continue to connect with the land (Gamlin, 2003; Roue, 2006; Shultz, Kelly & Weber-Pillwax, 2009). First Nations identity was, and often still is, tied to where they live.

The place-based identity of the First Nations students in this study also influenced what they observed during their journey to B.C. Their PowerPoint presentations highlighted nature. They directed their gaze toward landscapes and creatures which, although unique to B.C., were part of the natural environment. The photos of sea lions, a sea anemone, a starfish, a crab under a rock and a pretty little stream portrayed what they noticed. Initially, I was surprised at the attention to nature as I had expected that they would highlight the novel urban environment. Activities such as the movies, the arcade and shopping were the topic of conversation during their time in B.C. but were not discussed during the sharing circle.

Nature was a focus of their PowerPoint presentations but was not mentioned by any of the students during the sharing circle. Why were the pictures of nature chosen by

all of the participants for their presentations? If the presentations were the only source of data, it would appear that nature and seeing unique creatures and landscapes were the highlights of their trip. As I reviewed their presentations, I considered that perhaps their strong connection to the outdoors and nature at home led them to connect with these elements at their destination. This was corroborated in my discussion with a community member. She remembered all of the students' (B.C. and Ontario) strong interest in the outdoor cultural activities during the exchange activities. These pictures may also have been shown to contrast with the nature in their home environment. Others in the community would be interested to see them.

Nature also intersected with culture in the presentations. Student C in particular focused on remembered cultural activities: "We went for a trip up the mountains and the elder was telling some legends of the trees there." Student B concluded his presentations with a picture of a totem pole to represent the time spent with a carver in his workshop. This attention to nature was reflected in the sharing circle, not as nature per se, but in their discussion of culture. The B.C. elder shared his stories during experiences in nature; during a walk to a tidal stream and on a hike up the mountain. Student A's recollections of cultural teachings were of stories shared during these experiences. He also recalled that how the images were placed on the totem pole had cultural and spiritual significance. The participants reflected that "learning about another culture made me want to learn more about my own culture."

This identification with culture could have broader significance. Chandler and Lalonde (1998, 2008) studied the high rates of suicides among First Nations youth in B.C. They concluded that even though the suicide rates were alarming, the distribution varied among communities. Those communities that had stronger ties to their culture and language showed lower rates of suicide. Youth with a connection to their cultural identity were less likely to commit suicide than those youth with weaker ties to culture. Culture may not be the only reason for Chandler's findings as the results could also speak to the stronger relationships with elders and community members that youth with stronger connections to culture may have had. However, the fact that the youth in this study desired a stronger cultural connection also shows that pre-existing connections to culture and community can have an influence on their personal well-being (Riecken, Scott, & Tanaka, 2006). Consideration of the affect of the exchange on the youths' relationship to their culture leads to a discussion of the third research question.

Research Question Three

Could a small qualitative study speak to some of the broader issues in First Nations education and if so how? This qualitative study, involving First Nations youth from a remote Ontario reserve, can speak to some of the current issues in First Nations education in Canada. A qualitative study, though only relating the perspectives of a few participants, is able to provide an in-depth understanding of a topic. Educational research of significance to policy makers is often quantitative and based on statistics related to

achievement. *Hope or Heartbreak: Aboriginal Youth and Canada's Future* (2008) is a collection of research briefs published by the government of Canada which presents quantitative research related to the education and labour trajectories of Aboriginal youth. The research in the issue is informative, but is missing a portrayal of the thoughts and realities of the youth described. Most of the articles paint a bleak picture of the current education and labour prospects. The media, such as television, radio and newspapers often highlight stories of social dysfunction, communities with high suicide rates, and problems that First Nations youth on reserve face (Cazabon, 2010).

To understand the broad representations of the educational and social issues of these youth, we also need to hear their stories. The perspectives of the First Nations youth in this research study could add to the understanding of educational attainment and career aspirations of First Nations youth. The example of a practice such as a reciprocal exchange which encouraged and engaged these youth could stimulate other communities to seek out similar educational practices that would benefit their youth.

There is a saying that we “find what we are looking for.” Every day and in so many ways I found resilience, strengths and possibilities in these students. The insights shared by the participants in this study showed maturity and a depth of insight not often attributed to adolescents. Listening to these students share what was gained through this exchange and their dreams for the future revealed their hope and persistence in spite of many challenges. All of these participants' visions for the future included finishing

school. Two of the students also mentioned starting businesses in the community. Their revelations were in sharp contrast to the statistics which highlighted standardized assessments and statistics. Their desires to benefit the community were at odds with the media's continual focus on achieving personal success. Their strong desire for cultural connection could also inform the content and focus of First Nations schooling.

Racism and discrimination continue to be experienced by many First Nations students in Canada. However, when addressing the achievement gap these issues are not usually central to the conversation. Governments prefer to address assessment, resources and cultural teachings in their policies relating to Aboriginal education. Student A's raising of this issue during the sharing circle showed that adolescents could relate to, understand and would benefit from confronting these topics. Rather than planning only cultural activities such as stories, songs, dances, and crafts, would it be beneficial or counterproductive to spend time focusing on critical social issues with First Nations youth? This would be worthy of careful consideration and planning. The academic achievement gap between First Nations youth and mainstream students may not reflect on the capabilities of students, families and communities, but may also be indicative of systemic problems and the lack of opportunities caused in part by continued racism and discrimination. Could a focus on culture and enrichment also include a discussion of these concerns and remain a positive experience?

The influence of methodology and methods on findings.

The presentations recounted the daily activities while the participants were in B.C. The pictures showed nature, travelling, activities and photos of students with their peers; yet they all commented on the fact that making friends and learning about another culture were the highlights of their trip during the sharing circle. Why was there a discrepancy between what was shown and shared during the presentations and what was discussed during the sharing circle? Did the different methods influence what was revealed by the participants? Did the fact that the PowerPoint presentations were a class assignment constrain the information shared? Did the questions asked during the sharing circle limit the students' sharing; would the students have shared more or differently with a less constrained conversation? Were the presentations and sharing circles contradictory or complementary? When reflecting on these questions, I realized again how much the research methods could affect the data collected and the outcome of a study.

The pictures in the participants' presentations may have been chosen to share with their peers and community because they highlighted unique aspects of nature in B.C. that could resonate with the community's location surrounded by nature. The pictures may not have been meant to capture deep meanings, but only to offer glimpses of the week in B.C. The pictures showed activities, friends and places as well as nature; this is where we went; this is what we did. Perhaps the pictures were openings or visual cues, as Student A demonstrated, to stories of shared experiences. To be true to the presentations and

discussion, the visual images need to be considered in context rather than only as separate entities. Rather than photo elicitation, where the pictures are used as an opening for discussion between the participant and the researcher, each participant created a “photo story” by juxtaposing the visual, textual and oral narratives. The themes that emerged from the data were evident in these stories. Although each participant’s “photo story” revealed their unique vision and understanding, some of the photos chosen were identical or similar and the narratives overlapped. Together their presentations displayed the experiences of their shared journey.

The stories shared through the presentations were counterpoints to the thoughts disclosed in the sharing circle. Different layers of meaning relating to the same phenomenon were revealed by the different data sources. The pictures portrayed what was seen; the text and oral narrative disclosed events and feelings which were remembered; and the sharing circle exposed the underlying significance of the exchange experiences. In the sharing circle, with the focus on meaning and learning, the students revealed deeper connections and understandings than was seen or heard during their presentations. They discussed friendship, culture and dreams for the future. This study demonstrated that the multiple methods used did not replicate information, but created a space for thoughts and feelings that may have been hidden or ignored with only a single method. If the participants had only participated in a sharing circle would their strong affinity for gazing at and remembering nature have become visible? If the participants

had only created PowerPoint presentations would we know that making friends and learning about another culture were highlights for them? Together the different sources of data provided a more complete understanding of the exchange experiences for these First Nations students.

Limitations.

A small qualitative study of a single educational practice has obvious limitations. The advantage of a qualitative study, sharing in depth perspectives of a few participants, is also its greatest weakness. Such a study only reveals the insights of a few and may not be applicable beyond these participants. The results may have been different with other participants, or in a different location. The lessons learned may be true to the research participants but may not extend to others involved in the same activity or to others involved in similar experiences.

This research study examined the perspectives of Ontario First Nations students involved in a reciprocal inter-community exchange with B.C. First Nations students. The students shared their perspectives through PowerPoint presentations and during a sharing circle discussion. The data was gathered six weeks after the students returned home from B.C. So this study only shared the short term affects of the exchange on these students. Did the lessons learned through the exchange and the influences on motivation towards schooling extend beyond the immediate time frame of the exchange? Although the students' perspectives were informative, the influence of the exchange on their learning

and thinking would have been more visible if they could have shared their perspectives before the exchange activities as well as after it. Did the study reveal the understandings gained through the exchange or did these particular participants already have confidence and connect deeply with culture?

This study was limited to the perspectives shared by representative students from the Ontario group. These students were from an isolated reserve in northern Ontario. To expand our understanding of reciprocal exchanges for First Nations youth, it would have been beneficial to gain the perspectives of the students from the urban reserves in B.C. What did they gain from travelling to a remote First Nations community? Their viewpoints would have provided a broader understanding of the impact of reciprocal exchanges across the urban-rural dimensions. By including both of these dimensions, the study would have been more relevant in understanding youth exchanges in Canada. Were the results of this exchange similar or different to that of exchanges between diverse groups from mainstream schools?

SEVEC has commissioned surveys of past participants of reciprocal exchanges and published the information on its website (www.sevec.ca). The findings of this qualitative study were not analyzed with the same criteria used by previous survey research. Perhaps having these First Nations youth participate in a similar survey, or by using similar questions the results from this study could have been added to or compared with previous research.

A consideration of the limitations of the methods used also relates to the use of PowerPoint presentations and a sharing circle with open-ended questions as the primary data sources. Although I outlined my reasons for choosing these methods in earlier chapters, as I reflected on the findings, I speculated that a further session with the participants to explore their presentations and responses would have been valuable. I also wondered if the students would have revealed more in one-to-one in depth interviews than they did in these group sessions.

Some of the limitations of this study are also related to my identity. Throughout the study, I was conscious of my dual roles as teacher and researcher within the school and of my role as an outsider in the community. I tried to mitigate these factors by having the child and youth counselor facilitate the sharing circle. Although I had hoped for community involvement during data analysis to corroborate the themes that emerged, this was not possible. Sharing the findings with the community after the report was written limited significant input from community and staff members who were closely connected to the students and to culture. I acknowledge that my findings and interpretations may not be as valid without this timely input; however I hope that my conscious reflexivity and personal lived experiences growing up and living in a First Nations community added some depth. These limitations need to be recognized by those reviewing this study, but should not detract from the value of the information gained.

Recommendations.

This reciprocal inter-community exchange enriched the education of these First Nations students and similar exchanges have the potential to benefit many First Nations students in Canada. This study showed that it was viable, accessible and valuable. Currently, the travelling expenses incurred during a reciprocal exchange are funded for accepted groups by the Canadian government through agencies such as SEVEC. Underfunded and isolated First Nations communities should take advantage of such opportunities for expanding the educational opportunities of their students. Increased experience with these exchanges could forge connections between First Nations communities across Canada; rural and urban and also those from diverse geographic, cultural and linguistic regions. Developing networks among First Nations and indigenous groups are important to building strong First Nations leaders for the future.

The participants in this study recommended First Nations to First Nations reciprocal exchanges. However reciprocal exchanges with public schools could foster acceptance and understanding between students. When asked how to counter prejudice and discrimination, Student A suggested that friendly encounters between individuals would be a beginning. Students participating together in sports and activities could start to change attitudes and practices for all involved. A reciprocal exchange between First Nations and mainstream youth could encourage connections between diverse groups and foster a different perspective of First Nations issues for other Canadian youth.

When a First Nations community develops or uses an educational practice which is beneficial for their students they should share it with other schools and communities. Too often First Nations schools in their isolation do not have access to the successful ideas and practices used by others. They do not have the money, time or resources to develop the programs needed to encourage their youth. First Nations leaders across Canada need to collaborate to share positive and proven initiatives. The pictures and ideas shared by these research participants could inspire other First Nations youth to participate in an exchange and to expand their dreams and possibilities. The lessons learned by the staff that planned this exchange would be useful for other First Nations schools planning a similar exchange.

SEVEC provides information that shares how to plan a successful exchange, how to include at-risk students, how to involve the community and how to produce and share a video of your community with your exchange partners (www.sevec.ca). First Nations staff and students who have been involved in a successful reciprocal exchange, such as this one was, could add to this information and share their knowledge to assist other First Nations schools and communities planning such a venture.

Our students tried to connect with their exchange peers prior to their exchange visit. They sent letters, but they did not receive replies until a few days before the students arrived. That the school in B.C. was involved in the Winter Olympics probably influenced their lack of involvement before their trip. A strong commitment by both First

Nations communities involved in an exchange prior to the journeys would add to the benefits of the exchange. Students could connect via the Internet and share school related projects as well as informal information. The exchange could affect engagement, motivation and achievement for students from the first day of school. Both schools and communities could share goals and expectations to facilitate enhanced learning opportunities. Youth involved in an exchange should also have an opportunity to share their opinions and ideas. These research participants all recommended the reciprocal exchange and offered thoughtful suggestions for improvements.

Conclusion

Experiences, like this reciprocal exchange, which facilitated cultural connections and understandings for First Nations youth, should be promoted and encouraged. I once read that “students will be engaged with school when school is an engaging place to be.” To address the achievement gap and to raise achievement levels, perhaps an experiential education practice such as a reciprocal inter-community exchange would help school to be more relevant and meaningful for First Nations students.

This study showed that First Nations youth should have a voice in determining the usefulness of a program or practice. They also demonstrated a depth of understanding of core issues such as the importance of building relationships, connecting with culture, expanding horizons and combating racism and prejudice. The value of educational experiences and programs should not be measured solely by looking at numerical results

such as grades or days in school but equally the effects on the student's confidence, and dreams for the future.

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Appendix A The Highlights of My Trip
Student PowerPoint Project May 2010

Assignment:

Using pictures you have taken and/or pictures taken by others, you are to create a slideshow (PowerPoint) presentation showing the highlights of the trip.

- Choose a **minimum of 4 pictures and a maximum of 10 pictures** to create your PowerPoint.
- **Give each picture a caption** which tells something about the picture or why you chose the picture. Put the caption on or under the picture or on the slide before or after the picture.
- It is optional to add special effects or music to your slide show.
- This assignment will be part of your media studies mark.
- With your consent, Mrs. Hewitt will be using your slideshows and the discussion about them for her research.

These slide shows will be created during class periods in the computer lab during the week of May 10 -14th. You will receive a lesson on how to create a PowerPoint.

You will present your completed slide show to the class by May 28th.

We will also be presenting a large group slide show and/or these slide shows to the school and community at some later date.

Appendix B Ethics Clearance Letter

January 25, 2010

Ms. Judith Hewitt
Faculty of Education
McArthur Hall
Queen's University

GREB Ref #: GEDUC-680-09
Title: "Engaging First Nations Youth Through Reciprocal Intercommunity Exchange"

Dear Ms. Hewitt:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a full board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "Engaging First Nations Youth Through Reciprocal Intercommunity Exchange" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPG) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (article D.1.6) and Senate Terms of Reference (article G), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB, of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (details available on webpage <http://www.queens.ca/rs/researchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html> - Adverse Event Report Form). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes in study procedures or implementations of new aspects into the study procedures on the Ethics Change Form that can be found at <http://www.queens.ca/rs/researchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html> - Research Ethics Change Form. These changes must be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services or irvingg@queens.ca prior to implementation. Mrs. Irving will forward your request for protocol changes to the appropriate GREB reviewers and / or the GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,



Joan Stevenson, PhD
Professor and Chair
General Research Ethics Board

c.c.: Dr. Elizabeth Lee, Faculty Supervisor
Dr. Malcolm Welch, Chair, Unit REB
E-REB: c/o Graduate Studies & Bureau of Research, Attn.: Celina Freitas

J5/Kr



Appendix C Letters of Consent for Band Council



FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Duncan McArthur Hall
Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada K7L 3N6

Engaging First Nations through Reciprocal Inter-community Exchange
Active consent form for Band Council and Chief, and School Board

Please sign and keep a copy of this form for your records. Return the other signed copy to the researcher, Mrs. Judy Hewitt.

This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines, and Queen's policies.

We have read and discussed the information letter regarding the research study **Engaging First Nations through Reciprocal Inter-community Exchange**. We understand that the purpose of the study is to explore First Nations youths' representations of themselves as learners before and after participating in a reciprocal intercommunity exchange..

We are being asked to give consent on this form for our students to participate in this research study. We can withdraw our community from the study at any time without any consequences and request the removal of all or part of the data at this time. All students in the grade 8 class will participate in the Photo Voice activities but only the first 6 students who consent and have parental permission to participate in the study will have their data analyzed for research. The students will be reminded of their rights to withdraw without penalty throughout the research study. Withdrawing will not affect their participation in the exchange, class activities or any class evaluations. If they withdraw, their data will be removed from the study immediately.

We understand that as part of the research our students will take pictures, create Power Points, and participate in one 45 - 60 minute digitally audio recorded sharing session facilitated by the child and youth worker and observed by the researcher.

We understand that the researcher will protect the privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of the students and community to the extent possible by replacing names with pseudonyms and removing identifying information. Permission of any subjects in photos will be obtained.

Digital recordings and digital copies of photos will be stored on the researcher's password protected hard drive. Transcripts, researcher notes and will be kept in a secure filing cabinet and later stored at Queen's University for five years and then destroyed.

We understand that we can contact Mrs. Judy Hewitt, the principal researcher or her Faculty Advisor Dr. Elizabeth Lee (jmhqueens@gmail.com or Elizabeth.lee@queensu.ca) at any time with questions about study participation. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at Queens' University, Dr. Joan Stevenson 613-533-6081 (chair.GREB@queensu.ca).

We show our consent by initialing and signing the consent form on the next page.



Engaging First Nations through Reciprocal Inter-community Exchange

Active consent form for Band Council and Chief, and School Board

Date: _____

[] We consent to have our students participate in this research study

[] We do **not** consent to have our students participate in this research study.

Please print and sign your name(s):

Appendix D Letter of Information for Parents



Letter of Information for Parents/Guardians and Community Members for the research study **Engaging First Nations Youth through Intercommunity Reciprocal Exchange**. This study was granted clearance by the General Research Ethics Board for compliance with the TCPS: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans, and Queen's policies.

This is an invitation for your child to participate in the research study: **Engaging First Nations Youth through Reciprocal Intercommunity Exchange**.

The goal of this research study is to illuminate First Nations youths' vision of their learning journey and to explore the exchange experience which may encourage them to be more engaged with learning.

Your child is a member of the grade 8 class which is participating in a SEVEC exchange trip during this school year. All grade 8 students will also be participating in a Photo-voice project. Photo- Voice has been used by many teachers and researchers as a way for participants to share their understandings. Creating Power Points allows participants to reflect carefully and organize their information. Sharing circles are a way to allow everyone an equal opportunity to talk and listen. These positive experiences will be available to all students in the class

The research will involve 4-6 participants who will participate in 1 additional 45 - 60 minute small group sharing circle facilitated by the Child and Youth Worker and observed by the researcher before the class sharing of the Power Points. This will give these participants the opportunity to develop confidence and to share in greater depth their understandings of the exchange experiences. Those research participants without access to a digital camera will be able to borrow one from the researcher. These circles will be digitally audio recorded so that the researcher can later listen to the stories and transcribe (write) them. Copies of these students' Power Points, notes and the transcription of the circles will be used as research data for the study.

There should be no risk for your child to participate in this research. Their participation is completely voluntary and they decide what to share in the sharing circle with their peers and the researcher. The pictures and Power Points created belong to the students. All participants have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty of any kind. If they withdraw their data would be removed from the study immediately.



Letter of Information for Parents/Guardians and Community Members for the research study **Engaging First Nations Youth through Intercommunity Reciprocal Exchange**

The data used for analysis (Power Points, digital audio recordings, and transcriptions) will be kept on the researcher's password protected computer or hard drive. Printed data will be stored in a secure location during the study. All data will be kept at Queen's university at a secure location for 5 years after the study is completed and then it will be destroyed. Only the researcher and her supervisors will have access to the data.

The research results will become part of my Master's of Education thesis and may later be shared with others in conference presentations and/or journal articles. I will share a summary report of the research after my thesis defense with the Band Council and School Board and submit a copy of any article written to the community. I will also share with these students an informal version of this research.

I look forward to discussing any concerns that you might have about this research project. If you have any questions do not hesitate to call me or email me (jmhqueens@gmail.com or 705-463-1199) or contact my Faculty Advisor Dr. Elizabeth Lee at Elizabeth.lee@queensu.ca. Any ethical concerns about this study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at Queen's University, Dr. Joan Stevenson, 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca.

Yours sincerely,
Mrs. Judy Hewitt
Master's of Education candidate
Queen's University.

Appendix E Letter of Information and Consent for Student Participants



Letter of Information and Consent form for Student Participants

Please read carefully, return a signed copy to the researcher, Mrs. Judy Hewitt and keep a copy for yourself.

Engaging First Nations Youth through Intercommunity Reciprocal Exchange

This study was granted clearance by the General Research Ethics Board for compliance with the TCPS; Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans, and Queen's policies

This research is being conducted by Mrs. Judy Hewitt under the supervision of Dr. Elizabeth Lee, Department of Education at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario.

The purpose of this research is to illuminate First Nations youths' vision of their learning journey and to explore the exchange experience which may encourage them to be more engaged with learning. The study will require you to participate in 2 sharing circles 45 – 60 minutes in length facilitated by the school's child and youth worker and observed by the researcher. You will share your Power Point showing "My Life as a Learner" which you have created as part of the class Photo Voice project in this circle and discuss this topic with the other participants. These sharing circles will be digitally audio recorded so that the researcher can transcribe them. There are no known physical, psychological, economic, or social risks associated with this study.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You will decide what to share in the circle. You may also withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your standing in school.

What will happen to this data? Your privacy and confidentiality and will be protected to the extent possible. Your information will only be identified to others with a pseudonym or number. The researcher and her immediate supervisor will have access to this information. If anyone helps to transcribe or interpret the data they will sign a confidentiality form. The researcher will keep all data on her password protected computer or hard drive and in a secure location until the study is complete. After the data has been in the study it will be kept in a secure location at Queen's University for 5 years and then destroyed. The research data will be used in my master's of education thesis. An informal copy of the report will be presented to the students and community after the thesis has been defended. The data may also be published in professional journals or presented at scientific conferences, but any such presentations will be of general findings and will never breach individual confidentiality.

What if I have concerns? In the event that you have any concerns, or questions about this research, please feel free to contact Mrs. Judy Hewitt at jmh@queensu@gmail.com or her thesis supervisor, Dr. Elizabeth Lee at Elizabeth.Lee@queensu.com, or the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board (533-6081) at Queen's University.

If you agree to participate in this research study and to allow a copy of your Power Point, journal notes and transcribed comments from the 2 sharing circles to be used as data, please indicate your consent by signing this form and returning it to the researcher.

I, _____

consent to participate in the study.

do NOT consent to participate in the study.

Signed: _____ Date: _____



Letter of Information and Consent form for Student Participants

Please read carefully, return a signed copy to the researcher, Mrs. Judy Hewitt and keep a copy for yourself.

Engaging First Nations Youth through Intercommunity Reciprocal Exchange

This study was granted clearance by the General Research Ethics Board for compliance with the TCPS: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans, and Queen's policies

Release form for use of student's photographs and Power Points.

Date: _____

By participating in the research study entitled "Engaging youth through reciprocal intercommunity exchange" I have agreed to allow the researcher to use a copy of my Power Point and my discussion of these pictures in the 2 small group sharing circles as data for analysis. I understand that the researcher will keep a copy of the Power Points for this purpose and that they will remain in a secure location and that the information is kept private and confidential.

I will allow my pictures to also be shared in presentations. Yes No

I will allow my pictures to also be shared in publications or reports. Yes No

Please initial the above checklist and then sign this form. Keep one copy for yourself and return one copy with your signed consent form.

Signed _____

Date _____

Appendix F Letter of Information for Band Council



Letter of Information for Band Councils, School Boards and Schools for the research study **Engaging First Nations Youth through Intercommunity Reciprocal Exchange**.

This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines, and Queen's policies.

My research study, **Engaging First Nations Youth through Intercommunity Reciprocal Exchange** is designed to explore a practice which may encourage First Nations youth to be more engaged with learning.

This qualitative study will use photo voice, which gives students cameras to capture images of their reality for the purpose of critical reflection and dialogue. As well, symbol creation using the pictures taken to create a Power Point, and sharing circles will allow the participants to discuss their stories and visions of their learning journey before and after their exchange experience.

I welcome your advice, guidance and ongoing partnership in this study.

- As your community and school are planning a cultural exchange through SEVEC for the grade 7 and 8 classes during the 2009 – 2010 school year, students from these classes will be invited to participate in the research study. The students will be presented with information during a class meeting and the parents will be presented with information at a parents' information session. The first 6 students to return signed consent forms will be the research participants in the study.
- All students in the grade 8 class will be participating in a PhotoVoice project (www.photovoice.ca) to take pictures of the exchange experiences. PhotoVoice has been used with students of this age group by many researchers, and empowers the participants to share their visions and thoughts with others. It also has been shown to help students focus on learning. The class will be given lessons on: the use of the camera, using pictures to represent ideas, the ethics and responsibilities involved in sharing photos, and using a storyboard to create a Power Point. Students who do not have access to a digital camera will be able to borrow one for this project. Students will choose 4 – 10 of their pictures to use to create a storyboard and a Power Point to share their exchange experiences.
- Prior to the class sharing circle, the research participants will present and discuss their Power Points in a 45 minute sharing circle which will be facilitated by the Child and Youth Worker and observed by the researcher. This sharing circle will not take place during class time and will be digitally audio recorded for transcription purposes. The Power Points and transcriptions will be analyzed by the researcher for patterns and themes relating to the students' understandings of what was important during the



exchange experiences. The researcher may have a school staff member review the analysis and coding to corroborate the interpretations. Anyone involved in transcription or data review will sign a form of confidentiality.

- There should be no risk for students to participate in this research. The students are free to choose how much information to share with their peers and the researcher in the sharing circles. The confidentiality of the participants will be protected to the extent possible; the data will be identified by pseudonyms or numbers instead of names and photographs in which people can be identified will have the consent of all parties in order to be used. If these photos are used in presentations or publications, additional permission will be obtained beforehand.
- All students will be reminded of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or consequence. If any participant decides to withdraw their data will be deleted and destroyed immediately.

I am also hired as a part time special education teacher at the school. I will keep my role as teacher separate from my role as a researcher. Research will not happen during my work as a teacher. The information gathered as part of the research (photos, collages, recordings of student discussions) will only be shared with my supervisor.

All research information will be kept in a secure location; the data for analysis will be stored on my password protected computer and hard drive, and written documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. After the study is complete, data will be stored at a secure location at Queen's University for 5 years and then it will be destroyed.

The results of this research will be written as part of my Queen's University Master's of Education thesis. I will present a summary report to the band council and school board after the defense of my thesis.

I look forward to discussing this project with you and including your students in the research project. If you have any questions, please call the researcher, Mrs. Judy Hewitt, Master's of Education student, Queen's University, 705-463-1199 or email: jmhqueens@gmail.com or my supervisor Dr. Elizabeth Lee by email at Elizabeth.lee@queensu.ca. For questions, concerns, or complaints about the research ethics of this study, contact the Education Research Ethics Board at creb@queensu.ca or the chair of the General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Joan Stevenson 613-533-6081 (chair.greb@queensu.ca).

Yours sincerely,
Mrs. Judy Hewitt
Master's of Education candidate
Queen's University.

Appendix G Letter of Consent for Parents



FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Duncan McArthur Hall
Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada K7L 3N6

Judy Hewitt:

Appendix D: Parent/Guardian Consent Form

Please read this form carefully and if you are in agreement please sign both copies. Keep one copy for your records and return the second copy to Mr. Leo Grezla (acting principal).

My child is involved in the SEVEC exchange project sponsored by the school. I understand that my child is also invited to participate in the research study *Engaging First Nations youth through Reciprocal Inter-community Exchange* being run by Judy Hewitt. I understand that the purpose of this study is to explore First Nations youths' understandings and engagement with learning while participating in this SEVEC exchange with another Canadian First Nations group.

All students in the class will be involved in the photo-voice project which includes taking pictures, creating collages and discussing them during a sharing circle. The collages and discussions will focus on the students' stories of themselves as learners. Photo-voice has been used by teachers and researchers to help participants talk about their experiences. Creating collages allows participants to reflect carefully and organize their information. Sharing circles are a way to allow everyone an equal opportunity to talk and listen. These positive experiences will be available to all students in the class and I understand that Judy Hewitt will not know which students have consented to participate in her study and which have not until after the exchange and the related activities are over.

I understand that there is minimal risk to my child from this research. If my child has any concerns or is distressed in any way the school counselor will be available for a private conversation.

I understand that if I give my consent, a copy of my child's photos, collages and transcribed statements will be analyzed as part of data for the researcher's study.

I also understand that I can freely withdraw consent at any time by writing a note and giving it to the acting principal, Mr. Leo Grezla to include with the research study information. There will be no penalty or consequence for withdrawing my child from the study and their photos, information or statements will not be used as data in the research study.

I understand that the researcher will present her findings to the students, parents and the community before any other publication or presentation of this study.



I understand that I can contact Mrs. Judy Hewitt, the principal researcher or her Faculty Advisor Ms. Jackie Moore (jmhqueens@gmail.com or Jackie.moore@queensu.ca, 1-800-862-6701 at any time with questions about study participation. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at Queens' University, Dr. Joan Stevenson 613-533-6081 chair.GREB@queensu.ca

Please check one of the following statements and fill-in your child's name.

I consent to have _____ participate in this research study.

I do not consent to have _____ participate in this research study.

Name: _____ Date : _____

Signed: _____