

**A RETROSPECTIVE STUDY OF SCHOOL SUCCESS:
VOICES OF SUCCESSFUL ABORIGINAL PROFESSIONALS**

A Thesis Submitted to the
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For the Degree Master of Education
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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study was designed to explore the perceptions of Aboriginal professionals in various work sectors as they reflect on their educational experiences in high school and the nature of success. Questions guiding this research were: What is Aboriginal student success? What factors affect success? To what or whom do professionals attribute their successfulness? What can make others successful?

Prompting this study was the latest statistics about Aboriginal people released on September 24, 2003. The Aboriginal Peoples Survey was compiled by Statistics Canada in 2001. The survey stated that the number of off reserve Canadian Aboriginal students who are dropping out of school is 52%. In comparison to the Non-Aboriginal population, the overall high school dropout rate is 26%. What is alarming is that the drop out rate has not changed since the previous study in 1996.

Some of the research conducted has focused on finding barriers to Aboriginal students dropping out of school. Although this research assumed that if barriers can be identified, and removed they have only insignificantly decreased the dropout rate. This study gives voice to aboriginal professionals' success experiences by having them share their stories through in-depth interviews. Rather than focus on barriers, this study emphasizes positive high school experiences of Aboriginal professionals and factors that led to their success.

In-depth interviews were conducted initially with professionals in various work sectors that include human service sectors. A second interview was held with these professionals to clarify and further develop ideas emerging from the initial sets of

interviews. Descriptive memos and reflective notes were kept throughout the process with the analysis of data following traditions of qualitative methods.

The results of the study showed that the nature of success was complex, intricate, and idiosyncratic. Each participant had their own unique definition of success based upon distinct factors including a mindset, cultural orientation, spiritual connections, marginalization, and colonization. The definitions of success varied with changing variables of the participants.

Not surprisingly, the study related student success to the biological, social, physical and spiritual factors including Aboriginal spirituality; to external factors including culture, curriculum, instructional approaches, role models, relevant education, and relationships; and to the internal factors attitude, goal setting, motivation and inquiry.

In their suggestions of how others can be successful, each participant shared words of wisdom about education, stability, balance and a work ethic. The study offers teachers, parents, and students practical suggestions for increased student success and provides a list of implications produced by the study.

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DEDICATION

To my wife Cindy- the best thing that has ever happened to me.

To my children Kate and Kelli for the life and purpose they give me.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The latest statistics about Aboriginal people were released on September 24, 2003. The Aboriginal Peoples Survey was compiled by Statistics Canada in 2001. The survey stated that the number of off reserve Canadian Aboriginal students who are dropping out of school is 52%. In comparison to the Non-Aboriginal population, the overall high school dropout rate is 26%. What is alarming is that the drop out rate has not changed since the previous study in 1996. Despite all the programs, initiatives and interventions for Aboriginal students at-risk of dropping out of school, the numbers are still high. Much research in the past has focused on identifying barriers to at-risk Aboriginal students' successful completion of high school education. Recommendations to removing barriers have only slightly decreased the number of students dropping out of school.

Most of the literature gathered in this study relates to the theme of at-risk youth and identifies social, academic, economic, cultural issues which contribute to the dropout problem. Hains (2001) discussed what students perceive as barriers to high school success. Students identified poor relationships with teachers, racism, peer pressure, poor family support, counselling needs, personal wellness, drugs and alcohol, delinquency, jobs, few native teachers, teen pregnancy (p. 44). Johnson (1997) similarly described risk factors that include substance abuse, illegal activity, absenteeism, suspension, expulsion and failure, poor parenting, transient, and uneducated parents, English as a second language, being an ethnic minority and lack of school involvement. This is not to say that if a student has any number of factors mentioned above that he or she would become a

dropout. There are at-risk students who have overcome barriers and succeeded. These students were referred to by Johnson (1997) as having resilience.

Recommendations for addressing the dropout rate for Aboriginal people was described by Hains' (2001) students as Aboriginal curriculum programming, building teacher relationships, aboriginal counselling, programs that build racial understanding. Johnson (1997), in her study of resilient at-risk youth, interviewed principals and teachers and cited relationships, student characteristics, family factors, community factors and school factors as factors for building resiliency. Again addressing the barriers and following through with the recommendations for ensuring student success does not always mean success for students but highly increases their chances of succeeding.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe how Aboriginal professionals in various work sectors define school success. The secondary purpose was to explore the factors that these individuals believe to affect success: To what or whom do professionals attribute their success? What can make others successful? What is the role of school (culture, curriculum, role models, relevant education, instructional approaches and relationships) in their success?

Significance

The study was of significance for several reasons. There continues to be a lack of awareness and knowledge of history of Aboriginal education and students (Tymchak, 2001). The participants' voices expressed in this document highlight perceptions of

success and attempt to bridge the gap between Aboriginal students and what is seen by them as disconnected educators. Secondly, the literature review for this study reveals limited resources in the area of student success, let alone aboriginal student success (Bazylak, 2002). And finally, the Aboriginal population is growing in Saskatchewan in a manner that will change the demographics of this province. Therefore, attempts at changing the current at-risk situation is of importance to educators and the provincial communities.

Eliciting success stories from Aboriginal professionals represents an opportunity for the voice of Aboriginal people to be heard. The focus on barriers leaves researchers to make recommendations for Aboriginal students. This study allowed the participants to share their story of how they persevered through high school and to succeed beyond it. The professionals described what it was they have found to be helpful and assisted them in their own high school success experience. Sharing their success stories provides hope to those who have not yet succeeded in school. Students who don't succeed face a bleak future in gaining any fulfilling employment opportunities. Brady (1996) noted that unless serious efforts are made to educate Aboriginal youth, they will likely struggle to find employment and continue in a vicious cycle of poverty. Johnson (1997) concurs, but added that they are disconnected as citizens who live in a democracy and from the functions of that society. I was interested in the topic because of the ramifications it has to Aboriginal people socially, spiritually, physically, emotionally, culturally and economically.

Aboriginal Voice

I would like to stress the need for participants' voice to be expressed throughout the research. Antone (2003) stated "It is only recently that Aboriginal people have taken it upon themselves to strengthen their voice in relation to education programs...With the strength of voice and growth and development in Aboriginal education there is hope...for cultural wholeness" (p. 27). Changing the current trend in the dropout rate among Aboriginal students means hearing and listening to the voices of our own people.

The Researcher

I begin a section in this chapter about my history and my own subjectivity to the research. Critics will argue that the nature of qualitative research inhibits the researcher's ability to come to any valid conclusions about the data he/she is analyzing because of his/her own biases. Before any analysis began, I became in tune with the instrument: self. (Seidman, 1994). The process of becoming in tune was what Patton (1990) in Seidman (1994) described as Epoche:

Epoche is a process that the researcher engages in to remove, or at least become aware of prejudices, viewpoints, or assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation. Epoche helps enable a researcher to investigate the phenomenon from a fresh and open view without prejudgement or imposing meaning too soon. Thus suspension in judgement is critical in phenomenological investigation and requires the setting aside of the researcher's personal viewpoint in order to see the experience of itself. (p. 123)

Therefore, I balanced two views, one that sees my own meanings and perspectives, and one that listens to the views of participants to ensure that I have captured their meanings and realities. Seidman also stated that “[r]ather than decrying the fact that the instrument used to gather data affects this process, we say that the human interviewer can be a marvellously smart, adaptable, flexible instrument who can respond to situations with skill, tact and understanding” (p.16). Being aware of biases will help to prevent any distortion of meaning brought out by participants.

As a student in high school, I had the opportunity to experience life beyond Northern Saskatchewan by going on an exchange program in Ontario with several friends. The opportunity stirred in me a desire to explore the world beyond the borders of what I had always been used to. The borders for me were physical in nature as the community I lived in was situated on an island and the only way off the island was by ferry. On the other side of the island were opportunities and adventures waiting to happen. I believe that students today live on islands with borders that seem impenetrable and if they can only find their ferry ride across the rivers of adversity they arrive at the land of opportunity. The question that arose for me when I embarked on this study was what is the ferry for Aboriginal students? The ferry in my own life has been spirituality, risk taking, adventure and experiencing life outside of my comfort zone. But what is it for others? And how do we pass that on in an educational context?

As mentioned, most of my life has been spent in Northern Saskatchewan. I am a status Indian as defined by the Government of Canada. My roots are in a northern community rich in tradition and spirituality. I began my education career working as a guidance counsellor in my home community nine years ago. In that position, I worked

with youth in a wide capacity as the registrar, advocate, teacher, counsellor and disciplinarian. I would estimate that a third of the students I worked with were at risk of dropping out of school. I thoroughly enjoyed the work that I did with the youth in that community. The experience in that northern school lent itself well in a similar field when I moved to an urban setting where I worked as an addictions counsellor for an inpatient treatment centre in an urban setting working with adults and youth for four years. I then switched roles from working as counsellor to employment as a teacher.

As I was growing up and working in Northern Saskatchewan, it seemed that one of the definitions of success meant that a community member moved to a city and attended university. I then understood a successful person to be a community member moving to the city and completing a university degree. These people received attention by the community and were seen as role models. In my experience this was the most prevalent definition held by Aboriginal people living in Northern Saskatchewan. It is this perception and reference-point that led to the participants chosen in this study. I think there are a number of individuals who could have been potential participants but I chose participants with a university degree because of the strong message I received as a Northern Saskatchewan resident.

My own perception of success has included both academic and personal success. Personal success can consist of any number of achievements or goals that an individual has accomplished. An example of personal success was that of an Aboriginal male with a grade eight education originally from Northern Saskatchewan now residing in an urban centre selling ice cream from a bike cart. He was successful because he was consistent in his work, showing up every evening in a particular neighbourhood designated by his

employer. He was successful because he has been doing this job for approximately three years. Even though I may view his situation as successful he may not.

Academic success is or can include graduating from a high school, university or any other post-secondary institution. Academic success does not necessarily include high academic achievement but rather completion of an educational program. Obvious examples of success by participants in this study are described in further detail in Chapter Four.

I chose looking at Aboriginal professionals perceptions of success for two reasons. The first was because I thought that they could be an example to those who struggle with finding their own way. Without the support systems that I have had in my own life I believe that I would not be where I am today experiencing all that life has to offer. My path was not much different than many students struggling through their own educational experiences. The difference I believe was that I took risks, persevered, was determined, and received support from wonderful people.

The second reason was what I alluded to earlier about educational barriers experienced by at-risk youth. I believe that when the focus of a teacher is on barriers of at-risk youth the tendency is to concentrate on negative aspects of students leading to negative results. The principle I am describing is found in an aviation analogy. When bush pilots train new pilots to land on a hazardous airstrip, the skill required is to focus on the good part of the strip and not on the hazards. The natural tendency, however, is to focus on the obstacles on the airstrip inevitably resulting in catastrophes. Teachers who can keep their eye on the airstrip of student success can avoid any looming disasters.

I mentioned the rich tradition and spirituality that existed in my home community. I need to elaborate on those terms to further show the researcher's perspective. The tradition that I speak about is rich in the Metis tradition. As a treaty Indian the culture I was familiar with did not involve the drum but the fiddle. The dance I was familiar with was not a pow wow but the jig. I knew nothing about traditional Cree culture or events such as giveaway dances, rain dances, sundances, round dances, feasts and sweat lodge ceremonies, pipe ceremonies, and others. I was taught that these events were unchristian like and should not be performed.

This brings me to the spiritual aspect of my life referred to earlier. The spirituality I mentioned was that of organized religion extending four generations back to my paternal great grandparents. I grew up fearing God believing that salvation was granted to those who believed and followed the Ten Commandments. I knew nothing about traditional Cree spirituality. In terms of my own values then culture was not as important as my Christian beliefs. Every decision I made was based on my Christian values. This, of course, was positive in my life because I developed traits of honesty, integrity, perseverance, respect, kindness, generosity, courage, self control, independence, etc. I believe it was negative because I never viewed cultural issues as being of any value or that these traits can be developed in positive ways from an Aboriginal perspective as described by several participants. I believe that culture also includes the language, I recall our Cree classes in provincial high school and thinking how insignificant they were because they were not factors to acquiring jobs in the real world. As a high school Aboriginal student I dismissed Cree language altogether. I felt that in a contemporary and global society it was not practical. Some fellow classmates felt the same way as most of

us groaned when it was time to attend class. The changes that occurred in me in relation to culture, language, and spirituality during the course of graduate studies but also in the presentation of this thesis are elaborated on throughout the document.

I knew that as I embarked on this study I would have to set aside my biased perceptions and beliefs to listen to what participants were saying and be willing to voice through this document their lived experiences even if it contradicted and compromised my own.

Assumptions and Delimitations

In any qualitative study, there is a need to narrow the scope of the phenomenon being studied to ensure that what is being sought is not compounded with data that is beyond the overarching research question or misrepresentations within the study. Assumptions and delimitations were presented to consider potential threats to the validity of this study and to recognize the potential flaws inherent in the design of this study.

Assumptions

As I embarked on this study, I assumed that:

1. Using in-depth interviews was an acceptable and appropriate way to elicit perceptions of participants.
2. Each professional has their own unique story of achieving and defining school success.

3. Individuals who are in professional occupations or programs of university preparation for professional occupations were assumed to have achieved “success” in their high school education.
4. The study can be useful to educators to enhance their practice to become effective educators, particularly towards Aboriginal at-risk youth.
5. Success was defined broadly by participants in this study and may have different meanings.
6. Interviewees provided answers that articulated their experiences accurately and honestly.

Delimitations

The research study was delimited in these ways:

1. The study was delimited to participants with at least an undergraduate degree.
2. The study was delimited to participants within a specific urban area of Saskatchewan.
3. The statistics presented in this study apply to Aboriginal people living off-reserve.
4. The data collection took place within the time frame from June, 2004 to September, 2004.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the key terms were defined as follows:

Aboriginal. Native person living in Canada of either Status Indian, Non Status Indian, Inuit or Metis as defined by the Indian Act.

At-risk. At risk of dropping out of school.

Culture. “A culture is a way of life of a group of people, developed around a set of customs, beliefs, values, assumptions, attitudes, expectations, and behaviours” (Gilliland, 1995, p. 19).

Cultural Discontinuity Theory. Theories of cultural discontinuity have their origins in the anthropological studies of ethnic minority groups within a dominant, majority culture. According to students of cultural discontinuity theory, minority children having been initially raised in a distinctive culture of their own, are often thrust into a school system that promotes the values of the majority culture and not those of their own. If the resulting clash of cultures continues, the minority child may feel forced to choose one culture at the expense of the other. A tragic paradox emerges: Success (in school) becomes failure (in the community), and failure becomes success.

Dropout. “Any person who left secondary school for whatever reason prior to graduating” (Brady, 1996, 11).

Indian Control of Indian Education. Policy presented to the officials (federal government) responsible for Indian Education by the National Indian Brotherhood to allow local control of Indian education. The policy concludes that Aboriginal people can eventually address issues facing Aboriginal students themselves.

Interagency. “A term describing cooperation and collaboration between and among agencies in meeting the needs of children and youth in more than one service area” (Tymchak, 2001, p.163).

Non-Aboriginal. A general reference to those ethnic groups not defined as aboriginal.

Resilience. “Children and youth who are characterized by risk factors but who do not manifest risk outcomes are referred to as resilient (Barr & Parrett)” (as cited in Johnson, 1997).

School^{PLUS}. “On February 21, 2002, the Government of Saskatchewan released Securing Saskatchewan’s Future, Ensuring the Well-being and Educational Success of Saskatchewan’s Children and Youth: Provincial Response to the Role of the School Task Force Final Report. The government strongly endorses the vision of School^{PLUS} proposed by the Task Force where schools have two functions- to educate children and youth and to support service delivery” (Saskatchewan Learning, 2002, v-3).

Success. Completion of high school.

Voice. “Critical pedagogy which challenges Eurocentric styles of curriculum development and targets the ingrained acceptance of the hegemonic voice speaking for us all” (Bazylak, 2002, p.14). An opportunity to listen to participants, particularly Aboriginal people, share their stories.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction to the research by providing the overarching research question and the secondary questions. It also discusses the problem of at-risk youth, my background as the researcher and a definition of terms. The second chapter analyzes review literature on selected topics of at-risk youth, Indian education and success with a conceptual summary

of the literature added to organize salient points in the literature. Chapter Four presents the research data and Chapter Five summarizes, discusses and reconceptualizes the summary of the literature framework with the findings.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The number of Aboriginal at-risk students in our school populations remains relatively significant to warrant prevention and intervention efforts by all members of society. There is a plethora of information and resources available to counselors, teachers, parents and administrators who work with at-risk youth. In fact, Johnson (1997) reported in her study of at-risk youth that there have been thousands of articles and papers written on the subject of at-risk youth. The numbers of books, papers and articles written to this point, obviously have well exceeded what she reported. The literature in the past has dealt with barriers to student success; however, more recently there is growing literature which focuses on student success. Studies focused on barriers are often motivated by the assumption that by recognizing and addressing barriers, efforts can be made to provide supports for students to be successful. My goal was to seek a perspective that focused on Aboriginal student success rather than barriers to Aboriginal student success.

The purpose in researching Aboriginal at-risk youth was the belief that such students can be successful, regardless of the risk factors. The risk factors were significant but students at-risk can beat the odds if they have supports in family, friends, school, and in self. The importance of addressing the subject is crucial as the number of Aboriginal students at risk has remained relatively unchanged (Statistics Canada, 2001). As authors and researchers continue to write and expand on this topic the subject matter will not only gain the attention of all educators but renew a conviction and commitment to ameliorate current trends.

Literature related to aboriginal education included a historical perspective but not elaborated on in this study. Accounts in Aboriginal historical education are provided by other researchers (Ashworth, 1988; Axelrod, 1997; Barman, Hebert, & McCaskill 1986; Bazylak 1998; Goulet & Mcleod, 2002; Hampton, 1995; Pocha 2000). Peacock and Cleary (1998) urged that to not make reference to the history of Aboriginal education is to not give adequate background to the current situation in aboriginal education.

This literature review begins with a definition and behaviours of at-risk youth and student success and the nature of success. Finally, the third section provided an overview of relevant literature pertaining to factors to student success.

Definition of At-Risk Youth

In the literature, various terms were used to define at-risk youth. Youth at-risk can be defined simply as at-risk youth who are at risk of failing (Duke, 1993) or according to Martin (as cited in Johnson, 1997), who defined youth at-risk as students who became pregnant, commit crimes, commit suicide, and/or who drop-out of school. Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko & Fernandez (1989) used the terms at risk youth and dropouts interchangeably. The wide array of definitions reveals that there is no agreement on a single term. "A review of the known definitions reveals not only that there is a lack of clarity and consensus but also that the term is explained most often from an educational perspective and indicates individuals at risk of dropping out of the educational system" (Gross & Capuzzi, 2000, p. 6).

The definition of at-risk youth used in this thesis was *students who are at risk of dropping out of school*. With the number of students who drop out of school it is reported by Johnson (2000) that “one third of all children could be considered at-risk” (p. 45).

The obvious implications of students dropping out are their inability to acquire and learn adequate skills to contribute to the workforce (Chinien & Boutin, 2001). “In an economy that is demanding ever increasing levels of skills and education in its workforce, the long term economic prospects for Native people...will continue to be severely diminished as long as current dropout levels persist” (Brady, 1996, p. 10). The challenge for all students is to eventually make a contribution and have a meaningful existence in this world.

Antone (2003) asserted that the challenges facing Aboriginal people are many and begin with schooling, without it she suggests that Aboriginal people will self-destruct and face physical, emotional, spiritual and mental problems.

The reason for aboriginal student’s lack of success is compelling and real. People in all cultures have students who are at-risk through no fault of their own. At-risk students exist in all walks of life regardless of race, socio-economic status, gender, creed, or religion. Many approaches described as ‘loose models’ are created to address the needs of at-risk youth. Examples over the past fifteen years or so include “reclaiming youth at-risk” and “mending the broken circle” (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990), “reengaging students through social and physical challenges” (Buchanan, 1993), “What works: Student Motivation as a Guide to Practise” (Cleary & Peacock, 1998), “strategies for facilitating success” (Hampton & Roy, 2002), “establishing success” (Hains, 2001), “a model of resiliency” (Johnson, 1997), “peer support networks” (Meyer, Williams, Harootunian, Steinberg, 1995), “a model for school learning for American Indian youth”

(Powers, Potthoff, Bearinger, & Resnick, 2003), “responsiveness of schools” (Renihan & Renihan, 1995), “decolonizing schools” (Robertson, 2003), “Modules addressing issues salient for at-risk youth” (Waterman & Walker, 2001), “Motivating through meaningful work” (Wise, 2003), “School^{PLUS}” (Government of Saskatchewan, 2001). Models that are adapted and implemented can be effective and can cross cultural, socioeconomic, gender, and religious barriers.

Although described in varying degrees they seek to help meet the needs of students. As Aboriginal people, the most fitting was a perspective that incorporates knowledge, skills and values of the past consistent with Aboriginal culture. Knowing who we are as Aboriginal people means understanding who our ancestors were and building on that foundation.

Behaviours of At-Risk Youth

There are typical behaviors that researchers and educators describe as typifying an at-risk youth. The descriptions from some authors and educators vary and appear as comprehensive lists. A description by Capuzzi & Gross (2000) showed what the common behaviors were of at-risk youth. The list can be broken down into three perspectives: school, mental health, and home. They are listed below:

A school environment:

According to Aksamit (1990), Cohen and de Bettencourt (1991), Kushman and Heariold-Kinney (1996), and Mcmillen, Kaufman, Hausken, and Bradby (1993), the following behaviors are red flags for those at risk:

- tardiness;
- absenteeism;
- poor grades;
- truancy;
- low math and reading scores;

- failing one or more grades;
- rebellious attitudes toward school authority;
- verbal and language deficiency;
- inability to tolerate structured activities;
- dropping out of school; and
- aggressive behaviors. (p. 12)

A mental health perspective:

- drug and alcohol use and abuse;
- eating disorders;
- gang membership;
- pregnancy;
- suicide or suicide ideation;
- depression;
- sexual acting out;
- aggression;
- withdrawal and isolation;
- low self-esteem; and
- school related problems. (p.13)

The home environment:

- failing to obey rules and directives;
- avoiding taking part in family activities;
- spending a great deal of time alone in their room;
- being secretive about friends and activities;
- not communicating with parents or siblings;
- displaying values and attitudes different from family;
- resisting going to school or discussing school activities;
- arguing about everything; and
- staying away from home as much as possible. (p. 13)

Lenarduzzi (1992) indicated that the behavior of at-risk students was to be viewed as symptoms rather than threats. When teachers see their at-risk students behaving inappropriately, their behaviour was to be viewed as symptoms which make it easier to accept them. A change in attitude allows teachers to do the best job possible to teach these students. Teachers can easily dismiss and label students who have fallen behind in

class due to a number of behavioral symptoms. Some students who sit quietly making no attempt to catch up in their work, know that if they are quiet their teacher will be quiet. Teachers develop an attitude described by Lenarduzzi as “if they don’t bother me I won’t bother them” (p. 36) approach. Having student teacher relationships such as this will diminish any possibility of retaining at risk students (Hampton, 1995). The lack of communication prohibits any fruitful discussion leading to student success.

Perspectives on Student Success

By knowing the behaviors of at-risk students, the needs that are not being met can be addressed by using the model “mending the broken circle” (Brendtro et al; 1990) as an example. Specifically, Brendtro et al. (1990) pointed out that students who have an unmet need of belonging (absenteeism) are addressed by being involved in corrective relationships where they trust others and develop intimacy. Students who struggle to achieve (low grades) get the need of mastery met when they are involved in meaningful achievement opportunities. Students who are powerless (low self-esteem) become independent when they have opportunities to develop skills and confidence through leadership. Students who are narcissistic and/or hedonistic (failing to obey rules and directives) generally lack generosity and are cured when they are given lessons and experiences in altruism.

A closer look at the factors that put students at risk reveals that from a teacher perspective, it is overwhelming to begin to address the range of issues that face young people. Tymchak (2001) purported that teachers are quoted as taking on multiple roles in schools so much that they neglect the duties for which they were trained and hired. The

increasing levels of issues students were experiencing are brought to the classroom as this is where they spend most of their time. Consequently, teachers are helping students with justice, health, recreational, and social issues instead of academics.

The pressure has led to agencies working together more closely thus the creation of interagency initiatives to assist students and school personnel:

The integrated school linked services use collaborative processes to forge relationships among school divisions, schools, their communities, First Nations and Metis organizations, and provincial and community human service agencies.

The purpose is to identify new approaches to planning and new configurations of service delivery that are more coordinated, comprehensive, and responsive in addressing the complex and diverse needs of at risk students and families. (p.

Saskatchewan learning, v-2)

The goal of the integrated school-linked services was to create partnerships between health, justice, social services and recreation and others to alleviate the demands that were being solely placed on teachers.

A description of Nutana Collegiate (2000) was provided on their website. Nutana Collegiate is part of Saskatoon Public School Board in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Nutana Collegiate is a grade 9-12 school system offering all high school subjects to ensure that all students upon completion receive a high school diploma. Students who attend Nutana Collegiate come for various reasons. Some students take advantage of the quarterly block system as opposed to a semesterized system because they can pick up a high school credit in ten weeks. Typically, students attend the collegiate because they have struggled in school personally, emotionally or socially and access support services to achieve success.

Along with a teaching staff providing a regular academic program, Nutana has a number of support services personnel. Special programs include; student services, resource room, re-entry and support program, main street program, Omega program, youth resources center program, support center, daycare program, addictions services, social services, parental program, police school resource officer and a primary health care nurse. Students utilize services on site to help overcome obstacles that interfere with their school program. With such support systems in place, students are successful as a result many students go on to attend post-secondary institutions. This school is an example of a school-based approach and models the integrated school linked services framework.

A second unique high school in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan is called Joe Duquette High School. The school is a Grade nine to twelve high school providing academic programs, re-entry programs, upgrading programs, construction trades training, healthy lifestyles program, cultural camps, men's and women's dance and drumming and singing, lunch program, a day care center, a kitchen helper course, sweetgrass picking and pow-wows. The school has a wide variety of supports in elders, social workers, and an Aboriginal liaison-school resource officer.

Beyond traditional school activities Joe Duquette offers sweetgrass ceremonies which are held on a daily basis where students smudge and pray by using their hands to direct smoke all over their bodies to cleanse themselves, pipe ceremonies on special occasions, attendance in sweat lodges several times a year as part of cultural camp, and support circles for students struggling personally and in need of extra support (Haig-Brown, C., Hodgson-Smith, K., Regnier, R., and Archibald, J., 1997).

The school has a mission statement that was described as a place of healing for body, soul and mind. The program at Joe Duquette emphasizes cultural, traditional and spiritual practices. What sets Joe Duquette apart from most schools is its emphasis on the Aboriginal spirituality and respect for native traditions and values. The model for healing was the sacred circle:

The Sacred Circle, alternatively call the medicine wheel in plains Indian cultures, serves as the symbol system for interpreting healing and illness. Health is part of the same metaphysic as the process of reality itself. Within this wheel, to be healthy means to live a meaningful vision of one's wholeness, connectedness and balance in the world. The shared visions of well-being are celebrated and renewed through ceremonies and rituals. Healing restores the person, community and nation to wholeness, connectedness and balance. Illness is a loss of meaning which results in fragmentation and isolation, lack of purpose and direction. (Haig-Brown, et al., 1997, p. 37)

The medicine wheel is a common site in aboriginal cultures. The overarching concept with the medicine wheel was live holistically balancing the four dimensions of life: physical, mental, social and spiritual. The need for holistic healing is viewed as a necessary aspect for success in Joe Duquette High School although the staff debates the relationship and priority of healing and academic success.

The uniqueness of schools like Nutana and Joe Duquette also has unique challenges. The definition of success can be the focal point that divides staff members on what is important individual success through healing or academic success. Haig-Brown, et al. (1997) commented that the main focus of the high school can be two fold personal

healing and academics but as students achieve success academically, the emphasis changes. Although both necessary and important which one should be the main focus of school is currently debated.

What is Success?

Much academic literature that mentions Aboriginal success is growing, and from that, there appears to be a consensus that success in schools is defined as graduating from high school or post-secondary institutions. Success defined by Hampton and Roy (2002) was synonymous with graduating from university. Yurkovich (2001) in her study with American Indians focused on “strategies that support the completion of higher education by American Indian nursing students” (p. 1). Hains (2001) in her study with Aboriginal high school students defined success as completing school. In Bazylak’s (2002) work he described success as graduating from high school. Natriello & Pallas (1990) in their paper of promoting success for at risk students defined success as completing their high school education.

Teachers interviewed at Joe Duquette School gave a wide variety of answers as to what success is (Haig-Brown, et al., 1997). Some regarded success as beyond just completing high school. Success can be viewed as overcoming and or dealing with behaviors of at-risk youth. One teacher described success: “It could be the graduate, it could be that the student finishes in a year, it could be a student that realizes that they’ve got a drug and alcohol problem and they want to do something about it” (Haig-Brown, et al, 1997, p. 146). Haig-Brown, et al. (1997) concluded that a process for success occurs

academically when students develop relationships, start the healing process and then address academic issues.

From a parental perspective, Hampton (1995) citing Bradley (1990) reported that “Most Indian parents want their children to be taught the things necessary for success in both the white and the Native worlds” (p. 266). Pete-Willet (2002) in Antone (2003) echoed similar remarks when she stated that aboriginal students want the best of both worlds. In order for aboriginal students to have the best of both worlds I chose the definition of completing high school as the definition of success.

Nature of Success

A discussion of student success implied at some point there was student failure. Failure was something that was viewed as negative and vulgar. Slavin, Karweit and Wasik (1993) reported that success in elementary school does not guarantee success in high school but that failure in elementary school guarantees failure in education at later grades. What has been forgotten was that out of failure can come success. According to Statistics Canada in 1996, half of all Aboriginal students in education have failed. It does not mean that they are failures at life or more specifically in education. It means that circumstances arose in which they were unable to devote all their attention to school. It means that over the course of a lifetime there is ample opportunity for students to be successful in school.

The current trend in post secondary education suggests that Aboriginal students know the importance of higher learning and are returning to school to complete their education. The numbers of Aboriginal full-time post-secondary adult students in 2001 out

number all other Canadian students in every age category with the exception of those who are 20 to 24 years of age (Statistics Canada, 2001). Students are surfers riding the waves of success. If they miss a wave they wait for the next one to ride. Aboriginal students are successful when they look back at the wave that is coming, ride the wave, fall and catch the next one that will carry them to new and continued success. Students riding the waves of success are not deemed failures when they leave the incandescence of the shore.

Factors Related to Success

Although this heading was titled factors related to success it should be made clear that that the characteristics described here can be effective for any student regardless of whether they are Aboriginal or not. Cleary and Peacock (1998) reminded their readers that what works for Aboriginal students can work for all students because by nature we are all curious and can be motivated to achieve academic success.

Some literature reported that success experienced by Aboriginal students, whether in high school or post-secondary school, is often achieved when there are certain elements in place. The characteristics common to their success are referred to as properties (Yurkovich, 2001), factors (Bazylak, 2001) or strategies (Hampton & Roy, 2002). There are several common themes that emerge in studies involving Aboriginal students and success. Typically they include teachers, family, friends, community, culture, curriculum and personal characteristics, (Bazylak, 2001; Hains, 2001; Hampton & Roy, 2002; Robertson, 2003; Yurkovich, 2001). For the purposes of this review, these characteristics have been arranged into six headings: *relationships, culture, relevant*

education, instructional approaches, curriculum, and role models. The recipe for Aboriginal student success involves these key ingredients. Simply combining these ingredients does not necessarily mean gourmet results. The ingredients relevant to context and student background provide outcomes appropriate for each student.

Relationships

Some literature reported that the most critical factor for student success was the *relationship* students have with a teacher, parent, friend or family.

For example, Charles Harrington and his colleagues (Harrington & Boardman, 1997) have found that successful adults who were reared in poverty speak extensively of the importance of a caring adult, or mentor, in their lives- a parent, teacher, or some member of extended family who had faith in their academic potential and encouraged them, through word and deed, to pursue their education in the fullest. (Bempechat, p. 2)

This literature consistently reminds teachers, principals, parents, counselors, and other researchers that students who are at-risk can become successful when they are able to develop positive, influential and encouraging relationships with elders, adults, parents and teachers (Chapman, 2002). Caring adults in schools and communities are advocates for students dramatically increasing the possibilities for success.

Thomas (Brendro et al, 1990) commented that there was a need to develop a technology that will help in reducing the number of students that are at-risk. The technology he is describing is that of “relationship technology”. In Johnson’s (1997) study of resilient at-risk students:

In approximately 37% of the response cases, principals and teachers identified positive supportive human interactions as the most critical factor in at-risk students compensating for disadvantaged situations. Such supportive human relationships, it was suggested, can occur between at-risk youth and their parents, their teachers, their peers, their siblings, or any caring, concerned adult. (p. 5)

Successful students are those that develop positive and meaningful relationships with others. Regardless if the support is a family member or a friend that relationship can be so strong that it provides the necessary encouragement and help for the student to be successful.

The first key area involved the role of the *teacher and leader*. The ingredients do not simultaneously come together. There is a deliberate action on the part of the teacher to be involved in gathering the ingredients. The ingredients then are measured and stirred by the teacher. The role of the educator is seen as imperative to the success of Aboriginal students because “The school is the only institution providing ongoing, long-term relationships with all of our young Not surprisingly, students at greatest risk of dropping out of school are those who have never been friends with a teacher” (Brendtro et al., 1990). The role of the educator as the stirring agent is crucial to student outcomes. Without that relationship students are more likely to fail.

Not only are teachers viewed as important participants in the process of schooling, it fits culturally with how Aboriginal people educated their own people in the past. Mitchel (as cited in Hampton and Roy, 2002) agreed that relationship-based schooling was similar to the values of traditional First Nation peoples. Hains (2001) stated “When I asked the students to describe their past school experience, students whose teachers had

built relationships with them and showed support for their cultural ways recalled positive memories of their schooling” (p. 3). Recognition given to Aboriginal students was validating and honouring. I attended a conference on a topic of Indigenous education in which the speaker acknowledged the original inhabitants of the land. I recalled feeling proud and honoured with her remark. Her introduction set the tone for the rest of the lecture that obviously involved attentive first nation audience members.

Parsley and Corocan (2003) provided four actions of a teacher that are important for developing positive relationships with students. The first they describe was to develop and show trust. By giving students added responsibility showed that teachers were able to trust their students to behave appropriately. The goal of trust was to have all students feel safe and comfortable to ensure contributions through the expression of their own ideas in classroom discussions and in their own individual work.

Secondly, teachers who showed care to their students were able to develop relationships and then show interest in learning. The topic of caring in education was addressed by numerous authors (Henderson & Milstein, 1996; Noddings, 1992; Speck, 1999). Any attempts by schools at creating success for students needs to embrace caring as a compulsory attribute.

Cleary and Peacock (1998) noted that caring was not enough, students must learn. In that learning process, students are nudged along to succeed:

The nudge can simply offer up enough of a step to them so that they can take it and still have feelings of competence, or it can be dangling just the right book or individual project in front of them that will reattach them to their curiosity. A nudge might be encouragement to students who are trying to find things to say to

people who they want to have an effect on; or it can be connecting to them to feelings of success in self expression; or it can be helping them to find the feelings of competence they will need to operate in whichever world they choose to operate in; or it can be connecting them to just the right model; or it can be helping them to do things that will make their lives more self-determined and the circumstances in their community better. (p. 245)

Caring for students means paying attention to the detail in their lives that happens through dialogue and listening to students as they share their ideas, concerns and experiences. When teachers know their students, they are able to support and nudge them in various ways so that they become acquainted with success.

Care does not mean being passive and accepting mediocrity. Care is demanding the best from students. “We must not confuse caring with sitting in a warm circle, holding hands . . . care involves a vigorous insistence on high expectations for students and teachers. Care rejects second-rate teaching and does not allow lame excuses for low achievement” (Rooney, 2003, p. 76). The effective teacher has diverse roles acting as a disciplinarian, teacher and/or counselor the message is the same; consistently communicating and demanding the very best from every student.

The third action by a teacher was to create a classroom environment where students were able to take risks. Students who were supported in their classrooms by teachers using a non-threatening approach communicated to their students that the environment was safe. The atmosphere in the classroom was based on respect. Building relationships and creating a classroom environment that allowed students to take risks meant ensuring that students respected each other. Gilliland (1995) suggested that most

Aboriginal people will be careful to not do anything to disrespect others. Creating an atmosphere of respect will give students assurance that they can take risks without fear of ridicule or harassment.

When students are in a place where they feel like they are a part of the school community they are likely to succeed. Thus, the fourth action of a teacher to prevent student failure is to create an environment where the student feels like they belong. Wehlage et al. (1989) described the need for belonging as school membership. School membership was belonging and feeling accepted in a peer group and having support and acknowledgment from adults. Strategies for school membership provided by Lenarduzzi (1992) included advisory groups, interdisciplinary teams, activities coordinator, expanded committees, peer counsellors, school counsellors, academic support blocks, in school mentoring, transition programs and re-entry sessions. These supports incorporate marginalized students to be part of a school community.

There can be no argument that the role of the teacher was vital, but relationships with *family* were just as important to student success. "Anisef and Johnson (1993) indicated that the lack of a stable and supportive family often leads to lower levels of academic achievement which can lead to the decision to prematurely leave school" (as cited in Brady, 1996, p. 3). In my experience when students completed their educational experience they usually credited their families for their success. This shows the family as a necessary and critical factor for success.

In Bempechat (1998) referring to the work of Vygotsky (1962, 1978) and Piaget (1926, 1963) stated "that parents are fundamentally teachers" (p. 34). Parents act as teachers in their children's education. As Bemepchat (1998) pointed out, it is not overtly

observed but there are teachings that occur in the home that are subtle and done indirectly through bedtime stories when interactions may cause children to think critically and abstractly. If parents are teachers and all that has been mentioned above about teachers is true then parents have as much influence over the lives of their children. The sole responsibility of reducing failure in school has been placed on the shoulders of just teachers and must be shared by parents and other significant supportive adults.

Parents can act as motivators for their children to complete their education (Bempechat, 1998). Parents can communicate to their children that the need for education is to ensure that their future is filled with those opportunities afforded only by completing high school and pursuing post secondary education. Parents who are able to keep their children accountable for their education reap the rewards of their success.

In the British Columbia Education report (1999) on improving school success for first nations they found that families who had success would likely result in children having success. Parents obviously act as role models to their children who observe their parents effort to succeed. Another added benefit to children is the financial benefit they reap as a result of their parents' success. Typically, success in education means better opportunity which results in higher incomes for families.

The third role that is beneficial to the student is the role played by the *community*. Community is made up of people with emotions, behaviors and attitudes who work closely together in an enclosed environment. A school described as a community by Barth (2002) stated:

The vision is, first, that the school will be a community, a place full of adults and students who care about, look after and root for one another and who work

together for the whole, in times of need and in times of celebration. Every member of the community holds some responsibility for the welfare of every other and for the welfare of the community as a whole. (p. 11)

The school community is a place of interconnectedness where great care should be taken to treat people with dignity, respect, equality and kindness.

Yurkovich (2001) in her study of success of American Indian nursing students stated, “Students related that a support community reduced the loneliness and isolation, provided socialization...created a mechanism for the sharing of survival resources...established an emotional support and encouragement, and assisted interpreting and validating messages from the educational environment” (p. 11). A community is able to act as a family when there is no family to support the student or when a dysfunctional family is unable to be of any support to the student.

Culture

The second factor reported in the literature on factors that enabled success for Aboriginal students was that of *culture*. Researchers have not been able to come to a consensus on whether cultural programming really makes that much of a difference in educational outcomes. There is some debate in the literature that would suggest that cultural discontinuity is the greatest factor to Aboriginal student success but others disagree.

Cultural discontinuity theory was based on the principle that all aspects contained in a mainstream school are in contrast to the Aboriginal students and their families' views of a proper education (Powers et al., 2003). Gale (1991) noted that conflict ensues when

the traditional values of Aboriginal people clash with values of Non-Aboriginal people. “The performance of such children would improve, it is argued, if schools could ameliorate these discontinuities, rather than ignore them or make attempts to obliterate them” (Kelly & Caskell, 1996, p. 125). Therefore, Aboriginal students who receive messages contrary to what they have been taught from their parents and elders will likely be unsuccessful if the discontinuities are not addressed. The cultural component is not minimized and validation is given to the Aboriginal students for their history, culture, contributions, and language.

In a study by Hampton and Roy (2002), professors in a focus group described connecting with their traditions as important to achieving success. “For example, students may need to miss [school] to attend a Pow-Wow, or traditional ceremony, or to engage in subsistence activities. When students are supported in these activities, they will be more likely to succeed” (p. 22). A sensitivity to supporting the needs of students in attending such events communicates understanding to the student. It is unlikely that a pattern of behaviour would develop that saw a student leaving school on regular basis. Only in extremes cases would their absence be condoned.

Some other researchers make the case that cultural content is useful but there are more significant factors that are crucial to student success. “It is entirely plausible to suggest that while being a member of a visible minority does play a significant role in the decision to dropout, being part of a larger cultural minority, (socioeconomically disadvantaged), plays an equal, if not greater, role in the creation of this phenomenon” (Brady, 1996, p. 7). Aronson (2001) listed poverty as the most common hurdle for student success followed by racial and ethnic identity. In Powers’ et al. (2003) study

titled *Does Cultural Programming Improve Educational Outcomes for American Indian youth?* stated, “the results of the study indicated that cultural programming moderately, and largely, influences student outcomes. The strongest predictor of school success appeared to be the extent to which schools provide supportive personnel, and safe, and drug free environments” (p. 17).

A completely different perspective to the cultural discontinuity theory is offered by Yurkovich (2001). Her study reveals a new twist to Aboriginal student success and culture which she calls adjusting to the dominant culture. Students who are successful are the students who are adapting to a Euro-Anglo culture that is represented by the University and College institutions. Although her perspective is not a direct argument to the cultural discontinuity theory, it is implied.

Whether to debate the cultural discontinuity theory is futile conjecture to some educational leaders, both Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal, who have witnessed the impact the current mainstream educational system has on their students. As a result, educational personnel have established their own culturally relevant schools such as Joe Duquette High school in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and Sahekew in North Battleford, Saskatchewan.

Relevant Education

The third factor for student success was relevant education. *Indian Control over Indian Education* is how schools such as Joe Duquette and Sahekew can be characterized. Indian Education involves more than including a unit in social studies on treaties, hiring an Aboriginal teacher or having elders visiting schools. When these things are done

superficially, it is simply tokenism that only patronizes Aboriginal peoples. “Indian cultures have ways of thought, learning, teaching, and communicating that are different than, but of equal validity to, those of white cultures” (Hampton, 1995, p. 292). The value of Aboriginal culture and incorporating that into an educational setting must be viewed as equal to that of a Non-Aboriginal culture.

Indian education has endured for generations in these ways of knowing when incorporated into schools become what was known as decolonization. Graveline (1998) purported that there are two parts to decolonization:

First, it is necessary to resurrect one’s own history and to find out how it has contributed to the history of the world. Second, it is necessary to rewrite colonial history to show how it has led to poverty rather than progress. (p. 37)

A mainstream view has been adopted in schools systems today that has been unquestioned and unchallenged, not because of its validity but the lack of acknowledgement given to perspectives of minority groups, particularly Aboriginal people.

The goal of Indian Education was best described in the work of Bazylak (2002), “Traditional education did not end at age seventeen, but continued into adulthood with the teachings shared by elders in the community. Traditional tribal education so many years ago, satisfied the goal of lifelong learning many educators and researchers thrive to accomplish in education today” (p. 19). Traditional education has been successful and can be adapted to meet the needs of students today to ensure their goals of becoming lifelong learners. Elements of Indian Education include instructional approaches,

teaching methods, teaching styles, curriculum and Aboriginal teachers and leaders or role models.

Instructional Approaches

It is commonly known by Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal teachers that certain *teaching methods* are more effective than others in working with Aboriginal students thus a factor for student success. Of course, this can be said for all students in general, but more so for Aboriginal students as revealed in several studies. “A variety of teaching methods is recommended rather than the exclusive use of lectures” (Hampton & Roy, 2002, p. 15). Yurkovich (2001) in her study with Aboriginal students identified learning styles of listening and then doing as being most helpful to the students’ success.

Instructional approaches for Aboriginal students include indigenous perspectives to meet cultural learning styles (Swan, 1998). Student success hinges on the teaching style and methods used by the teacher.

In my own academic pursuits I have been in classes that included mainstream and non-mainstream students. In that time I have witnessed professors testifying that there seems to be more humour in the non-mainstream classes than there was in a mainstream class. I have seen this dynamic in classrooms both in high school and university. The use of humour in a teacher’s teaching style puts students at ease and lets students know that education can be a joyful and stimulating experience (Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Gilliland, 1995). “An effective teaching style reflects First Nations cultural values which include humility, humour, and an open-minded attitude” (Mitchell, 2000)” (as cited in Hampton & Roy, 2002). Aboriginal Education in the past was a serious and traumatic experience

for many students. Changing that approach lets students know that they have an instructor who uses a friendly approach which is more comfortable to students rather than an impersonal orientation.

Curriculum

The fifth factor reported in the literature for student success was *curriculum*. Much of the onus for relevant curriculum lies with the school but more specifically with teachers who are in classrooms with closed doors. It is these teachers who need to continue to be aware of the issues to make curriculum connected with society. “The curriculum must be continually modified and the methodologies updated in accord with our changing society and its needs” (Farmer & Payne, 1992, p. 50). Examples of updating curriculum may address the latest issues that face North Americans such as terrorism, globalization, and technology.

Curriculum that includes the contributions of Aboriginal people, customs, traditions and their language is important to Indian Education. “Research has shown that the constant neglect of culture blended with educational curriculum negatively affects students and how they view themselves as learners within the larger society (Hoover, 1998, p. 28)” (as cited in Bazylak). A focus on Aboriginal content allows students to understand their own history and gain pride in their own culture by taking classes in Native Studies, Native Art, and Native Language. The knowledge that is gained from an Aboriginal perspective allows them to build self-determination and efficacy. The goal of cultural wholeness is achieved and restored to what it was in traditional education. As

Aboriginal people gain power and reclaim education more culturally relevant material will be developed and implemented.

Finally, a critical aspect within the literature relating to youth at-risk and curriculum is to give the students choices (Gilliland, 1995). Choices allow students to have some control over what they want to learn with the goal of motivation to learn.

According to Peacock and Cleary (1998):

Students who are allowed choice in how and what they learn bring two kinds of intrinsic motivation to their work. First, they have feelings of self-determination linked with a task because they have had some control over its selection and perhaps its development, and second, they are more apt to have natural curiosity connected with a task or topic that is chosen.” (p. 224)

Students who have choice can work productively on topics that they are curious about but Cleary and Peacock caution that some students may not know how to handle instances where they are given choice. They recommend gradually transitioning from no choice to limited free choice in choosing topics.

Role Models

The sixth factor contributing to student success was *role models*. A report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives in Manitoba recommended training Aboriginal teachers to teach in Winnipeg’s inner city school. With the growing Aboriginal population in Saskatchewan, the need for Aboriginal teachers in non-reserve schools has increased. Robertson (2003) agreed that there was a need to have diversity in the teaching profession that reflected the diversity of the Aboriginal student body.

Some may argue that it should not matter if a teacher is Aboriginal or not. One only has to look at the success rate among Aboriginal students to realize that changes need to be made to address students' needs including the addition of Aboriginal teachers. Thankfully, there are institutions that are established to train Aboriginal teachers. The Aboriginal teacher education programs (TEPs) across Canada are educating teachers to meet the growing needs of society. Some TEP programs are receiving a large number of applicants who exceed the entry level requirements for a teacher education program. This is reassuring to First Nation schools as many will be the recipients of these future graduates who not only have the credentials to become educators but highly skilled, competent and professional educators.

Hains (2001) related one factor that contributed to Aboriginal students dropping out of school, according to her students, was the lack of Aboriginal teachers in schools. The presence of Aboriginal teachers in schools assures them that they are not the only minority in school. The benefit of having Aboriginal teachers comes indirectly as Aboriginal teachers act as advocates for Aboriginal students. Aboriginal teachers are a vital resource to students. They are much more able to understand their perspective and empathise with them because of their own experiences. They are able to relate to students much more than a Non-Aboriginal person would in relation to cultural, spiritual, financial, political, and educational issues.

Aboriginal teachers act as role models to their students. Regardless of ethnicity teachers are role models to their students. In Cleary and Peacock (1998) they quoted Patty George an American Indian teacher:

“My students say, ‘You’re cool because you’re a teacher and you’ve got money.’ I said to them, ‘What you guys have to understand is that inside of everyone of you is me.’ I said, ‘I was you. And our hearts match. And whatever you see in me- non-drinking, helping my own people, doing those things- that is inside of you. You can do those same things.” (p. 241)

To Aboriginal students they are role models because they were able to leave their areas of comfort, particularly, reserves and live in a foreign world - an urban center achieving an outcome that demonstrates to others that if they can achieve success then so can they. Often Aboriginal students in university are taught a mainstream knowledge and left without an understanding of an Indigenous knowledge (Antone, 2003). Aboriginal role models let students know that they have had to negotiate two polarized worldviews and still be successful. A post secondary institution such as the First Nations University of Canada ensures that an experience at a university does not necessarily have to involve a compromise.

Conceptual Summary of the Literature

This was a study of Aboriginal professionals in various work sectors and their perceptions of success. Cleary and Peacock’s (1998) *What Works: Student Motivation as a Guide to Practise* was used as conceptual summary of the literature to organize the literature that I reviewed on topics relating to at-risk youth, Indian Education and success. There are numerous models that address the at-risk student populations. Each model is tailored to the students they are attempting to reach. Therefore, A universal solution to

the at-risk problem is not plausible rather members of the students families, communities and schools work together to create solutions.

The conceptual summary was described specifically in Figure 1. The conceptual summary begins by highlighting at-risk youth. There are four blocks representing the definition of at-risk youth, behaviour of at-risk youth, definition of success and models of success. Next, I found six factors as the common threads in the literature pertaining to at-risk youth, Indian education and success which are relationships, culture, relevant education, instructional approaches, curriculum and role models. Circles surrounding the centre circle entitled factors related to success represent each of these factors. Finally, the centre circle is connected to a trapezoid. The trapezoid at the bottom of the page is entitled implications for student success which was determined when I completed my data collection and data analysis in Chapter Four and Five.

The conceptual summary provided in this thesis was reflected in the philosophy of some schools with a clear focus on Aboriginal education. As noted from their website Joe Duquette High School in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan is a case in point:

Joe Duquette High School offers *programming in an alternative manner*. The manner or approach is alternative not the curriculum. Programs at Joe Duquette must be flexible enough to go beyond the traditional “fixed” time periods (re: Sept. Dec.) while allowing for individualized programming. The content and the process of a program are more important than the quantity.

At Joe Duquette, a *holistic approach* is considered the means of educating all individuals. The approach focuses on the concept of the medicine wheel. The main aspect is the four capacities of the human being (mental, physical, spiritual and emotional). All four dimensions of one's life are interrelated and important in growth and development.

All adults should be willing to establish a *relationship* with students. This relationship permits issues of the 'heart' to take precedent over the issues of the 'mind'. A teachers belief and frame of mind, their philosophy, have a major effect on how or if a relationship is established with students. A teacher at Joe Duquette should start where the student is at while being honest, open and frank with them (do skills align with aspirations?). To do this a teacher needs a nurturing (positive, tolerant, understanding) attitude, not a pre-conceived attitude.

The expectation that success is measurable by a test is invalid. *Success* and failure are part of the normal growth and development of an individual. It cannot be measured accurately by a June exam. Success is developing a strong personal identity while realizing our interdependency with other people.

An approach that included Aboriginal pedagogy to address the needs of students in three critical areas was used to develop the summary: *Indian education* by using an alternative approach, *culture* by incorporating a holistic approach and *relationships* by interacting with students in a caring manner will lead to success.

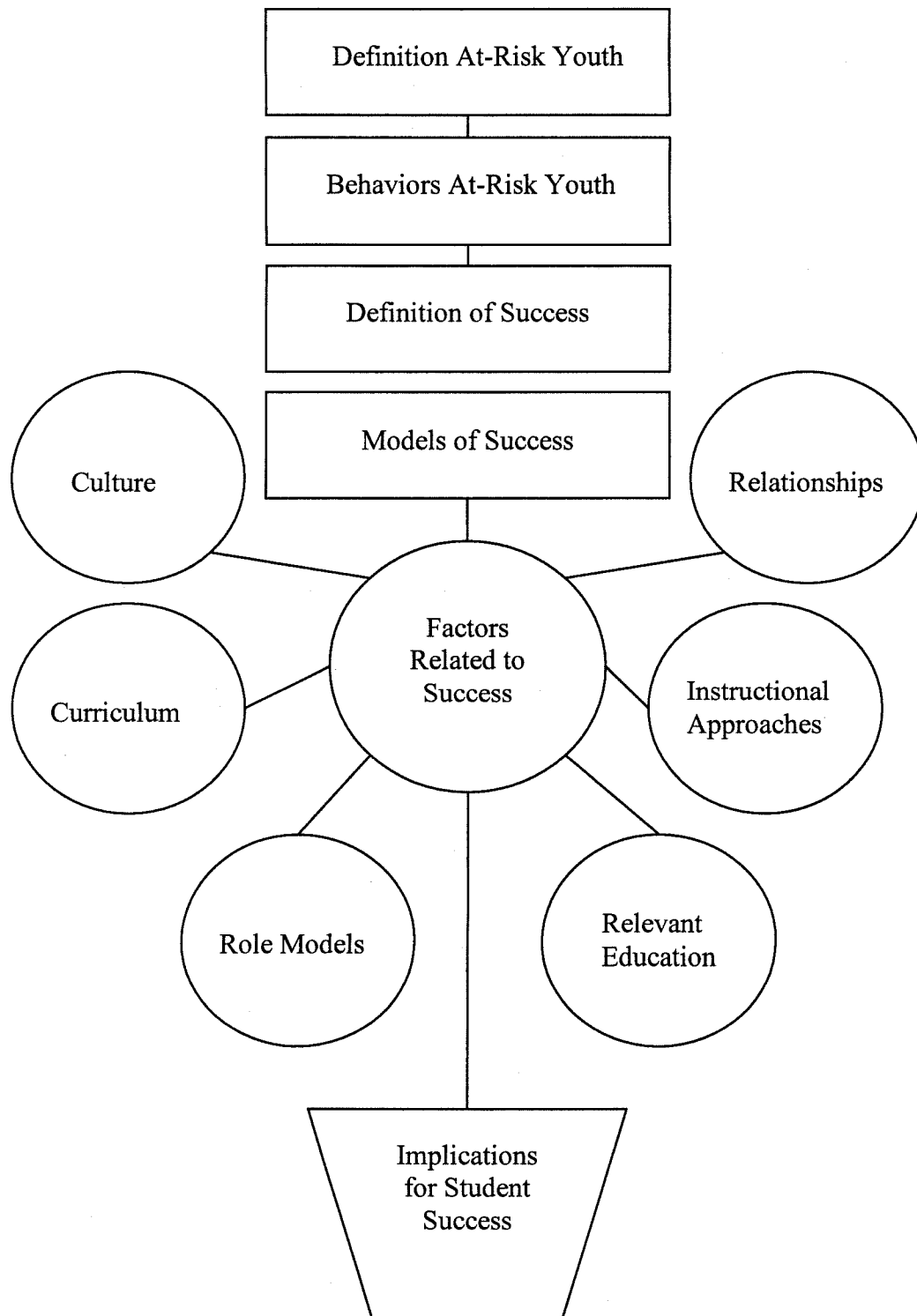


Figure 1: Contexts and Processes of Aboriginal Student Success

Summary

Echoing the words of Bazylak (2001) what is needed to further this study was for researchers to continue to listen to the voices of Aboriginal students who have been successful by using various research methods. Stories are yet to be told that will reveal more factors to Aboriginal student success whether through continued in-depth interviews, narrative approaches or more traditional means of using talking circles. Antone (2003) assured that the strengthening of Aboriginal voice will enhance the educational experience for Aboriginal people because of the rich content offered from an Aboriginal perspective.

The theme that was common within the literature was developing and nurturing of relationships as a way of creating success. A relationship whether developed with a teacher, family member, friend or any other significant person, was the support that enabled students to be successful. Those who have a relationship with a mentor or support person are able to achieve goals in their own lives. Students at-risk are successes waiting to happen when they cling to positive support networks.

The most common barrier to student success in the literature was that of socioeconomic status. Wealth does not guarantee success for any student but poverty is a significant issue plaguing Aboriginal people. As long as Aboriginal people live in poverty they will continually be faced with this barrier preventing any opportunities for success.

What is lacking in the literature is a perspective on how funds can be used to create success whether utilized by the student or by an institution, parent or other person on behalf of the student. In other words, if the barrier of socioeconomic status is removed

how are the funds used to create success for students. What supports and programs can be used to make changes if finances were not an issue becomes an important question for educators, parents, students, and all other stakeholders in education.

What is lacking in the literature was a perspective that looks at how spirituality can play a role in Aboriginal student success. If students are to balance their lives holistically they will achieve success. When using a holistic model to explain the successes of Aboriginal students, often it is the spiritual component that has the least amount of information. Spirituality can be a factor for success but how is it defined and how is it manifested in their lives become emerging questions to a future study.

The historical context of Aboriginal education reminded us of how Aboriginal languages were taken away. As Aboriginal education flourishes, Aboriginal students will grow to learn their own language through immersion programs and courses in high school and university. The voices of future Aboriginal students who have been successful will be captured in the language bestowed on us by the creator. The essence of who we are is eloquently stated in our native tongue. Nothing is more natural than learning about Aboriginal student factors of success from students speaking in their native language. When we have learned that language and speak it as our first language future studies will have rich data that will give us further understanding of success and success factors. Perhaps then there will be no need to address at-risk student behaviour among Aboriginal people.

Addressing the needs of at risk youth is a multifaceted issue that requires the efforts of all members in our society. Kushman, Sieber and Kinney (2000) remind us that students who fail are a reflection of a society that has unsuccessfully prepared youth for

positive outcomes in education. If society at large is responsible then as communities there is a need to develop partnerships that envisages success for students who are at risk.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to describe how Aboriginal professionals in various work sectors define school success. I developed an interest in this topic spurred from the Aboriginal Peoples Survey (Statistics Canada, 2001) indicating that the dropout rate among off reserve Aboriginal high school students has remained unchanged since the previous study five years ago. With the advances in education to accommodate Aboriginal people it is alarming that the dropout rate is still significantly higher than the national average. This retrospective study of Aboriginal professionals can hopefully provide some insight as to how high school students can achieve success. In this chapter, the research design, research method, methods of data collection and data analysis method and design are presented. Finally, ethical considerations for the purposes of this study were given.

There have been similar studies conducted in the past by Aboriginal researchers in the area of Aboriginal student success at the University of Saskatchewan in other graduate departments. One study (Pocha, 2000) focused on Aboriginal parents and their perception of their children's success in public school where as a narrative researcher used interviews as a research method to capture their stories. A second study (Bazylak, 2002) involved five female Aboriginal high school students in an urban setting where the methodology employed in this study was an Aboriginal traditional research method known as a healing circle approach which is similar to a focus group. The focus of this study was asking a similar question of perceptions of Aboriginal student success to a different group of individuals. This research project will add to the growing literature of

qualitative research on Aboriginal student success for others to build on or use as a reference.

Research Design

A qualitative study, with the method of inquiry following a phenomenological approach, was conducted to explore the perceptions of Aboriginal professionals in various work sectors regarding student success through interviews. The overarching research question “. . . concerns the meaning of a phenomenon, then the method that would best answer the question is phenomenology” (Morse, 1998, p. 64).

Storytelling as a way of making meaning described by Seidman (1998), a proponent of phenomenology, stated that participants share their stories relating their experiences as a meaning constructing opportunity. It is from that storytelling that reflections and the order in which they share that story allow for that meaning to be fully understood.

I attempted to follow the tradition of a phenomenologist to comprehend the meaning of what participants were sharing. Processes I followed were consistent with phenomenology:

Phenomenologists do not assume they know what things mean to the people they are studying (Douglas, 1976). “Phenomenological inquiry begins with silence” (Psathas, 1973). This “silence” is an attempt to grasp what it is they are studying. What phenomenologists emphasize, then, is the subjective aspects of people’s behaviour. They attempt to gain entry into the conceptual world of their subjects (Geertz, 1973) in order to understand how and what meaning they construct

around events in their daily lives. Phenomenologists believe that multiple ways of interpreting experiences are available to each of us through interacting with others, and that it is the meaning of our experiences that constitutes reality (Greene, 1978). Reality, consequently, is “socially constructed” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003, p. 23)

The reality of the participants lives are presented in the following chapter. Each participant’s interview was coded to find emerging themes that are elaborated on in the data analysis.

Qualitative research is defined by Bogdan and Biklen (2003) as “an approach to social science research that emphasizes collecting descriptive data in natural settings, uses inductive reasoning, and emphasizes understanding the subjects point of view” (p. 261). A qualitative study allows for participants to share their lived experiences through dialogue. A quantitative approach interprets numbers and not words which is the major difference for choosing a qualitative study. Seidman (1995) expanded on using a qualitative or quantitative approach:

For those interested in interviewing as a method of research, perhaps the most telling argument between the two camps [qualitative and quantitative] centers on the significance of language to inquiry with human beings. Bertaux (1981) has argued that those who urge educational researchers to imitate the natural sciences seem to ignore one basic difference between the subjects of inquiry in the natural sciences and those in the social sciences: the subjects of inquiry in the social sciences can talk and think. Unlike a planet, or a chemical, or a lever . . . (p. 2)

Thus, the difference between the two approaches is not the measurement of words but the meaning that emerges from the data (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Therefore, the goal of this research was not to generalize findings but to investigate deeper understandings of the lives of participants in the study.

Research Methods

Selection of respondents

The research method employed in this study involved semi-structured interviews with three participants who were professionals selected from various occupational settings. The sampling strategy used in this study was a purposive sampling approach. Specifically, the criteria, based on my own perceptions as discussed in Chapter One, was used to identify participants as follows:

- Degree (Minimum Undergraduate Degree);
- Working in an occupation in or advanced training in a professional field;
- Attained a measure of success in their field.

In the early stages of this study, I casually approached several colleagues and fellow students through informal discussions via in person, e-mail and telephone calls to assess interest. Many people to whom were spoken had been known by myself through my own professional working life as either a colleague, a fellow graduate student from the University of Saskatchewan or through other associations from previous work history. The rationale behind this approach was to ensure that a rapport was established well enough that allow participants to discuss their experiences and feelings comfortably with the researcher to ensure a rich collection of data. "In qualitative research, participants . . .

are carefully selected for inclusion, based on the possibility that each participant . . . will expand the variability of the sample. Purposive sampling increases the likelihood that variability common in any social phenomenon will be represented in the data . . .”

(Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 44). The purposive sampling method was used to select participants who have been successful in high school, currently work in a professional occupation or pursuing graduate studies. Informants were selected based on having, at minimum, a university degree, working on graduate studies and/or working in a human services sector.

Data Collection

The major method of data collection was through interviewing. “In qualitative research, interviews may be used in two ways. They may be the dominant strategy for data collection, or they may be employed in conjunction with participant observation, document analysis, or other techniques” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 95). For the purposes of this study the semi-structured interview was the instrument for data collection this approach was the means of collecting the data. “The open-ended nature of the approach allows the subject to answer from their own frame of reference rather than from one structured by prearranged questions” (p. 3). The loose structure in interviewing participants allowed for a freedom to elicit what they knew and how they understood the questions from their own perspectives.

Semi-Structured Interviews

I used semi-structured questions as a guide to elicit answers pertaining to perceptions of success among Aboriginal professionals (refer to Appendix E). I tested my questions with fellow graduate students as a pilot to verify the structured content of semi-structured interviewing. The feedback was positive and a few modifications were made including the order of the questions. This process was to allow for validity of the in-depth and semi-structured interview questions. Seidman (1998) expanded on the purpose of in-depth interviewing:

The purpose of in-depth interviews is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to “evaluate” as the term is normally used . . . At the root of in-depth interviews is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience. (p. 3)

This approach allowed the participants to freely express themselves through stories of their own high school experiences.

The research method chosen for this study fit with the questions being asked. It was difficult to derive meaning from other forms of research methodology such as surveys and questionnaires because of the nature of the questions being asked and the nature of participants as human subjects.

The in-depth and semi-structured interviews proceeded as described below:

1. The first interview was conducted for one hour asking questions that pertained to Appendix E. The goal of the interview was to have participants as Seidman (1995) described it reflect on meaning. Making meaning means asking participants to reflect on how factors in their experience brought them to the

place where they were currently employed. The initial interview schedule was distributed ahead of the interview time.

2. The second semi-structured interview was intended to verify what they have stated and to add, omit or change any ideas and thoughts they have stated in the initial interview. The second interview was designed to allow participants to reflect on questions they were asked in the initial interview and add to that if they need to. The time to reflect after the initial interview changed how they would answer the questions at a second interview. The views stated initially were consistent and did not change much during the second interview.

Data Analysis

All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed by a transcriber. The transcripts were given to the participants to assure accuracy. Participants were allowed to add, delete, modify or clarify transcripts. “Qualitative researchers are concerned with making sure that they capture perspectives accurately . . . Other researchers may show drafts of articles or interview transcripts to key informants” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 7). The interview was designed along the lines of the facets of the conceptual summary as follows: culture, curriculum, role models, relationships, instructional approaches and relevant education.

Analyzing the data occurred by sifting through, re-reading, and returning transcripts to participants for clarification and or deletions. I looked for emerging patterns and connections. Through analytical induction, I inferred events and statements as

instances of the same underlying theme all the while keeping the research question in focus and narrowed. In instances where there were repetitions and similarities it constituted a new code. Even when codes were created it was important to reconsider the codes with other participant transcripts. Thus, I utilized a constant comparative methodology. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) defined the constant comparative method of analyzing qualitative data as:

[C]ombin[ing] inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained . . . As each new unit of meaning is selected for analysis, it is compared to all other units of meaning and subsequently grouped (categorized and coded) with similar units of meaning. If there are no similar units of meaning, a new category is formed. In this process there is room for continuous refinement; initial categories are changed, merged, or omitted; new categories are generated; and new relationships can be discovered. (p. 134)

The question that I asked myself was, “Is this code similar to or different from other codes?” A similar technique was used to look for patterns among the codes and categories. The emergent themes from the interviews stemmed from the interview questions and the overarching research question.

I attempted to increase the trustworthiness of the research findings by using an audit trail and member checks. Lincoln and Guba (1985) as cited in Maykut and Morehouse (1994) stated that original transcripts of interviewees and a researcher’s journal are part of the constant comparative method of analysis all contributing to an audit trail. I kept notes, e-mail messages, conferences and other interactions with

participants in a researcher journal. The use of having participants check over transcripts and ensuring accuracy was referred to as a member check. These approaches were utilized to communicate to the reader that a process was applied to ensure trustworthiness.

Adding to the trustworthiness of the study was the need to address the question of whether or not what was being said by participants was trustworthy as far as the data analysis was concerned. This was accomplished through piloting the questions in the interview guide with graduate students and the ongoing discussions with other educators and their comments on the plausibility of the findings. An interview structure was a process that allowed a researcher to achieve validity. Seidman (1998) argued that an interview process can be used as means of providing validity:

[An interview structure] encourages interviewing participants over the course of 1 to 3 weeks to account for idiosyncratic days and to check for the internal consistency of what they say . . . by interviewing a number of participants, we can connect their experiences and check the comments of one participant against those of others. Finally, the goal of the process is to understand how participants understand and make meaning of their experience. If the interview structure works to allow them to make sense to themselves as well as to the interviewer, then it has gone a long way toward validity. (p. 17)

I did several things to ensure validity as described by Seidman. I used more than one interview to allow participants to articulate the meaning they have made from the questions provided in Appendix E. A constant comparative method of analyses of data

was employed to check for connections between participant's experiences, and to discover consistencies within the data.

Ethical Considerations

An application for ethical consideration was sent to the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board before the research was carried out. The application was made to ensure that I was ethically responsible and to assure participants will be treated with respect. Upon approval, letters were sent to participants outlining the nature of the study and assuring them of anonymity and volition. Participants share, to some degree, personal information in the research that will eventually be accessible to the public in which case leaving participants feeling vulnerable. Therefore, due to the nature of interviewing human subjects participants were assured confidentiality by the use of pseudonyms when referring to interviewees. Letters of consent were sent to participants outlining the nature and procedure of the study. Participants were given an option to withdraw from the study at any time during the study without penalty or loss of any services from the University of Saskatchewan.

The data collected was and will continue to be kept in a secure place and will be held by the University of Saskatchewan for five years according to the University of Saskatchewan guidelines. When interviews with the participants were completed, transcripts of their interviews were sent back to interviewees to ensure accuracy. Participants were given the option to make changes to the transcripts to reflect the views articulated by the participants. A copy of the ethical guidelines and approval is contained in Appendix A and F.

Summary

I outlined this chapter by research design, research methods, data collection and data analysis. The data was collected from Aboriginal professionals in various work sectors. The study was a qualitative research approach as I was interested in the meaning that Aboriginal professionals make of the word *success* and their own school experiences. The conclusion of this chapter was dealt with ethical considerations for participants and guidelines of my conduct as a researcher.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to describe how Aboriginal professionals in various work sectors define school success. The secondary purpose was to explore the factors that these individuals believe to affect success: To what or whom do professionals attribute their success? What can make others successful? What is the role of school (culture, curriculum, role models, relevant education, instructional approaches and relationships) in their success?

The study examined the perceptions of Aboriginal professionals in various work sectors to elicit information relating to six factors of school success: *relationships, culture, relevant education, instructional approaches, curriculum, and role models*. The qualitative information provided in this analysis was presented as quotes from two in-depth interviews.

Data Collection

As mentioned in chapter three, participant anonymity was protected by use of pseudonyms. Further to protecting the identity of participants was the careful consideration of removing any identifiable features such as work, school and home locations. The in-depth interviews were conducted with three participants over a three month period. The data collected in this study has been organized according to the conceptual framework developed in Chapter Two. The purpose of this chapter was to present data collected and analyzed from three interviews relating to questions in the interview guide (Appendix E). Data was presented for each of the participants in turn.

Introduction

As I present the data from participants, it was difficult to make a decision on what aspects of the interviews I would present and what I would delete. Each interview was rich in detail and provided insights beyond the scope of this study to elaborate on. At the conclusion of the interviews and as I began my analysis I realized that I had to include all aspects of what participants shared. That means that the data presented is a result of all the interviews. In some instances there was a repetition in participants' responses as a result of several interviews, the only pieces in the transcript that did not show up in Chapter Four are those where they were repetitive.

In the interviews the guide was a starting point. As I conducted the interview, I found that I was asking additional questions to elicit further understanding on topics related to the overarching research question and the secondary questions. The most difficulty I had with the interview guide was with Beth as she was unable to relate to the questions. I had developed an interview guide that I related to, that I understood. As stated by Holstein and Gubrium (1998) I took being subjective for granted and anticipated all my participants to answer the same way I did. I recall my first interview with her where we were halfway through the interview guide in only five minutes. I changed my approach and let her tell her story of her educational experiences as she lived them. After that first interview I knew that this was going to be a difficult process for me to analyze. I wrote notes about our interviews and would meditate on them asking myself what does this mean? How does this relate to my research questions? I would ask other educators for their input and if the findings seemed plausible. If I needed any further clarification or information Beth was gracious to oblige me. The

layout of the interviews is a chronological account from the transcripts. This data collection is not only their story but also the order in which they chose to relate that story.

When I initially conducted the study my understanding of success was narrow. I chose a narrow definition of success as it relates to schooling. At the conclusion of this study it has become so broad that it is impossible to define it. But even to define it; that too is impossible because who defines success? Success for individuals is different for everyone. Even when success is attributed to someone else such as the ice cream vendor mentioned earlier that might not be their interpretation or how they choose to see themselves.

Participants

Jack

During the interview Jack took charge, grabbing the microphone and holding it close to his chest as if to signify that his words came from his heart. His words were honest, sincere and eloquent. He projected confidently answering questions as though he had told these stories before.

Jack was a 30 year old Cree Aboriginal male from central Saskatchewan. Jack began his schooling experience in an urban center before moving back to his home reserve to continue in grades 8-12. Jack remembered being bullied at the reserve school recounting many fights he was in just to defend himself. I posed a question about what difference it would make if he switched from a reserve school back to a provincial school:

That is interesting that you ask me, because I have to be honest the reason that I was transferred to the small town Saskatchewan high school was because I came from a Reserve school. My family moved from [an urban center] to Jack First Nation Reserve when I was 12 or 13. I started Grade 7 on the Reserve school and right away I was marked in. I was marked/targeted for bullies. I didn't really speak a lot of the language, they took advantage of me in that respect.

I was different, I spoke more eloquently in English, and they didn't. I read very well, especially aloud. I was bullied because of that. Plus, the family I came from. See on the Reserve there are always family disputes and so on and so forth and Jack reserve is no different. Because of my family background I was bullied as well because of who my dad was and how politically reactive he was in and around the Reserve and within Canada. I was a target. They really took advantage of me in many ways. I came home with beatings. It didn't help matters that I always fought back and at that time I was very small, smaller than most students in my age group were.

To put in perspective what Jack was voicing I asked him to provide a description of himself. It was difficult to imagine Jack being bullied:

I am just over 200 lbs and I am 6 foot 1 inch. I was very small and like I said bigger kids really took advantage of that.

After many unpleasant experiences with other students, Jack's parents decided to send him to a provincial school near his home reserve. Jack was asked how the decision for him to move to a different school came about:

I think when I finally let them know that I could not handle it any longer.

Sometimes I would be bloody with bruises on my back and face from being beat up. My mom was sick of it, finally we had to charge one kid because he was beating me so badly. It was a parental decision.

I moved to Calvert High Provincial School in the middle of Grade 8 and I was so happy. I sat down and I did my work. I was one of the best students in the grade, as well through Grade 9 and 10. I was so happy to be there that I didn't even make a noise in Grade 8. I really kept to myself. There were other students around there from the surrounding Reservations. I wasn't allowed access to the Reserve in terms of membership I was originally from another Reserve. I was born into it because I was born before my parents were married. That was another factor which the kids honed in on, he is an outsider coming to school here. It made life rough. It came to the point where I accepted it and I expected to get beat up and I was ready to fight back at any given time, as small as I was. Now when I go back to the community today I can comfortably walk around there. Like I said what goes around comes around. There was a time in my life where I delved into the dark side and remembered all of those beatings. Let's just say everyone that challenged me then I gave it back to them. More than anything, why I have respect in the community is the fact that I didn't give up, I had spirit, and I wasn't afraid to acknowledge everybody. Even though I was different. I would still go up and shake hands, try to talk to everybody, regardless if they were disadvantaged still living in a Third World community type situation in their house. I grew up having really good friends in the community and people still

think I am from there. Some of them say he is from Martin reserve, but he is from here. A lot of people from Jack reserve will still claim me from there. Whether I am helping out in cultural events or just visiting people automatically assume I am from Jack reserve, because I lived there and it also has a lot to do with my family. When it comes down to it I will always acknowledge where I truly am from, which is an outside Reserve. That's part of being genuine and respectful.

Although Jack struggled through his schooling experience, he did not give up. It was his parents who decided for him where he would go to school. Jack expressed the elation he felt when he was transferred to a different school. At anytime he could have approached his parents to transfer out of that hostile environment but he stuck it out and waited until his parents decided.

Jack graduated from the provincial high school and later attended a Canadian university where he completed two years of Arts and Science course work and later a degree in Education. He is now married and has children, a father figure to four other children as well as keeping two older children who are in high school. Jack can be characterized as a type of public figure as he has been featured in a commercial and makes numerous appearances at Aboriginal traditional functions or community functions representing the Aboriginal community in pow-wows, singing and traditional feasts. Jack provided details of his participation in these public events:

I should go back into the culture here and mention that part of growing up with Traditional Spirituality, going to cultural events from where my dad is from, the Reserve I grew up on Jack Reserve. There is a society there, a Traditional Warriors Society, the Magina Sucta the helpers, the peace keepers. If one was to

look back in retrospect, what the contemporary is today. Which would be (so to speak) like a dog soldier (a warrior) the ones that would protect the camps and would sacrifice themselves for the rest of the people. These people would give the most of themselves, selflessly. Give and give until you have nothing. When you get some more, you give some more. It's about really maintaining the community. Today it is about helping out in these community events, learning about traditions Round Dances, learning about death and life of our people and helping out in those situations. In life we have the celebrations of giving thanks, acknowledging our environment through dancing and singing through ceremonies and through many other means. Where as in death there is one true ceremony and there is one way in sending off our departed. A lot of these functions I attended and grew up around learning the songs, process, protocol and learning the people. Who is who, who functions as what such as, Pipe Carriers other older more knowledgeable cultural resource people or in Cree- Oskapewis. These men and women are totally adept in knowledge of traditions and situations of history. My Uncle Klein, who is the leader of our warrior society. Generational Chief of our society he looks out for us, he is a Mentor, he sets a standard of how to do this, if we have questions he has answers.

If we are in need of something to do he has something for us. Sharing all of this knowledge with me as a member. Now I share this with the community that I presently live in here in the city, and a lot of it has to do with helping out in these cultural events and never ever proclaiming myself to be the "know all" and "be all" of being the ultimate Indian. It has a lot to do with being a good help,

resource, and making these events a success in a good way. Always maintain the fact of your humble beginnings. I can sit here and say that I do not have a problem with my ego because I know what it feels like to be knocked down and have extreme success, and I am comfortable just being in the middle and helping out. Helping out in a public capacity puts me on the line in a sense that I represent my family, it keeps me accountable. It also keeps me on my toes helping out with these events such as facilitating a Round Dance, running as a Pow Wow arena director, helping out with a Pipe Ceremony, assisting in a Feast, being a singer in a Sweat Lodge. As well as, other ceremonies or even in a Church capacity speaking to the people at Memorials or Commemorations or even at a Funeral. These types of events being out there, I am conscious of one thing and that is the fact that my kids are watching what I am doing and I am not doing it for myself I am doing it for the benefit of the community. I am living that role that was passed onto me through my teachings of the society being a true society member...I wanted to reach out and go beyond what the very small teachings that I have to help out where I can and only when asked. I don't force myself on anybody nor do I go around charging for my services.

If they give me a rabbit or a deer or even a handshake that is fine it is acknowledgement enough for me that I have helped us out and I am happy with that. A friend in need is a friend in deed. I believe the philosophy what goes around, comes around. I believe that if I help enough people then some day when I really need it they will be there for me or some kind of help will come around and help me out.

Jack is well grounded in the teachings of his *culture and spirituality*. He spoke of his participation in cultural and spiritual events as contributions. What he received he passed on in giving to others. The spirit of generosity that Brendtro, Bokenleg, & Van Bockern (1990) discussed in their work comes to mind as Jack was speaking. His altruistic actions were what ironically refreshed his soul to continue on the path of giving. Jack is giving in his work where he is employed operating a leadership program in the fine arts sector developing and recruiting local talent.

Success Defined

Success was defined by Jack in one of two ways- the first was completing high school and the second was described as making a difference. For Jack, a major milestone in his teenage years was experiencing success in a formal sense through high school graduation. He credited this achievement to his *spirituality, members of his family and to several teachers*:

According to my own standards my success was to complete Grade 12 . . . A completion of Grade 12 and getting my diploma was the biggest milestone during that time. My focus was to get that done and through it all family, traditions, culture, spirituality, religion and of course, the role models that I had in school; this type of standard that some of them set for me. It's my belief now, when I look back having children of my own and being a father figure to four children as well as keeping two older children (one is getting ready to go into high school and the other one is in high school) my idea of success is not just to do your best, but to specifically make every day count. For today will be significantly different

from tomorrow. Several times the students of today are really in a selfish mode. Selfish in that they have the attitude of "I want this, I want that". They can only think about themselves. I believe that you can turn and use that selfish energy into a positive thing where they look at themselves but from a different light. They look at the whole perspective of them - the self. They look at yes, I want all of these things, but what about my needs as well. I need to finish school and if I am thinking selfishly then I can only think of short-term goals. Then think short-term for today and make today count make the most of your day. So I find myself talking for hours after school spending time with my children and asking them questions; What did you do today? How is your day? Give me the details, sit down with them, look them in the eye, and talk to them in a really calm and soothing voice. Be there for them. Make time for them because my parents made time for me. When my dad was around he made time he found ways to make time for me. He would call me from the road. When my mom would be at home with us alone, she would stop and pay attention when we would talk. That is the kind of parent I wanted to be. Being successful in high school, they need to have that kind of foundation (a family).

Jack discussed how students today could become successful by channelling the energy in a way that it can bring about completion of high school. Completion of high school can occur when a student is able to focus on what it is they have to do today to be successful. If they can concentrate on the tasks that are before them now then they can have success in the long term. Another factor for success was being connected to a support group or in Jack's case family.

In the excerpt provided above the participant's caring nature as a parent was demonstrated by the effort he put into ensuring that he connected with his children once a day in a meaningful way. Jack mentioned how his mother modeled this parenting style to him. In turn, he was able to model interactions with his own children in the same way.

Jack carried on beyond just defining success; he identified several factors that were crucial to his success: *relationships, culture/spirituality and holistic balance*. He demonstrated the importance of making a connection to his family as to ensure that they in turn are successful:

They [students] need to have some sort of structure where religion and spirituality come into play, where they can pray. As a First Nation's person we are made up of four components: Spiritual, Mental, Emotional, and Physical. If we don't acknowledge these four parts of us we can fall to pieces very easily. It is a day-to-day struggle, and again, this comes with the concept of making your day count. He realized that success was about living a balanced lifestyle, not merely comprising the physical, mental and social but the spiritual. The spiritual encompasses religion and culture. Spirituality is having both religion and culture in one's lifestyle to maintain balance.

Jack initially indicated that his primary definition of success was graduating from high school. I asked him if a secondary definition of success existed in his mind. He responded:

Yes, making a difference. Not enough of us try to do that. Most of us are too comfortable with an office job low profile, low key not wanting to budge the system. They are comfortable with their lives in that respect. They have the

technology that affords them time to be luxurious at home to be lazy. The media feeds us with this information. It is all too easy, they make things easier for us by watching, listening or doing certain things. If you look on TV you can buy a mechanism you don't have to work out you can sit and watch TV and this gadget will make you lose weight. You can buy a pill and in no time you have this miraculous body.

What I [am] getting at is that we have to get out of that mode and start thinking outside the box and start making change, not just for the Aboriginal people, but as human beings, wake up. There is something wrong with our lives and it has something to do with the system.

Educationally speaking, being successful has a lot to do with waking up and wanting and believing you can make the change and be successful, making the difference not just for me and my family, but for everybody and however idealistic that sounds it is possible. It is possible if you believe . . . [Making a difference] I believe has a lot to do with being a good human being spiritually and religiously. In the end when we all meet in the middle if we are going to be judged let it be on the fact that we made the most of our life. Being able to say that we enjoyed it, we are thankful for it, we did all that we wanted to do, and maybe even more than we did. And that, means success to me that our life wasn't wasted that you did things, you lived it, you didn't just talk about it you did it.

Jack asserted that there are numerous ways in which an individual can make a difference. It can be as simple as speaking out, volunteering or performing culturally and artistically.

For Jack, then, success was not being passive in life and watching it pass by. It was about being an active participant in making a change in the world for the better.

Success Factors

Factors contributing to Jack's success were described in the excerpts from transcripts during several of our interviews. The first factor that Jack addressed was that of instructional approaches used by his teacher:

I would like to talk about one situation where I was made to feel successful and throughout my high school experience from Grade 8 – 12 at Calvert High School, I had extensive Industrial Arts training, of course, Home Economics was not a usual subject that men took in my time, but Industrial Arts was the first choice. It didn't consist mainly of wood shop work, but also drafting. I felt that everyone was treated the same it did not matter what color you were, what language you spoke, what background you came from, if you were tall, short, overweight we were all treated equal, therefore individual's succeed with confidence.

The facilitator of the program was the Principal of the school. He was a straight forward and stern, and at the same time wasn't cold and harsh, he set the standards physically, he had expectations and used a hands on method while demonstrating the passion he had for it. It was a very outstanding class. As a student in relation to the community of course, being a First Nation's person – a person of colour, person of the second language, I stood out, I was the only person of colour in my classroom. It was well-known in the community, I outlasted a lot

of my peers that are from my home community. They would drop out, they couldn't hack it, they felt uncomfortable, etc. I moved on and I kept up.

In the middle of the interview, I returned to the topic of the Industrial Arts teacher who used an instructional approach that made Jack feel successful. Using this approach brought not only success but a feeling of competency. Jack provided an example of being made to feel competent:

I think the competency factor has two parts. First of all we are very hands on, because we are working with wood. It requires accuracy physically speaking. Also when we go into the lab and do the drafting part we are using our minds. We are using our physical and mental abilities. We are making the plans, we see what we are going to be making, we plan that out. This requires knowledge of Algebra your math. This also requires the Science and Physics part of it. If you are going to be building something that has a lot of weight to it there is a Physics factor he acknowledged that. There is also a point of view that we had to understand. There was birds eye point of view, plain view and from worms eye view. We had to acknowledge these views by sections; we had to find out what is inside of the wood, what type of wood would be the best for this type of project. There is also the whole factor of how houses are built, how buildings are built and different types of structures (materials) besides wood that could be used. So the hands on and using your brain to make whatever you were making a success. It was an incredible process. I am very surprised that a lot of us got done, because I came from a classroom of jokers, slackers, master manipulators, generational.

You could tell with some of them by meeting their families that they were farming for a reason. They were just in there to get their Grade 12 hit the tractor. Jack made a connection to what he was learning in other classes, such as math and science, applying those skills to accomplish an assignment in his industrial arts class. Success in completing his project was possible by combining all the skills he was learning in other classes and applying them.

A second factor to Jack's success was identifying role models of teachers and family, specifically. Not surprisingly, these included teachers he had. He commented on one particular teacher he had who was instrumental in his high school success:

Role models in my school consisted of basically the teachers that I had. Of course the Industrial Arts, our Principal, our head administrator and coincidentally it was actually one of my Math teachers, the oldest of all the teachers there. He was very eloquent, articulate, and always had an answer, because a lot of high school students ask a lot of stupid questions just to pass the time away and I was one of them I tell you I harped on this teacher and he always had an answer. He had a rebuttal for everything that we had to say. He motivated me because there was no question that we could do it, he had total faith in us. If he set out something in Algebra, if he set out something in Geometry or whatever we were doing from a day-to-day basis he just never doubted for one second that we could do it. He would always reassure us and one of the things he would say is; no problem you guys will get this and there is not even a doubt in my mind.

A second instance in which Jack described his teachers as role models was elaborated on below:

There were other's in the classroom that I was part of a group of that we wanted to think outside the box, think beyond high school. This had a lot to do with the information and structure which was presented in Industrial Arts we knew we had to have some kind of a role model someone that really set a standard for us a true leader in that respect. Somebody that didn't just point a finger at us or make us feel guilty. A person that has that presence about them they don't have to yell or make you feel guilty to have expectations and they will let you know. They will look you in the eye and they will tell you when they've shunned you. When they shake your hand it will be a firm handshake indicating respect. These kind of ideas that fled into my mind when it comes to role models, a teacher, or a leader it makes me feel good knowing that I have that in my background.

Attributes his role model teacher had been that of having *high expectations, empowering others and respecting others.*

Jack commented on how his motivation and encouragement to continue with his education came from his family:

Certain individuals that supported me would definitely have to be my family, I can sit here and honestly state that I would be nothing without my family. My relationship is actually very tight with them. To this day, I am blessed I feel thankful that they were there for me, that they did not give up on me even though I was selfish and wanted to throw away the books and drop out because all of my other friends were dropping out. I was the only person of colour in class it was really hard because nobody understood that I came from a community where running water wasn't always available.

Despite the obstacles of peer pressure and being the only visible minority in class, Jack credited his family for his success. Without their support, he would not have completed high school and attended university.

A third factor in Jack's success was that of adapting curriculum to meet the needs of the student. I noted this as *relevant education*.

One thing that I noticed though was that some teachers were conscious that I was challenged in that respect they implemented Aboriginal ideas into their curriculum. Again, this is acknowledging the flexibility that they promoted.

Upon further probing he talked about a particular instance where his teacher implemented Aboriginal content in their teaching.

Yes, I remember they did a stint on singing and dancing. One of the teachers actually brought in somebody from the Reserve and did some guest speaking on Traditions. My dad came in once. More and more books came in, but again this is back in the 80's, this would be not to the degree of truth that we have today.

They were still in the Pocahontas stage you know the romanticized Indian kind of stuff right.

I think that growing up on the Reserve and growing up in a dual system where I did have an Anglican Christian background through my mom's family. At the same time when I was with my dad his family took me to a lot of places, Sun Dances, Sweat Lodges and Pow Wows. We traveled all over North America.

When Jack described his teachers providing flexibility he was asked to relate a story of their flexibility and creativity:

Yes I can, here is a really good one. For example in Social Studies one of my teachers, very stern gentlemen wore a suit and tie everyday and didn't lose his cool. He was a very cool character, at the same time he was very strict. He had high expectations in your writing and in your presentation. He was very articulate and some people couldn't handle his class. Again, this is one staff member that really tried to reach out and grasp Aboriginal knowledge and tried to implement it in the classroom even though there was not enough literary resources available. Simply there was not at that time in textbook form. So what we would do is focus on a current event strategy on a day-to-day basis where everyone would report current events. At certain times he would acknowledge Aboriginal current events such as, Treaty signing, the Queen coming to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan to declare Wanuskewin Heritage Park a Heritage Site. Those kinds of situations were important times. He would give background, he would be very articulate and do his research, he would tap into the Aboriginal community, again that is just a resource that just wasn't used enough in my day, but he made use of it. Even though he and I butted heads at times, because coming from a Treaty Consultant, political background that is all we talked about in my household, that is all I heard on the phone when my dad would talk to me. He had big meetings outside and in the house and we would go to these meetings. I knew my stuff back then and we would get into debates regarding politics and fairness and treaties and who was a treaty person and who wasn't. The class would be watching us back and forth like a tennis ball on the court it was really funny.

Creativity and flexibility requires a teacher taking risks. In the example provided by Jack the teacher although not knowledgeable about the subject was attempting to incorporate Aboriginal content. Jack did not comment in a negative manner about the teacher's lack of knowledge but rather about the fun he had in class.

A fourth factor in Jack's success was attributed to culture and religion. Although Jack did not specify, culture and religion can be classified as *spirituality*.

I also learned to dance at a very young age and sing as well, Pow Wow and Round Dance singing, but more than anything a lot of it had to do with helping out. I grew up around the Sweat Lodge as they would call, Oskapewis (a helper). I helped my uncle who is a Pipe Carrier by splitting wood, fetching rocks for the Sweat and whatever else needed to be done we helped. We did a lot of heavy labour; there were several cousins and myself that helped out around the Sweat Lodge. If I didn't have that in my background, those two factors my religious and my cultural/spirituality, I can honestly say with having that kind of foundation stabilized me throughout my life. I look back and there are a lot of similarities in both Christianity and also spirituality that we are praying to one God and I was taught that from a young boy as long as you pray your prayer can move mountains. I did a significant amount of prayer during my high school years just to get by because it was so rough.

Jack's religious and cultural beliefs kept him centered and focussed. He not only described in word how he coped as a student, he expressed specific behaviors he practiced to survive, namely, prayer.

A fifth factor in Jack's success was having *relationships* with family. As mentioned, parents were his role models, but they are also included under the category of relationships. Jack not only described the relationship with grandparents as a factor in his success but what it was he learned from them that coincided with another category culture and spirituality. Here Jack reflected on the two separate views that afflicted him:

Besides your mainstream view of the nuclear family (i.e. mom, dad, kids) that just wasn't a factor growing up. Sure I had my mom and dad, but I also had grandparents. On my mom's side I had Anglican Christian upbringing like I said and my grandparents shared a lot of that with me about the Bible and the importance of Jesus, God's Son. The sacrifice he made in order to teach the world a lesson about the importance of life, the importance of living true to God's word. A person has to live a certain way they can't be corrupt they cannot give in to deceit. More than anything they cannot give into (I don't want to come off over theological) the devil within themselves the evil that men and women do. We are comprised of many different factors that I mentioned. A youth doesn't acknowledge this and sways. If I can flip over to the cultural tradition side there is the Creator and Mother Earth. There has always been two that bring forth life. The same way with human beings; a mother and a father that bring for life, at the same time when we first start out we break into two cells and the traditions (if we come out of the biology lesson Mitosis) going into the traditional part, again there is two roads.

Spirituality those traditions teach us that we have a black road and a red road.

The black road is full of deceit and treachery, you lie, cheat and steal, and result

in doing bad things. The evil men and women do. On the red road is walking with prayer, walking and talking the active cultural protocol of spirituality. You're not only talking about going into a Sweat Lodge, but you are actually in there or trying to help out. These two sides I grew up with and was very uncomfortable as a teenager. I felt like I was being pulled apart that it was religious spiritual overload. At certain times I would be rubbing my head and at the same time I figured it had to be for a reason so I had to suck it up and accept it.

Jack talked about two different sets of beliefs that at times brought confusion and frustration. Now he views them as one and the same. Rather than be at an impasse on which is right or wrong he merges both together, choosing to see both as positive aspects that can be used to bring about good for him and others.

Success for Others

From Jack's point of view what was it that he thought that could make others successful? What can be said to a person living on the street to get them to be successful? These were questions that were posed and he answered them this way:

I think many times the average person that lives on the West-side that is under privileged has numerous situations due to the choices that they made and they cannot get out of it in result to the choices they made, and maybe the choices were made for them. First of all, understanding where they came from. They are down and out they are your typical street people they are hustling on a day-to-day basis. This hustling type of lifestyle is very challenging, it's a 24 hour job. If you are

not hustling on a conscious basis you are dreaming about it. They need to be listened to first. For me I would talk with them and listen actively. Ask them questions and then listen. An example would be finding out how they ended up in this situation finding out about their background, knowing full well that I am going to get the whole nine yards, because they will unload.

Most of them will unload or in fact, some of them will be suspicious, why don't you know? I have been lucky to establish trust with these people because I have to work with them on a day-to-day basis again or talk with them. Working in this atmosphere, I don't mind it at all. Once I find out where they come from, why they are there, I think what they need to do is to stop blaming themselves. I always say you can reach into your bag of excuses and you can sit here all day until you are blue in the face telling me I can't do this or I can't do that. You made choices and here is what you did just based upon what you told me, and I am not condescending you I am not being an asshole (please excuse my language). What I am doing is actively listening to what is going on with you, you told me and now I am telling you this is really what is happening to you.

Even though you have just given me a picture a perfect illustration of what you are going through there is a bigger picture out there and if the finger is going to be pointed it has to be pointed at the system. I say the system because 99.9% of the people out there do not understand the system that we live in the capitalist system. If they are going to be able to acknowledge and get on the road to healing they have to understand why they are really in this situation, and for that they need a little bit of education. They need that experience which would be a large Native

Studies component. This would be an awakening for them. Through this process this will be emancipation. That moment of clarity where it will all make sense, okay I am here now what? That one simple question, that is the true unadulterated best example of empowerment. We can talk to these people until we are blue in the face and present all of this information, just like high school students getting taught from a teacher and it is up to the students if they want to accept it and internalize it. Once they do that, that is empowerment, because they empowered themselves.

Only a drunk can really want to quit drinking the same thing with education a person has to want to learn. You cannot empower them you cannot force power on a person to make them feel good; they have to want to feel good.

Jack's response to the questions on how others can be successful can be described as external and internal factors. The external factors that Jack mentioned are things that peers, parents, teachers, elders, etc, can do to assist others to be successful. He stated that for others to be successful they need to be heard. When they are heard they are more likely to be understood. Jack described what individuals can do for themselves, which can be labeled as internal factors.

A key factor for others to be successful is to take responsibility for their own lives and for the decisions they have made. When individuals take responsibility they can take the next step of receiving an education and according to Jack lead to emancipation. The education he specifically referred to was Native Studies. Jack clarified that only individuals who want to learn and make that decision on their own will benefit and be successful.

Four Winds

I was first introduced to Four Winds through watching a video of Four Winds, which was a requirement before starting my four-month teaching internship. The video looked at the process interns go through in their internship. Needless to say, Four Winds had completed his internship and convocated from a Canadian University with a bachelor of education degree. At the time of this study, he taught in an urban elementary school and had been teaching for approximately 10 years. An opportunity to meet Four Winds presented itself when I enrolled in a graduate class in which he was a part of. It was that initial contact that led to his participation in this study.

Four Winds was 42 years old, Aboriginal Cree, from a central Saskatchewan reserve. He had raised 2 children from time they were ages 5 and 6 and were currently ages 21 and 22. Four Winds was also a grandfather of twins ages 4. He was married to an American woman who is completing her graduate work in the United States in the area of nursing.

Four Winds was comfortable during the interview process as evidenced by the way he was able to recall events in his past relating to his schooling experience. Four Winds attended a reserve school for grades 8 and 9 and a provincial school from grades 10-12. He described his experience at the reserve school as more positive than the provincial school:

I attended two schools as a high school student. I first attended a middle school/high school combination on Fontaine Reserve from Grade 7 – 9. Grade 10 – 12 I was enrolled in Goodale Provincial High School, which was a small town south of Ahenakew reserve. The first school I attended was a very poor school. I

always wished I could have gone to an up-to-date school. The reason why I attended the school on Fontaine Reserve was because in the 1970s the Bands were boycotting public schools and taking their own children to Reserve schools as a protest. I think it really started with Muskoday in 1973. They were the first Band that took the students back to their own environment and pulling them out of these white schools (for lack of better words). I went to this Indian School on the premises I was going to attend a really beautiful school on the Reserve.

Supposedly, the building itself was going to be up-to-date and curriculum was going to be centered on Indian Culture, language, and so forth. It ended up it was not like that at all, it ended up being the beginning of a protest throughout Saskatchewan. I went to this tar papered school, a shack of a school that was on Fontaine Reserve School. I did very well in this school. I even won an award in Grades 8 and 9. I think much of the success that I had while I attended Fontaine Reserve School was because my parents encouraged me to work hard and I also enjoyed going to school. I loved learning. The teachers there were down to earth (they were Cree teachers).

The foundation and success he experienced from the reserve school allowed him to be successful in a provincial high school with a completely different context.

Four Winds described acceptance and familiarity in the reserve school but the provincial school was unresponsive and indifferent. The struggle to continue on in high school was made possible through physical activity. The physical activity became a factor in his success:

Now Goodale Provincial School was a different story. It wasn't as comforting to be there as opposed to Fontaine Reserve School. What motivated me to do well was the sports program, so despite the teachers who I didn't like very much, these East Indian Teachers like this one Math Teacher, Mr. Dahliwal. He was not a very good teacher in my mind he was emotionless I felt he looked down at Cree people. He wasn't approachable. I felt that I didn't accelerate in his class because there was no relationship. I feel that if I had a better teacher I would have done better in Math. I really enjoyed the Sciences; Biology, Chemistry and I enjoyed English as well.

I feel if the teacher profile was better I could have done better. I think the teachers could have been more caring and loving like the teachers were that I left behind at Fontaine Reserve School. What really pulled me through were the sports. I was involved in track and field, volleyball, and basketball. My parents encouraged and supported me to continue with my education. The motto that I grew up with was that there was a Buffalo out there and it was called education.

Those are the two schools that I went through.

Physical activity and parents were key factors in Four Wind's success particularly at the provincial school. He reflected on the attributes of his teachers in the provincial school and the implications of his teacher's affect on his learning. Four Winds stated that if his teachers had expressed emotions of care, love and enthusiasm and had a relationship with him he would have done better in the academic core classes.

Success Defined

The participant defined success in two ways. The first way was simple and straightforward stating that success was happiness and enjoying life with whatever you were doing. Four Winds secondary definition of success was graduating from high school:

For me, I was always under the impression that success was being happy, being happy in who you were, and as long as you were happy and doing well that was success. I did not focus on grades whereas several students would play the numbering game on exams, but I felt as long as I was learning, happy, content and comfortable, and continually striving to meet my goals that was success for me . . . That is what success meant to me at the time and it is still that way to me today, as long as I am happy, comfortable and going forward that is success. For Grades 10, 11, and 12 successes for me was finishing all of my subjects and graduating. Being intact. Being true to who I was; my Indian soul. In other words I didn't need anyone to tell me that I was successful I already knew. In Grade 8 and 9 I reached the benefits, which was a trophy and a cash reward, but in Grade 10, 11 and 12 it was that inside feeling of being happy and knowing that I was doing something good that was going to help me in my future.

Four Winds mentioned being intact. For him it was important to maintain a cultural and spiritual connection in an environment that neither supported or encouraged either practice. In residential schools it was impossible to remain intact. Not in anyway are the experiences described by Four Winds a comparison to residential schooling but the

notion that he was able to retain his Indian identity in a Non-Aboriginal school atmosphere provided a sense of accomplishment and success.

Success Factors

Four Winds was able to identify many factors that were keys to his success. These factors are discussed in this next section. Near the beginning of the interview Four Winds made reference to two teachers in Grades 8 and 9 who were role models to him. They taught him fundamental cultural lessons of history and their Cree language:

This one teacher that I really enjoyed was Dan Harper. I was thankful that I had the opportunity to be his student. He used to tell us stories of the old days, about his political life, and he taught us Cree. He was like our Elder and as you know Dan Harper is the guru of the FSIN movement. He was one of the early leaders in the National Indian Brotherhood in Canada that started this whole political Indian movement. As a teenager I saw a lot of good things that he was saying and it coincided with what my parents were teaching me as well. Of course, there were other teachers, there was the late John Coon Come who taught me how to write Cree syllabics-cakipehiana. I was one of the few students who really liked the Cree syllabics and the Cree classes that we were taking. It instilled in me a pride of the language. Today I teach Cree syllabics. From that experience John Coon Come and Dan Harper these old people who are now walking the wind, they really taught me to have a lot of pride in who I was as a Cree a young man as a Cree Teenager. Other than the two outstanding teachers that I have mentioned above it was helpful as well that I was surrounded by my own people, I was going

to school with my friends, and I had good caring teachers (Indian and White), I really made it through and was prepared for Grade 10 – 12 in Goodale Provincial High School.

Factors for success in school included having role models but also learning the Cree language. What was of most significance for Four Winds was developing pride in his native language through reading, writing and speaking Cree in school. He said that what he had experienced and learned at his reserve school laid for him a foundation that would see him through the critical years of being in high school in a completely foreign environment.

When Four Winds was asked to provide a commentary on any role models he may have had in Goodale Provincial High School this was how he responded:

There really weren't any role models that I could remember from that time. It was a little Redneck town and it seems like schools and towns that are close to Reserves tend to create Redneckism the most prejudice. Towns that are further away for example Swift Current farther away from Reserves Indians would be a novelty (wow going to school with Indians) it would be cool. When towns and citizens of these towns begin to develop biases that are untrue then those fallacies continue to become propagated and taught, which ascend through generations. I had only a few friends while I was attending Goodale Provincial High School one of my good friends was Jim Whiteman (and he was white) to this day we still are friends.

Four Winds commented on the negative attitudes toward Aboriginal people that seemed to be prevalent in communities and municipalities that were situated near reserves.

Towns and cities that were far removed from reserves seemed to have fewer prejudices toward Aboriginal people. Nevertheless, Four Winds did not have any role models in the provincial school as he did on the reserve school. Even though he had difficulty relating to his Non-Aboriginal teachers he did befriend a Non-Aboriginal person who he still considers a friend.

When Four Winds was initially asked about role models he could not think of any immediately. After pondering over the question he talked about his father and teachers as role models:

You know back then there weren't too many role models not like in the late 1980's or 1990's that I remember they had these model programs that they were pushing in Canada. I would say my father was a big role model in my life even though he was not in school, Mr. Harper, Mr. Coon Come they were my role models.

The Indian teachers were my role models. I thought it was kind of cool that these teachers would be serving their own people. They were caring, patient, and gave you respect, which I liked. As for Goodale Provincial High School, despite the teachers I had to do it on my own. There was no real stand out in terms of "the role model". In terms of motivating me I guess I was motivated by these Indian teachers as they taught us their lessons there was a sense of humble pride and I tweaked into that, intuitively I sensed that it was there. I was more of a listener than a talker in my youth and I am still like that I like to listen to people and their stories.

Role models have now become associated with posters of Aboriginal people making a difference and becoming successful in every sector of the work world. When the participant was asked to provide role models he was unable to provide names of Aboriginal people as the poster program had not yet been launched. Today there are numerous biographies and posters of Aboriginal people portrayed in schools and in media who are succeeding in their careers.

The second factor for the participant's success was relationships. Four Winds described connections he had with his father and his teachers who were important factors to his success but he also shared his interactions with other teachers who were encouraging:

There was one teacher her name was Buffy Mercredi she was an English Language Teacher. She wanted me to read and write well, which I did. I took her advice to heart because back then at home all I did was lock myself into my room and read fiction books, action books, science fiction, and mystery. I would entertain myself that way. Unlike my friends they were out chasing skirts and smoking up. I was more of a home body (I was a chicken). I did play sports when I was a student I played soccer in high school and on the Reserve. Soccer was my outlet for creativity, exercise, and I really enjoyed the running. The coaches were really supportive and recognized that I had a lot of solace in running and they encouraged me to do that, and at the same time they encouraged to somehow use running for University (I thought about it but I am too short). Although I did well in track and field and Districts, but when I came to the bigger centers I would get blown away. I had limited success but whatever success I had

coaches recognized that and they helped me out, as well as the English Language teacher I mentioned above. Those are the people who supported me through Grades 10, 11, and 12 in Goodale Provincial High School.

The relationships with teachers provided opportunities to encourage Four Winds with his physical activity. Humbly, Four Winds admitted that even though he was not the best runner, he did it anyway, as it was a way of breaking routine and the rigorous grind of schooling. A lesson in self-esteem teaches that people who measure themselves against others will invariably have lower self-esteem. Four Winds knew that he was not the best runner and in fact could not compete at an elite level such as at the University level. Yet, he did not rob himself of that experience by not running because others were better. He ran because he was the best in his school that built confidence leading to his success.

Four Winds was asked if curriculum was a factor for success. He restated the question and responded:

Not through Grade 10 and 12. There was really nothing I could hone in on it was more or less the text book Indian. I was disappointed that there was not a lot of information with regards to Social Studies and History and we didn't even have Native Studies at that time.

I asked him if the curriculum provided in the reserve school had any Aboriginal content:

In Grades 8 and 9 was more of an in-house local curriculum, which I found very beautiful. We would take these teachings from these Elders and we would implement them in our writings, history, and even in Science. I wish they would have done more, but for sure Grade 8 and 9 the curriculum itself the local curriculum which was changed to suit us as consumers of that education was

something I enjoyed about Fontaine Reserve School because I was learning about my people. At the same time I wasn't only learning about my people I was learning the skills, the writing skills, thinking, and critical skills. I think today as a graduate student I feel that they could have done more which is why I am here [attending a Canadian University] because I know from that experience that something more can be done other than a little bit of add hoc curriculum kind of development, but it has to be more entrenched in the flesh of the curriculum.

Four Winds was pursuing graduate studies choosing Aboriginal educational topics and curriculum development as an area of focus to write his thesis. I probed further into the teachings of the elders:

They teach you that it was important to live up to the Indian Code of Ethics. In our Cree culture we have an unspoken Code of Ethics. This is one thing that they taught, but they would use stories; Wesakachak's stories, trickster stories, stories from their ceremonies and childhood, teaching from their Code of Ethics. I have come to understand it as the unspoken Bible of Cree culture or Cree spirituality.

To further understand the unspoken code of ethics I asked if Four Winds could give an example of a characteristic that was taught from the code of ethics:

This one characteristic is kind of like an ideology, but love you know Sahkihitowin. We would always name these values and these ethics in Cree. It was never in English it was always in Cree. Sahkihitowin was a big thing and using that concept they taught us how to enjoy Mother Earth and give respect, how to look at Elders with respect and love them for what they had, the wisdom that they taught, and also the ceremonies when we were involved in ceremonial aspects

they taught us to love that ceremony because that ceremony was what taught us about what our spirit was all about. It was a good concept and I wish there was more Elders involved in schools for today. Joe Duquette was a good example of what I used to see at Fontaine Reserve School. They are trying to use the Elder model and help students learn about this Code that I am talking about. One of the things that had me thinking of the future was the education and ceremonies that the Elders taught. I knew I wanted to work with them some day in the future, and I think I was smart enough or interested enough to soak it all in because I knew some day that I would be a man and I would use these things.

Love was one example of what was taught from the elders. The program taught at Joe Duquette High School in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan is one that the participant speaks highly of because of the emphasis on teachings of the elders and its curriculum that integrates Aboriginal content.

The third factor for success did not include instructional approaches specifically.

But the student did acknowledge the efforts of one teacher:

Through Grade 10, 11, and 12 I had to give credit to Buffy Mercredi. She tried hard to involve Native education in her work even though she didn't know much about the culture. She would take information from the text books and try to utilize those ideas. In terms of instructional approaches I can't say that there was anything super in their instruction. Buffy taught with love. I think to be a really good teacher you need to love what you do and you can tell. If you were like the East Indian teacher I had you can't see the love or caring so his instructional approach was strictly by the book. He didn't try to come out of the shell (so to

speak). It mystified me that I would see him laugh sometimes, but outside the classroom setting in the community. I could never figure him out. No teacher had really solid structural approaches I think they were just by the book whatever they learned in the College of Education and whatever suited their success as teachers that is what they used. I was just a grasshopper; like a servant trying to snatch the pebble from my master's hand so to speak (after which you will receive the wisdom).

In this section a trait a teacher had that Four Winds admired was that of love for teaching. She made attempts to include Aboriginal content in her classes. Interestingly, Four Winds did not comment negatively in her efforts to include Aboriginal content. The second trait that his other teacher did not show was that of any kind of emotion, particularly humor. Somehow instructional approaches may not have mattered as much as having teachers who were real, genuine and humorous.

The fifth factor in Four Winds success was culture. The reader at this point should have noted the strong cultural emphasis in the interviews. The most critical factor for Four Winds was provided below:

For sure culture was a big part of my success. I was subjected to it at home and in the community going to Sun Dances, Feasts, Funerals, seeing it played out by my Elders and by my parents. I learned by doing as well when you have that Cree language when you grow up with it you have that intuitive sense of the spirit of those ways, and this is where I see a lot of the culture missing in the students today. They are learning Cree from a mechanical point of view but they miss out in what the spirit of that Cree language is and so I think in terms of cultural

revitalization that is where CR (Cultural Revitalization) really misses it. Right now there are too many young people who don't know the spirit of that language and how it ties into the ceremonies and with the earth. Where if you learn it from the time you are a baby and speak it, intuitively you already have it. It is like programming it is in your brain and spirit. If you try to learn it mechanically something stops you and that is where I see the difference between then and now. Then, my peers and I we had the language and to a point it was successful for them in terms of giving them success – the culture. Then drugs and so forth stood in the way (so to speak). As well, I think racism. In Goodale, Saskatchewan there was an underlying racist ideology that I picked up on and this is where many of these teachers never went out of their way to help you where as I could see them helping the white students more. Being in Grade 7, 8, and 9 on Fontaine Reserve School I received a lot of support because they were my people and they had a vested interest in me because I was an Indian. Whereas “a monias” [Non-Aboriginal] have no vested interest in me because I am not like “a monias” [Non-Aboriginal].

Culture played a large part in the success that Four Winds had. When asked about the difference between culture and spirituality he responded by stating that they are the same thing. Four Winds described how the metaphysical world was connected to the physical world. He spoke about not only knowing the Cree language but the spirit of that language and culture. The spirit of the language is a spiritual component of knowing the ceremonies and how it is tied to the earth.

He was asked directly what made him successful he responded by saying that one characteristic that helped was being consistent:

I would have to say consistency was the one thing that made me successful; you have to be consistent, because if you take too much time off you won't be able to stay on task. It is kind of like right now as I work on my master's degree I have to be consistent when I am in class. I can't take off to the movies every night or be on the Internet chatting with my wife, because it is a long distance love affair she lives in Montana and I live here. She understands it too because she is also finishing her masters degree. I think it is consistency and once you are consistent you are afloat you are never sinking. I am consistent with my spirituality, having ties with the ceremonies back home, being consistent with my readings and writings and being consistent in my job; I show up I don't take off and leave my people wondering where I am. You have to be reliable and accountable... My accountability is to the Indian kids. The same thing that I was taught by my teachers is the same thing I am using today, and not teaching them in the austere teacher headmaster kind of British way, but in the real genuine heartfelt love for your work kind of feeling when you are dealing with Indian kids.

Four Winds stated that it was important to stay consistent with work, leisure and relationships. All of these areas need to be tended to in order for them to flourish and thrive. It was the trait of consistency that has kept him on a successful path. When he mentioned accountability he stated that teaching students was about making connections with his students. His classroom was not a place of learning it was a place of meeting with others first and then learning.

Success for Others

The final segment in the interview was asking participants what they believe can make others successful. Four Winds replied this way:

Whenever I am teaching or am with other people I always say that it is important to do the prayer and to do the work. Pray for good results and work for good results. It is like an Elder once said you have to walk your prayers you can't let the Great Spirit do it all for you, and He/She won't if you just sit in front of your TV watching Euro Cup Soccer all day. You have to do the work. If you do the work I think the Great Spirit will bless you, and that is how I operate. I operate on that spiritual ceremonial level but at the same time I know in the real world you have to work to get results. You have to have a balance in life; good intellectual stimulation, do something that will make you successful, work on a project, read a book, do something that stimulates the mind (that is something I try to do), a physical aspect is very important as well. It is important that if you want to be successful you also have to work on your physical aspect you have to lift weights, go for walks everyday, run or take part in something physical for at least 30 minutes a day. I try to cover all of those things – your mind, spirit, body, and your emotions. My emotions, basically, to have success as a worker I speak the truth all the time.

If I am true to myself I am true to my Higher Power and my feelings are always correct, my intuition, and I try to build on that with the connectedness with my cultural intuition. My Elders teach me that it is important to work on that because you come to understand more deeply the connection with those ceremonies and

what they are teaching a person, because if you do it mentally and intellectually its kind of like a one dimensional learning of that learning way where if you use all aspects it is a three dimensional approach – holistic. I believe that is what will make people successful. I also think people should treat their bodies well. Treat it like a Teepee, clean so it will be strong. I don't drink or smoke. I never have found any grandeur in it or anything that attracted me to it. I would rather approach life on a natural high like being able to finish my master's degree that will be the biggest high in my life, besides being married to my wife. Going through milestones being drug free that is success enough.

In the last passage there are several key points as to how others can be successful. The first characteristic for others to be successful was to put in the effort and work hard. Putting forth the effort meant having discipline. The discipline demonstrated by Four Winds was limiting his favorite past time of watching soccer to either going to work, to working on relationships, to having proper nutrition and exercising to attending an Aboriginal function or ceremony. The second was to live a balanced lifestyle nourishing and tending to your biological, social, psychological and spiritual life. A balanced lifestyle meant that life was not about extremes or excesses but about moderation. The participant provided an example of moderation in his physical life of spending thirty minutes a day exercising. It was not an all-encompassing, time consuming activity but enough to provide him with the opportunity to work on this physical aspect of his life adequately. It was this lifestyle of moderation that brought success to Four Winds life.

Beth

The third participant in this study was Beth. I would like to thank Beth for her participation in this study for without her this research would not have been complete. Beth offers a perspective much different to what I have known through either personal experience or learned about in the literature. At the time I was able to relate to factors discussed by Four Winds and Jack because in my own life I recognized having more external factors than internal factors. During the interview and analysis of Beth's data the researcher experienced frustration as he was unable to relate to it. Beth made no mention of relationships, culture, relevant education, instructional approaches, curriculum, spirituality, and/or role models as factors in her success. It was her perspective that others may benefit from as her data represented the reality of those unable or less likely to relate to that of Jack and Four Winds. At the conclusion of the study and reflecting on my own educational experiences I could finally relate to some of what Beth contributed in terms of internal factors.

It should be mentioned at the outset of Beth's data presentation that the interview was a snapshot in the life of the participant. Therefore, Beth's lived experiences were constantly changing. Beth described herself as a work in progress meaning that her understanding now may change in the future. Beth described herself as a person who viewed the world without absolutes or being concrete. A clash with my own worldview that was concrete and absolute desperately tried to make Beth's reality fit into mine was naturally a fruitless exercise. The interpretation of the data that I provided, therefore, represented only a partial understanding of Beth's interview at a particular time. An

attempt to present the data of “a work in progress”, as Beth described herself was only a part of a story still untold. The story begins below.

Beth was a 33 year old Aboriginal Cree woman from a northern Saskatchewan community. She was married and lived in an urban center working on a Masters degree at a Canadian University. Beth’s work history included working in a human services field for approximately eight years before changing career paths leading to a second degree in education. Upon completion of her second degree she enrolled in a Masters degree program with the intention of studying educational and gender issues. Although Beth did not grow up knowing her traditional culture and traditions, she was a fluent Cree speaker.

A context to Beth’s experiences from a series of interviews began with a presentation of her family history:

I didn’t want to create too much worry and anxiety for my family when I was younger; therefore I did what they wanted me to do for them. In that respect I stayed home the majority of the time and looked after the house, living my life that way I was wanting acceptance from them, but it seemed like the more I tried the more people walked over me. The whole situation, which is my own analysis, has been good for me to realize (others might not think the way I do) this is my life and I have had to figure it out. I mentioned about the Catholic Church being a big part of the community and how hierarchical that institution is, it is men who make the decisions, the men who are the Priests and anything going down that hierarchy is not of that much value. I came from a single parent family so that made me a less valued offspring than those with two parent families. I was raised in a family with the shame of being a product of a single parent family, especially

considering the family I belonged to was very much influenced by the Catholic Church, therefore there is shame that comes out of that and that I am a woman. Wanting acceptance when I was younger was very important to me the more that I tried to fit in and be accepted, it seemed the further away it got from happening. When I left and removed myself from that dynamic and family I began to realize that I didn't need them and it didn't matter because I was living my own life and realized I was giving them too much power to control me, especially when their values and beliefs were coming from an abusive relationship (between the Church and the community). I believe everyone should be treated equal. That is the bottom line. I never wanted special treatment, I just wanted to be accepted and to be respected.

She has an older brother and sister and never knew her father. Despite the obstacles that began in her family and negative experiences with the Catholic Church, she managed to achieve her goals with few supports.

Beth described her school experiences in a northern Saskatchewan school beginning with elementary. She reported a fairly stable school history attending most of her schooling in one school:

Speaking specifically about my own school experience within institutions; my elementary years was in a small rural northern community where there are First Nations and Metis people. I grew up in a Metis community. The school that I went to was provincially run and was populated with mostly First Nations, Metis and a few Non-Aboriginal people. I went to school at that particular community up until Grade 11. When I completed Grade 11 I left because there was no Grade

12 available. When school was out I moved south to Duceppe, Saskatchewan to take Grade 12. The first semester was hard it was the first time I left the community (like a homogenous group). My first language was Cree and my second language was English. The school I attended in Southern Saskatchewan had very few Aboriginal people. I completed one term there.

Partly due to the isolation, the school she attended for most of her life did not provide a complete education as students who completed grade 11 had to move to a southern community to complete high school. She accepted that in order for her to complete high school she had to move from her home community. With numerous choices of schools to attend in northern and central Saskatchewan she attended one located further away from her home in Southern Saskatchewan.

She remembered an incident that occurred while attending this Southern Saskatchewan school that she shared:

I will tell you one story while I was there that stays with me was I went there for the first semester of my Grade 12 and I have always been really keen and enjoyed the challenges of math. When I think about it now, it was hard for me to articulate in English therefore I found the language in math to be able to express myself. I was very shy and sat at the back of the class and did not draw any attention onto myself. I was the only Aboriginal person in the classroom. We had taken home exams regularly and I enjoyed the class. As shy as I was I handed in my exam and when the teacher handed them back a week later he called us up individually (I think to put a face to the paper) to pick up our exams.

I was extremely shy and had no self-confidence, but I got up and went to his desk to retrieve my exam. When I went to get the exam from him he said “no” and I stated my name and looked around the classroom and told the teacher my name again and he said “oh” almost falling off his chair, fumbling and looked as if he didn’t know what to do. I went back to my desk and looked at the exam and I had aced it. As subtle as that is, I interpreted that or I internalized this as a subtle form of stereotyping to say the least (I could say other things but we will keep it as is) . . . I took him as stereotyping me that he didn’t expect this brown face to do well on the exam that it had to belong to someone else . . . That was my experience there and after my first term was finished in Duceppe, Saskatchewan. I moved to Sussex, Saskatchewan the people that I was boarding with in Duceppe had moved out of the province so I had to finish my school somewhere else and decided to go to a school in Sussex, Saskatchewan at Layton High School.

The math teacher who gave Beth the negative attention only fuelled within her a desire to work harder. She was asked what she learned from that experience and if she wanted to prove something to those who stereotyped her she responded:

Yes, I think the best way I can answer that is if someone treats me badly or if somebody gives me negative energy it is like a challenge to me and I think that person is wrong. This feeds my energy to strive and succeed. I have lived with the challenges in my life. Just to say, “No I am not that – I am this”.

Beth described a determination to prove others wrong. Some students might not have responded the way Beth did but would instead feel discouraged become depressed and lose motivation. For Beth it was a source of energy that allowed her to be successful.

After her first semester in a southern community Beth returned relatively near to her home by attending a school that was located in central Saskatchewan. She moved to central Saskatchewan and graduated from Layton High School in Sussex, Saskatchewan.

Beth provided a description of the school and her experience there:

The school was very large. I thought the school in southern Saskatchewan was huge, the school in Sussex, Saskatchewan (Central Saskatchewan) was even bigger. There were more Aboriginal students at the school in Central Saskatchewan and I knew a few students that were attending as they were from my community, so we did form a peer/friendship group, which made it bearable to be there. I am glad I had the experience to be immersed in the challenge of being independent. It helped me even though it was very hard. It made me stronger. Anyhow, I didn't really experience racism. I finished Grade 12 in 1987 at Layton High School in Sussex, Saskatchewan.

Contained in this section was a factor to her successful completion of high school finding a peer group that had similarities. (Here was an example of how I attempted to create an absolute or concrete interpretation). The resilience that Beth had had in high school suggested that a peer group was not a critical aspect of her completion of high school. She would have completed high school with or without their support. However, it obviously helped her endure the process of formal schooling. The more challenging the situation became the stronger she became.

Success Defined

Beth stated that she had difficulty associating her life with the word 'success'. She used another term that more accurately described her:

I never envisioned myself to be successful. I was merely trying to survive the battle. Basically, I perceived "life" to be a battle. Waking up each day and stating I need to do this, and this, and this and when I completed the tasks that I thought I had to complete that was success to me. I never really had visions of grandeur because I honestly felt my destiny was going to be complete hardship. I am apprehensive to use success. '*Accomplishment*' for me is a better word as it fits better into my life. I am not a finished product and I feel I never will be. I cannot measure success – I am not a finished product. I have met goals that I have set out, which one of them was to finish my Grade 12 and I did.

Beth did not view her life as destined for luxury but a life of hardship and toil. She had to work hard each day to make it through. Although Beth felt as though she was unable to use the word success because she was not done growing, she took steps to work toward success by having goals. One of her goals was to complete grade 12. Beth obviously had others goals of getting married, attending university, landing a career, etc. Each goal she accomplished led to more goals.

In a third interview with Beth, she added to her definition of success and expressed it this way:

Success means completing or accomplishing something that I set out to do; this includes all the small stuff like cleaning my house, doing laundry, going for a five mile run, etc. One must not forget the small stuff in our

lives because those are the things most people have to do in their daily lives because the huge things are almost rare or occur too far in between. These answers are not concrete and absolute but what I believe is that things in our lives are not concrete and absolute, and that people evolve with experience.

Beth concentrated on the small tasks because eventually over a period of time led to larger accomplishments. It is these minor but significant milestones that motivated and challenged Beth partly because of the instant gratification and reward they provided.

I asked her what made her successful according to her definition of success she answered:

Waking up every morning. Seeing another morning, another day. I went to school and seeing the results of my exams, going for a run, I would challenge myself in my running. I would run in the heat of the day for an hour or two to see how much I can withstand. For me, that was my ultimate challenge, my success.

I didn't need to be acknowledged by anyone I did it for myself.

Beth took life day by day. She monitored her progress and when life was stressful she went for a run. If she needed to feel successful she issued an internal challenge to herself and when she accomplished that she didn't need an audience to applaud her, her applause and satisfaction was in a job well done.

Success Factors

In the analysis of Beth's data, few external factors were exhibited. She did not relate to the questions from the interview guide and answered many of them with single word answers. Several interviews were needed to collect enough data to provide a respectable analysis. It was from the latter interviews that several external factors were detected but also internal factors emerged. These factors are presented below.

A significant factor that emerged for Beth was what she called physical activity.

The physical activity was specifically running:

I had nobody in mind to finish my school for, I was alone. I knew that all along that I was alone. There are no ifs, ands, or buts about the situation I had to make my life happen. One thing that I can say has provided sanity for me was physical activity. I knew my life was going to be hardship and I knew my destiny was going to be hardship so I better get used to that and I will just keep plugging away, because this is what life has destined for me. Certainly when I did feel the pressures of everyday life or when I felt I wasn't measuring up, or felt not good enough I didn't rebel I never resulted in rebelling I kept physically active. I was and still am a runner. Running was a stress management coping strategy for me.

It was productive in ways of stability and being in tune with myself.

Beth was asked what or who motivated her to run, where she would run and why she would run:

No it was just me. After school I would run. I started running in high school, I knew I had speed. The teachers saw that in me they knew I had speed and I guess I didn't pursue that a lot in school, but I did that mostly after school.

I needed sanity and that was a way of stability or equilibrium (whatever you want to call it). In the midst of illegitimacy I found physical running to be helpful and healthy. It is a source, for me, in living in a little cocoon and not knowing what to do with the negative energy that is around me. Knowing that I can't run away from life but I run to think about life.

A factor for Beth to accomplish what she did was physical activity. Her ability to manage her stress through running allowed her to release negative energy. Her motto of "not running away from life but running to think about life" had nothing to do with weight control or staying in shape but of coping and understanding life.

One internal factor found in Beth's interviews could be described as a temporal mindset focussing only on the immediate daily tasks, allowing for the larger tasks to eventually being accomplished:

I lived like a hermit in some ways. Needing acceptance (that is another story) and doing what I can that was positive to get acceptance. I never intentionally set out to be the top of my class that was too selfish to do that or be able to recognize those things. I focused on getting up in the morning and attend school for the day until I finished school. It was a day-by-day or a year-by-year experience.

Beth returned to her need for acceptance from her family. As strong as the need was for acceptance, she maintained a focus to get through the day. The tasks throughout the day occupied her time and filled what would otherwise be a void.

A second internal factor for Beth was her love of learning. This was obviously demonstrated in her pursuit of higher learning in attaining two university degrees and working on a graduate degree. She had this to say about her learning:

I would like to say that I am always learning and that I will continue to learn until the day that I die. At each stage in my life or each day in my life I learn new things and therefore the things that I learn influence how I am or how I act. When I left my home community I went to school I did my first two years of university and that provided me an insight into human dynamics, human behaviour, and history of Aboriginal people. It was very useful; I was able to get a job out of the two years of university I attended. There were still a lot of unknowns that I had in my life. I completed my first degree while I was doing a second degree. I did my second degree which was my Bachelor of Education and I became a different person after that. Not physically speaking, but I became a different person in how I talked, how I do things, how I even see things. I received more information about how Aboriginal people have evolved and the situations Aboriginal people are faced with today. I was able to get a lot of history and that influenced how I expressed myself and associated myself with other people, and certainly I had a lot of empathy toward the situation Aboriginal people face today. I had that before for my first degree but I had a richer sense of history when I did my Education Degree.

Each time she earned a degree she learned something about herself and her world around her. In her Masters degree training she found her studies to be liberating as she learned about herself even more. She stated:

The research that I have been doing this past year has affirmed all that I have been thinking about, my existence, and my marginalization. I have now read academic writing that confirms my thoughts, but I have also learned a lot of other things in

that process. I feel more confident to speak about that, before my M. Ed experience I questioned myself whether I should speak or not about a situation that needed clarifying, and perhaps I would add to some clarity. Now I feel that it is my job to enlighten, especially in regards to what I am studying. Certainly as an Aboriginal woman, there are other Aboriginal women out there that I am sure share the same feelings that I have about their marginalization and the theories that I have learned have been very helpful and I would like to be an educator and help out as much as I can in that area. Help people to move forward rather than being stuck in the past, naturally what happens in the past hurts people as it did for me, but we have to be able to make sense of that past; how it came to be, understand it, and fully comprehend and conceptualize how our history was and how that influenced us as we were growing up. The information I have now is more empowering, it is in writing and I am empowered by the information I received and feel I am now able to share that as an educator.

Validations for all the beliefs and thoughts held by Beth are confirmed in her graduate level training. She has found answers to a series of complicated issues in relation to gender, Aboriginal issues and religion.

When asked about curriculum being a factor for her success and whether she received any instruction involving aboriginal content, she stated:

No, not really. I was immersed in brainwashing. I thought that Christopher Columbus was some kind of saviour and that Indians were evil. Little did I know that is why I was so selfless, so alone with no support emotionally, spiritually, which affected my growth as a person. I did what they taught. I rather felt

selfless to even suggest the idea. I wasn't confident enough that I wouldn't even consider suggesting anything.

She described herself as selfless putting the needs of others before her own. Her understanding of who she was as an Aboriginal female was distorted by the Eurocentric instructional emphasis. Although in this section Beth's self-esteem and confidence were low she still managed to complete high school and higher education. The supports she needed would have allowed her to have a better quality of life.

A question pertaining to role models and individuals who supported her was answered this way:

Certainly with my mother and my grandmother I had food and shelter. They provided me a sense of work ethic; you work, you work, you work and there is no getting through life without working. I am very grateful for their role modeling in that sense; people must work.

Throughout the interview the only positive comments about her mother was of her work ethic. The work ethic that was modeled to her was perhaps what allowed her to successfully complete high school.

Much to the surprise of the writer Beth could not say that culture or spirituality were factors in her success:

I really don't know what culture is. I don't know what that entails. For sure I grew up learning the Cree language and it is a different way of reality and understanding the world and associating with other people, kinships, and the kind of relational interacting. In terms of a Pow Wow or a Sweat that was a no, no. You did not talk about those Ceremonies. The only thing was going to Church

every Sunday. Christianity Catholicism was a big part in the community and it still is which therefore results in the patriarchal practices and beliefs that are institutionalized in that faith. Culture, I really don't know what that is. I had no support in that area of my life.

Culture and spirituality were significant factors in the lives of other participants in this study but not for Beth. She attended church as a child but had resentments towards that institution for the shame it brought to her family and ultimately to her. Culture in this context meant Aboriginal spirituality. The strong religious overtones in Beth's family meant that there were no syncretic practices fusing culture and religion together. In other words religion and culture were two separate elements.

Success for Others

The final section in the interview represented an opportunity for the participant to share her thoughts on what it was that can make others successful. She stated:

I think people have to really think about the concept of success. I know media, TV, movies perceive life as two parent families with a big house. This instilled in our minds, is very hard to measure up to. As an Aboriginal person that could lead to that. What is the point. I think success is counting the small stuff not looking forward to measuring yourself according to what is on TV or measuring myself according to the way that person looks or what he/she is wearing. Those are not measures. It is just not reality. Success is a matter of perspective for me, but if there is any words of wisdom that I can share; success is as small as eating a nice

meal or going to school knowing I made it through the day or having my health (I am successful so far - I am healthy).

Her focus was primarily on the definition of success and ensuring that people carefully define it. In the second interview she added a second characteristic for others to be successful and shared it this way:

That is a big area to talk about, but I think stability is very important because at least you have a starting point of how to figure out the situation. If people are moving, and moving, and moving the problem never gets solved. Stability allows individuals in a family to make connections in the community, and find resources for the people that need resources. Stability offers individuals a wide range of possibilities for growth. People need to have a sense of connection to their roots and how it might influence their lives by building a history, and once that is conceptualized the person is able to position themselves and look forward to some sort of future. Stability offers the resources if they are needed in the community whether it is counselling or being in school and establishing themselves in the community.

This characteristic of stability fits with the life that Beth led as she only attended one school for the majority of her school career. From my point of view Beth had stability in her inner self without it she would not have accomplished much.

Summary

This study provided an opportunity for three participants to voice their definitions of success, provided factors for their success and lastly provided words of wisdom on

how others can be successful. I developed a conceptual summary for data analysis after a literature review in areas pertaining to at-risk youth, Aboriginal education and success were completed.

The first two participants had some similar responses and related to the interview questions. The third participant had a completely different perspective and had difficulty responding to the questions. Similarities and differences are described below.

The definition of success varied among participants one of whom did not particularly like the term '*success*', being more comfortable with accomplishments. For the most part it was understood that part of the term success meant graduating from high school. When success was not referred to as completion of high school it was defined as making a difference or being happy, content, comfortable and striving for goals.

In terms of factors to success, it was obvious that the first and second participants shared similar experiences such as role models, relationships, relevant education and culture and spirituality. They discussed the need for having balance in their lives in nurturing the biological, social, spiritual and psychological aspects of their being as keys to their success. The third participant had similarities to the second participant in that they both had physical activity as an important aspect of their lives. The third participant did not view her running as a factor as much as a stress management technique to cope. It is this coping mechanism that allowed her to accomplish her goals. The third participant also exhibited internal factors of having a temporal mindset accomplishing the tasks for the day, which inevitably resulted in the accomplishments of larger goals. The first participant concurred that having a temporal mindset can bring about success. The second vital factor was the value the third participant placed on learning. As each day in her

studies brought about a deeper and richer understanding of her life and the world she grew. In terms of how others can be successful each participant shared different words of wisdom from education, stability, a work ethic to balance.

In the final chapter more commentary, synthesis and interpretation on participants' interviews are provided. Also contained in Chapter Five is a summary, literature review and re-examination of the conceptual summary, methodology, implications for educators, parents, and students are provided. Finally recommendations for further study and a final reflection are presented.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND RECONCEPTUALIZATION

This chapter provides a summary of the nature of and major findings; it revisits the conceptual framework, research method and design, discussion, and suggests a reconceptualization summary of the literature combined with findings. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further study and a final reflection.

Summary

An impelling force prompting the research was the report from Statistics Canada's latest survey entitled the Aboriginal Peoples Survey (2001) which purported that the number of Canadian Aboriginal students dropping out of high school was above the national average despite the efforts of educators and other stakeholders in education. The purpose of this study was to describe how Aboriginal professionals in various work sectors define school success. The secondary purpose was to explore the factors that these individuals believe to affect success: To what or whom do professionals attribute their success? What can make others successful? What was the role of school (culture, curriculum, role models, relevant education, instructional approaches and relationships) in their success?

The conceptual summary developed in the study was a result of a literature review in subject areas relating to at-risk youth, Aboriginal education, and success. Themes for factors in student success were categorized into six key areas: relationships, culture, relevant education, instructional approaches, curriculum, and role models.

The qualitative study followed traditions of phenomenology eliciting meaning participants make of success through semi-structured interviews. The research was conducted over a three month period consisting of several tape recorded in-depth and semi-structured interviews. I did my data analysis by sifting through data, re-reading transcripts and returning transcripts to participants for any clarifications, additions or deletions. This constant comparative method of data analysis provided opportunities to find and create themes and categories. Continuously refining data created new themes and in some instances grouping themes together.

Discussion

The findings in the study are discussed in this section and categorized using the conceptual summary. The discussion analyses what participants shared in light of the literature relating to the primary and secondary questions. In the final section, called '*internal factors, physical activity and spirituality*' are discussed to provide instances where factors described by participants were not part of the conceptual summary.

Success redefined

All three participants agreed that success referred to completion of high school. However, each participant elaborated on how they understood success by adding their own definition. One participant provided a word that better described her lived experience by suggesting the term accomplishments. The definitions by the participants are provided below.

Jack stated that one of his definitions of success was *making a difference*. The comments echoed the words of Brendtro (1990) who discussed altruism as a way of validating the self worth of youth when they volunteer their services. An underpinning of altruism is the concept of empathy. Jack discussed how people need to be more empathic towards others, particularly marginalized people. He stated that people have to be listened to first before they can be truly helped. Jack used terms such as ‘actively listening’, ‘understanding where they came from’ and ‘ask questions. . . knowing full well that I am going to get the whole nine yards, because they will unload’. According to Jack others can be successful when individuals working with youth listen and take an interest in them. He said when they are understood, they can take the next step that will lead to emancipation. Jack stated that moments of awakening occur when Aboriginal students learn about their own history through native studies classes. Education about Aboriginal issues was the beginning of emancipation according to Jack. Not only do Aboriginal people feel a sense of liberation but also a sense of empowerment in that now they are responsible to take action. In the case of Jack, his action was to become involved by participating in public events that feature and promote his culture.

Four Winds understood the term ‘success’ to mean ‘being happy’. As long as an individual was happy in life then they have achieved a measure of success. This happiness felt by an individual was labelled as contentment. Four Winds identified success as a state of mind that an individual has over his/her circumstances. He stated that success was not accomplishments a definition of success used by Beth. In an educational context Four Winds understood success to be the process of learning rather than on completing a specific grade.

Success also meant being intact as an Aboriginal person. This statement was significant considering the Aboriginal educational experiences of the past, namely residential schools. Four Winds educational history was an experience that allowed him to be who he was- an Aboriginal speaking, learning and practising his culture.

A positive attitude maintained by Four Winds about his schooling ensured his success according to his definition. Four Winds understood that staying in school meant securing a future. His persistence and tenacity served him well as evidenced in his current work as a teacher and part time graduate student.

Beth provided her definition of success as being accomplishments. She stated that the media portrayed success in a narrow manner. Success was living the American dream involving a mother, father, children, money, house and a white picket fence. Pursuing the American dream in those terms is futile, as many will not have these experiences through, sometimes, no fault of their own. Although for some, this pursuit maybe a dream they wish to live others do not. The other reality was that the American dream defined by media was part of the definition of success but according to Beth not all of success. Success was found in the mundane routines of life as she described it. It was these experiences that lead to the larger rewarding accomplishments. Beth experienced success or accomplishments in increments.

Beth's definition was a reminder that success was possible for any student. A perfunctory application of factors related to success may not always result in success unless success was defined by the individual. A measure of success defined by society cannot apply to Beth's definition of success because she was the only one who could define and live out that success.

Success Factors

The next section in this chapter addressed the secondary question related to factors to students' success. Factors for success included what was discovered in the literature review combined with the experiences of the participants which resulted in both internal and external factors.

Relationships

Relationships described by Brendtro et al. (1990) represent a crucial factor in student success. "Research shows that the quality of human relationships in schools and youth service programs may be more influential than the specific techniques or interventions employed" (p. 58). When effective relationships among teachers, parents, youth workers, etc., are developed, the likelihood of success for students is greater. A relationship with a student determines how successful they can be, ultimately affecting the success of the individual. In the absence of initiatives from youth, the onus is on the teacher, parent, youth worker, etc., to develop that relationship.

The first and second participants' interviews revealed that their experiences matched what the literature on factors for success stated. The first participant, Jack described the relationships with his family and teachers that without their support, encouragement, guidance and concern he would not have completed high school. In the interview Jack discussed how his parents were factors in his success but he also included the relationship with his grandparents as being significant. So much of the literature discussed the need for parental involvement that it was easy to overlook how vital a role can be played by grandparents.

Four Winds commented that he had positive relationships with his family and two teachers who were caring and loving. Brendtro (1990) described relationship building with love as an action of giving and not a feeling. "Caring is concern for life and growth of the person in relationship" (p. 62). It is these types of attitudes and beliefs that help a teacher, parent, youth worker, etc. develop significant relationships with students. Issues related to relationships were woven through discussions of other elements in the conceptual summary, as the following section will illustrate.

Culture

The most significant factor for Jack and Four Winds success was culture. Both participants practiced cultural ceremonies and traditions and both were introduced to the cultural practices at an early age. The literature pointed out that a larger factor to student failure is socioeconomic status (Aronson, 2001; Brady, 1996). Although this may be true a factor that brought about success for Four Winds and Jack was that of being *culturally connected*. Interestingly, none of the participants identified finances as a way of bringing about student success in their own lives or in the lives of others.

What seemed important for Jack and Four Winds was what Peacock and Cleary (1998) described as *tapping cultural interests*. Jack seemed to enjoy the efforts made by teachers to incorporate cultural Aboriginal content into the classroom, *even when the teacher was Non-Aboriginal*. In an instance recalled by Jack, he stated that he and his teacher would have debates over the content discussed in class. The teacher engaged Jack without feelings of intimidation or inadequacy but a willingness to hear Jack's perspective and admit his lack of understanding.

Relevant Education

What seemed to be of real value to Four Winds was being educated on his home reserve. He appreciated having Aboriginal teachers and he felt that the Aboriginal teachers had a vested interest in him because of his ancestry. He stated that he enjoyed being around his own people and that the experience at the reserve school prepared him for his next experience at the provincial school where there were few Aboriginal students or teachers.

Beth alluded to having consistency as a way of ensuring success. Beth's school history was consistent as she attended the same school until she left the community to complete her grade twelve. Relevant education in terms of *Indian Control of Indian Education* (Gilliland, 1995) was a factor for Four Winds as well as for Beth. Even though the school Beth attended was a provincial school, the school still had some control over the curriculum content provided to students. One type of event that occurred each year in Beth's school was a cultural festival to celebrate the culture. The festival involved singing, dancing, artwork, feasts, stories and a talent show exhibiting different aspects of the culture.

Jack had a different perspective as his experience in a reserve system was unpleasant as he had many negative interactions with students. When he transferred to a provincial school, he welcomed his new environment as it allowed him the opportunity to focus on schooling. In this instance the relevant education was not a factor to Jack's success.

Instructional Approaches

The learning styles of children are diverse, requiring teachers to use a variety of instructional approaches. Students learn in a variety of ways from the time they are born. Many values and beliefs have been instilled in students before they arrive at school. The way they have been shaped by parents, grandparents, etc. determines how they will receive teaching instruction in school (Gilliland, 1995). Gilliland further provided research literature that addressed instructional approaches, specifically in the Aboriginal community. Other researchers (Hampton & Roy, 2002; Swan, 1998 and Yurkovich, 2001) denoted humour and a hands-on approach as effective instructional approaches.

Two of the respondents attributed part of their success to a school teacher and the instructional approaches they used. When asked about what the school teacher did that helped him be successful Jack stated that it was the hands-on approach to learning. This, of course, resonated with the literature that reported the need to include a hands-on instructional approach (Peacock & Cleary, 1998; Gilliland, 1995).

Four Winds enjoyed attending his reserve middle school in grades 7, 8 and 9 because of the local curriculum that was developed using teachings from elders and applying them to school subjects such as language arts, history and science. He stated that he had a teacher he admired because of the way he could tell stories about Aboriginal issues, whether they were political, legends or humorous. Storytelling is more than just entertainment, it is a way of connecting knowledge and behaviors used to function in society (Gilliland, 1995). His Aboriginal teachers instilled in him pride in who he was as an Aboriginal person, pride in the language and a way of understanding the world.

Four Winds had a different response to his high school experience in a provincial school. Four Winds had no recollection of instructional approaches that were of any value. The one notable characteristic he did describe in one of his high school teachers was that of being passionate. He stated that this particular teacher presented her topic to students with passion, she taught with love. An affective approach is one that shows a teacher loving what they do, resulting in a positive reception from students.

Curriculum

A significant finding in this study was related to teaching Native Studies. Jack and Four Winds did not comment negatively on teachers who were Non-Aboriginal teaching Native studies or Aboriginal content. What was appreciated was that that type of programming was available to them. What was also appreciated was the effort made by teachers to provide Aboriginal content despite their lack of knowledge.

Some may ask whether it is necessary to teach Aboriginal content in schools at all. After all, if Aboriginal content is included, then it is unfair to end there because schools are filled with many other ethnic groups. Schools, then, should be including Italian, Ukrainian, Irish, and Norwegian content and so on to provide curriculum relevant to their culture. The point is valid, but the necessity of Aboriginal content in Canada has its origins in the fact that its history and knowledge come from this land base in North America. To learn Italian, Ukrainian, Irish, Norwegian content is an option if and when others visit their native countries. It would be preposterous if I was as an Aboriginal person teaching in Norway protesting the emphasis on Norwegian culture and advocating for Aboriginal content. The implications of living in a multicultural, pluralistic society in

North America are that all cultural content should be considered relevant. This is understandable but shows little or no regard for the cultures that have existed here since time immemorial.

I recently inquired about a teaching position in a rural community near several reserves for a middle years native studies teacher. I perused through the Saskatchewan Education Curriculum guides for what I would teach in that subject area. Of course I was not able to find much. I thought, "What would I teach then?" I decided that I would ask the principal what his expectations were for curriculum content. When I asked the principal about what I should be teaching the principal said that it was wide open. The reason for the emphasis on Aboriginal content according to the principal was the increasing Aboriginal population within the school. The question that arises then is who is this curriculum for? Is it strictly for Aboriginal students? Or should more Non-Aboriginal students be taking the course. As it is many Non-Aboriginal students do not. As stated in the significance of the study the ignorance towards Aboriginal people still exists due to the lack of emphasis on relevant curriculum. Similarly, Jack stated in the interview that Aboriginal content was underutilized.

Role Models

Four Winds mentioned two teachers who were influential in his life. What he described about the teachers was their involvement within the community. In a section of Peacock and Cleary's book (1998) entitled *Role Models: The inclination toward imitation* fit with Four Wind's description of how he emulated his role models, choosing a profession similar to theirs, by teaching Cree syllabics. Beth stated that her mom was a

role model for her because she had taught her a work ethic, this same work ethic is what allowed Beth to accomplish her goals.

Jack had real life role models who he interacted with on a daily basis. For Jack his parents and grandparents were role models and they were part of the reason Jack completed high school. Other role models he described throughout his interviews included teachers. Role models of people on T.V were not referred to. Posters as mentioned by Four Winds were not referred to. Role models were tangible. Role models were mentors who developed relationships, giving and being there in moments when students were in need. Jack stated that one of his role models had a rebuttal for everything. Role models were individuals who provided wisdom to students. His role models were knowledgeable, sharing what they have learned from others a question at a time. Jack's role models, outside of his family, consisted of competent and caring teachers who believed in their students.

Internal Factors

Beth provided a perspective different to what Four Winds and Jack presented. Beth's factors for success were described as internal factors. Many of the questions I developed were not applicable to Beth's situation, therefore, requiring several interviews before factors were manifested. A significant finding in this study was the discovery of how internal factors play a role in the success of the student. A description of internal factors was elaborated on below.

Beth's life can be described as a journey of inquiry particularly when she attended university. The first factor of Beth's success can be described as *inquiry*.

Curiosity is based on questions that a human has about their world, and to fully use the inclinations that humans have toward curiosity, school curriculum can be organized so that students can search for answers to their own real questions . . .

Students can ask the questions, see situations more clearly, and then they can find a way to act on what they have found. (Peacock & Cleary, 1998, p. 228)

Beth had many questions about her life, answers to her questions came after she completed each degree. The knowledge she attained she applied to herself in hopes of finding answers to questions she had. What she did with the knowledge she learned was practical, providing healing and clarity. Her confidence grew as a result of her new found knowledge to the point of wanting to share it with others. This was a huge step for Beth as she was unable to speak her mind or have an opinion about gender, education and/or Aboriginal issues because of her lack of knowledge and confidence.

Similar to the comments made by Jack, Beth stated that each time she worked on a degree she grew. Each degree brought about a greater sense of who she was. The lessons she learned in class affected how she saw herself, how she behaved and how she expressed herself. Her first degree provided her lessons about her own life experiences including family dynamics, human behavior and history of Aboriginal people. The classes she took changed her perceptions about how she saw herself and how she viewed the world. Just as Jack described empathy for nurturing altruism, Beth too echoed sentiments of developing empathy for issues that face Aboriginal people but only after taking classes related to Aboriginal issues.

An important issue related to the topic described above was that of including empowerment. Learning about the history of Aboriginal people and other Aboriginal

issues brought empowerment. Information provided Beth with empowerment. She felt more confident to share what she has learned by educating others. The education of others will lead to self determination allowing marginalized, oppressed people to make choices of how they want to see their world governed. Cleary and Peacock (1998) asserted that self-determination was modeled when goals were established and efforts to achieve those goals were in place. Thus, *setting goals* was another example of an internal factor displayed by Beth.

Another internal factor in Beth's experience I described as having a *temporal mindset*. Beth was living in the moment. Her attitude and outlook was to get through the day by working on the small tasks. Completing the small tasks led to accomplishing the larger goals. Success as Beth defined it was like making a mortgage payment. A homeowner is not overwhelmed at having to pay off an entire mortgage, rather the focus for each month is to make the required monthly payment. When the homeowner is making the monthly payment the debt is reduced and eventually paid off. So it was in the life of Beth, she made her payment by accomplishing the tasks for the day eventually leading to the accomplishments of larger goals.

The fourth internal factor that was not alluded to in the conceptual framework was the discussion regarding *competence motivation*, a term used by Bandura (1990), which would be classified as an internal factor.

The child who succeeds in attempts to be competent gains a strong feeling of pleasure which serves to increase future motivation. Repeated failure has the opposite effect. The child learns to feel anxious in mastery situations and thus the natural desire to achieve is curtailed. (p. 72)

Competence motivation was seen in Beth's interview as she challenged herself academically and physically. Each time she accomplished her goals she described feelings of satisfaction and self-respect. Peacock and Cleary (1998) ascertained that a means of ensuring a student having guaranteed success was by allowing them to do things they are good at.

Successful students are not just students who have had external factors as part of their "formula" for success. Beth showed that success can occur even when the external factors alluded to in the conceptual framework were not manifest. A formula for success can be manifested inwardly whether by design or not.

The final factor that links internal factors together for Beth was an attitude of *persistence*. In spite of the absence of external factors she was successful. Although her success has been attributed to internal factors and a few external factors the overarching theme of each factor was that of *persistence*.

In fact, each participant in the study was characterized with having *persistence*, a steadfast attitude towards achieving a goal or purpose. There were many obstacles in each of the participants' paths whether it was drugs and alcohol, lack of parental support, lack of teacher support, lack of cultural knowledge, poverty, racism, etc., they succeeded. Persistence is a quality that leads to success. Persistence is important because hardships, trials and obstacles are a part of a student's journey. Thomas Edison, Babe Ruth, Abraham Lincoln, Ronald Reagan, Phil Fontaine, Walt Disney, Beth, Jack, Four Winds, and many others are examples of people who have failed but later succeeded because of their persistence. Each participant had a strong desire to be successful. They stayed the course in spite of the obstacles in their lives. Their attitude was an unrelenting pursuit of

a goal that would lead to success regardless of circumstances. The motivation to complete their education was important because they understood the value in their achievements. Instilled in them were goals to complete their education and a determination that allowed them to persevere.

Physical Activity

A factor added to the conceptual summary and presented in the reconceptual summary was what was referred to as *physical activity*. Physical activity provided an outlet for Beth when she was feeling stressed. It was also used as a way to challenge herself and as a motivator to feel competent. Brendtro (1990) stated:

The motivation to be competent permeates the physical, social and emotional experiences of the child. At the environmental level, the child strives for physical and academic competence. At the interpersonal level, children acquire skills relating to others. Finally, at the intrapersonal level, the child struggles to master inner feelings and emotions (p. 72)

Beth provided examples of how she strived to be competent environmentally through challenging her self in her running and schooling. When she met the challenges she set for herself she felt a sense of satisfaction. The motivation to be competent affected her contextually and internally.

Physical activity provided not only a sense of accomplishment but also was a way of reducing negative energy. An example of negative energy she faced in her family was when she recalled instances where she was ridiculed for how she looked, how she said

things, how she did things and how it affected her self-esteem and confidence. A way of coping with her environment was to run.

Spirituality

A factor that was part of Jack and Four Winds success was culture as mentioned but intertwined with culture was *spirituality*. The three participants addressed spirituality in different ways. For Jack the spirituality in his life was traditional spirituality and christianity, for Four Winds it was traditional spirituality and for Beth it was neither. Obviously the belief systems, particularly in Aboriginal cultures was diverse as each person is individual and tailor their beliefs to suit themselves. Similar comments are echoed by Peacock and Cleary (1998) who stated that it was impossible to “definitively describe American Indian spirituality” (p. 46). Aboriginal spirituality is complex and vast and it goes far beyond attempts at categorizing and labeling what the beliefs are of all Aboriginal people. Spirituality was a factor for success, but that was defined by the individual.

Reconceptualization Summary of the Literature Combined with Findings

The revisions of the conceptual summary (Figure 2.) entitled *Investigating success; a reconceptualization*, included adding specific definitions of success provided by the participants, the inclusion of identifying the individual as having biological, psychological, social and spiritual aspects of their being and factors related to their definition of success.

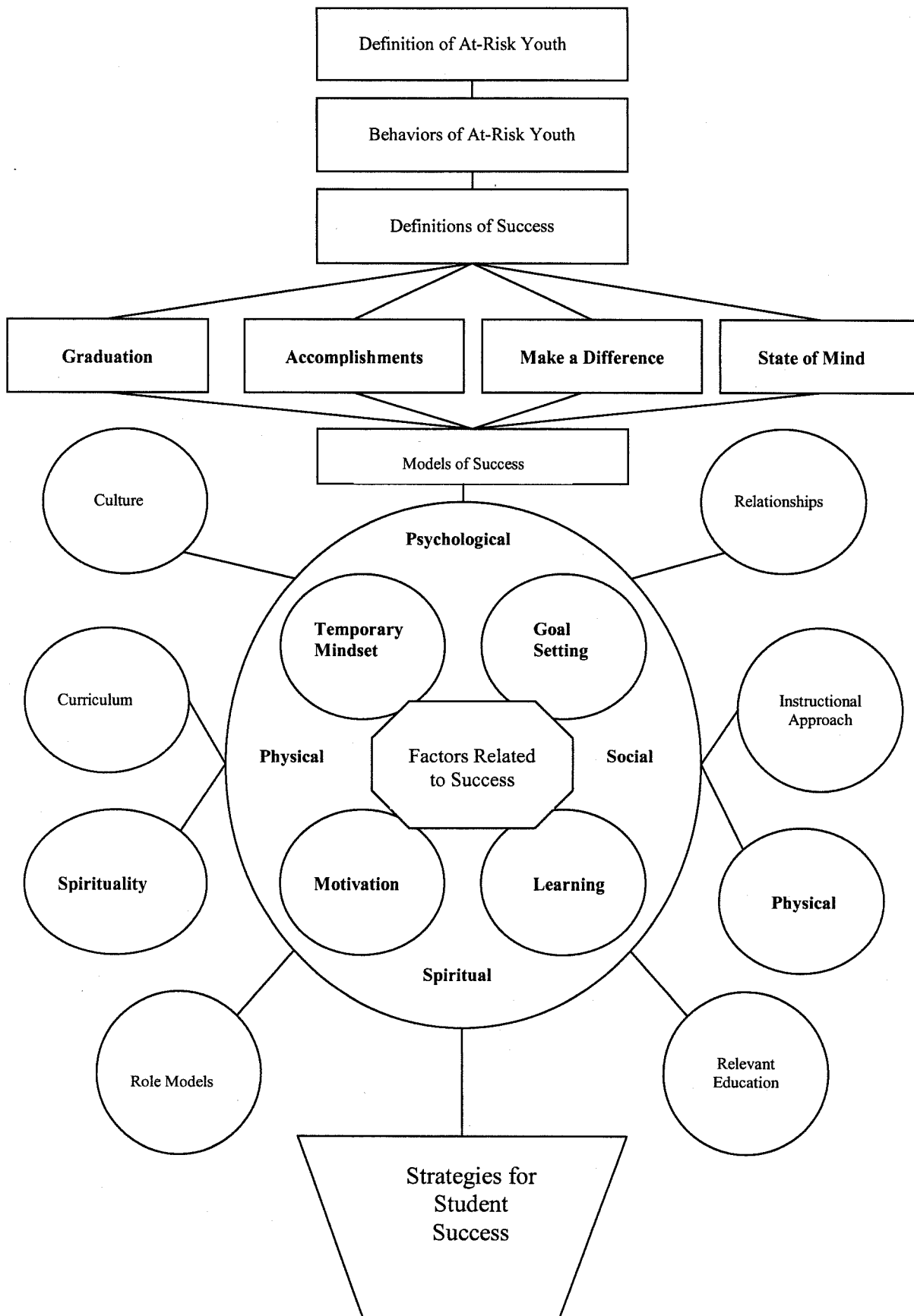


Figure 2. Investigating Success: A reconceptualization

The next section illustrated by the reconceptualization was the addition of internal factors and external factors related to the individual's success. This was a result of a rigorous examination of the participants responses and the effort to find a richer understanding of the participants' lives. For clarity, the above changes were highlighted in bold. Among the changes were the definitions of success, external factors were represented by outer circles and the internal factors represented by circles in the center of the figure. Strategies for student success are referred to in a section entitled *Implications for practice*.

The interpretation of the data was congruent with the philosophical tenets of phenomenology which was that the multiple realities constructed by participants was formed by the social contexts of participants. What they have experienced was known and that upon reflection construct meaning of their experiences. Following a phenomenological approach I systematically analyzed the data.

As a result of this study following a series of in-depth conversations with each of the participants it became clear that a pre-defined definition of success was not appropriate to the views of their reality. Each individual had their own unique definition of success based upon a mindset, cultural orientation and spiritual connections. Four sets of success orientations were provided in the reconceptualization in Figure 2. These related to graduation, accomplishments, making a difference and state of mind. In turn these areas in various ways combine to create each individual unique model of success.

The conclusion of this study and the nature of success revealed that the definition of success was more complex and idiosyncratic than what I first assumed. The

reconceptualized summary was a simplified model that becomes more complicated when more people are involved in this study. The nature of success was difficult to measure because of the constant changing variables as observed in the cases of the participants.

Students who have factors described in Figure 2. does not necessarily guarantee success as individual's background, history, context, locus of control, motivation and attitude determine the success or failure of a student.

Implications for Practice

The following was a list of implications derived from participants and the literature directed at teachers, parents and students.

Teachers

- Teachers have a moral obligation to continue to develop relationships with students (Bempechat, 1998; Brendtro et al., 1990; Chapman, 2002; Parsley and Corocan, 2003). As reported by Kushman, Seiber and Heariold-Kinney (2000) teachers who have had the best experiences in school are those who have developed meaningful relationships with students.
- Teachers must respond to the growing Aboriginal student population and cater to their needs as they differ from those of the mainstream student population. Attempts at catering to their needs are crucial regardless of the background and expertise of the teacher. Specifically, teachers can provide opportunities to include more Aboriginal content in class rooms and must complete at least twelve

credit units of University Native Studies classes in teacher education programs or ongoing professional development in areas relating to Aboriginal issues (Gilliland, 1995).

- It is critical that teachers raise expectations of Aboriginal students (Aronson, 2001; Lenarduzzi, 1992; Peacock and Cleary, 1998). Consider Beth who described an instance where a teacher made her feel like she had inferior math skills to the rest of her classmates. Certain students may exhibit at-risk factors but the expectation for these students must be similar to students who do not exhibit at-risk factors.
- There is great value in teaching vulnerable youth therapeutic coping skills with the intention of reducing the effects of stress. (Farmer & Payne, 1992; Miars, 2000).

Teacher Education Programs

- The broad, complex, idiosyncratic nature of success needs to be respected by all beginning teachers. There are many different facets of success that should be celebrated in the classroom. When teachers view success from the narrow point of view of just academic success they miss the opportunity to encourage and acknowledge other types of success.
- Students must be respected for where they are in their journey of experiencing and achieving success. Respect students for their success in areas other than the academics such as personal success in their attributes, abilities, skills and accomplishments.

- The classroom must be viewed as a meeting place first, and for connecting with students. When that connection is made the process of facilitating their learning can begin but not before acknowledging them.
- Teacher education programs must acknowledge the School^{PLUS} framework and contemplate its place in provincial school and/or band controlled schools (Curry & Tymchak, 2003).

Parents

- Student success was more likely with family support (Aronson, 2001; Bempechat, 1998; Farmer and Payne, 1992; Lenarduzzi, 1992; Yurkovich 2001). Specific types of support were provided by Kushman, Seiber and Heariold-Kinney (2000): Families can help their children by reading and talking to them from a young age, by taking an interest in their school work and homework, and by asking questions and encouraging their children to make decisions. Families should try hard to provide a stimulating learning environment for their children by playing games, engaging in family activities, having positive discussions about school and their child's social life during meals, encouraging responsible movie and television viewing. Families need to provide an environment in which their child feels safe, loved and nurtured. (p. 497)
- Parents must keep their children accountable for their actions. If their children are old enough to make their own decisions, then they must assume responsibility and accountability as an adult (Farmer & Payne, 1992).

Students

- One significant implication running through this study was the need for students to take risks in developing trusting relationships with healthy adults.
- In an increasingly complex, rapidly-changing, and time constrained society students are under tremendous stress and must learn stress management techniques. (Miars, 2000).
- Students would benefit greatly by aiming for balance by developing biological, psychological, social and spiritual parts of their being.
- Develop networks of support in a community; whether it is in extracurricular activities in school, cultural activities, religious and/or spiritual activities, or other opportunities for belonging in a community as to develop potential support systems.

Recommendations for Further Study

After completing the interviews and reflecting on the interviews and the title of this study, I gave thought to who would read this study. Who would be interested? Would it be professionals? Or would it be students? Who was the target audience? I recall an experience I had with a particular youth who after looking at several titles of different studies was captivated by a study because of its title. The title of this study was clear and concise. She immediately perused its pages to satisfy her curiosity and interest. As I reflected on this incident, questions that began to arise were: What title could be used in a future study that would attract readers?

The main goal of this study was to provide a document that encourages students to stay in school. Other goals of the study were to provide useful information to parents, teachers, administrators, counsellors and other professionals who work with students. That somehow they can take pieces of what has been said by participants and apply it to their own practice with their students and children. A future study is one that has a clear, concise and direct focus that looks at the lived experiences of high school Aboriginal students focusing on their perceptions of success. One such topic that comes to mind is a study of Aboriginal male high school students as their voice is lacking in the literature. Other studies include a study of the effectiveness of schools where best practices exist, a study focusing specifically on the nature of Aboriginal motivation and how it affects success and a study of student resilience in the face of at-risk factors.

Final Reflection

An after thought of the study on success was the need to include ample discussion on failure. As previously mentioned there are multiple faces of success and failure. The presence of any success is determined by how narrowly the individual views failure. Failure is an opportunity to grow, one that should not cause any one to fear it, as it will only shape who we will become. Failure should be viewed as a fact of life and not a description of how life will be. Failure can be a label used by society to describe an individual who has not reached what they perceive to be 'their' success.

A definition of success is created by the individual for the individual. And that a measure of success can only be determined by the individuals who define success. But

even in instances when an individual has not aspired or met their definition of success they are not failures, they are a work in progress working toward a goal.

In other instances the opposite occurs, such as in the case of Beth, where she attended a southern school and the story she related of success where an attempt was made by the teacher to sabotage her math skills by discrediting her ability. As Peacock and Cleary (1998) suggested:

Some students may have failed for so long in school that they will be initially resistant or even feign boredom rather than instantly turning around to be an enthusiastic student. They may be irresponsive for some time even to the most relevant curriculum. One cannot expect miracles with students who have had a history of disenchantment with school. (p. 206)

What is encouraging is that all students can have success when they view their mistakes and failures as passages to their eventual goal. That work requires understanding, empowerment, consistency, empathy and balance; and that there are powerful external and internal factors that can help students to achieve the level of success enjoyed by the participants of this study.

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APPENDIX A:

Application for Approval of Research Protocol

Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB)
FORMAT FOR APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROTOCOL

1. Jason Young Researcher, Department of Educational Administration
 Dr. Pat Renihan Supervisor, Department of Educational Administration
- 1a. **Student:** Jason Young to fulfill requirements of MEd (Thesis)
- 1b. **Anticipated start date:** June 1st, 2004
Anticipated completion date: July 30th, 2004

2. **Title:** A Retrospective Study of School Success: Voices of Successful Aboriginal Professionals
3. **Abstract:**
 This qualitative study is designed to explore the perceptions of Aboriginal professionals in various work sectors as they reflect on their educational experiences in high school and the nature of success. Questions guiding this research are: What is Aboriginal student success? What factors affect success? What or who do professionals attribute their successfulness to? What can make others successful?
 Semi-structured interviews will be conducted initially with professionals in work sectors that include human service and health sector. A second interview will be held with these professionals to clarify and further develop ideas emerging from the initial sets of interviews. Descriptive memos and reflective notes will be kept throughout the process with the analysis of data following traditions of qualitative methods.

4. **Funding:**
 This is an unfunded study.

5. **Participants:**
 There are five participants being recruited to this study. All participants will be initially contacted by the researcher through in person, by e-mail or telephone to describe the study and seek their interest in the study. The participants for this study are chosen from a wider population, specifically those employed in education, social work and health sectors and/or attending University in an urban area. Therefore, participants are not from the same high school.
 Potential participants will be eligible to participate in the study if they are Aboriginal and working as a professional in the education, social work and health sectors.
 Potential participants will receive a letter of intent from the researcher, a copy of the semi-structured interview guide, and a consent document indicating all pertinent information regarding the study and ethical issues. The researcher will then meet with the potential participants to further clarify the expectations of the study and to receive the signatures of consent. Many of the participants in the study are known to the researcher as colleagues, fellow graduate students, and through other associations. The usefulness of knowing the participants is that the researcher has rapport, allowing for a more comfortable interviewing experience and attaining rich data. The researcher neither holds nor previously held any type of authority over any of the expected participants, thus no dependent relationships exist.

5a. Recruitment material:

This research project is of minimal risk to the participants.

6. Consent:

- i.** Potential participants will receive a letter of intent from the researcher as well as a consent document indicating all pertinent information regarding the study and ethical issues. The researcher will then meet with the potential participants to further clarify the expectations of the study and to receive the signatures of consent.
- ii.** The participants will be duly informed in the consent form about their opportunities to withdraw from the study at any time.
- a.** All participants in this study will be required to sign a Participant Consent Form.
- b.** Not applicable to this study.
- c.** Not applicable to this study.
- d.** Not applicable to this study.
- e.** Not applicable to this study.
- f.** The researcher will not be conducting participant-observation nor will she be conducting naturalistic-observation of the participants in their work environment. All data to be collected will be via participant semi structured interviews.
- g.** The researcher will not be using a pre-formed group of individuals in this study. Rather the researcher will be approaching individuals individually. Please see the following appended documents: Letter of Intent, Consent Form.

7. Methods and Procedures:

Participants will meet individually with the researcher for an initial, semi-structured interview that is anticipated to last forty five minutes. Participants will then meet individually with the researcher for a follow-up, semi-structured interview that is anticipated to last twenty minutes. Interview questions for the second interview will be created from the emergent data obtained from the initial interview.

Interviews will be tape recorded and participants have the option to turn tape recorder off at any time during the interview. All participants will receive a copy of his/her transcribed responses and may choose to make any changes to his/her data if necessary. Participants will be required to acknowledge their agreement with the accuracy of the transcriptions by completing the Data/Transcript Release Form. Please see appended document.

8. Storage of Data:

All audio-recorded data and subsequent transcripts will be stored for a minimum of five years by the researcher's supervisor, Dr. Pat Renihan, in his office at the Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, at the University of Saskatchewan.

9. Dissemination of Results:

The results of this research study are for the primary purpose of completing the researcher's thesis in Educational Administration. Results may be published as an article or journal or presented at a conference, after completion of the study.

10. Risk or Deception:

- There is minimal risk to the participants in this study and no deception on the part of the researcher. Participants will be consenting adults who have been informed of the intent of the research and the requirements for participation.
- a. The participants are not viewed as members of a vulnerable population.
- b. The participants are not viewed as members of a captive or dependent population.
- c. The participants are not in institutional or power relationship with the researcher.
- d. The researcher will ensure that specific information in the data file regarding the participants input will be protected.
- e. Third parties will not be exposed to a loss of confidentiality or anonymity.
- f. The participant interviews will be audio-taped.
- g. The participants will not actively be deceived or misled.
- h. The researcher will ensure accommodation for the participants and their needs in the physical surroundings of the interviews.
- i. The intent of the study is to gain perceptions of Aboriginal professionals in various work sectors regarding student success. The questions to be asked of the participants are neither personal nor sensitive.
- j. Procedures are not likely to induce embarrassment, humiliation, lowered self-esteem, guilt, conflict, distress, anger, or any other negative emotional state.
- k. There is no social risk involved for participants.
- l. The research will not infringe on the rights of any participants.
- m. The participants will not receive any compensation for their participation during the course of this study.

11. Confidentiality:

All participants will be given pseudonyms to protect their identity and ensure anonymity. Any identifying information about the participants or their location will be eliminated. All data collected will be regarded as strictly confidential. Any identifiable remarks given by participants will be scrutinized and changed when necessary to further ensure confidentiality. All precautions will be taken to ensure that the identity of the participants will remain confidential and protect anonymity.

12. Data/Transcript Release:

- All participants will receive a copy of his/her transcribed interviews and have the right to add, delete or change any of his/her data. Each participant will be asked to sign a Release Form for Individual Interviews to acknowledge their agreement with the accuracy of what was stated in the transcriptions.
Please see the appended documents.

13. Debriefing and Feedback:

Upon the request of the participants, feedback and debriefing following the participation will be made by informing participants of the publication of the thesis and ways of accessing the thesis at the University of Saskatchewan.

14. Required Signatures:

Student Researcher

Supervisor

Committee Member

Committee Member

Department Head

Date

15. Contact Name and Information:

Jason Young
 306-966-7711 (office)
 306-955-3510 (home)
 518 Michener Way
 Saskatoon SK S7L 5V4
 jcy108@mail.usask.ca

Dr. Pat Renihan
 306-966-7619
 Department of Educational Administration
 College of Education
 University of Saskatchewan
 pat.renihan@usask.ca

APPENDIX B:

Letter of Consent

Consent Form

Dear _____

*You are invited to participate in a study entitled *A Retrospective Study of School Success: Voices of Successful Aboriginal Professionals*. Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have.*

Researcher(s): Jason Young, Department of Education Administration at 966-7619, (home 955-3510) or my supervisor, Dr. Pat Renihan, Department of Educational Administration, 966-7619 at the University of Saskatchewan.

Purpose and Procedure:

The purpose of this study is to describe how Aboriginal professionals in various work sectors define success. The secondary purpose is to explore the factors that these individuals believe to affect success. There are five participants being recruited to this study. All participants will be initially contacted by the researcher through in person, by e-mail or telephone to describe the study and seek their interest in the study. The participants for this study are chosen from a wider population, specifically those employed in education, social work and health sectors and/or attending university in an urban area. Therefore, participants are not from the same high school.

Potential participants will be eligible to participate in the study if they are Aboriginal and working as a professional in the education, social work and health sectors.

Potential participants will receive a letter of intent from the researcher, a copy of the semi-structured interview guide, and a consent document indicating all pertinent information regarding the study and ethical issues. The researcher will then meet with the potential participants to further clarify the expectations of the study and to receive the signatures of consent. Many of the participants in the study are known to the researcher as colleagues, fellow graduate students, and through other associations. The usefulness of knowing the participants is that the researcher has rapport, allowing for a more comfortable interviewing experience and attaining rich data. The researcher neither holds nor previously held any type of authority over any of the expected participants, thus no dependent relationships exist.

In-depth interviews will be conducted initially with professionals in work sectors that include human services and health sectors. A second interview will be held with these professionals to clarify and further develop ideas emerging from the initial sets of interviews. Both interviews will be conducted over a two week period. The initial interview will be 45 minutes in length. The following interview will be held the following week and will be 20 minutes in length. Total commitment of participants is 65 minutes over a two week period. The interviews will be tape recorded and participants can shut off tape recorder at anytime. Descriptive memos and reflective notes will be kept throughout the process with the analysis of data following traditions of qualitative methods.

Potential Risks:

There is minimal risk to the participants in this study and no deception on the part of the researcher. Participants will be consenting adults who have been informed of the intent of the research and the requirements for participation.

(Storage of Data):

The data collected from you will be kept in a secure place and will be held at the University of Saskatchewan with the supervisor Dr. Pat Renihan in his office for five years according to the University of Saskatchewan guidelines.

Confidentiality:

The data from this study might be published, presented at conferences or in a thesis; however, your identity will be kept confidential. Although we will report direct quotations from the interview, you will be given a pseudonym, and all identifying information, participant's position, name of institution and any identifying information about your work location will be eliminated.

Right to Withdraw:

The researcher acknowledges that you can withdraw from the study or refuse to answer particular questions in the interview at any time during the study without penalty or without loss of services at the University of Saskatchewan. If you withdraw, the data collected from interviews and tape recordings will not be used and destroyed.

The tape will be transcribed and analyzed to discover the patterns and themes discussed. You will be given a smoothed narrative version of the transcripts with false starts, repetitions, and paralinguistic utterances removed to make it more readable. Later the researcher will check with you about your responses in the transcriptions. You can add, delete or change information to reflect what you want to say. You will be able to receive a copy of the study after the discussion. *You will be asked to sign a Data/Transcript Release Form.

Questions:

If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided above if you have questions at a later time. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Sciences Research Ethics Board on May 25th, 2004. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Office of Research Services (966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect. Upon request, the participants will be provided with a summary of the study following its completion.

Consent to Participate:

I have read and understood the description provided above; I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily.

I consent to participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

(Signature of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Researcher)

APPENDIX C:

Consent for Release of Transcripts

Data/Transcript Release Form

I, _____, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interview in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview with Jason Young. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Jason Young to be used in the manner described in the consent form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

Participant

Date

Researcher

Date

APPENDIX D:

Letter of Intent

Letter of Intent

June_____, 2004

Dear _____.

Tansi! This letter is to confirm your participation in the research study I am conducting entitled *A Retrospective Study of School Success: Voices of Successful Aboriginal Professionals*. This study is a thesis that will be submitted to the College of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the Degree of Master of Education in the Department of Educational Administration University of Saskatchewan.

I am interested in the perceptions, ideas, and thoughts about high school success among Aboriginal professionals employed in education, social work and health sectors. My intention is to do two sets of interviews. The first interview will have a semi-structured approach that will last about forty five minutes. The second interview will have opened ended questions that relate to the first interview and should last about twenty minutes. I will make every accommodation necessary to ensure minimal disruption to your daily life.

I have enclosed consent documents which are designed to inform and protect you throughout this study. Please read these documents over carefully and sign them prior to our first meeting. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact me at the university (966-7711) or at home (955-3510). You may also call my supervisor, Dr. Pat Renihan (966-7619) if you have further questions about the study or the Office of Research Services (966-2084) if you have questions about your rights as a participant in the study.

Thank you for you participation in this study.

Respectfully,

Jason Young, Master of Education Candidate

APPENDIX E:

Interview Guide

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Describe the context of your school? Physical, historical, student population, neighborhood, teachers, special distinctions, reputation, well-known graduates, or people affiliated with school, location.
2. Describe your background as a student in relation to the community?
3. What are your perceptions of student success in high school? What does success mean to you?
4. What was your schooling experience like?
5. Describe a school situation in which you were made to feel successful?
6. Did you have any role models in school? Describe them? What made them role models? How did they motivate you?
7. Were there certain individuals who supported you? What kind of relationship did you have with them?
8. Did your teachers do anything with curriculum that were factors in your success?
9. How important was curriculum relevance to you as a high school student?
10. Did your teachers do anything with instructional approaches that were factors in your success?
11. Was culture a factor in your success? Why or why not?
12. What made you successful according to your definition of success?
13. What can make others successful?

Appendix F:
Ethics Approval



**UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN
BEHAVIOURAL RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD**

<http://www.usask.ca/research/ethics.shtml>

NAME: Patrick Renihan (Jason Young)
Educational Administration

Beh 04-92

DATE: May 25, 2004

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the Application for Ethics Approval for your study "A Retrospective Study of School Success Among Aboriginal Professionals" (Beh 04-92).

1. Your study has been APPROVED.
2. Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Committee consideration in advance of its implementation.
3. The term of this approval is for 5 years.
4. This approval is valid for one year. A status report form must be submitted annually to the Chair of the Committee in order to extend approval. This certificate will automatically be invalidated if a status report form is not received within one month of the anniversary date. Please refer to the website for further instructions
<http://www.usask.ca/research/behavrsc.shtml>

I wish you a successful and informative study.

Dr. David Hay, Acting Chair
University of Saskatchewan
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

DH/ck