

**FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS
PERSPECTIVES OF THEIR
EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE**

**A Thesis Submitted to the College of
Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Education
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the perspectives of First Nations students regarding their educational experience. Communication with seven First Nations students was conducted over a period of one month using in-depth interviews and dialogue journals. The sample of participants was drawn from three high schools in the Saskatoon Public School Division. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour. Through the in-depth interviews and the dialogue journals participants were asked to reflect on the following questions:

1. What are the profiles of First Nations students in the Saskatoon Public high schools in Saskatoon?
2. What levels of involvement they have within school?
3. What personal and career goals they have?
4. What school programs or processes are enabling them to achieve their goals?
5. What family and community support they receive?
6. What changes they think need to be made to improve First Nations students' educational opportunities and/or benefits

Findings

Participants in this study believe that education is necessary for them to be successful in their future. The literature review and the interviews indicate that attendance and enrolment patterns for First Nations people are improving. The participants identified that there continues to be a need for Aboriginal teachers at the high school level. First Nations students continue to experience racism from some non-Native teachers and peers. It was found that the parental and community support is inconsistent in the lives of these 7 First Nations students. Some participants were raised in single parent homes and their knowledge of and interest in their cultural background varies. In conclusion the participants believe that they must take responsibility for the choices they make in their lives.

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DEDICATION

It is with gratitude and respect that I dedicate this thesis
to the First Nations students who shared
their educational experience and their family history

and to my mother

Marie Louise Hounjet

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

My interest in the study of the education of minority students stems from two sources: (a) the curiosity I have about my mother's educational experience and the silence she keeps about her upbringing and (b) my own experiences as an elementary school teacher. My maternal grandparents were Cree and German. My grandfather was German, he died when Mother was 12 years old. At that time, my great aunt, Sister Therese Arcand and the parish priest thought it would be best if Mother and two of her brothers were sent to an orphanage. When my mother was 16 years old, my grandmother died. Being the eldest in her family, Mother tried to raise her six siblings with the help of my uncle, but it was too much for them. The extended family intervened, and the siblings were separated and placed in homes with friends and family. Eventually some were placed at a boarding school in Edmonton, others moved to British Columbia, and my mother eventually married. One of my uncles has not seen his youngest sister in 50 years. When I ask Mom about her father, she simply says, "let sleeping dogs lie."

Last summer I travelled with my mother and father to Leoville, Saskatchewan, to visit my grandmother's grave. This is the closest my mother has allowed me to get to her past. She speaks positively about her experience in the orphanage. She speaks of working hard and of the fair treatment of students who conformed to the school's expectations. Mom

spent 4 years in this institution, but these are the only details she has shared with her children.

I started my post secondary education after the birth of my two children. My husband worked in the oil fields in Alberta. This was seasonal work, and he was often unemployed during the winter. When we realized that a second income was needed, I chose to go into teaching. I have been teaching Grades 1 to 8 for thirteen years. During this time, I have had the opportunity to teach students from many ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. These students came to school expecting that their teacher knew how to teach all children, and I came out of university also believing this. However, such was not the case. I was very naive about other cultures and had developed little cultural sensitivity. I taught all children as if they came from the same background. What was good for the dominant society was good for the minority children in the classroom. Fortunately, my students and their parents quickly changed my mind. I was soon inviting resource people from different cultures to present material that would make school more meaningful for the minority students. The enthusiasm that all students demonstrated toward this type of learning was exciting. These experiences led me to observe more carefully how other teachers worked with minority students, in particular, First Nations students. I came to realize that many teachers were struggling with the same problems. They lacked the skills, knowledge and the sensitivity necessary to teach and communicate effectively with First Nations or minority students in general.

My lack of ability in educating First Nations students led me to attend all the inservices dealing with the issues of minority education that the school division offered; however, these were few in number. I then became a member of the Indian and Metis Education Committee. Through the work on this committee I learned of the available teaching resources which I could use

to teach about the history of Aboriginal people. As well I had the opportunity to work with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers who taught Aboriginal students. Finally, I learned of our systems efforts to improve the experiences of teachers of Aboriginal students and of their efforts to improve the educational experience of Aboriginal students. Although this was helpful, I needed more and so did my students. After a one-year educational leave, in which I pursued my Masters Degree in Education in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Saskatchewan, I was placed in a Community School in Saskatoon. The enrolment of Aboriginal students in this school was approximately 65%. Some Aboriginal students came to school weeks after school opening in September and the 9 o'clock bell did not seem to apply to them. They would frequently miss school to visit relatives, to take care of siblings or to attend traditional ceremonies. Some parents were reluctant to come into the school. Therefore during the reporting periods teachers would deliver report cards to homes in order to speak to the parents about their child's progress. Home visits were also made if we needed documents signed or if a student had difficulty following our school expectations. However, when children were involved in a special performance, such as the Christmas concert, parents and relatives would fill the gymnasium. I enjoyed learning about First Nations culture, however my experience at this school confirmed for me how little I knew about the history and the educational experience of First Nations people.

The Problem

One of the primary functions of education is the socialization of the young. This has two aims: (a) to explain to the individual members of a community who they are, who their people are, and how they relate to other peoples and to the physical world and (b) to train young people in the skills

they will need to be successful and productive (Miller, 1996). This implies that education or knowledge should include a historical perspective, as well as the students' point of view, and be selected and constructed in relationship to the students' desires, visions, descriptions of reality, and repertoires of action (Sleeter & Grant, 1991). However, in schools, the source of curriculum has often had very little to do with the students. Students who succeed in school, experience a meshing or overlapping between the knowledge taught in school and the knowledge that has personal meaning to them (Sleeter & Grant, 1991). As Cummins (1986) explains, "they participate competently in instruction as a result of having developed a confident cultural identity as well as appropriate school-based knowledge and interactional structures" (p. 32).

Generally, teachers do not intentionally discriminate against First Nations students, but through their teaching methods and interactions, they demonstrate the priorities and values of the dominant society in the school and in the classroom. For example, they model exterior authority rather than kin and personal authority; learning by telling and questioning instead of observation and example; clock time instead of personal, social, and natural time; rules exalted above people and feelings; monolingual teachers; alien standards; ignorance of cultural meanings and non-verbal messages; individual more than group tasks; and convergent thinking. All these are structural features that undermine the Native child's culture (Hampton, 1995, p. 38). The values reinforced by the teacher, the inclusion or exclusion of Aboriginal materials and perspectives in the course, the type of interaction in the classroom, and the relationship between teachers and parents will all affect the comfort of the Aboriginal student (RCAP, 1996). Far too few Indian students have contact with Indian educators who are attuned to their culture and who can serve as models of educational achievement (Edwards & Smith

1981, cited in Hampton, 1995). In traditional communities, the teacher is often chosen by the population and feels her or his job to be a calling comparable to that of a priest. They live in awareness that they are cultural role models for students (Stairs, 1996). Stairs also concludes that the culture-based approach to Native education recognizes that teachers bring with them knowledge and culturally patterned ways of organizing and passing on that knowledge, such as teaching language through conversation, storytelling, and talking while doing. They strive to make the school a significant part of the students' life.

In 1972 the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) produced a policy statement "Indian Control of Indian Education." It recognized the failure of Federal, provincial and territorial governments to implement appropriate policies to address First Nations goals for education, (RCAP, 1996). Since the Federal government's acceptance of this policy paper First Nations communities, parents and educators have urged the development of teaching methods, programs, strategies, and styles to improve the academic achievements of First Nations students. The intent of this focus is to involve actively First Nations students in their own learning and, in turn, to continue to address the under achievement that First Nations students experience in school. Schooling, in its organization and content, can encourage students to become active, engaged Aboriginal citizens and leaders (RCAP, 1996).

Many researchers, such as Battiste (1995), Hampton (1995), Haig-Brown (1988), Henderson (1995), Miller (1996), have studied the history of First Nations peoples' education and its effects, however, little written information is available about how First Nations students, especially among those attending high school perceive their educational experience.

Background to the Problem

The education of First Nations people has been characterized by five distinct influences: (a) Traditional Indian education; (b) Indian education under the obligations of the treaties (c) Indian education as a technique of assimilation into the dominant society (Barman, Hébert & McCaskill, 1986); (d) Indian Control of Indian education; and (e) the current emphasis on creating Indian Education *sui generis* (Hampton, 1995).

Traditionally First Nations people taught their children holistically. It was a comprehensive experience and a family obligation not a separate function (Henderson, 1995). Elders and parents taught children how to manage and prosper in harmony with the environment. Education occurred within cultural settings with communities as their classrooms (Henderson, 1995). Their teaching methodologies included oral histories, teaching stories, ceremonies, apprenticeships, learning games, formal instruction, tutoring, and tag-along teaching (Buffalohead 1976, cited in Hampton 1995). Children had many opportunities to observe adult role models who exemplified the knowledge, skills, and values being taught (Hampton, 1995, p. 8) and education took place in an atmosphere of warmth and affection (Barman, Hébert, & McCaskill, 1986).

The arrival of the European settlers in the early sixteenth century revised the control that Indian people had over the education of their children. Between 1867 to 1880, various treaties were signed which delegated educational responsibility of Indian children to the Crown. The Crown in turn transferred administrative authority to the Federal Government under the Indian Act 1876. From this act the Federal government assumed total control of First Nations children and their education on all reserves in Canada (Henderson, 1995). The Federal government used education as a technique of assimilating Indians into the dominant society (Barman, Hébert

& McCaskill, 1986). Through religious instruction, education became the process of transforming the mind of Aboriginal youth (Battiste & Barman, 1995), controlling the lives of Native people spiritually and socially (Haig-Brown, 1988), rather than educating them (Battiste, 1995). The rationale was that if First Nations children could experience a curriculum emulating white society, they would adopt the values and incentives underlying such a system and gradually integrate into that society (Friesen, 1983).

First Nations families strongly resisted the education practices of the government and the Church. By 1972, the NIB issued a position paper calling for Indian Control of Indian Education (Barman, Hébert & McCaskill, 1986). Within this policy the Federal government was reminded of its obligation concerning the education of Indian people. However, the main thrust of the policy was to urge the Federal Government to allow First Nations peoples to control their own children's education, as "only Indian people can develop a suitable philosophy of education based on Indian values adapted to modern living." NIB affirmed Indian children must be given "a strong sense of identity, with confidence in their own personal worth and ability," a process best undertaken when Indian bands exercise "full responsibility in providing the best possible education for our children" (Barman, Hébert & McCaskill, 1986, p. 15). In 1972 the Federal government accepted this policy of Indian Control and since then much progress in the education of First Nations children is now occurring. *Sui generis* is the most recent focus of Indian Education. It is understood as First Nations education as 'a thing of its own kind' (National Advisory Council on Indian Education 1983, cited in Hampton, 1996), a self-determined First Nations Education using models of education structured by First Nations peoples. It fosters the development of First Nations methods and First Nations structures, as well as Aboriginal content and Aboriginal personnel (Hampton, 1995). It indicates the desire for

First Nations people to be self-defining, to have their ways of life respected, and to teach their children in a manner that enhances consciousness of being an First Nations or Aboriginal and a fully participating citizen (Hampton, 1995, p. 10).

First Nations education has progressed since the signing of the treaties. The review of the history and the direction education is taking has developed an interest and a need to explore how First Nations high school students attending school in the Saskatoon Public School Division perceive their educational experience.

Need for the Study

Prior research by Regnier (1995), Battiste (1995), Haig-Brown (1988), Clearly (1998), has been conducted involving the parents, teachers and schools of First Nations children. This research has affirmed Aboriginal parents and grandparents want to prepare their children for stronger academic performances. They want to see early identification of children with special needs, provision of appropriate care, and parent education in the community. They see early childhood education as a means of reinforcing Aboriginal identity, instilling the values, attitudes, and behaviours that give expression to Aboriginal cultures (RCAP, 1996). However, teachers are not being adequately prepared for their experiences with First Nations students. John Taylor (1996), a teacher in two band-operated schools, reports that there was no support or direction available to new, non-Native teachers about culturally appropriate teaching methods and materials. Clearly & Peacock (1998), have listened to and shared the stories of teachers dealing with American Indian education: in particular how their education has been, how it is, and how it might be (Clearly & Peacock, 1998, p.1). Celia Haig-Brown, Jo Ann Archibald, Robert Regnier and Kathy Vermette (1995), in their

technical report Making the Spirit Dance Within have asked students to speak about the program and atmosphere at the Joe Duquette high school. The students appreciate the support of the teachers, the contact with Elders, and the opportunity to participate in traditional customs. However, First Nations students attending high school in the Saskatoon Public School Division have had little opportunity to speak about their educational experience, voice their opinions, or state their needs. In order for educators to better understand First Nations students, they must listen to their personal experiences and to their views on education. The information gained from their stories may provide the knowledge that will enable educators to review and develop programs that are relevant to the First Nations students. This study will give the students the opportunity to tell of their experiences and to tell educators, what their perspectives are. It will also provide educators with insight into their roles and responsibilities in the education of First Nations people.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the educational experiences of seven First Nations students attending high school in the Saskatoon Public School Division. It seeks to explain those aspects of schooling that First Nations students identify as contributing to, and detracting from, their academic achievement and their sense of self-esteem. Specifically, this study examines their positive and negative experiences, their thoughts, feelings, and dreams, as well as their advice for their families, peers, and for future educators of First Nations people as they seek to help First Nations students succeed. Through interviews with seven First Nations students and through their dialogue journals, this study sought, to answer among the seven First Nations students the following questions:

1. What are the profiles of First Nations students in the Saskatoon public high schools?
2. What personal and career goals do they have?
3. What levels of involvement do they have within school?
4. What school programs or processes are enabling them to achieve their goals?
5. What family and community support do they receive?
6. What changes do they think need to be made to improve their educational opportunities and benefits?

Researcher's Story

I was born and raised in the tiny French community of St. Denis, east of Saskatoon. We were a family of eight children. We did not have a lot of money for material possessions, but we had the support of our family. My father is French Canadian and a strong believer in the Roman Catholic faith. My mother is Metis. When she met my father, she spoke only English, but learned the French language in order to survive living in a French community. Like my father, she also believes in the ideals of the Roman Catholic church.

We attended the local community school, which consisted of five little one-room school houses situated only a few meters from the church. It was run by the nuns and the community. If we had a school board, I was never aware of its presence in our school. I don't remember the bus rides very much, but I do remember my days at school. The girls were expected to wear dresses, even on those cold winter mornings. When we arrived at school, we would go through our morning routine of prayers and hygiene inspection. My fingernails did not always pass inspection. With eight kids getting ready for school in the morning, getting the animals fed, and the cows milked before breakfast, there was always something overlooked.

In school, I always felt somewhat different from the other students, but I did not know what made me different. I had a number of theories, but to this day, I can only speculate on why our family was somewhat different from the rest of the families in the community. I thought maybe it was because we did not have a telephone, television, or running water or that we lived on the north side of the highway. We spoke both English and French, and I knew my prayers in both languages. Maybe it was because my mother was not French Canadian. At this time I had not realized that she looked different too. Her skin was darker and her eyes had a bit of a slant to them. Her Metis ancestry was very apparent in her looks. It was not until I was much older, however, that my sister told me that my mother had some Aboriginal blood. I didn't want to believe her because by then I had internalized that being Aboriginal was a negative characteristic. We never talked about Aboriginal people at home or at school. I felt, however, that to be part Aboriginal in our community could make us different.

Our educational program was taught to us entirely in French with a half hour of English instruction whenever the teachers felt like it, so it seemed. We were not allowed to speak English at school. We would lose our recesses if the nuns heard us practising English. Some of my siblings had a difficult time learning. I remember being in the same classroom as one of my older brothers. The teacher would get so angry with him if he did not understand an assignment or get all his work done. She would yell and scream at him, and if that didn't satisfy her, she would kick him to make him cry. Then she would send him to the principal's classroom. I did not know what would happen to him there; I did not want to know. School in this little community was not a happy place for those who had difficulty learning and for those who were bilingual. At school, we were intimidated by some of the teachers, alienated from some of our peers, and not encouraged to develop our own

identities. In many ways, I can relate our educational experience to those of the First Nations people. Being at home was comforting, as we felt protected, loved, and accepted. Of the eight children in our family, five of them dropped out before Grade 10. My sister Helen persevered and completed high school at the age of twenty-one. My sister Terry received her diploma in the Youth Care program at Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Arts and Science, and I received a Bachelor of Education degree at the University of Saskatchewan.

It is my opinion that the experience of many minorities are similar to that of my story. The isolation I experienced from my peers and the ill-treatment of my siblings by their teachers continue to happen in today's classrooms. What do educators need to do in order to enhance the educational experience of minority students in the classrooms.

Assumptions

1. First Nations students can articulate their goals, visions, and the obstacles to their success.
2. Teachers can gain from the experiences and perceptions of seven First Nations students.
3. First Nations students relate better to teachers of the same cultural background.

Definitions of Terms

In this study the following terms are of significance:

Aboriginal person is any original, indigenous or first peoples of an area. The earliest inhabitants of a country, in this sense the term Native may be used as well (Price, 1991).

Assimilate is to absorb a group completely into the culture of another (Price, 1991).

Band-operated schools are Federally funded schools, according to legal and financial obligations as outlined by the treaties controlled and operated by First Nations bands on reserves.

First Nations are those groups of Aboriginal people and their de-cendents who are recognized by the government under treaty and the term which is used in this study (Price, 1991).

Indian Act 1876 is the principal Federal statue dealing with First Nations status, local government and the management of reserve lands and communal monies. It also refers to a consolidation of then existing legislation (Haig-Brown, 1988).

Residential schools are schools created by the Federal government and run by religious groups (1867-1972), where Indian students were expected to reside for the duration of their formal schooling.

Treaty is a contract, settlement, or agreement arrived at by negotiations (Price, 1991).

Organization

This thesis is organized in five chapters, a summary of each chapter follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

In this chapter the need, the purpose, and the description of the research study is presented. Further, I share some of my educational experiences which are similar to the experiences of the First Nations students in this sample.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter two is an overview of relevant literature on First Nations education in Canada from 1876 to the present time, with an emphasis on more recent developments. It describes the philosophies of the schools and the programs constructed and created by the Church and the Federal government for the education of the First Nations people. It also depicts the strength of the First Nations cultures and their resistance to assimilation. Finally, it examines programs which are being developed to improve the quality of First Nations education.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter gives a brief review of the literature on qualitative research and describes the methodology used to conduct this study. The chapter also describes the student profile questionnaire, the interview guide, the topics for the dialogue journals, and the two types of field notes.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

In as close transcript form as possible, this chapter shares the perspectives and experiences of the seven First Nations students who agreed to participate in this study. Sub-headings in the chapter reflect key themes identified through the data collected in the in-depth interviews, the dialogue journals, and the field notes.

Chapter 5. Summary and Discussion

This chapter provides the researcher's interpretation of the data, including references to the literature where applicable. The findings from the study are presented and implication for future research have been suggested.

CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Traditional First Nations Education

The destiny of a people is intricately bound to the way its children are educated (RCAP, 1996). The education of First Nations people has gone through many changes, from traditional education to the inception of government and church controlled schools, and more recently, to Indian Control of Indian Education.

Traditionally, First Nations people taught their children holistically (Miller, 1996). Holistic education, develops all aspects of the individual. To First Nations people, an individual is seen to have intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical dimensions (RCAP, 1996). Education is a process that begins before birth and continues long after formal education is over. Learning at one stage has implications for subsequent stages (RCAP, 1996). Education also includes the process of socialization (Friesen, 1977).

Traditional First Nations life provided the conditions for a solid childhood foundation. Babies and toddlers spent their first years within the extended family, where parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters all shared responsibility for protecting and nurturing them (RCAP, 1996). Education relied on children looking and listening, in order for them to grow into healthy and successful adults (Miller, 1996). Much of what was learned was attributable to word-of-mouth transmission; the composition of education included all facets of First Nations culture. The people worked, played, and grew together (Friesen, 1977). Rooted in an oral tradition,

knowledge was frequently passed on in the form of stories, which were rendered in detail to preserve their authenticity. These stories, often simple on the surface, were multi-layered and addressed complex moral and ethical issues. Often, traditional knowledge was intended to be conveyed only at particular times or locations and in specific contexts (RCAP, 1996). Such education stressed the development of values like humility, co-operation, sharing, respect, and responsibility (St. Dennis, 1991). Miller (1996) describes the common element in Aboriginal education as the shaping of behaviour by positive example in the home. Proper behaviour was instilled largely by indirect and non-coercive means. Discipline was more often administered by embarrassment or warning stories. There was a powerful imperative to avoid imposing one's will on another individual in any but the most extreme situations, thus permitting children to express themselves and preventing the use of direct, coercive techniques of behaviour modification. As children passed from one educational stage of life into another, the status markers of maturity were the rewards for acquiring the abilities, skills, and knowledge of the adult (Friesen, 1977).

The traditional educational process was so natural that, when children became adults, often they did not realize they had been educated and trained by adult society (Miller, 1996). They learned that dreams, visions, and legends were as important to learning as practical instruction in how to build a boat or tan a hide (RCAP, 1996). They assumed adult roles in an atmosphere of warmth and affection. Through purposeful play, there was a heavy reliance on stories to illustrate the daily lessons and on modelling their parents, families, and ancestors. In this way, they were prepared to be successful mothers, providers, defenders, instructors, and leaders of their own community. They learned that survival and continuance was based on their ability to be respectful of their community and environment (St. Dennis,

1991). The curriculum for this instruction taught young people who they were, the nature of other beings, and how humans and other beings relate to one another. It explained the sources of all things, where they were destined to go, the dangers and opportunities of the journey, and what obligations and rights they had, both individually and collectively. It attuned them to the world, both material and spiritual. The most important feature was the lack of institutional structure and absence of coercion and routine (Miller, 1996).

Arrival of the Europeans

The introduction of European-style education interfered with Aboriginal societies. Four principal groups among the newcomers interacted with the Indians: the fur traders who relied upon the Aboriginal population for their physical and emotional survival; the permanent European settlers, whose principal object was to move Indians onto reserves; the Christian missionaries who were concerned with converting the spiritual beliefs of the Indians; and, finally the state whose goal was the assimilation of Indians into the dominant society through education (Barman, Hébert & McCaskill, 1986). The primary purpose of public education was to indoctrinate First Nations people with a Christian, European world view. Christian missionaries and the Federal government developed a policy of eradicating First Nations cultures through schooling children (Miller, 1996).

At Confederation the Crown invested authority of the treaties in the Federal government. Both "Indians and lands reserved for Indians" were exclusive matters of Federal responsibility under sections 91(24) and 132 of the Constitution Act, 1867 (Henderson, 1995). First Nations peoples finances and all social services, including education, were placed under Federal control (Sealy & Kirkness, 1973). The Indian Acts of 1876 and 1880 extended the power of chiefs and chiefs in council or school committees to

make rules and regulations on the construction and maintenance of school houses (Henderson, 1995). The Federal government saw schools as essential to educating Indians to an agrarian lifestyle and ultimately to their assimilation into European society. Most treaties after 1871 contained a commitment on the part of the Federal government to provide for the education of First Nations people (Sealy & Kirkness, 1973). More specifically, Treaty 8 contained a commitment on the part of the Federal government to provide for the establishment of schools on the reserves for the instruction of First Nations children and for future generations (Price, 1991). At the treaty negotiations, the chiefs asked that their children have the opportunity to learn new ways of survival in a rapidly-changing environment. For the chiefs, this did not mean a loss of First Nations cultural traditions. This opportunity was seen as a way to gain the benefits of a different tradition of learning from the non-Native society (Price, 1991).

The Creation of Residential Schools

By 1879, Americans believed that First Nations children would be assimilated more quickly if they were removed from influences of home, community, and family. The Davin Report approved the American practice of removing First Nations children from their homes, with provisions that schools be operated by missionaries. The Department of Indian Affairs accepted the proposal, offering to upgrade and maintain existing schools and construct new institutions. While Canada was influenced by American policy, the practice of removing First Nations children from their homes for the purpose of indoctrinating in them the values and habits of European society had been initiated in the early 1800's in Nova Scotia. Micmaq children were 'planted out' to farm homes to work and the government paid the farmer for taking these children (Battiste, 1984). This led to the creation of residential schools,

which were located away from reserves. The residential schools became jointly operated by the Church and government. The government was responsible for inspection, special rules and regulations, as well as making financial grants. The Church's duty was to manage the school, to contribute part of the operating cost and, most importantly, to provide Christian guidance to the children (Kirkness, 1992). Although the residential schools were managed by the Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches (Price, 1991), the Catholics and Anglicans had the greatest cultural impact on First Nations in Canada (Frideres, 1974), and in fact, wielded tremendous authority over the lives of First Nations people.

The typical academic day at the residential schools began with an hour of religious study followed by two hours of reading, writing, arithmetic, and a few other subjects (Haig-Brown, 1993). Some students enjoyed the academic portion of their day; others were uncomfortable and felt intimidated by the teachers and their strict regiment and harsh discipline. These students were at a disadvantage compared with the students who spoke English fluently, who lived with their own families and to those who received five hours of academic education in the public schools. First Nations students were so far behind that they could not easily transfer to a public school when they reached high school or pass comprehensive exams. The First Nations people were set up to fail (Frideres, 1972).

Residential schools were used deliberately to break down the transmission of culture and language from one generation to the next. For nearly a century, parents and grandparents in reserve communities were legally compelled to turn their children over to the custody of residential school authorities. Celia Haig-Brown (1993) shares this memory of a student who was taken away by the "cattle truck" and dropped off in front of the residential school:

All of a sudden here we come in front of this building, and after being told to be afraid of the white people, you can imagine the feeling we had. We were herded into the front and down the hall where the dining room is. We were already so scared and we were lonely for the protection of our parents. We didn't know what we were going to get into. (We wondered), "Why did my mother and father send us away?" And then, all of a sudden, we see somebody coming down the hallway all in black and just this white face and that's when I started just shaking and we all started crying and backing up. . . We were doing that of sheer fright. This sister is coming towards us and what has been going on in her mind is, "Here's these little wild animals." You know when you go to touch a little wild animal, it cringes and we say right away, "Oh, it's a wild animal. We've got to tame it." I could just imagine what was going on in her mind, "These little wild Indians: I've got to tame them." (p.51)

Children were beaten for speaking their own language. They were not allowed to wear their traditional clothes and hairstyles or practice their religious ceremonies. In many schools, sisters and brothers were forbidden social contact; sterile, institutional child rearing practices replaced the warmth of their families. Many students endured hard labour, hunger, sexual and physical abuse. Those who tried to run away were returned by their parents or by school agents and punished. Spiritual and emotional abuse occurred, as Indian children were forced by the missionaries to follow a foreign religion and taught that to be Indian was wrong and shameful. All this occurred while children were under the care of the Church and Federal government (Jaine, 1993). The painful process of cultural invasion confused both parents and children. Indian parents were devastated as their children were taken away by government agents. Parents were discouraged to visit and even forbidden from entering the school (Miller, 1996). Indian parents no longer felt needed and the guilt of sending their children away was overwhelming. Through despair, some parents turned to alcohol and suicide to escape reality (Haig-Brown, 1986).

Indian Control of Indian Education

As early as 1890, First Nations people began to react to the deplorable conditions of their people. Native parents disliked the conversion and "civilization" of their children in distant residential schools, the stress on English, and the teaching of women's chores to young men (Barman, Hébert, & McCaskill, 1986, P.97). They wanted education to prepare them to participate fully in the economic life of their communities and in Canadian society, but they wanted education to develop children and youth as Aboriginal citizens, linguistically and culturally competent to assume the responsibilities of their nations. They wanted youth to emerge from school grounded in a strong, positive Aboriginal identity. Consistent with Aboriginal tradition, they wanted education to develop the whole child, intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically (RCAP, 1996).

By the 1960s, recognizing their failure in the Federal and residential schools the Federal government was pursuing a policy of integrating children from reserves into nearby provincial high schools and boarding them with families in urban centres. Also at that time, provincial governments in the west formed large school districts in northern areas of their provinces with some Aboriginal representation. A growing number of Aboriginal people were moving from employment-starved rural areas into urban centres, expanding the number of Aboriginal students in city schools. Residential schools continued to operate into the 1970s (RCAP, 1996).

The major turning point of First Nations education occurred in 1969 with the governments recommendations contained in The White Paper. In The White Paper, Ottawa announced its intention to terminate its responsibilities to First Nations peoples. The White Paper, a statement of intention on the part of the government of Canada to transfer responsibilities for First Nations affairs to the provinces. The governments objective was to

move away from the obligations of the treaties; to phase out the separate legal category of "status Indian;" and to wind up the operations of the Department of Indian Affairs. First Nations leaders reacted strongly. The National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) became more assertive about the need for Aboriginal people to acquire control in a number of areas. The first of these in which a success was scored by the NIB was education, under the banner "Indian Control of Indian Education," in 1972. It recognized the failure of Federal, provincial, and territorial governments to implement appropriate policies. Thus, The White Paper was never translated into policy.

Since 1972, residential schools have been phased out and, together with Federal day schools, have dropped in number. The number of schools under First Nations administration has grown proportionately. First Nations controlled schools have hired more Aboriginal teachers, enhanced curriculum to include cultural elements, and introduced language classes. In 1973, the Federal government agreed that, where First Nations communities so desired, there would be a shift in control over the schools in which their children were educated (Miller, 1996). Nevertheless, Aboriginal educators report that their authority over education was and remains limited. The Federal government has generally insisted that schools conform to provincial regulations with respect to curriculum, school year, and so on, thereby restricting schools' ability to include innovative, culture-based curriculum (RCAP, 1996).

In response to the educational concerns being raised by First Nations people, the Federal government's Standing Committee on Indian Affairs was charged with the responsibility of preparing a report on Indian Education. This report, presented in the House of Commons on June 22, 1971, revealed to the Canadian public the educational problems facing Indian people. Some of the findings were:

- A drop-out rate four times the national average (96 per cent of First Nations children never finished high school);
- "Inaccuracies and omissions" relating to the Indian contribution to Canadian history in texts used in Federal and provincial schools;
- An age-grade retardation rooted in language conflict an early disadvantage, which accelerated as the child progressed through the primary and elementary grades;
- Less than 15 per cent of the teachers had specialized training in cross-cultural education and less than 10 per cent had any knowledge of a First Nations language;
- The majority of First Nations parents were uninformed about the implication of decisions made to transfer children from reserve schools to provincial schools. (Report of the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs, cited in Kirkness, 1992)

In 1973, the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations) presented a proposal on Indian Control of Indian Education to the government. The key elements of the policy were:

1. Indian parents must have full responsibility and control of education;
2. Band councils should be given total or partial authority for education on reserves. (Price, 1991)

Educational change is now under way, but within strict limits. Native people are now undergoing the painful process of healing from the trauma of Federally controlled and boarding schools and of restoring their cultural identity. They are experiencing unaccustomed emotions, gaining original insights, and facing unfamiliar challenges, as their self-awareness grows in the context of a "post-everything" society. But of utmost importance, First Nations people have urged schools to utilize First Nations thinking and talent

whenever Aboriginal people are being discussed in classrooms (Laroque, 1975).

Developments in First Nations Education

At present, the vast majority of First Nations students attend one of four types of schools: Federal day schools, which are located on reserves; provincial (public) day schools, which are usually off reserve; band schools on reserves; and separate schools, usually affiliated with church denominations. Since the policy of Indian Control of Indian Education was adopted in 1973, the number of Federal schools has declined dramatically, as bands have assumed responsibility for educating their own children. As articulated in the policy statement, Indian Control of Indian Education, the challenge to First Nations people is clear:

Our aim is to make education relevant to the philosophy and needs of Indian people. We want education to give our children a strong sense of identity with confidence in their personal worth and ability. We believe in education:

- ...as a preparation for total living;
- ...as a means of free choice of where to live and work;
- ...as a means of enabling us to participate fully in our own social, economic, political and educational advancement (p. 3, 1973)

Today, First Nations people are taking control of their future and of the education of their children. They want to see their children succeed in both worlds, without having to deny their heritage and culture, and they want learning to be a pleasant and relevant part of their everyday living. First Nations students are experiencing changes in schools both in curriculum content and in their reactions and experiences within schools.

In 1969 to 1970, there was an increase in the number of First Nations students attending school. In 1981, 63 per cent of Aboriginal people 15 years or older but no longer attending school, had completed primary school, and

29 per cent had completed high school. A decade later, 76 per cent of Aboriginal people over 15 had completed primary school, and 43 per cent had completed high school. The current situation has improved with the establishment of First Nations schools, the hiring of First Nations teachers, the inclusion of cultural content in the curriculum, and changes made to the educational programs offered in the provincial schools. Modest improvements have been made to school curricula. The number of band-operated schools has grown steadily. The majority of First Nations children attend provincial schools. About 42 per cent of First Nations people lived off reserve in 1991, and in almost all instances, their children attended provincial schools. In the same year, 46 per cent of students residing on reserves attended provincial schools. Thus, in 1996, 68.7 per cent of First Nations students were in the provincial school system (RCAP, 1996). Since 1985, the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission has required school districts, with an Aboriginal population of five per cent or more, to establish an educational action plan, which includes the recruitment of Aboriginal teachers.

The Indian and Metis Education Advisory Committee

In 1989, the Saskatchewan Minister of Education established the Indian and Metis Education Advisory Committee (IMEAC), formerly known as the Indian and Metis Curriculum Advisory Committee (1984-1989), as well as the Native Curriculum Review Committee (1982-1984). IMEAC advises Saskatchewan Education and makes recommendations through the Indian and Metis Education Branch on the development and implementation of improved programs of instruction for Indian and Metis students. It provides a means of involving the Indian and Metis community in the decision-making process for education programming and of soliciting input into the development of courses of instruction. Specifically, IMEAC is to assist in

developments pertaining to (a) the Indian and Metis Education Policy from Kindergarten to Grade 12 (April 1989), and other policy and planning areas; (b) a Five Year Action Plan for Native Curriculum Development (1984), and its successor; (c) curriculum and instructional resources development in relation to the development and implementation of core curriculum; (d) special needs and projects such as community schools, Native Studies and Indian Languages programs; (e) teacher and administrator preservice and inservice education; and (f) research and evaluation in relation to Indian and Metis education (Saskatchewan Education, 1992).

In the 1980s, emphasis was placed on improving the effectiveness of the Core Curriculum. In particular, positive and accurate portrayals of Indian and Metis peoples were incorporated into a number of resources. Involvement of Indian and Metis parents was stressed. Liaison and co-ordination with the educational partners, teachers in the field, and other educational agencies formed the basis for ensuring positive development (Saskatchewan Education, Training and Employment, 1995).

Education Equity

In 1985, the Education Equity commission asked school boards with five per cent or more Aboriginal students to develop education equity programs for approval under section 47 of the Human Rights Code. Most K-12 education equity programs were formally approved between 1987 and 1989. Programs focussed on five goals (a) reviewing curriculum to include Aboriginal content; (b) increasing the involvement of Aboriginal parents in the school system; (c) reviewing school policies and practices for bias against Aboriginal people; (d) increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers; and (e) providing cross-cultural training for teachers. By 1989, most school boards with significant enrolments of Aboriginal students had equity

programs. Most of these programs now include anti-racism or anti-discrimination policies along with procedures to deal with discriminatory incidents and staff training.

From this, a planning document for the 1990s evolved entitled A Partners in Action, Action Plan of the Indian and Metis Education Advisory Committee. It focussed on evaluation methods designed to determine whether initiatives in Indian and Metis education were being effective and the degree to which curricula and programs were meeting the needs of Indian and Metis students. These indicators speak to the extent of equity that was being achieved and the degree to which positive attitudes towards Indian and Metis peoples were being displayed by students (Saskatchewan Education, 1991). In 1995, in consultation with Saskatchewan Education, a forum was mounted on Indian and Metis education with the view to setting new directions for development. Representatives of Elders, students, the partners in education, Indian and Metis communities, government agencies, and business were invited to attend. Information gathered at the forum became the basis of IMEAC's new action plan titled Indian and Metis Education Action Plan (Saskatchewan Education, Training and Employment, 1995).

Today, approximately 77,500 of Saskatchewan's K-12 students benefit from the education equity programs described earlier. While success rates vary, one school division reported that the withdrawal rate for Aboriginal students in Grades 9 through 12 declined from 20.0 per cent in 1987 to 1998 to 3.9 per cent in 1994 to 1995; over the same time period, the withdrawal rate for all students in those grades declined from 8.9 per cent to 8.0 per cent. The number of Aboriginal teachers in school divisions with equity programs rose from 170 to 229 between 1989 and 1995, an increase of 35 per cent (Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, 1996).

Trends on First Nations Students Enrolment

Further indication of the changes that are taking place is evident in the statistics reported by Indian Affairs and Northern Development (1996) in their Basic Departmental Data (1995). The number of Registered Indians enrolled in post-secondary institutions more than doubled between 1985 to 1986 and 1993 to 1994, rising from 11,170 to 23,068. From 1994 to 1995, enrolment increased by an additional 3,751 from the previous year, to an estimated 26,819 persons. The university enrolment rate for the Registered Indian population aged 17 to 34, increased from 2.3 per cent from 1990 to 1991 to 3.7 per cent between 1993/94. Over the same period, the university enrolment rate for Canadians aged 17 to 34 increased from 5.9 to 6.6 per cent.

While university participation rates among Registered Indians remains below the Canadian level, absolute differences between the two groups are narrowing consistently over time. Since the inception of "Indian Control of Indian Education," First Nations bands are assuming more control in the education of children on reserves. The number of band-operated schools increased from 64 in 1976 to 1977 to 412 between 1994 and 1995. The government's commitment to increased First Nation control of on-reserve education is reflected in enrolment trends. The proportion of children enrolled in band-operated elementary and secondary schools is increasing, while the proportion enrolled in schools operated by Federal or other authorities is declining. The proportion of children enrolled in band-operated schools increased from 5 per cent between 1976 and 1977 to 54 per cent in 1994 and 1995. The proportion of children enrolled in Federal schools dropped to 2 per cent between 1994 and 1995 from 42 per cent between 1976 and 1977. Finally, the proportion of students enrolled in provincial and private schools dropped from 53 per cent in 1976 and 1977 to 44 per cent in

1994 and 1995.

More specific to Saskatchewan, Statistics Canada (1993), reports 16,325 children from ages 5 to 14 attended school. Of these, 14,960 lived at home; 920 lived in a boarding room; 820 lived with a non-Native family; 4,980 lived with a First Nations family; 455 lived with in other environments; among these children, 9,350 reported having Aboriginal teachers; 15,505 reported that the language of instruction was English; and 5,485 received instruction in an Aboriginal language. There are no provincial or Federal data bases specifically designed to provide information on Aboriginal students in Canada who abandon school before graduation (Mackay & Myles, 1995). Increased retention rates are thus seen as a slow but sure indication that First Nations students perceive education in provincial secondary schools as an instrument to promote their own development in ways which they themselves can determine (Mackay & Myles, 1995). However, statistics alone provide no insight into why students stop attending school or what can be done to influence their behaviour (Mackay & Myles, 1995).

Teachers of First Nations Students

Teachers are central to the education experience. The teacher is a role model whose own behaviours and attitudes are absorbed by students. Positive changes to a system can only happen with the enthusiastic co-operation of teachers, administrators, and the community working together. Yet, teachers cannot be expected to perform their many functions adequately unless they are properly prepared.

The training of Aboriginal teachers has been a top priority for First Nations people since the 1960s. Since that time, 34 Aboriginal teacher education programs have been created across the country. In 1981, about

4,490 Native people were in the teaching profession and related occupations; by 1991, there were 8,075. While there are many more Native teachers in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal school systems today than a decade ago, the numbers remain far too low relative to the current and projected need.

Not all teacher-education programs prepare teachers for the cultural dimensions of teaching in Aboriginal classrooms. The Hawthorne Report of 1966 talked about the importance of increasing the number of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers with cross-cultural sensitivity. Teachers who try to exercise their cultural sensitivity may over compensate in ways that set their Aboriginal students apart from others. This is an indication of the teacher's low expectations of Aboriginals as a group and of failing to see them as individuals (Laroque, 1975). Educators and professionals in today's classrooms must possess a well developed cultural awareness and must have the necessary skills and training to challenge First Nations students academically and intellectually. They must also learn to treat them with respect and dignity, allowing them to practice and proudly share their First Nations heritage.

Provincial schools have varied in their receptivity to Aboriginal children. In locations where there are many Aboriginal children, schools have opened their doors to the parents and developed vibrant community and school programs. However, most Aboriginal students attend schools where there is no special effort to make them or their families feel part of the life of the school. There is a gap between the culture of the home and that of the school. Formal education is still predominantly the domain of non-Aboriginal professionals.

There have been many important initiatives by provincial governments and schools boards to create positive learning environments for Aboriginal students. Aboriginal support staff have often been hired, curriculum has been

reviewed to eliminate obvious racism, alternative programs have been established to assist students at risk, and Aboriginal teachers hired, particularly at the elementary school level. Educators point out that the upward retention trend reflects increased satisfaction by First Nations students with provincial schools. These students have developed better habits of regular attendance, punctuality, and persistence. Credits on their transcripts may give them better employment opportunities, even without a graduation diploma (Mackay & Myles, 1996).

The literature review describes the educational experiences of the First Nations people. They are demonstrating a need to take control of the education of their people and a desire for their children to succeed and to be accepted in both societies.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter outlines the research strategy and methods used for data collection and analysis. It describes the procedures for establishing research relationships and responsibility to research ethics.

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the perspectives of seven First Nations students regarding their educational experience. Through written and oral communication and observation, the students shared experiences of their family background and educational experience in interviews.

Research Methodology

Minorities, such as the First Nations people, are often asked to be involved in a research study. They are sensitive to the fact that researchers are interested in their history but often researchers are not sensitive to them. In light of this fact, I felt it was crucial that the data collection be conducted in culturally appropriate ways (Bishop, 1996). More specifically, students needed to be comfortable with the ways that data were collected. My role was to gather the oral and written stories of the First Nations students, permitting them to be in control of the information that they shared. I chose to use a narrative inquiry method. The narrative inquiry method I chose was aimed at uncovering the many experiences and “voices”

of the participants, emphasising their individual complexity (Bishop, 1996 p.24).

The narrative inquiry method relies on purposive sampling in order to obtain information about unusual or typical cases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Purposive sampling in some sense represents the population under consideration (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Fetterman (1989) used purposive sampling in his study on student drop outs in Brooklyn. He found that the identified participants could provide historical data, knowledge about contemporary interpersonal relationships and a wealth of information about everyday life.

For the purpose of this study, I used in-depth interviews, dialogue journals, and field notes. In the narrative inquiry method, the researcher and the participants influence one another. Through interaction; the knower and the known become inseparable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This achieves a level of understanding; however, it raises more questions than it answers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). With the permission from the students the initial interviews were tape recorded. Parents of one student who was under the age of 18 gave written permission for their daughter to participate in the study. The interviews began after the researcher received consent from ethics. A student profile questionnaire led the interviews. The questionnaire included questions about personal demographics. It was helpful in categorizing the participants during the data analysis. The interviews led into a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions. The first approach allows the participants to interpret the question and encourages them to give long and detailed answers, which may lead to other topics for discussion (Fetterman, 1989). The closed-ended questions require more specific answers and are useful in trying to analyze behaviour patterns. Researchers typically ask more open-ended questions during the discovery phases of their research

and more closed-ended questions during confirmational periods (Fetterman, 1989). The knowledge and information gained through the interviews were discussed with the participants, providing an opportunity for correction, verification, and challenge (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Descriptive field notes helped to visualize the person, the moment, the day, and the setting (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). They helped recap points made earlier in the interviews. Reflective field notes recorded any thoughts, changes, or decisions the researcher made during the data collection. I kept a daily reflective journal. It contained my personal thoughts and observations about the procedures, the participants and my personal reflections.

The final data-collecting technique used for this study was the dialogue journals. The journals gave the students an opportunity to explore any information they wanted to share and to reflect on our interviews. The dialogue journals were an extension of the information garnered from the interviews and provided another source of data with which to cross-check and interpret.

Each First Nations student has a personal way of perceiving the world which can be identified and understood using the narrative inquiry method. This method has proven to be very effective in cross-cultural studies. Bishop (1996) studied the Maori people of New Zealand using this technique. It was successful in allowing them the opportunity to share their stories orally. This method would allow the First Nations people being interviewed the comfort of sharing their experiences in their traditional oral culture.

Data Collection

Site Selection

This study was conducted in three urban high schools in the Saskatoon Public School Division. One high school had a high Aboriginal

enrolment. It offered Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students the opportunity to complete courses in quarter classes and it offered Aboriginal English as a Second Language class. The second school had a very low enrolment of Aboriginal students and it did not offer any programs designed for First Nations students. The third school offered an alternative education program. The alternative education program is designed for students who could not experience success within the structure and expectations of the regular programs. It also had a high enrolment of Aboriginal students. In late April 1997, I met with the principals to obtain permission to engage in research in their schools.

Participants

The students in the present sample were identified with the help of the then Indian and Metis educational consultant for the Saskatoon Public Schools, the principals of the high schools, the school counsellors, and the classroom teacher. The researcher and the educators discussed the criteria used to identify these students. The researcher wanted to interview students from Grade 11 and 12, who had a variety of educational experiences, and students who would be excellent sources of information and who would best represent the general population of First Nations students.

Seven First Nations students were selected and invited to be a part of my research based on the following criteria:

1. The participants were currently enrolled and attending a high school within the Saskatoon Public school Division.
2. The participants were a mix of male and female students.
3. The students had various educational experiences. Some had previously attended reserve schools but had quit. Some had attended school in Saskatoon all their lives, and others had changed schools

frequently.

4. The participants were selected from Grade 11 and 12 and they ranged in age from seventeen to twenty-one.

5. An explanation of the project was provided to the parents or guardians of the students who were under the age of 18, and their approval was requested and received.

Data Collection Methods

The combination of interviews, dialogue journals, and field notes were employed to record the students' responses or perspectives. Since this study was seeking to identify the educational experiences of First Nations students, issues and factors arising from the reflective and descriptive field notes and in-depth interviews led to further data collection and analysis.

Each interview was conducted in the guidance office at the school and in mutually convenient surroundings, such as the public library. The classroom teacher introduced me to the students and I met the students in the Aboriginal ESL classroom. We then went to the guidance office for the interviews. The students received an initial introduction to the research topic. Along with a verbal description of the study they were made aware of the time commitment involved. For their ready reference, a short written abstract was available. The students needed a clear understanding of the goals of the research and how the data collected might begin to fill the gap in the existing literature of the perceptions of today's First Nations students. Two interviews were conducted with each student. Three students provided four to six journal entries. The other participants chose not to participate in the journal entries. The journal books and topics were provided for them. Dialogue journals were not mandatory, as the students may have seen them as an assignment. We corresponded twice a week for three weeks. Dialogue

journals were used to provide another approach to uncovering the First Nations students' experiences. They are a link to the data collected through the interviews and the field notes. The material from the interviews was organized by colour coding and linked to the content of the student journals. By giving code names to main points made the findings accessible, as well as identifying what remained to be discovered. Coding schemes helped to develop a more specific focus and more relevant questions (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The narrative inquiry method achieves a level of understanding, but it may also raise more questions. Using dialogue journals in the narrative inquiry method may make the data analysis more complex; however, it may also make the data clearer overall (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

For the first entry of their dialogue journals they were given a story about an educational experience from a Grade 6 student, and I asked them to write about a positive educational experience that had impressed them significantly. For their second entry I asked them to talk about a teacher who had had a positive impact on them. For the third entry I invited students to describe how effective teachers motivated and challenged them to attend school regularly and to produce quality work. Their fourth entry was for them to discuss how significant relationships influenced them. The fifth entry dealt with the programs or activities they were involved in, and they were asked to assess their effectiveness. The sixth journal entry was of a personal nature. It asked for a description of the support they received from home, school, and the community in order for them to continue their education. This entry also asked them to explain why, or if, education was important to them. At the end of this time, there was a final interview to allow students the opportunity to express themselves once more and to experience feedback.

In-Depth Interview

The primary source of data collection was the in-depth interviews with each participant. In the narrative inquiry method, the in-depth interview gives the opportunity for the researcher and the participants to interact. For the purpose of this study, there were some initial open-ended questions; more questions emerged which may be added to, or even replace the original ones (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). When in-depth interviews are used, the researcher becomes the most important medium for gathering and interpreting the stories of the respondents. The prime sources of data, words, and actions, are obtained by looking, listening, and asking (Lofland & Lofland, 1984). The introduction of the first interview included rapport building and a review of the information shared about the purpose of the study, the anonymity of each participant, permission to tape the interview, and assurance that all data gathered would be kept confidential. A student profile questionnaire and a combination of open-and closed-ended questions guided the interview. In the second interview, the participants were asked to share any relevant thoughts, feelings or experiences that they may have had since the last interview. They reviewed a written transcript of their last interview to enable them to make any clarifications, changes, additions, or deletions. Six interviews were tape recorded with the participant's consent. One participant was uncomfortable with the tape recorder and asked that his interview not be taped. Participants chose pseudonyms which were assigned to all field notes and taped interviews for security and for confidentiality of the tapes and transcripts. The tapes and transcripts were stored in a locked cabinet and they will be destroyed when a final bound copy of the thesis has been submitted to the College of Graduate Studies.

Field Notes

Two types of field notes were recorded: Descriptive field notes recorded objective descriptions of events, emotions, and behaviours of the participant and interviewer during the exchange or interaction. Included in these notes were summaries of the in-depth interviews. Reflective field notes recorded the researchers thoughts and feelings on the research process. These descriptive and reflective field notes were analyzed to guide the questions used in subsequent interviews.

Data Analysis

Verification of Data Collection Procedure

Following the initial interview with the first participant, the written transcript of the interview, the interview notes, field notes, and transcription were reviewed with the research advisor. A form of constant comparative analysis (Lofland & Lofland, 1984) was used where the data were analyzed simultaneously with data collection. This allowed the researcher to focus on and shape the study as it proceeded, consistently reflecting on organizing the data, while seeking to discover what the First Nations students had to say (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). This method used constant analysis and subsequent comparison of incidents or events arising from data collection. Connections were perceived among the stories: What was being illuminated? How were the stories connected? What themes and patterns gave shape to the data (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). As categories with the same properties emerged from the data collected during the interviews, field notes, and dialogue journals, they were given code names. New data collected were compared to the categories already developed. If the new data did not fit previously constructed categories, new themes and sub-themes were defined or added. Analysis of the data from the observation field notes and the in-

depth interviews also involved a search for patterns, recurring themes, and categories that indicated the perceptions of First Nations students. This analysis started after the first interview and was an on-going process.

Triangulation is an important data analysis procedure. It involves the use of multiple-data-collection methods such as interviews, dialogue journals, and field notes. Triangulation contributes to the trust-worthiness of the data by comparing it with at least one other source (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Using multiple sources of data revealed how ideas were interrelated. Through the use of this procedure, it was possible to compare and contrast data collected from a variety of perspectives, thereby increasing the likelihood of deriving valid and meaningful inferences from the data (Guba, 1985). For example, one means of triangulation used was participant validation. This process involves incorporating segments of interview data from the first interview into the second interview with a participant. This was done by giving the participant the transcript of the first interview, thereby providing opportunities for students to clarify and elaborate on material previously provided. In another form of triangulation, participants received a dialogue journal at the initial interview and were invited to write to me on a predetermined topic or to jot down any thoughts they may have had that were not discussed in the interview. Writing in this notebook was not mandatory, as the participants may have resented having to do an extra assignment. Participants were given the opportunity to clarify and elaborate on all written material. The entries in these notebooks were compared and contrasted to the data collected from the in-depth interview and the field notes.

Analysis

Data collection was a continuous process; therefore, the constant comparative method of data analysis described earlier was used, and the

data were categorized and coded into various themes and patterns. This method allowed the data to be organized on a continuing basis and connections in methodology to be made between each data gathering session.

Time Line

The proposal for this project was put before the principals of the three schools in April, 1997. The interviews and dialogue journals were begun in early May. During March and April, 1998, the data analysis was completed and the thesis written.

Research Ethics

Previous studies have reported that First Nations Peoples describe their educational experience as mostly inadequate. Some students enjoyed the academic portion of their day, others were uncomfortable and felt intimidated by the teachers. This study seeks to see how seven First Nations students in three Saskatoon high schools perceive their educational experience.

I specified a need to have both male and female participants. Participation was voluntary. Written permission from the parents or guardians of the student under the age of 18 was requested and received prior to the first interview. Through an initial introduction of the research topic and of the researcher, I shared my goals with the participants. The rights of the research participants were foremost at all times. The participants were informed of the nature and purpose of the study. Pseudonyms were used to assure privacy and participants were free to withdraw at any time. At the second interview the students were given the opportunity to review the transcripts of the data collected and to check for accuracy of information. All data will be destroyed

as soon as the thesis has been defended and a final bound copy has been submitted to the College of Graduate Studies.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

Introduction

The main purpose of this study is to determine how First Nations students perceive their educational experience. The first section describes the sample population involved in the study. The second section conveys stories about home life, and of school, and the unique characteristics of each student.

Description of Participants And Setting

The following description is to give the reader a sense of the participants involved, as well as the setting of the study. Seven First Nations students, who have lived in communities including Yellow Quill, Patuanak, Onion Lake, Peter Ballantyne, Camsack, Saskatoon, Isle-a-la-Cross, and Red Pheasant participated in the study. Their individual ancestry was either Cree, Saulteaux, and Dene. They were interviewed by the researcher during the month of May, 1997, and dialogue journals continued into the month of June, 1997. To assure their anonymity, participants chose the following pseudonyms: Ralph, Bob, Junior, Toni, Naomi, Patrick and Arnold. The three schools in which data were collected varied in size, population of First Nations students, and courses offered.

Family Backgrounds

The following information was taken from transcripts and the Student Profile Questionnaire. It presents the personal demographics and family backgrounds of the participants.

Ralph is a 21-year-old male student whose First Nations affiliation is Dene. He is fluent in both English and Dene, as were his parents. He tells of his mother's accomplishments prior to her death: "My mom [had] just finished her degree in teaching at NORTEP." His dad "had a Grade 12, and I think that's about it." His father, now 68 years old, no longer works but plays the organ at church. Ralph is the middle of three children, with a 27-year-old full brother and a 19-year-old half brother. Ralph's 19-year-old brother is the father of three children: "He didn't go to school; he only went up to Grade 6 [or] 7. He loves staying in the bush and trapping, hunting, fishing; gets a job on the reserve; he works. He has time to go down river do some fishing." Ralph comments: "Yeah, my [older] brother, he's got his own place; he comes over once in a while. He didn't even go up to Grade 9 and he has a job." Ralph's mother passed away when he was 10 years old. After her death, Ralph was raised by his stepfather; however, he continues to visit with his biological father, "I always go back to my dad's house, I would rather sit there than sit at home sometimes, because it gets boring at home, eh." Ralph describes the life with his stepfather as "a fast life." He basically raised himself, "cause he's hardly around." His stepfather "owned a taxi company, so he was always on the road." There was little stability in Ralph's upbringing: "Never really had a curfew, try to be home on time, 10:30, 11:00- not too late and on weekends. I usually tell my dad that if I'm not home by 12, I probably won't come back." Ralph lived in La Ronge: "I stayed one year in La Ronge.; I didn't really like it, so I thought I'd come up to Saskatoon and try

it out." At present he lives with a cousin.

Junior is an 18-year-old male student whose First Nations affiliation is Saulteaux. [Junior speaks English and understands a little Saulteaux and Cree.] He was raised by his "mother and sort of my dad." His grandmother would keep him for weeks at a time while his parents went on business trips. Junior's parents are separated: "My mom and dad were together for, ever since, ah, my mom moved to the city here. Before that, I just stayed with them, both of them together." Junior is the middle child. He has, "um, let's see, 6 sisters and 5 brothers, that I know of." His mother has been married twice: "Mom was married before my dad, and she was married to a guy named Alex, that's one of my sisters' dad." His mother attended the residential school in Lebret: "She was very lonely there, the only person she really had out there was my uncle. . . To pass the time she played basketball." She now has a teaching degree and is, at present, teaching kindergarten on the reserve. Junior is not sure what education level his father attained: "I believe he [my father] might have got his GED already, his Grade12." Junior is living in a community home at this time. He was sentenced with a charge of "break and enter" and placed into custody for 3 months with 1 year probation. He has two-and-a-half weeks left at the group home; he will then move in with relatives.

Arnold is a 17 year-old-male student whose First Nations affiliation is Cree. He speaks English, and understands only a few Cree words or expressions. Arnold's mother, "speaks English and she's non-native. . . My father speaks Cree." His mother dropped out of school: "I think she dropped out in Grade 9." His mother is, "a waitress; she's been waitressing almost twelve years." Arnold thinks his dad "dropped out in Grade10, but then he went back and he went through NORTEP, and he's got his Standard A teaching certificate." However, he does not teach. Arnold is the middle child

of three, with an older brother and a younger sister. Arnold's mother encourages him to go to university so that he does not end up like her: "She had to depend on welfare for a lot of the years in my life, and she works; sometimes she works 12 hour shifts and just have to leave us with babysitters all the time." Arnold's mother was the primary care giver: "My father would come and go for periods of time, and so mostly my mom raised me, but my dad played a role. But like, maybe four years he be somewhere else, and then maybe three years, two years, he be living with us, and two years he'd go somewhere else. . .Some of the time, he was away working on the reserve. My mom didn't want to live on the reserve; she left the reserve when we were, like, 5 or 4. . ." Arnold and his family have "moved around a bit in the city. My mom, she got tired of [it]. I don't know why we moved." Arnold's grandfather attended a residential school: "He got beat up a lot." Arnold's great-grandmother would not let her daughter go to school: "My grandmother, she was raised by her mom in the bush. Her mom didn't want her to go to school. She wanted to keep her at home, and so, she knows, sort of, more about her culture."

Naomi is the middle child of three siblings: "Me and my older brother are from my dad, and then, my mom married when I was about eleven. She got remarried, and that's where my little brother came from, and, like, my little brother is a full Indian, and me and my brother are half." Naomi is 18 years old. She resides with her mother and her younger brother. Her mother speaks Cree and English; Naomi understands some Cree. Naomi's parents are separated. "My mom left my dad when I was about six cause she wanted a career." Naomi seldom visits with her father: "He lives in Manitoba." Her mother remarried but, "got a divorce a few years ago, so it's just us again." Naomi's mother is a teacher and has taught in various northern and eastern communities: "She would just work here and there for a while. I don't know,

she got tired of the same place.” She provided a good life for her children: “She’s always been, like, very responsible. . .make sure we had a good living. Now she’s, like, trying to better herself, you know, getting her masters. . .She is very inspirational.” Naomi is, “pretty traditional with my mom; we do a lot of things together; we go to a lot of sweat lodges and feasts and round dances; and I’m supposed to start dancing this year too, jingle dress.” Naomi is very proud of herself: “I have my family, and I have my grades in school, plus I don’t drink and I don’t smoke up. So, I’m into my Native culture, and so, I feel, like, pretty well balanced.”

Toni is a 17 year-old-female student. Her mother is: “White, and then, my dad, my real dad speaks some Cree.” Toni speaks English and knows very few words in Cree. When asked if she had any brothers and sisters she replied: “Do I have to count all of them?. . .Because I have one living with me. That’s my brother; he is younger than me. I have an older half sister, younger half sister, and two other younger half brothers and sister, that I know of.” Toni is the second eldest in this combined family. She presently lives with her mom and stepfather. Toni lived with her biological parents for nine years. Her parents were divorced when she was in Grade 5. Toni’s father is a journeyman mechanic, and she sees him “probably once or twice a year.” Toni’s mother dropped out of high school “cause she had me; she was 17. And then she went back, and she’s got her Grade 12 now. . .I think she has one more English or something to do, and then she’s done.” Her mother is working in a child care facility. Toni’s stepfather, “finished Grade 12. . .cause he went to Kelsey [Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Technology]. Living at home for Toni is like “being in prison.” Toni has been dealing with some emotional problems. She has tried to talk to her parents: “I wanted to tell them, I was thinking these things, but every time I had communication with them, it always ended up fighting.” Her problems compounded and led to two

suicide attempts.

Bob is a 20-year-old First Nations student. He is fluent in English and he states, "I know a little bit of Cree." His mother is Cree, and Bob's dad was "Cree, too. I don't think he's full Cree." Bob has an 18-year-old brother: "My brother lives with my grandma." Bob was raised by his mother: "Well, actually, my dad died. She [mother] was there for me all the time." Bob's uncle spent time with him: "He would always come over; he would pick me and my brother up. He'd take us out, and he knew when I was having a hard time. He taught me how to weld." The family lived in British Columbia; however, "after my dad died," they moved to northern Saskatchewan. They lived in various small towns: "I didn't really like it, just moving, leaving all my friends behind and finding new friends." He has been living in Saskatoon for approximately two-and-a-half years: "Well, no. I moved back to Loon Lake for about six months; then I moved back here." Bob's mother "has her Grade 12. . . My dad, he had Grade 3." Bob is very close to his mother: "Usually, when I need someone to talk, I'll talk to my mom."

Patrick is a 21-year-old male whose First Nations affiliation is Cree. He has lived in Saskatoon since the age of 14. Prior to that he lived on the reserve with his parents and his eight brothers and six sisters. He is the youngest son, and he has a younger sister. His parents both speak Cree. Patrick "wishes I knew how to speak Cree." He now resides with his sister and his girl friend, and he will be a father in 2 months.

He does not know what level of education his parents attained but remembers that his mother attended a residential school. She used to "tell us about her scary dreams, about her days in the residential school." Patrick's father, "showed him [Patrick] what to do, showed him how to work." Patrick now works as an illustrator for Cree books, and he helps make mathematics games. His teacher and the Indian and Metis consultant "got him the job."

Patrick was very intimidated by the tape recorder so it was not used. Notes were taken while he spoke and after each interview.

The participants were eager to share their family background. Clearly, their upbringing and backgrounds were different from one another, however, they all demonstrated respect and admiration for their families.

Educational Background

Participants were asked to describe their involvement in school. Topics ranged from years in current school, other schools attended, attendance patterns and recidivism.

Ralph moved around a great deal and attended various schools in Northern and Central Saskatchewan. Due to his frequent moves and interruptions in his education, Ralph repeated Grade "7 maybe 11. I got kicked out." Despite this, Ralph is the only sibling in his family to complete a high school education: "I feel it's my duty that I have to finish Grade 12." Ralph sees education as the key to a successful future: "Like, nowadays, you need a Grade 12 even to be a janitor, if you want to make a living, put food on the table for my own family one of these days. Education is the only way to go nowadays." His grandparents, aunts, and uncles who live on the reserve, continually encourage him: "That's good that you're finishing your Grade 12; don't stop there." His education is being sponsored by his band.

Junior has attended various schools in and out of Saskatoon. He started kindergarten on the reserve, then had to attend the provincial school "cause there is only kindergarten there [on the reserve]." For Grades 2 to 5, he moved to a community in eastern Saskatchewan and then into an elementary school in Saskatoon for Grades 6 through 8: "I had Grade 9 here [Saskatoon], and then, ah, I didn't pass my classes, so. . .at the beginning of

the fall, my second year in Grade 9, I moved." Junior has repeated "um, Grade 9. . .and Grade 10." When he started Grade 10, "I wasn't coming. . .I was into drinking. . .having fun was more important than going to school." He regrets this: "I would have been graduating this year." At the present time, Junior attends school regularly, as it is part of his probation. He is also encouraged by a close friend who is also an Elder: "He would say, you should get an education."

Naomi has attended various schools, as well as various types of schools, including a residential school: "I was in Saskatoon. . .Big River . . .Sandy Bay. . .Stanley Mission. . .Swift Current. . .Shell Lake." She attended on and off the reserves. Her academic progress was not affected by her family's frequent moves: "I liked moving, change of scenery, change of people, and like, this way I know people from all over the province. It is nice everywhere I go. I usually know someone there. . .I remember when I was in Grade 9, and I was going to school in Swift Current. It felt funny, because a lot of my friends, they would, like. . .sit there and talk. . .oh, do you remember when we did this in Grade 2, and do you remember when we did this in kindergarten. . .and I was, like, left out. . .I was always, like, the new girl. That part I didn't like, but other than that, I liked moving." Naomi has always excelled in her studies: "When I see my good marks, it makes me feel good, and I want to keep doing more, and I want to beat the mark."

Toni has attended various elementary schools in Saskatoon. She changed schools because "it was just closer, I guess, whatever way my parents went to work, kind of thing. Cameron Elementary School was right across from my daycare, where my mom worked. . .I had to move because my parents divorced." Toni "switched from regular to almost like, MDA [Modified Disciplinary Approach], switched to the higher class." She was in the Academically Talented Program at Cameron Elementary School, but she did

not enjoy school. Toni would complain, "my legs are broken," just so she would not have to go to school. When she was in Grade 11, she was in the MDA program. This program is for "all the smart students. . .it was just more higher learning...it's just to keep you more interested." She is now in Grade 12. Toni is the senior pin (student representative) for her school.

Bob has attended, "Woodland High School. . .Riceton Elementary. . . Alexander Ball. . .Medicine Hat Comprehensive High School. . .I can't even remember that other one. . .Cold Lake. . .and an elementary school in Alberta." He has been attending high school in Saskatoon on and off for four years. Bob is in Grade 12: "Well, I'm taking Grade 11 math class." He has repeated Grades 5 and 8 and has had to repeat some high-school classes. Now at the age of 20, he worries: "If I come back next year. . .it's going to cost me so much money, and I don't know if I can." He wishes he had stayed ". . .in school last semester so I could graduate this year."

Arnold attended "St. John's, Grade 1, on the reserve; Alfred Campbell; Kindergarten in Canoe Lake, Saskatchewan., (it's the only school there). After St. John's in Grade 2, I think I was at St. Thomas, then St. Mathew, Grade 3; and back to St. Thomas for Grade 4, 5, and 6; Grade 7 at Bishop James and Grade 8 was Lakeland and St. Thomas." He has attended the same high school for four years. Arnold "had a pretty easy time in school. . .My cousin said that I'd drop out at Grade 10." Arnold has not repeated any grades and is looking forward to graduating in June.

Patrick attended school on the reserve. He said he "didn't learn very much, and it didn't seem like they did anything in school." Patrick has difficulty reading and writing but he says,"got to do what I got to do." He is very artistic and has been displayed at the Mendel Art Gallery. His band "didn't believe he was graduating." Patrick has a very demanding schedule after a full day at school: "work [from] 4 till 11 and homework after that."

The educational background of these First Nations students have similarities and differences. They have attended many schools during their elementary and high school years and their goal is to finish Grade 12. They have various levels of effort at achieving their goal. They are motivated by family members, friends, Elders, and teachers, however, the biggest motivating factor that these students have in common is their desire to achieve.

Factors that have had an Effect on Participants' Educational Experience

Participants shared various perspectives that may have influenced their educational experience. They positive and negative aspects in the nine areas of their educational experiences.

School Courses

Participants were asked to describe a typical school day. They discussed courses in which they were enrolled, areas of difficulty, student expectations, extracurricular activities, attendance, and recidivism.

Ralph laughs: "My day starts at 3:15-that's a typical school day. It's fun." Actually, he leaves at 9:10, but he says, "I left a bit earlier and I get here by 9:25; my first period doesn't start until 9:35." His first period is, "English, with Mr. T., then I go to social studies with Mr. M., and I got dinner; then I got mechanics and construction in the afternoon, so its a pretty easy day." He is in the regular stream: "Last semester I took Native Studies." In this class, they were "just learning a lot of definitions, and self government." Ralph finds mathematics difficult, "mostly fractions. . .I just can't sink it in my head." He attends school on a regular basis but is sometimes late on Mondays. Ralph comments: "I'm still kind of burnt out from the weekend." Ralph had to repeat Grade 11, because he was suspended due to his lack of attendance. He

smiles, "I used to be called teachers pet last semester, because everybody else missed 15 classes and they're out, but I was late 18 classes and I missed, cause. . . second period, last semester, I used to show up pretty late, and I just stay in class. Some of the other people got canned." During his free time, "once in a while, play floor hockey, and maybe I go to the music room" to play guitar.

Bob gets to school "at 9:30; I go to class. . . economics. Right now we're doing some kind of group thing in the library, but economics isn't hard." He prefers "working by myself, after economics I go to-it's break-I'll usually go outside for a smoke or use the washroom or something and then go to ESL [Aboriginal English as a Second Language]; and I sit there, and I do some homework; or if I don't have homework, sometimes I'll just sit there, and then it's lunch time. Lunch time maybe I'll get a soccer ball from the gym and go kick it around outside or go to the library or, if they're playing floor hockey in the gym, I'll play floor hockey and I do a lot of things at lunch time. In period 4--I have a spare for period 4--if it's nice out, I'll just sit outside and just sit out front and relax, and then. . .my period 5 class which is my math class; I'll go to class, do my work, after that I'll go home." He is enjoying the Aboriginal ESL class: "This ESL that I'm in, it's just a class I go to. I go to this class every day and I just do work. It's just for me to go in there, do some extra homework; the teacher in there, he'll help me." While attending school in La Ronge, "there was this Work Ed program I was taking, and I would go to school in the morning, and in the afternoon, we would go to work, and I like that; that gave me some experience and stuff like that." When he lived in La Ronge, he was involved in soccer and baseball.

Naomi has a regular routine: "I get up at 8:00, and then I get ready for school, and I always eat a big breakfast cause breakfast is important, and then I come to school, and I have my first class from 9:30 until about 10:45."

Her first class is math A-30, "and then after that, we have a break, and that's like for about 15 minutes, and then I have English A-30, and that's for another hour until 12, and then there's noon hour, and then I have math B-30, and that's for another hour, and I get out at 2." At this time, "it depends, I don't know, I don't like to do the same thing every day. The only thing that I can do the same everyday is homework. Other than that, like, sometimes I'll go with my boyfriend somewhere, or I'll see my little brother, or do something with my mom." Naomi has been a student assistant in the Aboriginal ESL class. She would do some "photocopying, putting units together." Naomi has studied Cree. She is actively involved on the grad committee and plays school volleyball. In past years, she attended drama club, played basketball, and participated in track-and-field activities; she was also the school student president in Grade 8 and, in Grade 10, was the editor of the school paper. Naomi attended Big River Indian Education Centre: "They had a residence, the residential school. . .and all the kids lived right in residential school, that attended, cause most of the kids are from far away; and then the kids that excelled in their school work and were good role models, they got to live in group home. . .They have, like, four houses set aside; and in each house, there was up to four kids. So there was two group homes for the girls and two for the guys; and I was in there half of the year. I was in residential school, and the other half of the year, I was in group home; and, see, in group home, you got to pay for everything yourself because you worked by cleaning up the school. We used to have, like, so many hours in a month that we would have to clean the school; and we got paid for that; and we had to pay for our own rent and our own groceries and everything. So it was like independent living. It was really good; I liked that experience."

Toni starts her day: "Get up; run; rush; eat; eat on the way out to the car; at school, talk to my friends again or do little errands; third, then lunch,

which I usually have stuff to do in lunch on Thursday's are alternate [shortened day], so I go to work right after that." In Grade 11, Toni was in the MDA program. This program is designed for "all the smart students." The courses Toni studied were, "well, you had your math, science, Englishes, and then the rest of your classes were electives." Toni is very involved in extra-curricular activities: "You need, like, a page [for] all my sports, I guess; SRC [Student Representative Counsel], hostess for school events. . . student assistant in the Aboriginal ESL class. . . Mondays I have to do SRC meetings; Tuesdays I have grad meeting." She is also the senior pin for the school. Toni says that SRC, "helped me a lot. . . helped me to kind of see, like, you know, I can control things; I can organize things; I can do this, and this you know, like, make me see that I can do things." She found that sports "sometimes interferes with your school work. Like, there's a big game tonight. It's between my essay and the game, though I've went to my basketball games, and I had to read a book while I was on the bench between shifts." Toni was not impressed with her computer class: "[It] didn't help me at all. . . its on kind of older computers." Toni's favourite subjects are "math, art, and English, I guess. . ." Although she finds aspects of English language arts difficult: "I'm not literate. . . I don't use my words really well. . . I have trouble saying what I need to say."

On a typical school day for Junior, "I'd get here and go to Mr. S's class. . . He teaches various things--English, Native studies. I get there, and I do a bit of my own work, and I give him some of my own work, some work that I'm doing for him." Junior enjoys this class because he can "do his own thing there" and receive a credit. He then goes to science, which is a quarter class. Quarter classes are completed in 8 weeks. Junior also takes art; he comments, "yeah I draw, one of my drawings is at Midtown. I'm proud of it." He is also completing his English 30 this semester. Junior does not find

school difficult, however, "English would probably be my hardest, I don't know, I don't really like, you have to use a lot of your feelings and stuff like that, eh, and I don't know how." Junior took Native studies: "It just--I got a high mark." He thought what they should do in Native studies is, "spend less time on the history of it and more time on social problems of today." Junior played high-school football; his position was defensive line. He was also the City Wrestling champion in the heavy-weight category.

Arnold starts his day: "I usually sleep in till I think sometimes 9:00, 9:30. And when I wake up late, I don't really have time to shower or anything. I quickly grab something and get out the door. When I get to school sometimes a teacher will say, 'oh you're late again.'" This semester he is, "just taking accounting. In second, I was taking Native studies, but I got kicked out because I had 15 absences. . .then there is a break and then family life, and then there is lunch. For lunch, I usually just go to the library, and I try to do all my homework in the library. Then when I come home then I don't have homework to do for the rest of the day, and I can do whatever I want after. . .then, after lunch, I have algebra 30, and after that, I have English 30-A." Arnold was on the track-and-field team for Grade 10 and part of Grade 11.

All participants were enrolled in a regular program in their high school. They participated in extra curricular activities that they felt comfortable with and that they enjoyed. They were self motivated and knew they would have to make positive decisions in order to complete high school.

Attendance

Participants were asked to describe their attendance patterns. They discussed why they were late and why they would or would not attend.

Bob does not come to school as much as he should. He has a

"tendency to miss classes here and there." He is not definite about his reasons for not attending; he just says, "some days I'll just not feel like going to class; some days get up and won't even want to go." Bob is feeling discouraged: "I didn't finish school last semester, and I won't be able to graduate this year. . .that's why I don't bother coming to classes." Ralph, has difficulty coming on time on Mondays: "Weekends are just over and [I] still feel kind of burnt out sometimes; sometimes you just stay home and do nothing." Toni went through stages of not attending: "It gets boring going to school day after day, and then homework, homework, homework; and then there's no fun." Naomi has always attended and has never had the desire not to come to school. Junior is attending school regularly; his probation is "forcing it on me." Prior to his sentence, his record was poor: "Yeah, I'd come when I felt like it; sometimes, I'd just go out of class and just not come back." He was interested in learning but found the pace of learning and instruction slow and boring. He would then fall so far behind that he could no longer catch up. He would quit: "yeah and that would start a cycle, like, I'd get ahead, and I'd just, ah, wait for a long time, and I'd play catch up and then get ahead. . .and in between those times, sometimes I'd fall behind, and then I wouldn't come to class, and I wouldn't catch up, and then I'd fall deeper and deeper and deeper." Arnold misses many morning classes: "Sometimes I miss a lot; and sometimes I don't miss. It's usually only in the morning classes that I miss a lot; and as soon as I get to school, I usually attend." His mother usually wakes him up for school. Some of his teachers tell him, "if you can't be on time, don't bother coming at all:" "I got a letter from the school, saying I was missing to much school and I was tardy."

All participants have been attending regularly at this time. However, it is evident that their attendance has not been consistent. The participants give various reasons for not attending regularly.

School Expectations

Participants were asked what were the rules and the consequences of not meeting the school expectations.

Junior expressed that students were “not allowed to wear hats in class, but you can wear them in the hallways”; and “obviously, the main rules--no fighting, no spitting, no slander.” The school had an attendance policy, “15 absences and you’re gone.” Bob describes the rules as “oh, just normal rules at every school: no swearing, no fighting, no missing classes, no skipping. I break the rules once in awhile; and there’s a no-smoking rule. Only time you can smoke is during break, and [you] can only smoke on the east side of the school.” Arnold described the rules as “regular rules.” He lists other school rules: “the late thing; and you’re not allowed to wear hats in the class; and you’re supposed to respect everyone else, give everyone respect that you want them to give you; you can’t talk when the teacher is talking.” Naomi expressed disapproval of “[no] smoking in the front. I hate that we can’t do it; I hate the back. . .It’s just like a brick wall and a field; it’s just boring; it’s like they’re trying to hide us.” She lists the other rules: “fighting they don’t really tolerate very rarely; but sometimes they’ll just allow the kid. . .the one that got beat up on; but the one who beat up the other kid has to be suspended. You know, a lot of my friends have been kicked out for fighting and stuff; and [they] have to go to City Park or something. Hats, you can’t wear hats in the classroom because it’s a place of learning, and it’s supposed to be, like, training you for the work place. They say they have a dress code, but I don’t know. You should see [how] some of the kids dress; they’re, like, punks. Here, it’s like really bad. . .Then smoking--you can’t light up in the front--you can get suspended, and there’s, like, a \$5000 fine if you’re caught pulling the fire alarm.” Ralph seemed relaxed about the rules: “Yeah, smoking and two lates equal an absence.” After clarification of the

question, "Tell me about your school rules?" Toni listed the following: "Like, the hat rule, boys and girls dress code--you have to have your hands, like, if you wear shorts or skirts or anything your hands have to touch [she demonstrates]; they have to be longer if you put your hands beside your side and can't have a lot of your body showing. But they're usually not strict on that cause of the styles that are coming. They don't want any cleavage showing or any of your legs too high showing, I guess." If students do not follow these rules "they tell you to go home and change; or if it's a beer shirt, but mostly they don't. They're usually not too strict on those, just because of society today labels them O.K.; and alcohol and something like that, they'll call your parents, suspend you if they catch you and drugs; suspend you or kick you out; fighting suspend you or kick you out." Consequences for misbehaviour would be a visit to the vice principal's office; for the second offence, a letter would be sent home; and a third offence would lead to a suspension from school.

These students did not find the academic or behavior expectations of their school demanding. They took responsibility for their actions and accepted the consequences.

Teachers

Participants were happy to discuss their teachers, past and present. They talked about how they were received by their teachers and how the students' attitude would affect the teacher's response to them.

Ralph feels the teachers are fair: "Actually, I feel like I get treated a lot better than the other kids." Teachers allowed Ralph to miss more than the maximum 15 classes. One teacher allowed him 18 lates with no suspension. Bob observed that "the teachers are fair if you're fair." Naomi agreed with these students: "Most of my teachers are really good. It depends on the

individual how the teacher is going to treat you. If you're going to be good and you're going to try, then they're going to help you." Arnold has contradicting opinions about the fairness of teachers. He thinks "most teachers are fair; they encourage you and stuff. . . They tell me things about my culture." When Arnold missed too many classes, "some teachers were nice to me, though. They let me stay cause I can do the work. It's just getting to school." However, "my brother didn't graduate from high school. . . He got bad teachers and that affected him in a bad way." The teachers told him "he was never going to make it to hockey school." Some of his teachers called him "stupid." Arnold's sister was kicked by one of her teachers, as were some of the other students who had been "mouthy to the teachers." One of Arnold's art teachers discussed with him the implications for arriving at school late: "If Native people are going to go anywhere, they have to be more responsible." Arnold believes "that some teachers are lenient with Native students, with me anyway. I think some of them sort of let me off the hook or they mark me easy. . . I think that they're easier on me then they should be. . . and that they make the work a bit easier." He also believes, "most teachers think that Aboriginal students have, like, an attitude problem. . . I think Aboriginal students don't want to be like them. . . They don't want to be confined in school. . . They want to have, like, more freedom, and they like learning. . . I think they like learning from more experience." Patrick felt that "some teachers give some pretty easy questions." He mentions how one teacher spoke to students: "I don't know why you're graduating. You're not worth it." In Patrick's words, "Mr. P. was a real asshole to Aboriginal kids. I told him off. I tried to work hard in his class but can't." Junior says teachers "are just doing their job." He describes the vice principal: "He's a good man; he's helped me out a lot. . . he's given me favours this past semester. He would have kicked me out and he said, 'no he's not going to kick me out'. . . that was right before

my sentencing, too, so that would have looked really bad.” Toni comments: “I only talk to the ones that will talk to me, that are nice.” She observed that “some of them [teachers], you can see that if, some of the guys from ESL, you see them walking down the hallway, a teacher will say, “Hi,” to me and just kind of walk by them.”

The participants in this study were open and honest in their description of their teachers. The students experienced racism, abuse, fairness, support, and encouragement.

Characteristics of quality teachers

Participants were asked to discuss what characteristics they thought quality teachers should possess.

Naomi “liked teachers that I can joke around with. That way, the work seems more like fun.” She also thought that “teachers that beat around the bush [who perhaps think they’re helping by over explaining] are very annoying.” Naomi observed “that when teachers [who] really don’t care for their jobs [who are there only for money] wind up with students who don’t care for the class.” She found that “English and math teachers are perhaps the most effective. This is because, all of the teachers I’ve met in these areas are perhaps the most passionate for their work and always seem to light up their rooms with an air of fascination. These teachers motivate me because they manage to make me believe that what I’m doing is interesting and good for my future.” Participants thought that teachers needed to be friendly, and they needed to possess a good sense of humour. Teachers should be patient with the students and be there when students needed help. Bob describes one of his teachers: “only teacher, right now, that makes me feel good and relaxed.” Ralph described his Grade 9 teacher: “although I was a pest in her class, she

always had time to help, whoever needed help and everyday I always needed help." These students also needed someone who would encourage them to "be proud of your culture, and do not be ashamed of being Indian." The participants expressed the need for freedom to be themselves and not be controlled. However, Toni felt that students also needed "a good teacher who is not going to let them skip and get away with it." She sees her ESL teacher as "putting a lid on it, straightening them out. He takes a different approach. He's not so, I'm the teacher, you must listen; I'm your buddy, I'm here to help you. He shows them real--life situations; he shows them the long--term things." Junior describes the ESL teacher: "He's an all right guy; he's pretty good; he's just there, and you know you can count on him every day." Ralph describes one of his First Nations teachers as, "the teacher I'm mostly related to, because he's just, maybe, because he's Native, maybe I can get along better with him. I think differently than other people." Toni also expressed that the ESL students respect their teacher more because he's Native, and he knows a lot of stuff about Natives. Patrick says, "I don't care if they're Aboriginal teachers as long as they treat everyone fair, equal."

Community and Parental Support

The participants described community and parental support. They discussed who encouraged them to continue in school and how.

Ralph's stepfather encourages him to attend school regularly: "He just says, 'make sure you attend, like, don't miss for nothing.'" When asked, "What are the consequences of missing class?" Ralph replied, "Sometimes he raises his voice. . .if I get kicked out, that's when shit will really hit the fan." His aunts and uncles encourage him not to stop at Grade 12: "Don't stop there. As for me, it's too late. It's never to late to go to school." He comments, "As soon as they [aunts and uncles] hear something, the whole town knows about

it. So, if I get kicked out of school, the whole town is pointing at you, eh.”

Most importantly, “it’s a disappointment to myself,” not to complete Grade 12.

Ralph’s band is paying for his rent. He receives “about \$475.” Bob’s grandmother and mother encouraged him to attend school. However, his mother does not attend the parent-teacher interviews: “The last time she went to one, I was maybe about, it was probably the year before my dad died.” Bob admits: “I usually don’t tell her what I have. Maybe if I told her she would go, but, I don’t know. I think I’m scared of what the teachers are going to tell her, and she’s going to come back and tell me the teachers told her, and I just don’t want her to say anything bad.” When Bob needs help with homework, “once in while she’ll sit down there and she’ll help me [with] my social, but other than that, she probably wouldn’t help me.” His grandmother just wants him to get his Grade 12: “She doesn’t care how I do it, she just wants me to.”

Bob is completing Grade 12: “I’m doing it for myself, a big part of it is for him [his father]. . . I just think that he’d probably be proud of me finish school.”

Naomi’s mother “is supportive, but she never told me what I should do. I’ve always been very independent, and she respects that, and that’s what I like.”

Toni’s parents tell her she must work hard: “They tell me, have to get your marks, have to do this, marks, blah, school, blah, blah. Then it’s, like, in order to get this, you have to go and work. University work hard, hard, hard.” She would like to hear them ask her, “Are you happy with what you’re going to do?” They caution her, “don’t end up like us.” She does not find their approach encouraging: “They want so much more, and it all comes down on me. It’s kind of overwhelming.”

Junior’s family supported him: “They fed me, kept me clothed, I don’t know.” His mother is encouraging him to get a degree: “Since she started university, when she moved here in ‘89, so she’s pretty high on that, that I should get a degree or something.” On the reserve, “me and my cousins we’d be sitting around, they just tell me, go for it all, get

what you can now." Junior has a friend who is an Elder: "He would say that you should get an education." If Junior chooses to pursue a post secondary education, "the band will probably help or else the Saskatoon District Tribal Council." Arnold is graduating this year: "So I did O.K." His cousins told him, "that I'd drop out at Grade 10." His mother, "helped me get up in the morning. My dad hasn't really done anything, I don't think for school. He just sort of says it's important to get an education. . .Dad drives him to school." Arnold does, "look up to him [his father] because he's been to university." He believes "If I want to go somewhere with my life, I have to get an education, or I'll probably just end up on welfare." Patrick is happy to have his sister wake him up to go to school in the morning. His brother is "not very helpful. He got jealous that he [Patrick] did something with his art. He talks behind my back." Another brother defends Patrick: "Leave him alone. You guys had that chance but you blew it. He's trying hard." Patrick has a nephew who wants to be like him: "So I'm a role model for my nephew. He's 13, and he doesn't want to do nothing. I made a deal. If you pass your grade, I'll buy you a stereo." Patrick's band "didn't believe he was graduating." He will receive \$250 for graduation expenses. However, "it's not the amount I was looking for. People on the reserve got \$650." This is Patrick's first experience with success.

Cultural Awareness

Participants discussed their involvement with their culture. They shared their thoughts on their culture, what languages were spoken in the home, and who in their family taught them about their culture. Also, they described the traditional customs of their people.

Ralph is fluent in "English and Dene." [Junior speaks, "English and Saulteaux."] He also understands some Cree: "I just picked up [Cree] when

people were talking. . .cause, ah, Saulteaux and Cree is very similar.” Naomi speaks “just English.” Her mother “speaks Cree, sometimes.” Bob admits, “I know a little bit of Cree.” Toni said that she knew a little Cree and then retracted, saying, “No, don’t even put it down.” Her biological father speaks Cree. Patrick commented, “some people tell me I don’t know Cree. I wish I knew how to speak Cree.” Ralph stays in contact with the Elders on the reserve. When asked what they talk about he replied, “mostly things about the past, what it was like before the highway to the reserve was made. People used to live in different areas, and then they all came together on the reserve. I just hear different stories of what happened in the past, mostly down river people lived there.” When he is experiencing personal problems, he calls home and usually talks to an Elder or his grandparents: “They just explain things in depth; they talk about the same subject for about a good half hour, then move on to the next subject. Usually, they mix them up to, eh; they talk about one thing, then something else, and back to the first thing. Gets me thinking.” Toni had little knowledge about her First Nations heritage. She did not understand the question, “What band do you belong to?” She described the reserves as a negative environment: “It seems that the reserves, they be like going through the drinking thing at the reserve, the abuse whatever else. I always call it the reserve thing, like all the bad stuff happened at the reserve.” Junior does not communicate with the Elders on the reserve, but visits with one in Saskatoon. He lived with an Elder prior to being placed in a community home. The Elder would “have his little talks” with Junior, encouraging him to complete high school. He also talks to Junior about the traditional ways First Nations kids were raised: “He [the Elder] doesn’t really put any pressure on that.” They would also discuss politics and values. Junior’s grandmother would speak to him about his culture, but he does not know very much. When Junior goes back to the reserves, he is often called a

“coconut” white on the inside and brown on the outside because he does not know his language. They also ask him, “What kind of Indian are you?” It is also more difficult for him to find a job on the reserve, “cause if you’re a permanent resident, you’re more likely to stick around.” Arnold’s father and grandparents live on the reserve. Granny speaks a little English. His father believes in Native Spirituality. Arnold’s brother calls him “white” sometimes: “I think it’s because I’m going to school and I’m doing this. He says I’m not an Aboriginal. . .He’s concerned about all Indian things, and I’m not concerned about all Indian things. I learn about other things too, because I get tired of Indian issues. . .I don’t just sort of agree with his viewpoints on Indian people, call me apple or not Indian. Maybe sometimes I believe him too.” Arnold will sometimes stop in at the Metis and Friendship Centre: “I went there to get my treaty card. Sometimes, when I’m there, like, when I go to the doctor’s office and I go downtown, or if I’m downtown waiting for a bus or something, I’ll stop and pick up the Native paper.” His sister was involved in Native dancing. Naomi is, “into my Native culture.” She and her mother “do a lot of things together. We go to a lot of sweat lodges and feasts and round dances; and I’m supposed to start dancing this year too, jingle dress.” Naomi does not visit with the Elders: “I haven’t actually ever gone to an Elder for problems but my mom’s spoken for me.” In contrast to Naomi, Patrick “doesn’t like going to Sun Dances. I don’t believe in anything--in sweats, pow wows and sun dances.” This year Patrick “spent Christmas with family on the reserve, first time in six years.” Bob’s grandmother used to “talk Cree to me when I was younger but, it’s just that now she doesn’t talk Cree anymore. She talks to me in English.” His grandmother taught him “how to run a sweat.” He has only attended one sweat lodge: “They’re really hot, you sweat lots, its just something you go in there. It’s a round thing; and it’s on the ground; and there is hole in the middle; and you take rocks; and you put rocks in there;

and those rocks are, like, red hot; and there's an Elder in there; when they shut that door, it'd be black in there. The Elder in there, he'll start singing; and he'll throw water on the rocks; and steam comes up; and it's supposed to, like, if you're in one, you're supposed to pray and it also helps you to clean your soul."

Bob used to smudge when he lived with his grandmother: "My grandma does it a lot, and when I was staying at my grandma's, I used to do it." He enjoys going to pow wows: "There's drummers, they'll sing and dance. . .it's just a fun thing." Arnold's father "wants me to get more culturally involved. He himself is returning; he doesn't know much about his culture; he is sort of going back learning things. I guess he wants me to do it with him." Arnold is not sure: "I don't know, I've been to a few sweats and Sun Dances and stuff like that, but I'm not that interested in it. I don't know why. Probably one day I'll probably want to go back to learn more about my culture."

Peer Relationships

Participants were asked to discuss relationships they have with their peers. They talked about things they do with their friends and their lack of friends. Participants shared personal feelings about the way they are treated in their schools and in the community.

Junior and Ralph expressed that the student body knew very little about First Nations students: "They don't see the life through the eyes of a Native, how they look at objects and it's all about respect. That's the one thing I always hear since I learned how to talk, respect. You got to respect everything." Patrick felt he had been given some unfair treatment: "Some Natives, I just don't understand. They try so hard to make it in the city. Others, they drink and walk around in ugly clothes. My cousin went to a bar, got

kicked out and blamed for stealing because he was Native." Patrick did not find it easy growing up in the city: "probably wouldn't survive if I was the only one in my family in the city."

Arnold found Grade 4 lonely: "I didn't have any friends in my school, but I had my friends from the West side. I still hang around with them. I feel more connected with them." Arnold's east side peers "feared them because of fighting." Yet, they would say things like, "Go get your Oka Cola or your grandpa is a Lysol drinker." Arnold believes that his peers have misconceptions: "I think that they were assuming that because I was Native, I smoked pot, and I've had people assume that because I was Native my parents are alcoholics or my dad is an alcoholic and a wife abuser." When Arnold was younger, he and his brother would hang around Egadz: "I think we hung around there a little bit but that was the kids; they were sort of a bad influence a little bit on me and my brother." Arnold recalls his first drug experience in Grade 3: "Some older cousins were into it, and some of my older friends and some of my brother's older friends." His uncle, "used to supply when they were in Grade 7 and 8." Arnold comments: "Yeah, I partied quite a bit when I was younger, in my younger days, like in Grade 7 and 8. . . and a little bit in Grade 6 too. . . I usually get drunk. A lot of times I got drunk, when I was younger, but I quit when I got into high school. . . I hope I'm past that stage. I hope [I] don't ever go back to that stage." Arnold does not have any friends in his present school; "They acknowledge me, but I'm not sure if I know what a friend is." Arnold washes dishes part time: "It's not that bad. I don't get along with my co-worker. . . He bosses me around and stuff, and I can't stand that because he's younger than me. . . I just sort of take it."

At school Bob would, "prefer working by myself." He does not feel respected: "Well, just by how they act, you can just tell, just by how they're acting. Sometimes they'll treat me all right, and then again, they'll just totally

be the opposite. . . I don't know. We just don't get along." After school, "I'll phone up my friends. Maybe we'll go out, go to a party or something or sometimes we go to the bar; we play soccer, baseball, football, hockey, basketball--just go and have fun." He describes his friends as multi-national: "I have white friends, I have Chinese friends, I have all sorts of friends. If they treat me good, I'll treat them good."

Toni enjoys going out with her friends: "We mostly go party, have fun, just driving around, going out to eat, wash our cars, the movies, go play pool." They sometimes drink when they go out: "If we all want to drink, someone has to sacrifice themselves to be the driver. Even though we know it's bad for us we do it anyway."

Junior has "a lot of friends." He enjoys playing cards, "talk to people, mainly I guess I keep to myself. I don't really have my own group, I don't really have a best friend, I got a lot of friends though. I talk to people. I have a few words with them, go out sometimes." Junior sees the First Nations students are "kind of a minority in the school. There's lots of us but we're still a minority a lot of people look down on that. . . They're not good people, they're kind of ignorant." He shares his frustrations: "Sometimes I see people, I just feel like getting violent on them. It's not a good feeling."

Personal Goals

Participants were asked to share their personal goals with the researcher. They talked of finishing high school, going into post-secondary education or the work force.

Ralph is determined to complete his Grade 12: "Nowadays you need a Grade 12, even to be a janitor. If I want to put food on the table for my own family one of these days, education is the only way to go." He plans to work in the janitorial field or in the mines. He says, "a lot of my uncles work at

mines too, so I threw in an application there too, see if I can start off with a better job, then hopefully next year go back to school again." He would like to take "heavy-duty mechanic" classes at Kelsey: "Then, if my application goes through, I'm going to go to aviation school in Ontario." Ralph explained how he first got interested in aviation: "Well, when I was about six, seven, there was a forest fire near the reserve. I was out playing around the back yard; then I hear this loud noise and I look up and there's a big helicopter going over my head; and I [was] just surprised by that, eh; and I ran to the fire cache, seen how it hovers and how it moves."

Bob's personal goals are, "right now, just to finish Grade 12, and then try and go into some kind of a course or something maybe at Kelsey." He would really like to get into engineering, but if he cannot, he may take a course in welding or in construction. He has no definite plans: "It's wherever I can get work, that's where I'll be."

Junior says, "I want to finish high school." He shares his aspirations: "I'd like to go into banking, or I'd like to own my own business. . . I think a bar is pretty good. Makes big business." Later in his life, he would like to get a degree: "I'd like to get a degree, or own a bar, get an agriculture, into what ever I can, even do a little gambling."

Naomi is determined: "I'm going to be a family doctor to start with, and I'm going to open my own practice in North Battleford--a Native run clinic." In her clinic. "I'm going to hire Native doctors and nurses, and it's going to be completely native run. There are eight reserves around there, so I could do a lot of good."

Patrick's teachers, his guidance counsellor, and the Indian and Metis Representative for the Saskatoon Public School Division were instrumental in helping Patrick secure a placement in an art school for next year.

Arnold is excited about graduating in June: "Yeah, but I'm graduating

this year so I did O.K.." He has been invited to attend the "13th Annual Native Recognition Night." It is an evening dedicated to recognizing the achievements of Aboriginal students. They receive awards and scholarships. Arnold does not know what he wants to do after he graduates; "I think I'm going to try to go to university, but I'm not sure. . . I never planned to be anything. I don't know what I want to go into yet. Commerce, I think, then Education, go through ITEP." At present he is working as a dish washer.

Changes to Education

Students were asked in the first interview to think about what changes need to be made to improve the success rate of First Nations students completing high school.

There are aspects of the reserve school that Ralph misses: "the grass, the trees, and the freedom. Here, wherever you walk, there is pavement-- over there its gravel roads. You're always busy there. In the city, it's you always need money to run around. Back home money is just an object." The way to success: "I just pick the right choices." Arnold contradicts himself: "In the cities, I think they need more Aboriginal teachers, I don't know if it would make a difference, if they're Aboriginal or not." Bob would probably, "try and hire more Native teachers, because in this school, I know that there are three Native, well not even three Native. There is one full-time; Native teacher here, there's one counsellor that's Native but other than that that's all there is; and there's, like, over 200 students in this school." He felt: "Native students would probably have, they'd have more people to come talk to, more people to relate with; and it would probably be easier for them to talk to them."

Naomi believes: "Success is totally dependent on the individual; if students want help, there is always help for whatever you need." She would go to the principal or vice principal, and if they could not help her, she would

go to the next person. Naomi believes: "It depends on the person. How much do you want, that's how much you're going to get. . .I know a lot of Native kids who are go getters and will go and take what they need and get what they want and, you know, do it in a proper manner; and I know a lot of kids who would rather be out in the rough crowds." Naomi describes parents of some of her friends: "They still drink and doing crazy things. . .If you're going to have a kid you have to respect that kid. You can't show them wrong things, otherwise you're going to end up with a kid who's a failure." Naomi thinks the Aboriginal ESL class, "was a good step." She also explains that Elders, "used to talk to the students you know, about traditional values and ways." They used to come to the school, and the students were very receptive at first, "but it's like everything else--for two weeks it's fascinating, and then it just dies."

Naomi and Toni believe that in order for education to change, society must get rid of the drugs. Toni expressed: "I barely know any Indian that don't smoke up. . .So many kids go to class ripped all the time." She says, "I figure if we had this traditional teaching and stuff going on here, then it would help because, when you are traditional, you can't drink and smoke up, out of respect for your grandfathers." Toni, describes her cousins: "They don't care about school really; money and fun are important to them, and drug abuse plays a part in their failure." In order to help these kids, "motivational speakers would be really good. One thing that I've noticed is that not a lot of the Elders out and like telling them what happens, what to do about it, like, mentally strong as well as physically. I think that's where the weak link is, is mentally. A lot of them think that they should do drugs." She believes, "they have no goals." Toni comments: "The school system is trying, but they [teachers] are hard on them [students] because of the parenting. . .Just cause the parenting didn't help their attitude. So they come into class having a bad

attitude, and so, the teachers just kick them out. Like, that's not going to help them."

Junior and Arnold believe that First Nations students must become more involved in their schools. Arnold feels, "If I would have got involved a little bit more, I think I could have met more people." But just attending class is not enough. Students should join sports teams; they would not feel so left out: "Some days its really hard for me to stay there [at school] because you see all these people going around with groups; and they have friends, I'm not really a part of that." Schools also need more role models for First Nations students. As well, Junior believes the general population in the school needs to be educated: "They need to get educated. . .they got to see the reserves. . .they're going to crack jokes about it, I know. That's just the way they're going to be. So there's not much you can do about that until we're just about equal in number." Arnold disagrees with his brother: "I think my brother can't really blame a teacher. . .I think most of it is his fault. He should take the blame, not blame other people."

Summary

This chapter presents the educational experiences and family backgrounds of seven First Nations students attending high school in the Saskatoon Public School Division. They have had many positive experiences. They enjoy their educational programs and in general they find their teachers to be fair. First Nations students appreciate the opportunity to work and talk to First Nations teachers. However, throughout their formal education they have and continue to experience racism from their peers and from some of their teachers. Participants have similarities in their upbringing. All participants relocated several times, hence they have changed schools frequently. As well all participants have lived with various role models,

however, all have had one constant care giver. Some participants struggle with problems of suicide, drug and alcohol abuse and conflicts with the law. In conclusion all participants are anxious to complete their Grade 12 and to move forward with their lives.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, SUMMARY, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The major areas covered in this chapter include a review of the original research questions; a summary of the results of the study; and suggestions for further research. It is hoped that the findings may prove useful to people working with First Nations students.

Review of the Research Questions

This study was undertaken to explore the educational perspectives of seven First Nations students attending high school in the Saskatoon Public School Division. The research questions which guided this study were:

1. *Tell me about your family background.* This included a discussion of their tribal and First Nations origins and the languages spoken by the participant and in the home; the number of siblings living with them or outside of the home and their place in the family; their mobility, within or without their family; who the significant care givers were and their level of education; number of years in urban areas; and number of dependents they have.
2. *Tell me about your involvement in school.* Participants were asked how many years they had attended their current school; their grade level; the types of programs in which they were enrolled; their attendance patterns; and their involvement in

extra curricular activities.

3. *What are your personal school or career goals?*

Participants provided a self assessment which included their perception of the current school year and their future goals.

4. *What school programs or processes enable or are the least helpful in assisting you to achieve your goals?*

Participants described a typical school day; school subjects; areas of difficulty; teacher and administrator interaction; school rules and disciplinary actions; counselling service; and peer relationships.

5. *What family interactions and community programs are enabling you to achieve your goals?*

6. *What changes do you think need to be made to improve First Nations students educational opportunities ?*

These questions were addressed to the seven students in the sample in interviews. The recurring themes that emerged were: (a) school programs; (b) school expectations; (c) attendance; (d) teachers; (e) characteristics of quality teachers; (f) community and family support; (g) cultural awareness; (h) peer relationships; (i) changes to education. Conclusions were drawn from the findings.

School Courses

The literature review discussed the traditional ways in which First Nations people were educated. Education is a process that begins before birth and continues long after formal education is over. Learning at one stage has implications for subsequent stages (RCAP, 1996). Participants in this study varied in their knowledge of this process. Two participants were so far

removed from their origins that they were not able to tell me what their First Nations affiliation was. Three of them were aware of the experiences of their grandparents and parents in residential schools. One student mentioned that his mother was raised in the "bush," because his grandmother would not allow her to go to the residential school. Today, the efforts of Aboriginal educators and communities are directed toward restoring continuity between the home environment and the school. The teaching of traditional languages, the staffing of schools with Aboriginal teachers, the inclusion of Elders as teachers, and the development of curriculum rooted in the values, history, and culture of First Nations peoples are all attempts to fit formal education into a broader learning process that begins in the family (RCAP, 1996).

All the participants in this study had similar academic schedules, and they followed similar courses. While some had courses geared toward their particular needs. A course that one school offered that the other two did not was the Aboriginal English as a Second Language (Aboriginal ESL) class. Although this course is still in its developing stages, the participants spoke of it favourably. They enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere that the teacher provided for them. They were able to come into this class to work on homework or engage in conversation with an Aboriginal teacher who would help them with their entire academic program.

The Aboriginal ESL program also provided time for the teacher to do home visits during the school day. However, with the high enrolment, there was no time to leave the school. The lack of teachers at the secondary level inhibits the development of appropriate curricula and pedagogy and deprives students of role models (RCAP, 1996). Three participants had been enrolled in the Native Studies class. However, they found the class irrelevant to their needs. One student described it as, "learning a bunch of definitions"; another student thought the content failed to deal with the experiences of First Nations

people today. In talking with a teacher about the Native Studies program I found that the content of this program was structured to guide the students through the history of the First Nations people. The rationale was that students must learn the terminology used in the history of First Nations people in order to better understand their history.

Some participants were enrolled in quarter courses, which were completed in eight-week blocks. The success of achieving a credit in a short period of time, as opposed to dedicating an entire semester to one subject, was seen as desirable. Two students mentioned that there had been an Elder program in the school. However, the program seemed to have lost its momentum after a couple of weeks. They suggested that it needed to be reviewed. Naomi explains that Elders “used to talk to the students, you know, about traditional values and ways.” They used to come to the school, and the students were very receptive at first, “but it’s like everything else—for two weeks it’s fascinating, and then it just dies.” Two participants took part in the Work Ed program. They enjoyed the work experience and were gaining credit at the same time. Other programs met the basic requirements for a recognized Grade 12. The participants identified which programs should be reviewed and those with which they felt comfortable. For example, Naomi believes the Aboriginal ESL class “was a good step.” Bob appreciated the Work Ed program. He comments: “I would go to school in the morning, and in the afternoon, we would go to work, and I like that; that gave me some experience. . .”

School Expectations

The three high schools in this study varied in size, population of First Nations students, program and in location in Saskatoon. However, their student expectations were similar. The participants in this study understood

and accepted the behavioural guidelines and consequences their school had in place. For example, Arnold described the rules as "regular rules." Junior listed the rules: "Obviously, the main rules [are] no fighting, no spitting, no slander." Each school had an attendance policy, such as, "15 absences and you're gone." Bob admits: "I break the rules once in awhile." He outlines other school rules: "the late thing; and and you're supposed to respect everyone else--give everyone respect that you want them to give you; you can't talk when the teacher is talking." Other rules included: "Hats, you can't wear hats in the classroom because it's a place of learning, and it's supposed to be, like, training you for the work place. They say they have a dress code. . .and there's, like, a \$5000 fine if you're caught pulling the fire alarm." If students do not follow these rules, the consequences are a visit to the vice principals office; for the second offence, a letter is sent home; and a third offence leads to a suspension from school. The participants understood that it was necessary to have rules in the school. They were not confined by them to the same degree that their ancestors who had attended the residential schools. School is not a frightening place.

Levels of Involvement Within Their School.

The review of the literature indicates that students who succeed in school experience an overlapping of school subjects and the knowledge that has personal meaning for them (Sleeter & Grant, 1991): "They participate competently in instruction as a result of having developed a confident cultural identity, as well as appropriate school-based knowledge and interactional structures" (p. 32). For example the two female participants in the study were very involved in their schools. They enjoyed the commitment and social aspects of the sports and committees in which they were involved. One young woman was also very knowledgeable and involved in the First Nations

culture. She presented herself as a confident and enthusiastic student. The other knew very little about her heritage. Only one male participant was involved in school sports. He expressed that Native students should be more involved in their school. The other four students were not involved in extra-curricular activities at the school or community level. They felt alienated by their peers and by some of their teachers. Arnold felt: "I [don't] have any friends in my school"; and in Patrick's words, "Mr. P. was a real asshole to Aboriginal kids." Clearly, participants that were involved in the extra-curricular activities at the school and community levels saw the benefits of their involvement. For example, Junior acknowledges his success: "Yeah, I draw; one of my drawings is at Midtown. I'm proud of it."

Attendance.

Statistics Canada, 1993, reports 16,325 children from ages 5 to 14 are attending school in Saskatchewan. In one northern community, a study of the educational system indicated that many of the changes that Aboriginal people had asked for had been implemented; yet the retention rate is not improving. The highest drop-out rate for Aboriginal students is between Grades 9 and 10 (RCAP, 1996).

Three participants in this study were successful in completing their Grade 12 in a continuous 12-year period. However, only one student attended on a regular basis throughout her formal education. The other participants had many reasons for not attending. They ranged from: "I didn't finish school last semester, and I won't be able to graduate this year. . .that's why I don't bother coming to classes." Ralph says: "Weekends are just over and [I] still feel kind of burnt out sometimes; sometimes you just stay home and do nothing." Toni comments: "It gets boring going to school day after day." Bob is very direct when he says, "Some days I'll just not feel like going

to class.” Four participants had dropped out or were suspended during their high school years. Upon their return, they were more determined to complete the necessary 24 credits to receive a high school-diploma before the age of 21. It is apparent in this sample of First Nations students that regular and continuous attendance is an area of concern.

Teachers

The literature in Chapter 2 explains that the values reinforced by the teacher, the inclusion or exclusion of Aboriginal materials and perspectives in the course, the type of interaction in the classroom, and the relationship between teachers and parents will all affect the comfort of the Aboriginal student (RCAP, 1996). Generally, the participants in this study felt that the teachers are fair: “I feel like I get treated a lot better than the other kids.” Bob observed that “the teachers are fair if you’re fair.” Naomi agreed with these students: “Most of my teachers are really good.” Arnold has contradicting points of view: “Most teachers are fair. . .most teachers think that Aboriginal students have, like, an attitude problem.” Patrick felt that “some teachers give some pretty easy questions.” Arnold agrees with Patrick: “Some teachers are lenient with Native students. . .and that they make the work a bit easier.” Toni comments: “I only talk to the ones that will talk to me, that are nice.” The participants have pointed out that some teachers continue to discriminate against the First Nations students by not having the same academic expectations of them as they do of the non-Aboriginal students.

Characteristics of Quality Teachers

Teachers cannot convey accurate information about Aboriginal people and instil respectful attitudes unless they have been prepared to do so (RCAP, 1996). Participants in this study said that a good teacher needs to

possess and demonstrate qualities such as friendliness, patience, encouragement, knowledge of Aboriginal people, sensitivity and respect. They appreciated teachers who were fair and firm, yet not controlling. For example, one student commented: “[Mr. S.] is the only teacher, right now, that makes me feel good and relaxed.” Ralph’s Grade 9 teacher, “always had time to help.” Junior enjoyed his ESL teacher: “He’s an all right guy; he’s pretty good; he’s just there, and you know you can count on him every day.” Some of the participants agreed with the literature in that there is a need for more Aboriginal teachers at the secondary level. Ralph describes one of his First Nations teachers as “the teacher I’m mostly related to, because he’s just, maybe, because he’s Native, maybe I can get along better with him. I think differently than other people.” Others felt that regardless of their teachers’ race, in general they were meeting their overall expectations.

Personal and Career Goals

As stated in the literature, one of the primary aims of education is to train young people in the skills they will need to be successful and productive (Miller, 1996). The participants in this study were asked to share their personal and career goals. They all spoke of the importance of education, and their immediate goal was to graduate from Grade 12. They believed that to be successful, they needed an education. Five of them planned to pursue a post-secondary education. Ralph’s goal is “to go to aviation school.” Naomi comments, “I’m going to be a family doctor.” Junior is still deciding, “get a degree, or own a bar, get an agriculture [degree], into what ever I can, even do a little gambling.” Patrick has been accepted to art school. Toni will attend university. Two of them do not know what they wanted to do, but they were sure that they wanted to work. Throughout the conversations, it was clear that their parents were encouraging them to complete high school and

to pursue further education.

Peer Relationships

Some of the First Nations students in this study felt that other students in their school knew very little about Aboriginal people: "They don't see the life through the eyes of a Native." The male participants felt that First Nations people experienced unfair treatment. For example, one participant's cousin was "blamed for stealing because he was Native." Arnold's peers, "were assuming that because I was Native, I smoked pot, and I've had people assume that because I was Native my parents are alcoholics or my dad is an alcoholic and a wife abuser." Arnold felt he did not belong and he "didn't have any friends." Bob does not feel that his peers respect him: "Just by how they act, you can just tell, just by how they're acting." The female participants enjoyed their social connections with their peers: "We mostly go party, have fun, just driving around, going out to eat, wash our cars, the movies, go play pool." Junior found his peers to be "kind of ignorant." He shares his frustrations: "Sometimes I see people, I just feel like getting violent on them. It's not a good feeling."

It is obvious from these statements that the high schools must explore ways in which Aboriginal students can become involved and feel accepted by their peers. These students are experiencing racism from their peers and it will continue until non-Aboriginal people learn to model acceptance of the First Nations people and their culture.

Family and Community Support

A statement in the policy on Indian Control of Indian Education clearly articulates that Native people believe in education. They want schools to give their children a strong sense of identity, with confidence in their personal

worth and ability. All participants were encouraged by their family members to pursue their educational goals. For example, Ralph's stepfather would tell him: "Make sure you attend, like, don't miss for nothing." The benefits of attending school regularly were stressed. Arnold believes: "If I want to go somewhere with my life, I have to get an education. Some students were provided with the basic necessities of life and were expected to be self-motivated. Family members would wake them up in the morning, or apply discipline and consequences for not attending. One student had the support of the people on his reserve guiding him to his graduation day: "If I get kicked out of school, the whole town is pointing at you, eh." Some participants who were living on their own were being sponsored by their band. One student was being encouraged by the pride of his late father: "I just think that he'd probably be proud of me." One student was motivated by her mother's respect for her. Her mother is a positive role model for her daughter. Other parents simply do not want their children to endure the same hardships they had. Two students looked to the Elders for encouragement. Two other students were being harassed by their brothers and cousins about their success. The most common motivating factor in completing high school was that they were doing it for themselves. Arnold sums it up by stating, "If I want to go somewhere with my life I have to get an education, or I'll probably just end up on welfare."

These participants had set goals for themselves and were working to attain them. Family relationships are important in Aboriginal families (Hampton, 1995) and the findings demonstrate this case.

Suggestions for Changes to Education.

Aboriginal peoples ethics of non-interference permits their children to make their own choices in every aspect of life (Ross, 1992). This philosophy

is reinforced in the students statements of independence. Students feel strongly that they should not be dependent on outside influences for encouragement. One stated that "your success depends on your desire to achieve." Another student had a similar point of view; she felt that "success is totally dependent on the individual. If students want help, there is always help for whatever they need." Three students simply said that you just have to make the right choices. They also felt that they needed to set goals and learn how to attain them in order to succeed. In summarizing this, Arnold feels, "you must take responsibility for yourself, don't blame others." The need for more Aboriginal role models was also stressed: "Try and hire more Native teachers." These young people would like to see more Native teachers in their schools. Junior comments: "In the cities, I think they need more Aboriginal teachers." Some suggested a need for Native clubs and more activities for Native students. One such opportunity was the Elder program. Two students thought that Elders could teach them to be physically and mentally strong, therefore, developing an inner strength to help them say 'no' to the influences of drugs and alcohol. Elders could also teach the history of First Nations people so that students may better understand the context of the lives of their ancestors. Some students felt that in order for education to change, society would have to get rid of the drug problem as they saw drug abuse as a major cause of their failure. It was also suggested that First Nations students become more involved in their schools, more specifically on sports teams. This would reduce the stress of loneliness and give the student a feeling of belonging. It would also give the general population the opportunity to get to know the First Nations students on a personal level. Finally, some participants feel strongly that changes to education come from the environment in which one is raised. As Naomi clearly states: "If you're going to have a kid, you have to respect that kid. You can't show them wrong

things, otherwise you're going to end up with a kid who's a failure."

Summary

Each First Nations student has his or her own unique perspectives of their educational experience. Although there are similarities and differences they all agree that they must take responsibility for their future for which they are doing. The participants in this study have shared their perspectives of the educational experience and have made suggestions for changes to be made in order to improve the education of First Nations students. They believe that changes must come from the home, the school, and from our society. Parents and guardians must be positive role models for their children. Teachers must be consistent in academic and behavioral expectations of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Society must address the issue of racism in and out of the school. It is hoped that findings from this study will provide information and feedback on how best to address the educational needs of First Nations students attending urban high schools. As there is little literature expressing the perspectives of First Nations students, this study may help in the establishment of a research based foundation on which to begin the process of expressing students needs and to continue the development of programs that will help First Nations students to succeed academically and personally.

Suggestions for Further Research

Investigating perceptions of First Nations students of their educational experience is necessary if we are to gain a better understanding of their needs. Based on this study, further research could include:

1. Studies involving larger samples of urban and rural First Nations high school students in Saskatchewan would provide a broader view of their perceptions.

2. Classrooms which have programs that the First Nations students have identified as beneficial should be examined. This information would help us define the aspects that are being defined as beneficial to students.
3. Elders as role models and teachers, and they should be involved in the school. What changes need to be made to continue this program and ensure its success?

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Appendix A
Interview Guide,
Dialogue Journal Topics and Questions
and
Student Profile Questionnaire

Interview Guide

1. Tell me about your family background.
- Tribal/First Nations origins, languages spoken, number of siblings, number of dependents, place in family, mobility, significant care givers, education level of care givers, years in urban areas
2. Tell me about your involvement in school.
- years in current school, grade level, general, enriched or French Immersion stream, attendance patterns, extra curricular activities
3. What are your personal school or career goals?
- current self assessment, current school year, future goals
4. What school programs or processes enable or are the least helpful in assisting you to achieve your goals?
- describe a typical school day, school subjects, areas of difficulty, teacher and administrator interaction, school rules and discipline plans, counselling service, peer relationships
5. What family processes and community programs are enabling you to achieve your goals?
6. What changes do you think need to be made to improve First Nations students educational opportunities and/or benefits?

Dialogue Journal Topics and Questions

1. Describe a positive school experience you have had.
2. Tell me about a teacher that really sticks out in your mind that may have influenced you to get to where you are today.
3. Describe how effective teachers motivated and challenged you to attend school and to produce quality work.
4. What kinds of programs or activities in this school have you been part of and how do you assess their effectiveness?
5. Tell me about who you consider to be the most significant relationship in your life. Did you see them as positive and supportive? If not, why not?
6. Tell me about the kinds of support you receive from your family, extended family or community in regards to education.

Student Profile Questionnaire

Personal

Name _____ Pseudonym _____

Age _____

First Nations Affiliation _____

Languages spoken _____

Parents _____ Permission Received _____

Number of siblings _____

Ranking within family _____

Dependents _____

School

Name of school _____

Grade _____

Recivism _____ Which grade _____

Academic stream _____

Alternative education programs taken or taking _____

Other schools attended

Location of Schools

Extra curricular activities:

At the school level _____

Within the Community

Contact Dates _____

Appendix B

**Participant Consent Form
and
Confirmation of Participant Role**

Jacqueline Duff
c/o The Department of Educational Psychology
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Participation - Release Agreement

I agree to participate in the research study on the perceptions of First Nations students on their educational experiences. I understand the nature and purpose of this study and I am participating as a volunteer. I am aware that the data from this study will become part of the text of Mrs. J. Duff's thesis. I understand that I have the right to withdraw at any time and that a pseudonym will be used to protect my identity. Once the study is completed I will be allowed to review the data to ensure it is valid.

Research Participant

Primary Researcher

Date

Date

Parent or Guardian of

Jacqueline Duff
c/o The Department of Educational Psychology
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Confirmation of Participant Role

As a participant in Jacqueline Duff's research project, I confirm that I have been informed of the following:

1. That my participation in the investigation is voluntary and that I am at liberty to withdraw at any time.
2. That I have been informed of the nature and purpose of my participation in it.
3. That all interviews and journal entries shared with Mrs. Duff will be used, in part or as a whole, in her thesis.
4. That my identity will be protected through the use of pseudonyms.
5. That I shall be made aware and informed of all information collected about me and I will be consulted about how it will be used.
6. That the information will be kept confidential and stored in a locked cabinet in Mrs. Duff's home and that the data will be destroyed one year after the thesis has been defended.

Signature of Participant

Date

Appendix C

Letter of Introduction and Guardian Permission Form

Jacqueline Duff
c/o The Department of Educational Psychology
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

April 28, 1997

Dear _____

I am a graduate student in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Saskatchewan. Under the supervision of Dr. Mark Flynn, a professor in the department, I will be conducting a study, the aim of which is to find out how First Nations students feel about their educational experiences. I am writing to request your permission for your son or daughter to participate in some conversational interviews and to write to me about their education. I have included a list of some of the questions that I will be asking.

With the permission of your son or daughters' teachers and principals, I will be working in the schools during the month of May. I would be grateful for your consent in allowing your son or daughter to take part in this study.

I would be pleased to meet with you to discuss this project if you wish. I can be reached at 373-3250.

Please have your son or daughter return the form below to his or her classroom teacher at your earliest convenience. Thank you.

Yours truly,

Jacqueline F. Duff
(Graduate student, EdPsyc Dept.)

I/ We give my/our consent for my/our son or daughter
_____ to take part in the study on First Nations students
perceptions of their educational experiences in May, 1997.

Signature

Child's name in
Block Letters

Date _____

Appendix D

**Letter of intent
Student
and
Principal**

Jacqueline Duff
c/o The Department of Educational Psychology
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Letter of Intent - Principal

April 15, 1997

Principal:

_____, Saskatchewan

Dear _____

I am presently at the University of Saskatchewan working toward a Masters Degree in Educational Psychology. My focus is on Cross Cultural Psychology and the education of Minority Students. I plan to conduct research on the perceptions of First Nations students about their educational experiences. I have spoken to Mrs. Baxter, the Deputy Director of education for the Saskatoon Public Board of Education and she has approved my application to conduct this research.

The focus of my study is on urban high school First Nations students and their perceptions of their educational experiences. This research will consist of personal interviews and dialogue journals with six to eight students. The interviews will be conducted during the month of May and the dialogue journals should be completed by mid June.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me by phone at 373-3250 or my supervisor Dr. Mark Flynn, 966-7710.

I request your permission to work at _____ school on this project.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline F. Duff

c.c. _____

Jacqueline Duff
c/o The Department of Educational Psychology
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Letter of Intent - Student

April 27, 1997

Dear _____:

Thank you for agreeing to talk to me about your educational experience. I believe it is important to understand more about how First Nations students perceive their educational experiences. By sharing your perceptions and experiences you will be starting to fill the gap in the existing literature on the education of First Nations students, thus school boards and universities may have a better understanding of your needs.

Your participation will consist of approximately two interviews and six journal entries. I look forward to sharing thoughts and ideas with you. Enclosed is a confirmation form and a participation release agreement for you and your parents to sign. If you have any questions please feel free to phone me at 373-3250 or you may contact my supervisor, Dr. Mark Flynn, at 966-7710.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline F. Duff

Appendix E
Ethics proposal
and
Ethics letter of approval

**Submitted to University of Saskatchewan Ethics Committee
For Approval: Research Questionnaire**

1. Name of Researchers and Department:

Jacqueline F. Duff, in partial requirements for a Masters Degree in Educational Psychology, from the Department of Educational Psychology, University of Saskatchewan (supervisor Dr. Mark Flynn).

2. Title of Study:

First Nations High School Students Perceptions of their Educational Experiences

3. Abstract:

Previous studies have reported that First Nations Peoples describe their educational experience as mostly inadequate. Some students enjoyed the academic portion of their day, others were uncomfortable and felt intimidated by the teachers. This study seeks to see how six to eight First Nations students in three Saskatoon high schools perceive their educational experience.

5. Subjects:

Approximately six to eight subjects will be recruited with the help of the following groups of people: Saskatoon Public School Board, the principals in three high schools, parents and students. The Indian and Metis Educational Consultant of the Saskatoon Public School Board, Shauneen Willet, along with the principals of the schools will help to identify potential subjects. I have specified a need to have both male and female participants. Participation will be voluntary. Permission from the parents or guardians of the students under the age of 18 will be requested.

6. Methods and Procedures:

Interviews and dialogue journals will be used by the researcher to sample perceptions of grade eleven and twelve students. The interviews will begin with a student profile questionnaire and will lead into a combination of open ended and closed ended questions. Attached you will find the student profile questionnaire and typical interview questions. The questions and statements for the dialogue journals are also attached. Because of the nature of this study topics may vary during interviews and for the purposes of journals. The content of the taped interview and the written dialogue journals will be subjected to content analysis using a constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. London: Sage.

7. Risk or deception:

To the best of my knowledge I do not foresee any risk or deception to the participants. However, should I become aware of any I would communicate this to the subjects.

8, 9, 10. Confidentiality, Consent, Feedback:

Through an initial introduction of my research topic and of myself, I will share my goals with the participants. The rights of the research participants will be foremost at all times. Informed consent of parents, students and the school authorities will be obtained prior to research. The participants will be informed of the nature and purpose of the study. Pseudonyms will be used to assure privacy and participants will be free to withdraw at any time. The students will be given the opportunity to review the data collected and to check for accuracy of information. All data will be kept confidential and it will be stored in a locked cabinet in my home. As well, all data will be destroyed one year after the thesis has been defended and a final bound has been submitted to the graduate studies.