

**Discerning the Network of Supports employed by Off-Campus
Indigenous Adult e-learners through an Indigenous
Methodological Lens**

A Dissertation Submitted to the College of Graduate Studies and
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of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Educational
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ABSTRACT

“A very wise teacher once told me that if writers could not state the point of a paper in one sentence, they did not yet know what the point was.” (Sandelowski, 1998. p. 376)

The point of this dissertation is thus: To respectfully illuminate the e-learning experiences of Indigenous off-campus university alumni, so that higher education leaders, instructors and support staff might better understand the types of individual, institutional and programmatic supports that can facilitate the completion of place-bound Indigenous students’ programs of study at Canadian post-secondary institutions.

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry is to respectfully demonstrate relational responsibility to a virtual community of place-bound Indigenous adult e-learners comprising a disparate population of tribal citizens whose contemporary social experience is largely marked by colonisation and assimilation. Many place-bound learners find themselves isolated from the geographic locales of typical post-secondary educational institutions, and are not necessarily looking to not have their own Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural realities discounted while engaging with academia. They do however, aspire to have their educational experiences validated as being academically legitimate, irrespective of the fact that the instructional methods and physical circumstances they experience as e-learners differs significantly from those of other Indigenous and non-Native campus-based learners.

Drawing upon an Indigenous methodological framework, this study clearly demonstrates that place-bound Indigenous e-learners do draw upon formal institutional educational supports as necessary, but their primary sources of support are those that already exist for them within close proximity to their places of residence, whether in urban centres, rural municipalities or geographically isolated communities in Western Canada.

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PROLOGUE

Over the course of my life, I have had several opportunities to develop my skills and knowledge through experiences associated with the harvesting of wild animals for food. As a child, I would watch my male relatives prepare for their periodic excursions into the bush at certain times of the year, and upon their return, I would periodically be invited to participate in the skinning, meatcutting and packaging of the harvest based on my contributory capacity as assessed by the older men. As I grew older, the range of activities with which I was entrusted expanded, and my responsibilities grew in direct relation to my ability and interest in participating. Unfortunately, due to a variety of intersecting socio-economic and interpersonal factors that impacted the adults around whom I grew up, there was not a lot of continuity in opportunities for me to participate in hunting and fishing activities as a child/youth, and my interactions with any ancestral cultural knowledges relating to food gathering were circumscribed and beyond my own personal locus of control. It was not until I developed a degree of stability in my adult life circumstances that I found myself in a position to resume my tutelage in the ways of gathering wild meat for use by my family and friends.

When I was in my late 20's, I found myself residing in Northern British Columbia and nowhere near the lands, waters and forests where my ancestors have been harvesting food for generations. Fortunately, I had developed close friendships with several older men who were living on their traditional homelands in communities close to my own. For a variety of reasons, my friends did not have many sufficiently interested/developed nephews living nearby at the time to help out with the more physical tasks associated with the collection and processing of the resources of their territories, so my handiness and willingness were welcomed and I was

encouraged to go out on various food gathering expeditions. Although the learnings passed along to me by my own relatives and my own past experience with hunting were not grounded in the landscape of British Columbia's Northcoast, it was clear that some of my rudimentary knowledge and skills could be transferable to a different geographic and cultural context. If I recall correctly, even though I was a settler in that geo-cultural domain, I was brought on as a junior partner of sorts, provided that I could quietly participate and not interfere with the locally-situated traditions, procedures, and ways that informed the practice of my friends, who themselves were local knowledge holders in the community-based discipline of hunting.

As I participated in numerous trips, the men with whom I would go out on the land and water assessed my capacity to be of assistance. They observed how well I prepared myself mentally, physically and spiritually for time spent afield. They watched how safe I would be with a variety of powerful implements used for harvesting and processing. They noticed the ways I adapted to local ways and procedures that were rarely discussed openly, out of respect to the various life-forces associated with the experience. And gradually I came to be included in stories (some successful, others more humorous) of bygone hunts that were related to the younger men in the village as they began taking to the traditional roles that their uncles had been caretaking and modelling for them.

One consistent theme nurtured within me as I was learning to participate in traditional food gathering was the principle of respect. Within the teachings I received from multiple sources, I was encouraged to operate with great deference to numerous powerful conventions relating to the relationships between and among human beings, inhabitants of the animal and plant worlds, the geo-physical landscape, the natural elements, and the spirit world which undergirds all of these relationships. Some of these relationships were enacted through activities

and ways of going about things (e.g., ceremonies, rituals, and protocols) that led to successful trips and good relationships with community members upon my return, regardless of whether or not any game was harvested. By being repeatedly immersed in messages to “do it right”, “be careful”, and “be thoughtful” (English translations), I was being encouraged to act in a respectful manner that would not bring dishonour to me or any of the other participants in the activity, be they human, animal, or plant. Although I have little to gauge my success, I have tried to make the principal value of respect foundational to all of my interactions with other beings in my local environment, whether I happen to be in the presence of Indigenous people/entities or not, and especially when I am visiting areas that are far removed from the homelands of my own Mi’kmaq and European ancestors.

While I was busy enhancing my cultural knowledges in the field through experiential learning, I was also participating in learning of a different sort. In 1995, fifteen years after graduating from high school, I obtained my first university degree – a Bachelor of Social Work from the University of Victoria distance education program. This was a significant achievement for me in many ways, however it also was problematizing. As is true of many Western social rites, the elevation of any Indigenous person’s social status to that of ‘honourary white man’ that comes with the conferral of a university degree (Paul, 1993) not only physically cloaks us in raiment (i.e., cap and gown) that were never intended for us, but which also cause us to appear different from the community members who are used to seeing us in other forms of dress or regalia (if appropriate). The official Oxford-style garment of academia was designed to provide its’ wearers with camouflage and security for an easier journey through the socio-economic landscape of Western society, and when I first put it on, I began to feel a nascent disconnect emerging between myself and my neighbours who were residing in nearby First Nations and

semi-rural communities. Where previously I had been trusted or benignly accepted, I was now viewed with a degree of suspicion by some individuals, particularly those who had had unfavourable interactions with colonial/post-colonial education policies or the university-trained professionals (e.g., anthropologists, Indian agents, priests) who visited their communities.

Knowing that my visage had shifted among my social peers because of my achievements within the formal education system, I resolved to continue tracking “the new buffalo” - post-secondary education - as Plains Cree scholar Blair Stonechild (2006) describes it, to see what other aptitudes I could develop that might be of benefit to the wider community of Indigenous and settler learners/practitioners with whom I had come into contact as a social work student. In gradual yet appropriate ways, I distanced myself from the support systems of my local geographic community by enrolling in a cohort-based distance education Master of Social Work degree program along with a number of other social workers who also self-identified as having Indigenous ancestry. Upon the conferral of my graduate degree, I became sanctioned to present myself as a social work educator, albeit only on a sessional basis initially. I was asked to teach undergraduate courses and since 2001 I have led more than two dozen offerings of social work courses, either on-campus, via correspondence and through internet-based learning management systems (e.g., WebCT, Blackboard). Over time, I found that I preferred the virtual classroom dynamic of working with non-Native and Indigenous students from across Canada, and my interest in e-learning began to develop. Eventually, I was asked to develop a new on-line course for undergraduates enrolled in an Indigenous Social Work specialization, and that experience prompted me to begin looking at the intersections between social work education and distance education in a more systematic way.

When I attended my first International conference on Open and Distance Learning in 2007, I was exposed to a breadth of theory and practice that I had heretofore been unaware of. I became fascinated at the potential of distance education to support human resource capacity development in Indigenous communities in ways that could align with culturally appropriate ways of knowing, and when I attended an International conference on Indigenous Social Work the following year, I began to see how the same sort of Social Work distance education delivery that I had experienced as a student, instructor and course designer paralleled some emergent practices outside of Canada. I heard whispers of interdisciplinary conversations that reflected the pedagogic possibilities of the Information Age and also the threats to helping professions posed by globalisation. Disciplinary boundaries were becoming more diffuse as scholars from a variety of traditions “interrogated the structures, functions, habits, norms and practices that guide global flows of information and cultural elements and asked questions about access, costs, and the chilling effects on, within, and among audiences, citizens and emerging cultural creators, Indigenous cultural groups, teachers and students.” (Vaidhyathan, 2006, p. 303) The potential of this kind of emancipatory research piqued my interest as I found myself reflecting on my previous experience as a participant within online course delivery environments, and I began thinking about the extent to which Indigenous students enrolees in e-learning professional programs might be carving out space within academia or the wider post-secondary educational policy and research community. From what I was able to see, there was not much discussion occurring on this theme among my colleagues and peers in my own social work profession, and I began to once again hear the call of Stonechild’s new buffalo prompting me to step back into the familiar student role that I associated with both my personal development in Indigenous ways

(learning to hunt/fish) and my professional development in the ways of Western academia (learning for advancement).

Consequently, when I entered into a PhD. program later that year, I was determined to explore the nexus between social work education with Indigenous students and educational theory and practice, particularly as that related to technology-enhanced learning. Having had worked in academia for several years prior to this, I was keenly aware that the structural dynamics of poverty, racial discrimination, and classism in North America were/are routinely downplayed in heterogeneous university classes. Rather than focussing on the emancipatory potential of undergraduate education, too often the systemic events of oppression were being expressed in individualized terms, while the locus for change was affixed at the individual level rather than society as a whole. (Ferguson, 2000) But my own experience as a distance education student also told me that the collaborative relationships that developed within some virtual classroom environments can create opportunities for marginalized voices to be raised without pressuring students to capitulate to the epistemological dominance that privileges Eurocentrism as “the special quality of mind, race, culture, environment, or historical advantage which gives this human community a permanent superiority over all other communities”. (Blaut, 1993)

Although the coursework associated with my PhD. program was based on a face-to-face delivery model which required me to re-engage with on-campus learning dynamics, as my classes progressed, I often found myself being drawn back to my own previous experiences as a mature off-campus student and instructor. When other participants in my classes would refer to terms such as ‘students’ or ‘classrooms’, the mental images that sprung to my mind were not associated with children or young adults sitting in classrooms or lecture halls, but rather I conjured images of the disembodied faces of Indigenous single parents, sitting alone in their

homes in the glow of their computer monitors. These people had no other person nearby with whom they could discuss their emotional reaction to a profound source of knowledge that some instructional designer had chosen to include in their social work reading coursepack, and I wondered how they were managing to cope with that experience.

I recalled the leap of faith that they and I had taken when entering an unfamiliar learning space for the first time, especially knowing that many of our own personal memories of the classrooms of our childhoods were marked as much by shame and confusion as they were by empowerment and accomplishment. I thought about having to bundle up my (then) young daughter to drive to the post office in hopes that a promised reference book necessary for a course had finally arrived from a distant university library or bookstore. I recalled the stress of submitting every assignment on-line and hoping that each one would be received in a readable format. And then I would remember the feeling of safety that comes with having family and friends nearby, the comforting familiarity of ancient rituals, and the healing power of the land waiting just outside the door.

After giving having these images steep in my subconscious throughout my coursework and competency exams, I came to believe that perhaps I could use the gift of my PhD. experience to find a way to give voice to some of the otherwise invisible off-campus adult learners who rarely see themselves represented on the promotional brochures or websites of academia. I spoke with several older people whose wisdom I respect, and they indicated that it would be good for me to follow up on the idea of looking into the experience of Indigenous adult distance learners from the point of view of place-bound students themselves. And thus I began my doctoral research ...

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As a person of Indigenous ancestry who has settled upon and worked in many capacities within the helping professions in the traditional territories of numerous Indigenous peoples in Western Canada, I believe that the English language term “in a good way” has become pretty well axiomatic across all First Nations in the 21st Century. I have heard and used this phrase in such disparate Indigenous cultural milieux as a Nisga’a Potlatch, a Gitksan healing lodge, a Wetsu’wet’en residential school survivors group, a Straits Salish planning committee, a Dene hospital, and a Plains Cree rain dance ceremony, among many others. As I understand Indigenous protocol, if a person approaches a task with purposiveness, humility, understanding, and respect, then she or he will be seen to be acting “in a good way”, and accordingly s/he will be granted some trustworthiness by the community. Whether or not the action is ultimately fruitful and a useful product achieved is not the sole benchmark for quality of the enterprise at hand, but rather it is also the process used and the manner in which it was attempted that dictate whether or not quality has been achieved.

1.1. Problem Statement

Although it is not the intention of this research to document the numerous social inequities that Indigenous peoples in Canada experience with respect to post-secondary educational programming, any examination of the issues facing the descendants of the original inhabitants of this land must be prefaced by the fact that many prospective Indigenous adult learners experience financial, historical, academic, cultural, geographic and social barriers to post-secondary education, as noted by the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (Canada, 2007). The Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation (2005)

recognized that “Aboriginal students face many barriers to admission and successful graduation at colleges and universities,” including “liv(ing) in remote and isolated areas that require them to relocate to attend post-secondary programs often marked by an alien and isolating cultural environment for Aboriginal students from remote and rural backgrounds” (Holmes, p.8). A typical response to the range of barriers facing Indigenous adult learners is made by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (2002) who state that “(t)he extension of technology enhanced learning is seen by many as one way to increase post-secondary accessibility within remote Aboriginal communities” (p. 2).

The successful completion of any adult learner’s educational program of study is not however entirely dependent on the best intentions of government and the administrators of post-secondary institutions. Simply scaling-up technology-enhanced learning tools to reach off-campus learners does little to meet the recognized need of Indigenous students for the types of non-academic services that are frequently available to on-campus Indigenous learners. Typical Indigenous student support services found in Canadian post-secondary institutions “comprise the broad array of counselling, mentoring, tutoring, as well as non-academic services such as housing, childcare, and social and cultural activities.” (AUCC, 2010). Unfortunately, and for a variety of reasons, many of these targeted support services are simply not available or accessible to off-campus Indigenous adult learners who find themselves bound to their places of residence out of cultural, familial or economic necessity.

Indigenous student support does not rest solely at the administrative or program level either. It is also widely recognized that in order to better ensure the completion of post-secondary programs by Indigenous students, cultural sensitivity within curriculum is key. (Battiste 2000; Baskin 2003; Young 1997). From my experience as a student and instructor in

the social sciences, culturally relevant course materials, resources, and assignments are now routinely making their way into the pedagogical approaches employed by many post-secondary instructors teaching in campus-based settings. Although there is still much work to be done to achieve full inclusion of Indigenous knowledges in on-campus settings, it is particularly unclear to what extent curricular supports for Indigenous ways of knowing are making their ways into the course outlines of instructors who are delivering courses via distance education and e-learning technologies.

This study is predicated on the belief that many off-campus Indigenous students have access to a variety of cultural and interpersonal supports to enable them to complete their studies that fall outside the formal rubric of institutional student support services. Through my doctoral research, I hoped to respectfully interrogate the e-learning experiences of off-campus post-secondary Indigenous alumni with a view to obtaining new insights into the nature and extent of supports - administrative, curricular, and instructional - that may be of benefit to Indigenous off-campus learners of the future. The intent of the study had enabled me to develop a more fulsome understanding of the nature and extent of the institutional, interpersonal and cultural supports that facilitate the completion of social science coursework delivered through e-learning at the post-secondary level to off-campus Indigenous adult learners. Although there are numerous reputable training and professional development service providers that deliver programs of study to adult audiences through e-learning modalities across Canada, because I do not have any personal or professional experience with any such organizations, the experiences of Indigenous alumni associated with those types of educational service providers was delimited as falling outside the scope of this research project.

1.2. Research Questions

What are the perceptions of off-campus Indigenous alumni regarding the procedures, content, and pedagogic elements of coursework delivered through internet-based modalities (e-learning) as being supportive factors in the completion of their most recent post-secondary experiences?

Subquestions:

What are typical experiences of post-secondary Indigenous adult learners who have completed e-learning courses while continuing to reside in off-campus communities in Western Canada?

What was the nature and extent of formal and informal supports that they drew upon as distance education learners?

To what extent did they benefit from administrative, curricular, and instructional supports available to them in their e-learning studies?

How do they perceive the benefits and challenges of on-line learning?

One challenge facing post-secondary institutions hoping to increase student enrolment among previously underserved populations is the provision of a high-quality student experience that is both relevant and achievable. If these two objectives are not met in e-learning environments, the reputation of the institution will suffer and adult learners will vote with their feet and enrol in courses from other educational providers. In order to effectively provide an environment where e-learning is achievable to off-campus Indigenous learners, administrative processes and curricular content must be designed and delivered in ways that are compatible with the technological infrastructure available in the learner's community. In order to provide relevancy within curriculum, pedagogical approaches and course materials may need to be created or adapted to reflect the unique socio-cultural dynamics of place-bound Indigenous adult

learners. A greater examination of the unique socio-cultural dynamics facing place-bound Indigenous adult learners is undertaken in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

Designing effective student supports - administrative, curricular and pedagogic - for Indigenous learners in largely Western on-line learning environments is a relatively new area of study. One aim of this research was to explore the extent to which Indigenous post-secondary alumni saw their institution's efforts at providing administrative, curricular and pedagogic supports as contributors and/or impediments to their completion of their programs of studies. Because my professional experience and academic training has been largely associated with professional programs in social work and education, I delimited the range of my study to exclude the experience of Indigenous alumni with post-secondary programs of study in the humanities, arts or sciences. In addition, because I did not set out with a primary purpose of exploring the familial and cultural supports that Indigenous students may draw upon in the completion of their studies, the research questions that guided my inquiry more appropriately focussed on the academic supports that may or may not have been provided by their chosen institutions over the course of the participants' on-line studies. Accordingly, the research associated with this dissertation was designed to explore the experiences of place-bound Indigenous adult learners who had completed e-learning coursework in an academic professional program, in the hopes that the evolving constellation of student support programming for Indigenous learners at a distance might be more thoroughly understood.

It is my understanding that no such similar study has been undertaken heretofore, especially one in which the principal investigator and all of the participants are themselves people of Indigenous ancestry.

1.3. Defining Support

Although I am not a native Mi'kmaq language speaker, it is my understanding that the Mi'kmaq word "*getuapematl*" translates into English as "the need for assistance". It is my understanding that the reciprocal concepts of needing assistance and providing help are central to the relational nature of Indigenous worldviews. There are times when we all need help, and times when we all are expected to provide succour to others - this is a central function of the feasting system that underpins many social traditions of Indigenous peoples worldwide. In the English language, I think it would be accurate to suggest that a word closely associated with Indigenous conceptions of the need to provide and receive assistance would be the word "support". This word, is used both as a verb and a noun, but the definition that I think best fits my intentions for this study correlates to the Merriam-Webster Learner's Dictionary (2011), definition of support, namely: "Something that holds a person or thing up, and stops that person or thing from falling down." (learnersdictionary.com/search/support%5B1%5D). From a holistic perspective, support thus defined may be manifested through the physical, emotional, spiritual and mental assistance of animate and inanimate entities which transcend the temporal bounds normally associated with Western conceptions of human existence. Support is huge; for the purposes of this study, however I elected to concentrate my attention on only five key dimensions of support that I believe relate to the experience of off-campus learners at the post-secondary level. These dimensions of support expand the range of administrative, curricular and pedagogic supports outlined in my research questions somewhat, in order to better describe a more fulsome range of supports than might be contained within the rubric of institutional supports to adult learners. The dimensions of support identified in this dissertation include, Academic supports, Non-Academic supports, Personal supports, Indigenous Cultural supports,

and Off-campus learner supports. In hopes of establishing a common typology for the main dimensions of support that I reference in this study, the brief descriptions that follow reflect my understandings of the main features that constitute each of these five key dimensions of support.

1.4. Academic Supports

Many academic support programs and services offered at the post-secondary level are geared towards minimizing student withdrawal (i.e., dropping out) before they complete their program of studies. Tinto (1993) produced a widely known model of student departure comprising six progressive phases: student pre-entry attributes; early goals/commitments to study; institutional experiences; integration into the institution; goals/commitments to the institution; and the departure decision. In order to address these factors, it is my understanding that most post-secondary institutions in Canada have developed programs and facilities that aim to meet the academic needs of learners in such areas as: pre-enrolment advice, academic counselling, student financial aid, campus facilities, campus services orientations, supplemental instruction services, mentoring, language and technology proficiency labs, learning management systems, and policies aimed at ensuring administrative fairness and accommodating to individual learning preferences and abilities. (Prebble, Hargraves, Leach, Naidoo, Suddaby, G, & Zepke, 2004, p.55). In this dissertation, the term ‘Academic Supports’ may be understood as comprising many of the administrative, curricular and pedagogic supports offered to students, faculty and non-instructional staff within Canadian post-secondary institutions.

1.5. Non-academic Supports

“Personal adjustment and integration into the social fabric of campus life play a role at least as significant as academic factors in student retention” (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994, p. 7).

In order to facilitate the assimilation of qualified individuals into the post-secondary student experience, many campus-based post-secondary governance bodies and student associations prioritize the utilization of institutional resources in ways that will facilitate the retention of current learners. Nostalgia for the heady post-secondary experiences of their youth fuels much alumni generosity and this pool of goodwill also spurs much governmental, corporate and philanthropic financial benevolence in the Canadian tertiary education sector. However, in order to ensure that the memories of future old boys/girls will remain aglow with fondness for their alma maters, timely and strategic investments must be made to promote the psychic, physical, interpersonal, and spiritual well-being of currently enrolled students. Such non-academic programs and services include: health services, personal counselling referrals, recreational programs, organized sports (varsity and intramural), social/cultural clubs, campus facilities (e.g., day-care, housing, food services, bookstore, information technology sales and services, gyms/pools), religious/pastoral care services, employment placement services, campus security, and policies aimed improving campus community health and cultural capital by establishing a feeling of safety through actively promoting non-discrimination and the valuing of minorities. (McInnis, James, & Hartley, 2000, p. 50). Because these types of supports might be more commonly articulated as being extra-curricular, for the purposes of this dissertation, I have chosen to exclude such programs and services from my typology of administrative, curricular or pedagogic supports to post-secondary students.

1.6. Personal Supports

In my experience as a post-secondary student and educator, I have come to realize that many of the personal supports relied upon by learners are not only those offered under the aegis of formal institution-based programs, policies and services. Although anathema to the post-

modern era in which many social scientists claim Western society now finds itself in, the residual influence of an ancient informal helping system of family, friends and community members (kith and kin) underlies the academic and social success of many adult learners. The range of personal supports that enable post-secondary learners to complete their studies may be drawn from both/either the formal or informal personal support system, depending upon the individual's interests and his/her willingness to draw upon the social capital resources available to him/her.

In the formal, post-secondary institution-based tertiary education system of Canada, a range of personal support services may be made available to discrete sub-populations of a institution's student body. The Women's Centres, International Students' Associations, Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgendered/Questioning Student Centres as well as the organized religious denominations that have been permitted to operate on many Canadian campuses provide a range of personal support services to individuals who elect to avail themselves of such services. Such services may include: emergency financial aid/counselling, sexual health counselling, collective advocacy, spiritual guidance, assistance in locating housing, ridesharing, social/cultural celebrations, and English language tutoring. Many of these self-selected student associations also provide mentoring programs and host community gatherings aimed at reducing the social isolation that may be experienced by the partners and families of learners.

In the informal helping system, the types of personal supports that adult learners may have access to are entirely dependent upon the nature and extent of social capital they may have available to them. Many informal supports are the antecedent versions of services and programs that are now mirrored in the formal institution-based system. Depending on the individual's circumstances, such informal supports may include: tuition and living allowances, subsidized housing/meals/activities, travel assistance, cultural guidance/celebrations/connectedness,

child/elder care, social/recreational activities, fundraising, exercise buddies, and emotionally supportive friends. Although personal supports may be delivered through formal or informal means, I believe that because these kinds of programs and services have not been prohibited from operating on many post-secondary campuses in Canada, some of these supports can be categorized as falling within a range of administrative and curricular supports.

1.7. Indigenous Cultural Supports

Many of the gains in educational attainment for Indigenous students have come through traditional on-campus course delivery and the creation of limited-entry programs of study delivered by culturally sensitive instructors. Course offerings have been buttressed by campus-based student support systems such as the Indigenous students' associations that are sanctioned by many Canadian universities. The academic and personal supports provided by staff and elders operating out of Aboriginal Student Centres has been shown to be a strong resilience factor for Indigenous students. (Walker, 2000). Additionally, institutional investments are being made in developing campus-based learning communities aimed at lessening the estrangement that Indigenous students may feel as they become immersed in the multicultural plurality of on-campus student life. For example, an article by journalist Paul Wells in the November 22, 2010 issue of Maclean's magazine ('the 2010 University Rankings'), positioned the University of Victoria as a global leader in Aboriginal student support programs through their development and delivery of the LE,NONET project which comprises seven specialized programs including: targeted bursaries, an emergency relief fund, a peer mentor program, an Aboriginal community internship program, a research apprenticeship program supervised by Indigenous faculty, on-line personal and academic counselling, and faculty and staff workshops. (Wells, p. 18).

Models of inclusion such as the LE, NONET project and Aboriginal Student Centres contribute to the recruitment and retention of Indigenous students by meeting their physical, cultural and social needs. However, in order to counter the hegemonic discourses contained within Western curricula, some post-secondary institutions have also taken steps to increase inclusivity in the psychological realm of learner needs. The adaptation of all curricula to reflect a greater cultural sensitivity to the historical experience and traditional ways of knowing of Indigenous people is one important step that is being undertaken within some Canadian post-secondary institutions. The introduction of mandatory undergraduate courses addressing specific Indigenous issues, experiences and outcomes within the health, social work and education fields has begun in several programs; unfortunately however, it is only to a much lesser extent that post-secondary institutions have begun to reach out to Indigenous audiences using the Information Age technologies that have the potential to transcend the historic narratives that surround Indigenous-Settler relations.

Accordingly, it is my position that the Indigenous cultural supports that can be found at some Canadian post-secondary institutions may provide a degree of administrative, curricular or pedagogic support for students, faculty and non-instructional staff.

1.8. Off-campus Learner Support

Since receiving its institutional charter in 1978, Alberta-based Athabasca University has developed into Canada's pre-eminent leader in distance learning programming. Having emerged contemporaneously with the Information Age, Athabasca quickly adopted a program delivery model that extensively relies upon electronic communications technologies. The program delivery model administered by accredited e-learning institutions such as Athabasca requires instructors, administrators and course designers to consider and develop methods of meeting the

needs of a diverse range of adult learners who are not ever required to set foot upon a physical campus. In order to maintain the accreditation standards necessary to attract fee-payers and endowments, the service delivery model of e-learning focussed institutions must be flexible enough to recognize that some students may require more support than others and there may be times in a student's academic career when they require more help than otherwise. "Flexible, continuously available, easily accessible learner support systems are required, but such systems must be genuinely useful." (Hughes, 2004. p. 368). With respect to academic supports necessary to effectively support off-campus learners, it cannot be underscored enough that distance learners are not a homogenous lot. "In a sense, every user is a special group of one." (Mood, 1995, p.127). Faculty, course designers and teaching aides/tutors should approach course delivery with an appreciation that resources, activities and assignments should accommodate the local values, styles of learning, and cognitive preferences of the target population. (McLoughlin, & Oliver, 2000).

Non-academic support services for off-campus learners vary from institution to institution, but drawing upon Athabasca as a model for e-learning leadership, important facets of non-academic support they have developed include: administration support (e.g., registration and learning portals, up-to-date policy and procedure web pages, user satisfaction surveys), technological support (e.g., computing helpdesks), study skills assistance (e.g., peer support, writing centres), online counselling (e.g., academic intervention, personal crisis assessment and referral), program advising (e.g., on-going transfer credit assessment process, program requirement advising), and digital library services (e.g., search tutorials, integration with course materials, asynchronous helpdesk). (Hughes, 2004 pp. 372 - 376).

With respect to off-campus learner supports, it is my position that many of these programs and services fulfil administrative, curricular and pedagogic supports to students, faculty and non-instructional staff of the institutions that have prioritized the development of these types of support functions within their service delivery models.

1.9. Organization of this Dissertation

This dissertation is presented in a manner that is consistent with the formatting recommendations of the University of Saskatchewan College of Graduate Studies. Chapter One introduces my rationale for undertaking this research, presents the overarching research questions and provides a definitional framework for the varying conceptualizations of ‘support’ utilized in this dissertation. Chapter Two presents contextualising information regarding the provision of post-secondary education to Indigenous peoples in Canada, and provides an overview of institutional responses that have been implemented in their efforts to meet the needs of Indigenous adult learners through distance education modalities. Chapter Three presents the methodological dimensions associated with this dissertation, including statements regarding my epistemological positioning and personal framework for understanding, as well as an overview of the procedural milestones that guided my process of inquiry. Within an overarching and unifying metaphoric representation, Chapter Four gives voice to the participants in this study and demonstrates how their expressed experiences relate directly to numerous of qualitative categorisations that emerged from my data analysis activities. Chapter Five presents the differential findings, conclusions and implications of this study that may have resonance for students, distance education program delivery staff, and post-secondary institutional leadership. The final sections of this dissertation detail the references drawn upon in support of the

arguments made, and present two appendices associated with the methodological dimensions of this study.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXT AND RELATED LITERATURE

Unlike some of my close acquaintances, I have not been raised to be a historian or keeper of stories. For numerous possible reasons, the retention and relating of precise details of historical significance has not been an asset that ever became fully activated within me. This is a fact of my life, and I feel no less a whole human being as a result of this situation. For me, I feel fortunate to have been encouraged to nurture other equally important talents that lie in latency in many others. Elders and others whose opinions I respect have told me that I am a good observer, and that I have a breadth of perspective that is not as site-specific as the field of vision of many others. I am as thankful for these mental gifts as I am for the physical gifts that I inherited and have subsequently been lucky enough to retain.

As a way of compensating for my average capacity to remember significant details, I have come to rely upon technologies that would have been unheard of in the days of my ancestors, but which serve me well. For me, the actions associated with physically printing, typing, cataloguing and retrieving details of events serve as important mnemonic devices that facilitate my understanding of the circumstances I find myself in from time to time. Just as when I mark an “x”, a date, and the weather conditions on a Geographic Service of Canada map to denote a good place to find animals at certain times of the year, I have found the act of typing out some antecedent details can significantly contextualize an experience for me and serve as a reminder to me at a later date that there may be some important factors I should bear in mind as I consider setting out on a course of action that is not part of my everyday routine. In light of my desire to establish a better context for the data collection I undertook for my doctoral research, I feel that it is important to describe some important details that blazed the trail for me on my

research journey. One such important consideration is what I consider to be several significant contextual factors associated with the history of post-secondary education with Indigenous peoples in Canada.

In this Chapter, and throughout this dissertation, I use the term ‘Indigenous peoples’ to refer to the descendants of original inhabitants of the lands now recognized as comprising the Nation of Canada. This definition is consistent with International law, and for the purposes of this document, it does not substantially differ from the Canadian term ‘Aboriginal peoples of Canada’ as defined in the *Constitution Act (1982)*. Although the Canadian term recognizes three distinct classes of Aboriginal peoples - Indians, Inuit, and Metis - each groups’ experiences of colonisation have differed from each other in substantially dissimilar ways, due in large part to their unique relationships with the Federal and Provincial Crown. For instance, in terms of education, Metis people and Indians who became enfranchised had been able to access post-secondary education from Canadian institutions far in advance of such opportunities being extended to registered Indians and Inuit.

The objective of this dissertation is intended to illuminate the experiences of support articulated by post-secondary alumni who self-identify as having Indigenous ancestry, regardless of their Aboriginal designation under the *Constitution Act (1982)*.

2.1. A Synopsis of Indigenous Post-secondary Education Policy in Canada

There has been very little scholarly research undertaken on the phenomenon of Indigenous adult learners participating in post-secondary distance education within Canada. Unlike in the United States of America where a network of tribal colleges have established solid track records of delivering coursework through distance education modalities, few Canadian researchers have systematically conducted inquiries into the policy dimensions of the

relationship between Indigenous place-bound adult learners and e-learning educational service providers. Consequently, this contextual piece draws upon numerous secondary sources in an effort to present a reasonable overview of the policy landscape within which e-learning courses are being currently being provided to Indigenous peoples across Western Canada.

As is the case for many other areas of Canadian social policy, the complex interplay between Federal/Provincial post-secondary education policy and the aspirations of Indigenous peoples of Canada has led to somewhat of a warped current situation wherein Indigenous communities have limited control over education and training. Despite being systematically disadvantaged for the past three or four centuries, many Indigenous people do aspire for themselves or their children to obtain post-secondary certification. However, unlike the circumstances of several generations ago, several Indigenous student support initiatives have emerged at both the Federal level as policy, and at the Provincially-chartered university level as programs. In order to clarify the nature and extent of these Indigenous student support policies and programs, it is important to delineate the key historical antecedents to the current state of affairs.

It has often been pointed out that the primary function of education is the socialization of young people in society and that this happens primarily in the home. European colonisation of the territories of the Indigenous peoples of North America introduced formal institutions that changed the nature and function of education for Indigenous people dramatically. “American Indian education historically occurred in a holistic social context based on reciprocal relationships involving all dimensions of one’s being while providing both personal development and technical skills through participation in community life.” (Cajete, p.26) However “as early

as the 17th century, efforts were being made to “francize” selected aboriginal youths, that is, to educate them and incorporate them into European New World society at its lowest rungs.”

(Barman, Hebert & McCaskill, 1986 p.4). The results of these long-ago interactions, had limited utility for Indigenous people however, as is evidenced in a 1784 epistle of Benjamin Franklin wherein he cites a 1744 recitation made by an unnamed spokesman of the Iroquois Confederacy as saying:

...several of our young people were formerly brought up at the colleges of the northern provinces; they were instructed in all your sciences; but, when they came back to us, they were bad runners, ignorant of every means of living in the woods, unable to bear either cold or hunger, knew neither how to build a cabin, take a deer, or kill an enemy, spoke our language imperfectly, were therefore neither fit for hunters, warriors, nor counsellors; they were totally good for nothing. We are however not the less obliged by your kind offer, though we decline accepting it; and, to show our grateful sense of it, if the gentlemen of Virginia will send us a dozen of their sons, we will take great care of their education, instruct them in all we know, and make men of them.

As a response to the growing unease in numerous military and socio-economic policy areas between the Indigenous peoples and his colonists, in 1763 King George III of Great Britain issued a Royal Proclamation that formalized the terms of engagement between settlers in the colonies of North America and the Indigenous peoples who resided in the territories of Europe’s “New World”. The 1763 Royal Proclamation together with the promise made to sustain the welfare of Indigenous peoples made in the 1764 Treaty of Niagara form the contemporary justification for the fiduciary relationship between First Nations and the Crown, as represented by the Government of Canada (Borrows, 1997). The ancestral Indigenous leaders who learned of these undertakings through the transmission of oral knowledge understood the sacred

covenant associated with treaty-making, and henceforth from 1763, anticipated that treaties would be required before settlement and resource exploitation could occur in the territories of their peoples.

The legal necessity of establishing and upholding the spirit and intent of treaties has enshrined a special relationship between the Crown and Indigenous peoples. In the Mi'kmaq territories, Peace and Friendship treaties were established, whereas in the Great Plains, treaties took the form of numbered agreements that were signed between 1872 and 1906 (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2006). In the later documents, it is clear that Indigenous leaders understood the value of education, as the terms of this fiduciary obligation were negotiated explicitly in post-confederation treaties (Carr-Stewart, 2001), as exemplified by the following excerpt from Treaty 9:

Further, His Majesty agrees to pay such salaries of teachers to instruct the children of said Indians, and also to provide such school buildings and educational equipment as may seem advisable to His Majesty's government of Canada. (James Bay Treaty Number 9, 1905-06)

When these agreements were not upheld by the Crown after the tribes had settled permanently on land reserved for their exclusive use, Indigenous leaders sought remedies through the means that were available to them at the time. For example, in 1912, a main issue pursued by the Qu'Appelle Indians of Treaty 4 was to have “an Indian institution established where they can receive the higher education, so they can become the Indian Agents, clerks and professional men.” (Carter, 1990). For decades, however such protests fell upon deaf ears as successive governments of Canada delivered education in partnership with several Christian denominations to Registered Indians through the residential school system. It was not until the repatriation of the Canadian Constitution in 1982 that Indigenous peoples could receive a fair hearing regarding

unfair treatment that occurred as a result of treaty violations. As a result of court rulings initiated by Indigenous individuals and groups, Canada now recognizes that historic treaties must be more broadly interpreted and must take into account Indigenous oral history. With respect to the provision of post-secondary education, Indigenous people in 21st Century Canada are now better able to assert that the treaties spoke to more than just the basic elementary-level education that was provided in the reserve-based schools of the first half of the 20th Century.

The special relationship between settlers and Indigenous peoples established by King George III was codified within the context of Western jurisprudence in the *Constitution Act, 1867* of the Dominion of Canada. Henceforth, all matters coming within the class of Indians and lands reserved for Indians would fall within the jurisdiction of the Parliament of Canada, and the issuance of charters to universities and community colleges was placed under the purview of the Provincial legislatures. Although the Dominion government held exclusive jurisdiction over the provision of educational services to Registered Indians and Inuit, Canada did not create any specific educational legislation; rather the government administered all matters relating to education under the umbrella of the Indian Act. (Carr-Stewart, 2001).

Perhaps not surprisingly then, the process of education for Indigenous peoples was marked by a single dominant pattern, regardless of their tribal, territorial and cultural origins. Formal education in Canada was assimilationist. The primary purpose of formal education was to indoctrinate Indigenous peoples into a Christian, European worldview, thereby ‘civilizing’ our ancestors. (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Whether administered by a missionary in a tribal village, a nun in a residential school, an accredited teacher in a band-operated day school, or a tenured professor at a university, the assimilationist bent of formal

education for Indigenous students of all ages was (and to a large extent still is) grounded in cognitive imperialism marked by the imposition of worldviews based on a false notion of cultural superiority. (Battiste, p.192)

As is the case with many other social programs impacting Indigenous peoples, the Constitutional division of powers between the Federal and Provincial Crown has generated much discussion and debate in the legislative branches of governments in Canada and around policy tables for well over 140 years. In regard to post-secondary education policy for Indigenous peoples in Canada, the debate takes two separate but related directions. The first direction focuses on the question of Constitutional responsibility for providing services to the descendants of the Indigenous peoples who first inhabited the landscapes commonly referred to as Canada. The second direction is based in the insistence of the Federal government that post-secondary programming for Indigenous peoples is not a treaty right, but rather a discretionary and non-essential policy directive. The deconstruction of both of these arguments reveals the underlying principles of patriarchal Eurocentric domination that continue to inform the postsecondary education experiences of Indigenous students today.

The 1982 *Constitution Act* (s.35) designates three categories of Aboriginal people within Canada: Indians, Inuit and Métis. With the exception of the Inuit, no other category is consistent with historic First Nations self-conceptualizations of Tribal membership, as far as I know. I myself, as a person with the DNA of Mi'kmaq ancestors in my body's cells do not claim any category of these governmentally sanctioned definitional nomenclature for myself. The terms "Indian", "Métis" and "Aboriginal" are all products of 2nd Millennium ways of conceptualizing the world and the Indigenous peoples who didn't happen to live in Europe during that time. The influence of European age of enlightenment thinking based in classist

biases constructed North American Indigenous peoples as “the other” in the meta-narrative of Colonial thought, and the post-colonial residue of this typology still exerts considerable influence into the early years of the 3rd Millennium, AD.

Since the passage of the first *Indian Act* by the Dominion of Canada in 1876, the paternalistically biased historic and contemporary definitions of who may claim entitlement to Registered Indian status and associated access to health, educational and social programs for Status Indians has been quite limited. Currently, many programs designated for the use of Status Indians exclude Registered Indians who reside off reserve, non-Status Indians, and others who share markers of Indigenous ancestry within their genetic composition, such as myself. The inclusion of *Section 88* into the *Indian Act* (1951), sought to correct some of the legal inequities regarding the provision of services to Indigenous peoples, however the issue of governmental responsibility for the provision of post-secondary education to Indigenous peoples only became cloudier at that time, as Registered Indians would henceforth be entitled to attend and graduate from universities and colleges without being forced to surrender their Indian status (if they had it to begin with) upon the conferral of a degree.

Since enacted in law in 1956, the Federal government has assumed responsibility for the funding of Registered Indian students to attend post-secondary educational institutions, however until 1968, the very few Indigenous students who did manage to attend a university or college could access only limited Federal funding to support their education.

With the exception of some Aboriginal teacher education programs that were launched in the mid-1960's in Ontario and the Northwest Territories and which attempted to cater to the needs of Aboriginal students, it is generally agreed that little in post-secondary education for Aboriginal peoples existed prior to the 1970's. (Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, p.13)

In 1968, the Federal Department of Indian and Northern Development (DIAND) created a vocational program which also provided direct financial assistance to Registered Indians and Inuit enrolled in universities or colleges (Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2006). It was not until 1977 however that a coherent and comprehensive program was created through the *Appropriations Act* by DIAND that allowed for the funding of Aboriginal post-secondary student support programs above and beyond the provision of tuition, books and living expenses necessary to support individual adult learners in their studies. (Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000).

Contemporaneously to the Federal government's creation of funding programs for select individuals of Indigenous ancestry to attend universities and colleges, Indigenous leaders were also taking steps to have a much greater say in post-secondary education than was then being provided within mainstream institutions of higher learning. In a 1973 response to the *1969 White Paper Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy*, the National Indian Brotherhood had formulated the *Indian Control of Indian Education* policy statement which called for more than simple funding to individuals as part of a comprehensive post-secondary education strategy for Indigenous peoples. Although focused on the entire educational enterprise as it related to Registered Indian children and adults, the *Indian Control of Indian Education* statement did call for the local control of First Nations education and curriculum development at the university and vocational institute levels. Through the efforts of Indigenous leaders, this policy statement was accepted in principle by Federal government as National policy. (Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000).

Some promising successes were achieved as a result of the adoption of the *Indian Control of Indian Education* statement by Canada. The postsecondary participation rates of Registered

Indians did increase 12% between the 1970's and 1990's, and by 1996, the post-secondary enrolment rate for Registered Indians between the ages of 17-34 years was 6.0% compared with 10.4% in mainstream Canadian society (INAC, 1997). Although these figures are not disaggregated to demonstrate how many of the Indigenous students may have been classified as off-campus learners, the nascence of the internet in the early 1990's would suggest that any such learners would likely have been taking courses through off-campus cohort based programming or correspondence type distance education. For on-campus Indigenous students however, some were beginning to benefit from increased administrative support for their studies as partnership programs between local Indigenous communities and colleges/universities were initiated during this period. Additionally, in 1983 the University and College Entrance Program was established to enable Indigenous students lacking university entrance qualifications to gain admission by taking preparatory courses (Standing Committee, 2006). Under the Post Secondary Educational Assistance Program, funding from DIAND was made available to all Registered Indians and Inuit who were eligible to attend universities and colleges, although it was recognized at the time that additional funding and student support services would be required from Canada if the postsecondary education participation rate for Indigenous peoples was ever to equal the 20% national average rate of adult post-secondary participation of the time. (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 1989).

In 1985, however, a report commissioned by the Government of Canada (Nielsen Report) demonstrated the intent of the Conservative Government of the day to shift Canada's policy direction away from the perception of post-secondary education as being a treaty right claimable by all Registered Indians. The 1985 *Task Force on Program Review* identified "areas of overlap

between federal and provincial governments” which provided the Government of Canada with a rationale to:

...reduce programs to Indians, thereby reducing expenditures and to invoke provincial government and private sector involvement in the delivery of Indian programs and services. At the same time, the government sought to pass on its responsibility for Indians and limit expenditures to Indian communities, in the guise of local control, thereby forcing Indian governments to resolve current and historical problems themselves. (Di Gangi & Jones, 1998, p. 165).

By reconceptualising Indigenous post-secondary programming as a non-statutory program delivered at the discretion of Canada, Federally administered programs targeting individuals could be scaled back, and programmatic approaches designed to encourage colleges and universities to recruit and retain Indigenous students could be ramped up. Despite outcries from Indigenous individuals, organizations and their allies, the Federal government’s response was: “As matters now stand, Ottawa’s position is that post-secondary education is neither a statutory right, nor is it an aboriginal treaty right” (SICC, 1989), and consequently by the mid 1990’s, Canada’s Federal policies and budgets began to reflect the recommendations of the 1985 Neilson Report.

As the scope of Federal transfer payments to provincial governments expanded to include funding for Indigenous post-secondary programs, the Provinces continued to insist that services targeted to Registered Indians should fall under exclusive Federal jurisdiction, hence the Federal government should bear 100% of the financial responsibility for the provision of educational services to Registered Indians, regardless of whether the individual resided on or off-reserve. In 1989, the Federal Post Secondary Educational Assistance Program was replaced by the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) which tightened individual eligibility and

restricted direct student funding, and the Indian Studies Student Support Program was established to assist Provincially-chartered institutions to increase the participation of Indigenous students on their campuses (Standing Committee, 2006). The PSSSP policy for the allocation of monies to First Nations Bands to assist band member post- secondary students is still in place in 2012, and the ISSSP policy continues to provide funding to Provincially chartered colleges and universities for the development of post secondary programs targeting Indigenous students. (INAC, 2000).

2.2. Post-secondary Institutional Responses to Indigenous Learner Support

Even before the creation of the University and College Entrance Program and the Indian Studies Student Support Program in the 1970's and 1980's, the Canadian social justice and feminist movements of the late 1960's and early 1970's had propelled many university administrators, department heads, and professors to reach out to Indigenous communities. Since the mid 1970's, Canadian universities have begun to create space for Indigenous students using a variety of strategies of inclusion. The introduction of specialized restricted entry professional development programs (e.g., Indian Teacher Education Programs, Social Work Indigenous specializations), Indigenous students' associations, and the increasing inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in classroom curriculum have done much to create space within academia that is much more accommodating to Indigenous ways of knowing than even I recall from my first experiences as an undergraduate student in the faculty of Arts at the University of British Columbia in 1980. In an effort to bring Indigenous knowledges into academia in less exploitive way than was undertaken by faculty-appointment holding anthropologists in the first half of the 20th Century, a number of Native Studies departments have also been created in Canadian universities since 1970. As of December 2010, five separate undergraduate programs in Native

Studies (or similar) had been created within the universities of British Columbia, three in Alberta, three in Saskatchewan, two in Manitoba, three in Ontario, one in Nova Scotia and one in Newfoundland and Labrador in December 2010. (Canadian-Universities.net, 2010, Stonechild, 2006).

Regardless of these advances, the Institutional response to the increased presence of Indigenous students on campus has largely fallen within one of four models of Indigenous higher education (Barnhardt, 1991). The categorized models of Indigenous higher education that were articulated by Barnhardt are described in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 - Models of Indigenous post-secondary programming.

Assimilationist Model	Programs for Indigenous peoples are controlled by the university system and designed with the premise that the goal of education is to assimilate Indigenous people into society.
Integrated Model	Universities provide a level of autonomy for Indigenous programs within the larger institution by means of advisory committees, Indigenous faculty, etc.
Independent Model	Tribal or regional colleges are established with strong local control, but lacking in critical mass and resources to consistently meet accreditation requirements.
Federated Model	Financially and administratively separate from a university but must vet programs through the affiliated university for academic validation Barnhardt, 1991 (in Stonechild, 2006, pp. 104-5).

Examples of post-secondary institutions following each of these models of Indigenous program delivery exist throughout Canada today. These Indigenous program criteria were catalogued in an informal survey undertaken by Swampy Cree Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Knowledges and Social Work Michael Hart in July 2007 in an effort to determine how many Indigenous faculty members were then employed within Faculties of Social Work across Canada and the extent to which Indigenous content was being incorporated into

curriculum. Although he did not receive responses from every accredited Faculty of Social Work regarding Indigenous faculty staffing, it is clear that the entire range of Indigenous program models articulated by Barnhardt is represented to some extent across Canada. In Table 2.2, I have attempted to illustrate the degree of incorporation of Indigenous faculty and curricular content across the Faculties of Social Work that responded to Hart's survey using the four categories described by Barnhardt as a benchmark.

Table 2.2 - Indigenous Content in Canadian Undergraduate Social Work Programs

Institution	Undergraduate Social Work Indigenous Program Elements	Categorization
UVic	Indigenous specializations, Indigenous faculty, on-campus, decentralized and on-line course delivery	Integrated
NVIT	Indigenous philosophy basis of all programs, Indigenous faculty, on-campus only	Independent/ Federated
UNBC	Indigenous specialization, Indigenous faculty, on-campus only	Integrated
TRU	Aboriginal perspective, no Indigenous faculty	Assimilationist
UCalgary	Indigenous faculty, decentralized delivery with Indigenous cohorts	Integrated
FNUC	Indigenous specialization, Indigenous faculty, on-campus and decentralised course delivery	Federated
UManitoba	No Indigenous faculty, decentralized delivery with Indigenous cohorts	Assimilationist
Laurentian	Indigenous faculty, decentralized delivery with Indigenous cohorts	Integrated
Carleton	Decentralized delivery with Indigenous cohorts	Assimilationist
Dalhousie/ St. Thomas	Indigenous faculty, decentralised delivery with Aboriginal cohorts	Integrated

Hart, M. unpublished personal communication. July 9, 2007

In this table, the criterion identified as “Indigenous faculty” refers to situations where program policy dictates that Indigenous courses must only be taught by Indigenous faculty.

Although my classifications using Barnhardt’s categories would likely generate some debate among the non-Indigenous faculty and administrators of these programs, I believe that the Indigenous faculty and Indigenous advisory committees associated with each program would likely agree with my classifications. It should also be noted that each of these institutions also have created other Indigenous student support programs such as Aboriginal student advisors, Aboriginal students’ associations and each has developed scholarships and bursaries limited to Indigenous applicants only. Since this informal study was conducted in 2007, the circumstances of each of these Faculties with relation to the incorporation of Indigenous content and Indigenous faculty may have changed significantly, although there has been no other systematic research undertaken to garner this sort of information that I am aware of in the intervening period.

By way of contrast with a professional field other than social work, an example of the types of accommodations being made for Indigenous students within Canadian Medical School programs demonstrates that much work still needs to be done to fully integrate Indigenous worldviews and knowledges into many professional degree programs. This study was undertaken by the Indigenous Physician’s Association of Canada in 2007 and involved reporting by Deans of Undergraduate Faculties of Medicine under the auspices of improving recruitment of mature Aboriginal students into the profession of medicine. This information is presented here as an example of the systematic efforts that are occurring within some professions to recruit Indigenous students into educational programs across Canada, albeit in a professional program other than education or social work.

Table 2.3 - Accommodations for Aboriginal Peoples in Canadian Medical Schools, 2007

UBC	5% seats reserved for Aboriginals; modified admissions process; Native student support program
UAlberta	7 reserved positions/yr.
UCalgary	Native student support program
USask	5 reserved positions/yr.; Native student support program
UManitoba	Modified admissions process; Native student support program
McMaster	Modified admissions process
UOttawa	7 reserved positions/yr.; Native student support program
Queens	4 reserved positions; modified admissions process
UToronto	Native students support program
Western	3 positions
McGill	Native students support program
UMontreal	None
USherbrooke	None
Laval	None
Memorial	Aboriginal liaison officer (Inuit students)
Dalhousie	2 seats; Native students support program

Hill, 2007. p.20

As promising/disturbing as these figures suggest, it is clear that the post-secondary institutional level response to increasing access and improving student experiences for Indigenous learners across Canada remains largely unsystematized. Despite the emergence and

evolution of governmental and institutional policies and programs targeted towards supporting individual students and post-secondary institutions, data collected for the 2005 Canada Labour Force Survey indicate that in Western Canada, only seven percent of Canadians with Aboriginal ancestry had university degrees, compared with 18% of non-Aboriginal Canadians. (Luffman & Sussman, 2007. p.15). I personally can count myself among the beneficiaries of ISSSP sponsored programs, however I also appreciate that although a significant increase in completion rates has occurred, there is still a long way to go before equity in post-secondary participation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians can be established.

2.3. Indigenous Student Support in e-learning Environments

To a large extent, the initiatives undertaken by North American universities seeking to advance culturally sensitive practice with Indigenous learners have focussed on their proven and familiar methods to address the needs of traditional on-campus adult learners. As positive as these efforts have been, the socio-economic gaps between “have” and “have-not” communities continues to grow in Canada, especially in regards to First Nations communities that find themselves relegated to the shoulders of the Information Superhighway for a variety of reasons. For adult learners residing in remote communities, the much vaunted promises of distance education to provide equal opportunities for access to education, alternative paths for the disadvantaged and disenfranchised, a second chance for education for adults who missed out on education in their formative years and to encourage life-long learning still remains largely unfulfilled (Rumble, 1989). This is despite the fact that a thorough set of prerequisites for successful distance learning were identified more than 45 years ago (Eldstroem, 1966).

These prerequisites can be related to distance learning in remote Aboriginal communities by recognizing the following: good mass communication, good home

environment, language fluency, skilled course writers, printing capabilities, recognition of distance learning as legitimate, and being geared to specific student goals rather than long-term community goals. (McMullen & Rohrbach, 2003, pp. 93-94).

Although the processes for engaging distance learners have been articulated for several decades, the routine inconsistency of their application leaves many place-bound adult learners without many of the foundational student supports necessary to complete their programs of study.

Through e-learning, students who would normally be bound to their site are able to access courses and therefore pursue post-secondary degrees or professional development in their own communities (Carnes, Awang & Marlow, 2003; VanHorn & Myrick, 2001). But although asynchronous communication with off-campus learners has become much more regularized through e-mail, electronic learning management systems and reasonably priced hardware and software, it is my belief that university administrative functions and instructional design issues have not been as accommodating to non-traditional learners, including those who choose to pursue educational opportunities without having to remove themselves from the cultural responsibilities and familial support systems present in their home communities. For example, in my own experience as an undergraduate distance learner, I recall being acutely aware of the unique situation of peers in my cohort who had substantial cultural roles to fill their home communities. Within the kinship network of Northcoast tribal groups, the clan responsibilities for many of my fellow students required they participate in ceremonies at various unscheduled times throughout the calendar year. From initiating new-borns to the hand-digging of graves, my classmates were following roles that had been established thousands of years previously. As community members who also happened to be post-secondary students, the administrative

imperative to attend an on-campus class during the weeks of community mourning that proscribe travel outside the village created a conflict that would have seen their rapid exit from many campus based post-secondary learning environments.

As a post-secondary course developer, I believe that effective on-line distance learning with Indigenous learners works best in situations that incorporate moderated group activities that build upon values that are aligned with Indigenous ways of knowing, such as interdependence and co-operation (Kovach & Montgomery, 2010), while also respecting cultural roles ascribed through heredity, gender, or age. I have seen that by creating situations that can lessen the feelings of isolation and/or cultural inappropriateness that typify the experience of learners who may be unwilling to participate in the competitive manner that is not discouraged in many on-campus settings, the moderated group discussions of on-line education can augment student learning in ways that courses designed for on-campus delivery do not. Although on-line group activities can be designed to incorporate elements of Indigenous ways of exchanging information such as talking circles, these also can present a challenge for instructors who are asked to assign individualized grades based on demonstrated achievement of an established learning objective. Group activities designed into on-campus curriculum anticipate roles that do not translate well into asynchronous course delivery where all participants (including the instructor) are content providers, and presentation skills are limited by internet bandwidth, computer hardware and software compatibility issues. And for many Indigenous adult learners who do not have proficiency in keyboarding or the nuances of English language grammar and composition, their participation in on-line group activities may be proscribed if they feel they may be publicly shamed from within their peer group because of their lack of keyboarding proficiency.

For Indigenous communities that have struggled to retain cultural integrity and individual Indigenous learners who have had to weigh the risks associated with a move to a large urban centre for schooling, the increased access to reasonably priced, culturally sensitive and professionally accredited educational opportunities through internet based learning is a tremendous advancement. If adult learners do not have to leave their community, and can still access quality individualized programs that increasingly demonstrate sensitivity to Indigenous cultural and remote community dynamics, North American society benefits as a whole.

Some post-secondary institutions have embraced the opportunity to improve social justice through distance education. By capitalizing on technological innovation and the democratizing effects of a stable telecommunications infrastructure and infusing their pedagogical approach with principles of emancipatory and anti-oppressive education, forward-thinking Canadian university faculties have taken concrete steps to improve the post-secondary educational experience of place-bound Indigenous learners. By making strategic investments in learner support services, honouring Indigenous student and community experience, and capitalizing on unprecedented opportunities for learner access, they have demonstrated leadership in servicing marginalized Indigenous audiences that will benefit these Institutions and their graduates for decades to come.

In this chapter, I have attempted to give an overview of what I consider to be the key policy and practical dimensions that relate to the inclusion of Indigenous adult learners within Canadian post-secondary educational institutions. In doing so, I sought to draw due attention to

significant factors that illustrate the historic and contemporary assimilationist underpinnings that are inherent to many educational enterprises, while also pointing to the actions that some professional programs and individuals have taken to redress the normalised social exclusions of the past as these relate to contemporary Indigenous student experiences. By courageously facing the past and making concerted efforts to achieve social justice via the appropriate use of emergent technologies, the economic and social disparities that were once reified within institutions of higher learning may yet give way to reconciliation between academia and Indigenous peoples.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

What's the Indian word for a bad hunter? - A vegetarian. (Anon)

In the academic tradition associated with the production of a dissertation, the third chapter typically addresses the research design and methodology aspects of the student researcher's study. Typical components of this chapter provide details with respect to the following areas: the author's theoretical foundations with which s/he approaches the study (i.e., epistemological positioning, framework for understanding); the research questions for which answers are sought; the design dimensions of the study (e.g., time frame, sampling criteria, methodological considerations, data collection, data analysis). The third chapter typically concludes with discussions of the research process itself (e.g., ethical considerations, factors associated with entering the field, and data collection issues), and various data interpretation dynamics (e.g., scholarly contribution and significance). This format lends itself well to a scholarly tradition that anticipates that "the finished dissertation will become the first draft of a publishable book". (MLA, 2007. p.30)

For this dissertation however, I believe that it would be congruent for me to present these typical research design and methodology discussions within a personal context that is more aligned with an Indigenous hunting model of storytelling wherein a wide range of possible meanings is plausible. (Basso, 1996. p. 60) To me, an Indigenous model of storytelling can be inclusive of the narrator's own life circumstances and experiences, which, in the case of this dissertation have been marked by my having to conduct research in ways that I would consider to be respectful to Indigenous participants, but which also must bear sensitivity to the post-colonial

realities of the 21st century worlds within which Indigenous peoples walk on a regular basis. The post-colonial realities of academic research being undertaken by Indigenous graduate students were well-articulated by Kovach in her 2009 landmark book, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations and Contexts*, wherein she states:

Characteristics, Conversations and Contexts, wherein she states:

“Colonial interruptions to Indigenous culture continue, and there is no way to address tribal epistemologies and Indigenous research frameworks without considering these relations. ... In post-secondary institutions, Indigenous students experience the burn of colonial research on a consistent basis most evident in the suppression of Indigenous knowledges. Post-colonial? There is nothing post about it. (p.76).

With respect to my doctoral research, I fully realized that I was operating within the colonised space of mainstream academia throughout every phase of my project. In order to complete this dissertation in accordance with time proven parameters for qualitative research, I made strategic concessions that could accommodate for institutional timelines and administrative processes that function within the constraints of the Gregorian calendar and established standards of practice, and not within Indigenous conceptions of doing things when the time is right in a manner that is respectful of Indigenous protocol. Because I considered myself to be a guest who was utilizing another person’s office as I conducted my work, I followed the advice I had been given many years ago by elders who spoke of the need to conduct myself as an ambassador of my ancestors.

One example of the balance I needed to establish between the formal activities associated with conducting this research and the personal elements of the other elements of my life is in the area of relationality. As mentioned previously, I began working as a contract academician more than five years before applying to enter the PhD. program for which this doctoral research was conducted. As an Assistant Professor of Social Work, I have established working relationships

and personal friendships with numerous Indigenous academics who also work in social science disciplines at universities situated across Canada and globally. Over the years I have shared meals with many of the Indigenous authors I have cited in this dissertation - at ceremonies in some situations, and at semi-formal gatherings in other scenarios, and over a campfire in still others. My spouse (Dr. Margaret Kovach) is a well-respected academic whose scholarship is in the area of Indigenous knowledges and research methods, albeit she does work for a different employer than I. She does work in the same college (University of Saskatchewan, Education) where I was enrolled as a PhD. student, however. Accordingly, my PhD. committee was comprised of my spouse's professional colleagues, although my dissertation itself was defended before external reviewers from outside my spouse's college and/or from an institution that neither she nor I had any personal or professional association with.

This professional accommodation is unusual enough for a dissertation, but because I was also hoping to interview other Indigenous alumni of post-secondary programmes who - like me - had completed their studies through e-learning, I also had to be mindful when seeking key informants to assist me in recruitment and in selecting participants for this study. In order to maintain the integrity of established ethical standards that are required before undertaking human service research within academia, I was required to take methodological steps to ensure that I would not breach anonymity of my prospective participants, some of whom might well have been students in classes taught or attended by me, my spouse or one of my PhD. committee members. As it turned out, only one participant in my research was not known to me or one of my PhD. committee members before participating in my research; this participant was referred to my project by a key informant who has also been a close colleague of mine. Nevertheless, it is my belief that the barriers to participation in the study that arose from working within Western

procedures for ethical research (e.g., time constraints, anonymity concerns) - as well as the restricted population of prospective participants who possessed the desired sampling criteria and who were available using methods that would be congruent with the study design - were not overly detrimental to the relationality aspects inherent to the Indigenous research methodology I employed for this study.

With respect to the story I hope that this dissertation enables me to tell, I again turn to and draw upon the metaphor associated with Indigenous preparations for harvesting that I made reference to in my prologue. Accordingly, and in support of the positions I take with respect to the research design and methodology employed in this study, I found it useful to first enumerate several key preparation processes that I have experienced personally and have seen routinely performed by Indigenous hunters/fishers* prior to undertaking a trip into the field to collect nature's bounty. (Table 3.1)

These classifications are my own only. As a person of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry who can at best describe himself as a settler/guest on the traditional tribal territories of the Indigenous peoples upon whose lands I live, work and practice, I cannot emphasize enough that in no way should these categorizations be perceived as establishing any sort of definitional set of rigid cartographic delimiters in which to contain the multiplicity of phenomena associated with the activities that the Indigenous food gatherers of the world may employ before engaging in their purposive preparations.

- * Throughout this chapter I have elected to employ the term *chasseur* to refer to individuals taking purposive action towards achieving success while sojourning afield in search of personally meaningful experiences. In this context, a *chasseur* may represent either a food gatherer or a seeker of knowledge.

In recognition of the limitations of the English language and the typical discourse of academic research, I have aligned my categorization of these processes with four discrete facets of preparation, namely: 1) preparing ourselves, 2) having a plan, 3) checking our materiel, and 4) ensuring supports are there when needed. Table 3.1 illustrates these key aspects of Indigenous preparations in advance of heading afield, and gives examples of the activities I associate with each of the four identified facets of preparation.

Although not every activity listed in Table 3.1 may find a direct counterpart with the typical activities of scholarly research, I do believe that there are enough parallels to allow this information to serve as a functional framework for representing the approach I took to designing and completing the data collection and analysis phases of my doctoral research.

In order to present the methodological and design elements of the original research I undertook for this dissertation in a manner that I feel is consistent with the Indigenous methodology I utilized for this study, it is my intention to align the identified key aspects of Indigenous *chasseur* preparations with the typical subheading categories found in qualitative dissertations. Accordingly, each of the discussions associated with the subheadings below will be linked back to a concept identified in Table 3.1, and each discussion will also demonstrate how I applied the principles to my doctoral research. Although unorthodox, this presentation format is aligned with my aim of bridging Western academic tradition with Indigenous ways of knowing - as I conceive these within my own limited understanding.

Table 3.1 Key Aspects of Indigenous *Chasseur* Preparations for Heading Afield

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Preparing ourselves: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. ritually cleansing our spirits; b. focussing our attention and attuning our senses to respond to opportunities and malevolent forces that we may encounter; c. keeping our physical bodies clean and unpolluted; d. ensuring that we are emotionally and physically healthy enough to cope with inevitable stressors of the challenges ahead. |
| 2. Having a plan: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. being clear as to what to be done, why that action is necessary, and how to go about completing activities in a good way; b. deciding which roles each participant will take during the various action phases, including: preparation for field living, travelling, reconnaissance, setting up the equipment, executing the plan, dispatching our targets respectfully, dressing and transporting the catch, and cleaning up after ourselves; c. ensuring the appropriateness of the teachings being given to neophytes, and d. monitoring the well-being and safety of everyone on-site. |
| 3. Checking our materiel. | <p>Ensuring that our gear, clothing, provisions, utensils, and transportation devices will be adequate for any types game or environmental conditions we might expect to encounter for as long as we are afield.</p> |
| 4. Ensuring supports will be there when needed. | <p>Taking appropriate steps to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. people with capacity know what we are doing and where we are going; b. significant others are thinking positive thoughts about our mission; c. emergency help is reachable if needed; d. others will make time available to undertake their roles with respect to the catch upon our return. |

3.1. Epistemological Positioning

(This subheading corresponds roughly with Section 1(a). - cleansing our spirits - of Table 3.1)

“So in the Dry Month, in Lasimedek, the young man began the Rites of Purification. For it was only to one who had cleansed himself by fasting, by purging, and by self-sacrifice, could success in such an undertaking come.” (W. Wright, in Robinson, 1962. p. 24).

It is my assertion that the spiritual cleansing component of Indigenous *chasseur* preparation aligns most directly to the epistemological positioning aspect of the scholarly research tradition. More specifically, when a researcher ‘come cleans’ about her/his beliefs about knowledge, s/he is declaring an alignment with an established method of reasoning - an epistemology. Although the physical rituals of spiritual cleansing have been largely expunged in the modernist transition from oral traditions to a writing culture (Weber, 1905, as cited in Baehr, P.R & Wells, G.C., 2002), the secularization of Western academic institutions has not entirely eliminated the public declaration of belief represented by the researcher’s statements on her/his epistemological positioning in relation to the matter under scrutiny. The Indigenous epistemological principles I looked to for guidance in my own doctoral research within the Western academic tradition, are described in the sections below.

3.1.1. Honouring Stories

In the traditional Indigenous lore surrounding food harvesting with which I am familiar, much attention is given to preparing the individual for the tasks at hand. There are many reminders of the importance of making solid preparations before ever embarking upon the numerous tasks associated with hunting or fishing. The ancestral folkways of Indigenous peoples routinely remind us to “Do it right.” and “Be mindful.” Ancient Indigenous languages

describe teasing reminders of humility, such as the Nisga'a term, "*Gal-witkw*" - which roughly translates as "One who goes hunting, but returns with nothing." Oral histories remind us of catastrophic historic events that occurred when improperly trained/supervised old ones did not show respect to animals, the retribution for which included the destruction - by fire, earthquakes, landslides, floods, tsunami, tornadoes, marauding animals, or other devastating means - of villages, houses, and families. Community folklore (or a visit to the local cemetery) reminds us of individuals who have transitioned to the spirit world who were not careful enough with respect to the local elements or terrain, or whose equipment failed or was misused. It is my understanding that the oral histories of most Indigenous peoples contain many varied lessons that encourage us currently walking the earth or traversing the waters that prompt us to prepare sufficiently for tasks that require specialized knowledge or training in order to do them well enough so as to not be unlucky or to bring dishonour upon ourselves or our families. Should we not heed the encouraging reminders contained within the stories of others, we still might get lucky and return home having successfully accomplished that which we set out to do, but luck is a fickle force that cannot always be depended upon. By respecting oral knowledges and treating the shared stories of others as the gifts they are, Indigenous *chasseurs* can reduce their dependence on luck and uphold time-honoured ways of relating that can provide guidance in times of need.

3.1.2. Spirituality

Another important epistemic principle that guided my approach to my doctoral research is also connected to the concept of luck, as referenced in a story I once received in an academic gathering from respected Chickasaw teacher, Eber Hampton. "Luck," he said, "is always looking around - He walks past your door before daybreak every day and looks in. If you are

prepared for him, he will greet you and share his gifts with you.” At the time, this Indigenous teacher was talking about the systematic approach to hunting that had been introduced to him by tribal knowledge keepers whose opinions he valued. In his tribal ontology, it is apparently not uncommon for non-human forces (such as the conceptualization represented by the English word, “luck”) to be represented in anthropomorphized terms. I too accept that the energy forces that many Western thinkers describe as being mythological creatures (e.g., *Naxnok*, *Whitigo*, *Coyote*, or *Raven*) continue to have relevance in the lives of many human beings, and I personally can accept that luck “walks around” and has the power to transform an individual’s life in the manner described. To my way of thinking, the concepts of luck and transformation represent aspects of the Great Mystery - *kji-kinap* - that are observable to those who are prepared for, open to, and attuned enough to understand these forces for what they are. Being ready for the unpredictable appearance of itinerant spiritual energies is another important aspect of the epistemological position I try to bring to every action that I make, including the research activities associated with this dissertation.

3.1.3. Ceremony

Through disciplined action, it is my belief that the spiritual force that lies latent in all human beings can become actualized. It is through participating in the purposive actions of ceremony that we can draw attune ourselves to the energy vibrations of the spirit world. This was convincingly described to me by Blackfoot knowledge keeper, Leroy Little Bear who once passed his thoughts on this matter along to a group I was a part of in the following way:

Every human being has within us a radio that is capable of picking up all frequencies - AM, FM, Shortwave - you name it. Some people believe that there is only one frequency - the one their dial is tuned to - and that frequency is the only right one. But others

realise that many other frequencies do exist, and we can take steps to tune those frequencies in, if we open our minds to the possibility.

For me, this quote speaks to the importance of ceremony as a deliberate set of actions that human beings can undertake to expand our signal reception so that we can tune into other energy wavelengths and develop richer understandings of our physical and social worlds.

With respect to my own doctoral research, I agree with the position of Swampy Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2008) when he states that research undertaken in a manner consistent with an Indigenous worldview becomes “a ceremony for improving your relationship with an idea. It takes place everyday, and has taken place throughout our history” (p. 110). To me ceremony is the primary mechanism Indigenous *chasseurs* use to ritually cleanse our spirits before heading afield.

Over many years of venturing afield, I have come to see that, depending on the circumstances and the objectives being sought, sometimes the formation of a hunting party may also necessitate some spiritual cleansing beforehand in order to ensure that the work ahead gets done in a good way. Although the local Indigenous practices may not have parallels with the cultural traditions of my own ancestors, I have had occasion to witness and participate in ceremonial practices associated with the cleansing of the spirit as practiced by the culturally-informed people whose families and communities stood to benefit from traditional harvesting activities (if successful). Such activities can entail the recitation of ritual prayers and songs, or the placing of offerings into fire, smoke or water. Sometimes powerful or sacred objects are drawn upon to assist the purification process in advance of a trip afield. Because these practices are not my own, it would not be ethical for me to describe these rituals further.

In advance of my entering into the data collection phase of my doctoral research, I did take steps to prepare my spirit for the tasks ahead. I knew that I would begin embarking upon data collection and analysis activities in the Autumn of 2011, after I had completed the necessary procedural steps that the University of Saskatchewan requires before human subject research can be undertaken. In the dry months of late Summer, I paid respect to the energies of spirit world over a fire and smoke and I readied myself for interceding prayers, teachings and wisdom of the other life forces to whom I had declared my intentions for this study. Later into the data collection phase - for example, on days when I would be sending out electronic communications related to participation in the study - I always took steps to clear my mind of distractions and other thoughts that could lead to potentially counterproductive outcomes. By going about my tasks in this way, I believe that I was opening pathways for the flow of positive energies for the work at hand.

3.1.4. Ways of Knowing

By opening our senses to the possibility of other ways of knowing through ceremony we are reminded that all that one sees is not necessarily all that is perceptible. It is my limited understanding that teachings can come from many sources and in many manifestations. As with the experience of luck, there is a continuum between what may be considered an absolute windfall or a devastating catastrophe, wherein one person's experience of a particular phenomenon may be entirely different from those of another. Accordingly, it is from this vantage point as a hunter/fisher who has been received some schooling in Indigenous ways that I relate to the methodological processes of scholarly research. To my way of thinking, I can clearly see numerous parallels between the experiences of heading into the field to collect, process and disseminate data and heading into the field to harvest, preserve and distribute food. Although the fields/environments into which the participant (either hunter/fisher or social science researcher) is heading are demarcated in fundamentally different ways, it makes sense to me to scaffold across these similar experiences. This bridging of knowledge is particularly practical when related to the dynamics associated with participant preparation in advance of a field-based enterprise. I believe that this approach would be in keeping with Kovach, (2009) where she states, "However we define it, this [researcher preparation] is about doing the work in a good way. If we are attuned to the ancestors, Indigenous researchers know what this means and that it matters deeply." (p. 50).

3.2. Framework for Understanding

(Corresponds with Table 3.1, s.1(b) - Attuning our senses.)

From the teachings I have received from a variety of sources, I have come to see that many Indigenous cultures understand human development as a process of lifelong learning

where individuals can transform themselves and their community roles as their lived experiences, abilities and interests permit them. As Plains Cree elder Danny Musqua describes it:

We have a beautiful tradition and a holistic view of the universe that makes us who we are. In our circle, we need the old and the young, the old to teach and the young to keep the tradition alive. Nothing really dies out in a circle, things might get old and wear away, but they renew again, generation after generation. That is what the circle is all about. (Musqua, as cited in Knight, 2001, p.5)

Education, therefore, is an individually manifested but community moderated lifelong learning process that begins before birth and continues long after formal training has ended. It is not a process that is bound to a specific institution or phase of life, but rather lifelong learning and teachings aimed to balance all dimensions of the person were intermeshed. (Battiste, 1999).

It is my understanding that historically the acquisition of learnings necessary to graduate from one phase of life to another was achieved in relation to available knowledge holders (human and non-human alike), and individuals were expected to transform from one social role to another over the course of their lives based upon their lived experiences, interests and abilities. From what I understand, some individuals received mentoring and learned to work within established methods of inquiry that enabled them to be recognized as being competent to take on specialized roles within some Indigenous communities. In ancient times, healers, hunters, historians, and artists were all exposed to time proven and locally appropriate opportunities to observe, research and learn skills that could augment their own innate gifts.

This approach to knowledge gathering stands in contrast to formalized Western ways of information gathering and skill development - institution-based research - in that it “not only involves the construction of a body of knowledge, but it also involves the investigation of

processes by which all knowledge is passed on to successive generations and by which the skills of inquiry are acquired, as well as the processes by which social action is initiated.” (Keeves, p. 4)

4) A 2004 report of the Indigenous Peoples’ Health Research Centre to the Canadian Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics summarized the relationship between academia and Indigenous communities with a declaration that: “The old order of research - positivist, empirical, and driven by the agenda of the academy, has not served Indigenous populations whose interests are currently geared towards surviving and thriving through self-determination and control of resources including cultural and knowledge resources.” (Indigenous People’s Health Research Centre, p. 9). Although focussing primarily on the Canadian post-colonial experience, this description of the interaction between Western academic researchers and Indigenous communities is consistent with that of Indigenous communities who have come into contact with Eurocentric researchers throughout the world. This usage of the term ‘Western’ relates to a mindset that is informed by the discourse of Eurocentrism, which Henderson describes as “a dominant intellectual and educational movement that postulates the superiority of Europeans over non-Europeans ... it has been the dominant artificial context for the last five centuries, and is an integral part of scholarship, opinion and law. (2000, p. 58).

Within the professional research community, claims to knowledge and the protection of intellectual property have largely been framed within Western concepts of property and rules of knowledge production. (Indigenous People’s Health Research Centre, 2004.) These classifications of knowledge create problems for Indigenous peoples who are struggling to transform an unjust status quo that is not working well for them. It is my belief that Indigenous researchers can draw upon critical transformative theory to develop multiple strategies to counter the historic actions of Western settlers, industrialists and researchers who have been

systematically exploiting the lands, knowledges and bodies of Indigenous peoples, all the while “explaining and justifying the individual’s act of conquest, of repression of exploitation. All of it was right, rational and natural.” (Blaut, 1993. p. 26). As victims of Euro-American colonisation, the unique epistemologies that were gifted to Indigenous peoples by the Creator have become subsumed and fractured by the imperatives of modernism that could not accept and were threatened by Indigenous worldviews and socio-historic narratives.

Despite the fragmentation of worldviews and disruption of traditional social structures that has occurred within many Indigenous societies as the direct result of colonialism, the traditional value of respect was not entirely displaced within Indigenous communities. It is my understanding that in contrast to the institutionalised position ascribed to the concept of respect within Western approaches to knowledge creation, Indigenous peoples continue to engage with the concept of respect within formal and informal research contexts in an altogether different way than do many others who have undertaken their projects from a Western epistemological location. Swampy Cree scholar Shawn Wilson locates the qualities of respect within a relational approach to research that is built upon:

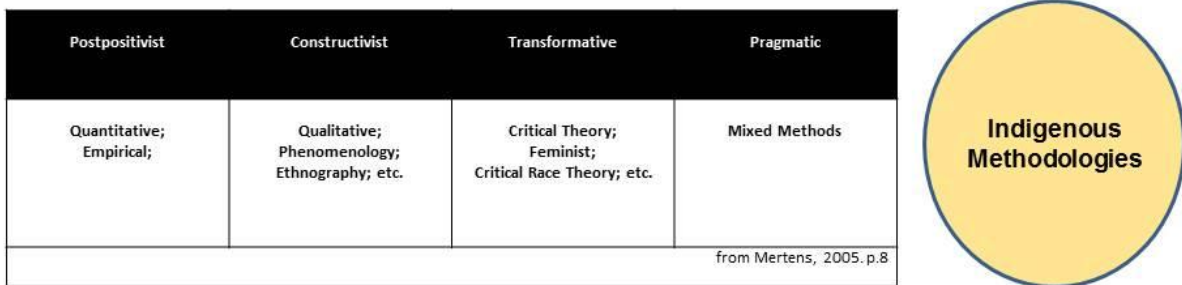
... the concept of relational accountability. Right or wrong; validity; statistically significant; worthy or unworthy; value judgments loose (*sic*) their meaning. What is more important and meaningful is fulfilling a role and obligations in the research relationship - that is being accountable to your relations. (Wilson, p. 77)

Within Indigenous societies, the spider web of relations ensures that the welfare of the group is given paramouncy and this is reflected in “the communal value of wholeness that tells members that, if they all do their parts, then societal order will result.” (Little Bear, 1999, p. 84). In this relational way, social order among community members is maintained through a respect for others which becomes externalized and observable in everyday activities that demonstrate

strength, sharing, generosity, and kindness. In relation to non-humans, the principle of respect is demonstrated through ceremony and practicing traditional ways of interacting with the animal, plant, mineral and spirit worlds. (Deloria, 1972)

For this dissertation, I elected to utilize a methodological approach that drew upon principles of Indigenous methodologies for researcher preparation and data collection in conjunction with constructivist qualitative research methods for organizing the data and presenting the findings. As displayed in Figure 1, this methodological approach distinguishes between Western research paradigms (Mertens, 2005. p.8) that derive from Enlightenment Era philosophizing, and Indigenous methodologies that themselves are *sui generis*. (Kovach, 2009.

Figure 1 - Situating Indigenous Methodologies and Western Research Paradigms



from Kovach, 2009. p. 31

p.31) Although the methods associated with Western and Indigenous knowledge-seeking may have apparent similarities in some cases, the different philosophical underpinnings between Indigenous and Western differentially emphasize various aspects of the ways in which disciplined activities may be undertaken. For example, a Western approach to protocol would

emphasize completing a research ethics board human subject review for a time-limited project, whereas Indigenous approaches to protocol that I am familiar with would likely emphasize reciprocity and on-going relationality. Alternatively, an Indigenous approach to storytelling of oral history might be construed as folklore, law or a religious work to a Western researcher, depending upon her/his positionality and scholarly discipline. With respect to my doctoral research, I drew upon a pragmatic, cross-paradigmatic approach that could facilitate collecting data through electronically modulated interviews with Indigenous participants who had lived in rural or remote communities while completing post-secondary coursework, with an aim to understanding how Canadian universities might better support future Indigenous e-learners who might find themselves in similar circumstances. I wanted to try to do my research in a good way, and to me that meant I would need to be accountable to Indigenous principles of respect, relationality and reciprocity. But I also knew that I had a limited amount of time to complete my research to the satisfaction of my PhD. committee, the administrators of a university graduate studies department, and an external reviewer so that I might be able to disseminate whatever findings I obtained - hopefully to the benefit of current Indigenous distance learners.

3.3. Research Protocol

(Corresponds with Table 3.1, s.2(a) - Being clear as to what is to be done.)

In order to be clear about what is to be done and why it is that the action is necessary, a solid plan is required before ever contemplating stepping into the field to fulfill an identified need. Regardless of whether the objective is related to meeting a basic need for survival, or seeking a broader teleological understanding of some dimension of nature, it is important to know why it is that we are seeking that thing. “Qualitative research design ... begins with a question, or at least an intellectual curiosity if not a passion for a particular topic.” (Janesick,

2000, p. 382) For my doctoral research, it was my own personal and professional experiences with receiving and delivering post-secondary coursework while residing in communities many kilometers distant from any campus of my home institution that propelled me to consider a systematic exploration of the experiences of other place-bound Indigenous adult learners who found themselves in similar situations to mine. My concern for the well-being of place-bound Indigenous adult learners prompted me to develop a series of research questions that could shed clarity on the multiple dimensions of support utilized by distance learners in post-secondary e-learning environments.

After having honed my initial preconceptions of distance learning with place-bound Indigenous learners through my coursework and a review of the literature, I prepared myself for my data collection activities by taking steps to ensure that each interview I was to conduct would elicit responses to a similar set of queries. Using my own lived experience as a place-bound learner as a phenomenological starting point for my data collection, I compiled a textual interview guide/protocol that grouped together the information and interview questions I intended to use to illuminate the varied experiences of off-campus learners. In reflecting on my lived experiences and compounding these with my past professional training and experience as a child protection investigator, I understood that the semi-structured interview techniques I intended to use for my study would permit discursive flexibility and situational exploration of conversational themes as they emerged. I used the interview protocol in a consistent manner with each participant in order to provide them with consistent messaging regarding the data collection and consent processes as well as to remind me of each topic area to be covered over the course of our conversations.

Being mindful of the power dynamics associated with interviews, I knew that it would be important for me to avoid using the interview protocol in a clinical manner. Instead of applying the protocol in a rigid, check-box type manner, I employed it as more as a conversational guide that could be used in different ways with different participants, depending on the flow of our conversation and the degree of pre-existing familiarity we may have had going into the interview. A copy of the interview protocol I developed and utilized for my doctoral research is included as Appendix B.

3.4. Study Design - Time Frame

(Corresponds with Table 3.1, s.2(b) - Delimiting the various action phases.)

Before entering afield to begin a gathering enterprise, it is important to consider the temporal influences that may impact decision-making. In the past, time was measured in relation to the positioning of the celestial bodies of the sky. Days and seasons were measured by observing the movements of the sun. Local tides were tracked and ocean-based activities planned accordingly. The phases of the moons demarcated the lunar months and were juxtaposed with traditional ecological knowledges of local animals to indicate the times when prey species would be more available for capture by various harvesting methods. Longer cycle events such as snow levels, droughts, floods, and the symbiotic fluctuations of predator and prey animal cycles were archived in oral histories, awaiting only the reappearance of specific environmental conditions to prompt the trained knowledge holders to activate the lessons of the past for the benefit of current generations. Although Western concepts of timekeeping have crept into many aspects of life in Indigenous communities, I have had many opportunities to observe situations where Western concepts of time have been abandoned, and events have taken place in a much more organic manner.

One key component of *chasseur* preparation entails having a plan that lays out the action phases for the field-based gathering exercise. Once having identified the required stages for necessary activities, the sequencing of the events associated with each phase can then be established, and decisions made about the expenditure of resources necessary to accomplish the identified tasks. Over the course of my doctoral research, the action phases within which I found myself operating were consistent with those typically found within qualitative research studies.

I began my full-time doctoral studies in September, 2007 with the intention of completing my coursework within one year, however in December I was approached by the directors of a newly mandated First Nations social policy institute in Saskatchewan who knew that I had been working with First Nations organizations in British Columbia before moving to Saskatoon to begin my PhD. studies. These professionals were the long-standing leaders of social service programs located on First Nations throughout the treaty areas of Saskatchewan, and when they asked me to become the inaugural executive director for their new organization, I felt that this was an offer I could not refuse. Harkening back to a previous experience of being politely requested to attend an upcoming potlatch by a Gitx̓san hereditary chieftain, I felt that this was not an offer I could easily cast aside. After consulting with my lifepartner and my PhD. program advisor, I decided to answer the call of the local Indigenous community, and I modified my student status into part-time studies with the expectation that I would be further extending my coursework in order to begin work with this institute. I informed my new employers that I would get the organization up and running, secure on-going funding to meet their identified priorities, establish the identity of the organization as a professional and ethical entity, and hand the operations of the fully-functional organization over to a sufficiently-qualified Saskatchewan Indigenous person once I had completed my doctoral candidacy exams and was ready to start

collecting data for my doctoral research project that would eventually enable me to secure a tenure-track position in Social Work.

By the Spring of 2009, I had achieved my personal and professional objectives related to my studies and responsibilities to my Saskatchewan First Nations employers, and I passed my competency exams in May. In July, 2009 I accepted a tenure-track position with the Saskatoon campus of the University of Regina Faculty of Social Work, with a caveat that I was to complete my dissertation within 24 months of being hired - a factor that inevitably impacted my research design by introducing a compressed time-to-completion constraint. I was given a reduced teaching load, and threw myself into my new position wholeheartedly - redeveloping courses, serving on committees, applying for research grants, collaborating on scholarly writing projects, presenting at conferences and trying to establish a serious academic reputation for myself Provincially, Nationally, and Internationally. Facing these competing priorities and the workload and collegial demands of full-time work, I once again relegated my doctoral studies to a part-time status, and it was not until the Winter of 2010 that my research proposal was ready to be presented to my PhD. committee.

Meeting with my committee to review my proposal provided me with numerous suggestions intended to strengthen the overall congruency between my proposed data collection methods and my research questions. For example, because the utilization of technologically enhanced communications devices was central to my overall research question, and I was intending to gather semi-structured data with participants who were not geographically proximate to Saskatoon, it was suggested that I invite each participant to complete an asynchronous on-line survey in advance of a real-time interview. Despite my reservations that this data collection method might disrupt the relational aspects of my research design, I

constructed an electronic survey instrument using the proprietary University of Saskatchewan on-line survey design software (i.e., MySurveys). After investing several more weeks in learning how to use the survey design software and constructing a reasonably appropriate survey instrument, I was then required to submit an application to the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board (REB) for approval to undertake research with human subjects. A copy of the Research Ethics Board application (including all attached appendices) that I submitted to the University of Saskatchewan REB in May 2011 is included as Appendix A.

Developing my human subject research application required me to rework the initial design I had intended for participant recruitment from that which I had originally presented to my PhD. committee. My initial proposal drew upon a relational approach to research that would require me to make overtures to several key informants at post-secondary institutions in Western Canada with whom I already had pre-existing relationships. The positions these key informants occupy bring them into occasional contact with Indigenous alumni from their institutions, and in these capacities the informants had personal knowledge (including e-mail addresses) of recently graduated students who might fit my proposed sampling criteria. This was important, because such an approach would have obviated the need for me to recruit individuals from among my own quite-limited circle of personal contacts, while at the same time, this approach would have widened institutional interest in the outcomes of my research at these other institutions. Fortunately, after discussing the logistics of altering my initial design to one that excluded participant referrals from key informants with my PhD. committee supervisor, we determined a course of action that could involve both participant referrals for an interview and individual participant self-selection to the electronic survey process. Through either self-selection or

referral, prospective participants were to be sent an standardized electronic invitation participate via e-mail from my University of Saskatchewan e-mail address.

Following the receipt of my REB certificate of approval in early July, I began taking steps to recruit prospective participants in mid-July 2011. Later that month, while attending an international conference on Indigenous Education, I met up in person with several of the key informants I had initially intended to contact. Drawing upon the goodwill of our pre-existing relationships, I asked these key informants to assist me by referring prospective participants to me via my University of Saskatchewan e-mail address, and several of them promised to do so. After returning from the conference and preparing myself appropriately for setting afield (as described previously), I then attempted to contact a number of individuals whom I had known professionally over the past decade who I knew would fit the sampling criteria for my study. However, I quickly found that without having access to current personal e-mail addresses, it was quite difficult to reach out to post-secondary alumni who may not maintain or have access to e-mail accounts issued by the post-secondary institutions from which they received their degrees. Upon the suggestion of a member of my PhD. committee members, I opened an account in the name of my research project with a popular social networking website in Canada (i.e., Facebook) and attempted to locate prospective participants using the website's member search function. After having ascertained the whereabouts of several prospective participants using that communications medium, I sent each person an electronic copy of the REB approved boilerplate invitation that outlined my research question and invited them to reply to my electronic invitation to participate in my survey via e-mail. Of the four individuals I contacted using social networking software, I received no replies to my invitation to participate in my project's on-line survey.

Having had little success in reaching prospective participants through impersonal electronic methods, I turned my attention to my initial, relationship-based plan of contacting key informants and asking their assistance in identifying prospective participants. Over the course of several events I attended in September - October 2011, I personally met with several professional associates whom I knew had recent experience with providing post-secondary education to Indigenous off-campus learners (individuals and cohort-based) in Western Canada. I then sent e-mails to each associate that included informational attachments from my REB approval package, along with key speaking points they could use in their e-mail invitations to prospective participants they had awareness of. Using this relational method, I know that at least three key informants did distribute e-mail invitations to prospective participants, and for that I am grateful.

Beginning in October 2011, I was contacted by nine prospective participants, to whom I then distributed electronically generated e-mail invitations to participate in my on-line survey using the MySurveys software. Four participants eventually completed the on-line survey, all of whom were invited to participate in one-on-one real-time interviews with me. All but one of these participants were known to me through a variety of professional positions I had held over the previous decade.

Over the months of November and December 2011, I conducted real-time interviews with five interviewees using electronically mediated communications software, digital computing and telephonic hardware, and the data transportation infrastructure upon which the internet is based. Each interviewee was interviewed once, with each interview taking less than one hour to complete on average. Although the time spent with each interviewee was not long, the quality of interaction in each interview was friendly and cordial. By January 2012, I had personally transcribed each of the interviews into digital text-based documents, and had received

faxed or scanned copies of the member-checked transcript release forms that had been signed by each interviewee. I began data analysis shortly thereafter using qualitative analysis software to facilitate the systematic organization of the data obtained from the on-line survey instrument, the individual interviews, and my own field notes, and had identified the key themes emerging from the data by March, 2012.

3.5. Study Design - Sampling Criteria

(Corresponds with Table 3.1, s.2(b) - Describing participant characteristics.)

In advance of heading afield in pursuit of objectives that may be useful for individual or community well-being, I believe that it is important to have a clear understanding of the physical characteristics of the target(s) being pursued. For example, when a person expresses an intention to “go fishing”, I believe that s/he should first have a rudimentary understanding of the huge qualitative differences among species of fish, their habitats, and the variety of methods available to prospective fishers. Hand-line fishing for 100 kg halibut in 100 meter deep tidal waters on a windy day in October differs significantly from moonlit dip-net fishing for 10 g. smelt in a 10 cm. deep ice covered creek in March. Experienced anglers know that different species require different methods and gear, as well as some reasonable understandings of the lunar, diurnal and seasonal patterned behaviours of the species they can expect to encounter while afield. Of course, on any given day a fisher can always “get lucky” and achieve success using whatever tools are available to them, but on the balance of probabilities, an approach that relies upon a poorly understood level of integrity between the species being sought and method being applied only leads to intermittent success at best, or life-threatening injury at worst. From much personal experience gained from numerous trips afield for in search of food to share, I have come to

appreciate the importance of preparing myself beforehand by ascertaining the desired physical characteristics and a general experiential profile of that which I am seeking.

Scaffolding between this ecological knowledge and my own doctoral studies, after I had completed my oral competency exams, I prepared myself for the original research phase of my academic venture. When the time came for me to undertake my data collection, it made sense for me to apply a similar technique to that which I have used in advance of going fishing. To me, the analogy with fishing was patently clear as I delineated the desirable characteristics of the beings I hoped to catch in the webbing of the methodological net I intended to cast for my research. (Figure 2) Consequently, as I formulated the specific questions I hoped to use to elicit information from the participants in my study, I reflected upon my own lived experiences and developed some purposive sampling criteria that I felt would increase the methodological integrity between my data collection methods and my intended outcome - a deeper understanding of the supports utilized by off-campus Indigenous post-secondary students over the course of their e-learning studies. Drawing thus upon my own experiences with distance and technologically enhanced post-secondary education, I knew that there were Indigenous people out there who would be able to identify with my personal off-campus learning experiences. Using my own circumstances as a experiential delimiter for interrogating this off-campus Indigenous learner phenomenon, I determined that the eligibility criteria for participation in my research should be restricted to individuals who possessed the following attributes:

- self-identification as a person of Indigenous ancestry;
- registration as an off-campus student at a post-secondary institution in Canada;
- completion of at least one course through on-line delivery methods;
- convocation from their post-secondary program of study;

- access to information and communications technology (i.e., computer, modem, internet connection, software) necessary to participate in the study.

I recalled the personal contact I had made over the years with numerous individuals who met these criteria, so I knew that a pool of suitably qualified prospective applicants did exist, although I knew it would likely be difficult to recruit a large number of participants for my qualitative research using these identified sampling criteria. This dynamic was reinforced for me after reviewing an analysis of the 2001 Canadian Census data during my review of the literature associated with this study, when I found that post-secondary “participation rates of Registered Indian, Métis, and Non-Status Indian populations are about 10-13% among men and 15-16% among women”, however only “between 40-43% of Registered Indian and Inuit men complete their studies while completion rates range from 51-57% among women” (Hull, 2005, pp. 58, 61). Consequently, I did not attempt to further delimit my sample to provide for a gender balance among the participants.

In consultation with my PhD. committee, it was determined that sufficient data to complete the study could be obtained by interviewing up to six participants who fit the sampling criteria. It was further suggested that in order to improve the richness of the data, it would be best if the interviews were to occur as soon as possible following each participant’s convocation from their most recent post-secondary program of study. As it turned out, I interviewed five participants who voluntarily agreed to participate in this study. This number might have been larger, had I not been working within a compressed timeframe related to a requirement of my employer that I complete my dissertation within two years of accepting a tenure-track position. Also, had I not experienced an initial lack of response to my invitation to participate I likely would not have had to revisit my participant recruitment strategy.

As stated earlier with respect to the relationality aspects of the principles of Indigenous methodology I drew upon for this study, it is my belief that I conducted the interviews having had already established a reasonable level of trust between myself and the participants. Because of these pre-existing relational dynamics, even though the actual interviews with individual participants typically took less than one hour to complete, I believe our pre-existing relationships facilitated my thematic coding and analysis of the data, and lent itself well to my being able to present their voices accurately and respectfully.

The personal characteristics of the participants who were interviewed for this research study are displayed in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2. Research Participant Characteristics					
E-learner Participant Characteristics	Participant Code				
	A	B	C	D	E
Indigenous Affiliation	Cree	Metis	Saulteau/ Sioux	Dene	Cree
Gender	F	M	F	F	F
Consider themselves to be “a cultural person”	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Age at completion of studies	55	45	47	55	30
Same household caregiver/spousal responsibilities	elder/ spouse	children/ spouse	grand- children	children/ spouse	spouse
Previous post-secondary completed: (on campus/off-campus)	Bachelor (on)	Diploma (on)	Bachelor (on)	Bachelor (on)	Bachelor (on)
Community of residency	rural municipality	small city	reserve	remote townsite	small city
Usual area of residence	AB	BC	AB	NWT	BC
Institutional Registration status	off-campus	off-campus	off-campus	off-campus	off-campus
Blended/entirely e-learning	blended	e-learning	blended	blended	e-learning
Individual/off-campus cohort	cohort	cohort	cohort	cohort	individual
ISSP or Aboriginal Organization funding for most recent degree	n/a	yes	n/a	n/a	no
Number on-line courses taken	4	16	2	5	10
Degree granted (level)	Masters	Bachelor	Masters	Masters	Bachelor
Year convocated	2011	2005	2011	2010	2011

Using this same matrix to illustrate my own personal characteristics, I possess both Mi’kmaq and European bloodlines, I identify as a male who has a female lifepartner, and I was 41 when I completed my last e-learning studies in which I registered as an off-Campus learner (i.e., 2003). During my distance education student career, I lived mostly in a rural municipality in Northern

BC, and I took one on-line course, plus five correspondence courses and ten off-campus cohort-based courses where I had to travel to a community college campus 150 km away to participate in Summer-institute type courses. I completed Bachelor and Masters degrees as an off-campus learner, and had completed one paraprofessional certificate program at a nearby (i.e., within 30 km) community college campus.

3.6. Study Design - Methodological Considerations

(Corresponds with Table 3.1, s.2(a) - Knowing why action is necessary and how to complete activities in a good way.)

As discussed in the prologue to this dissertation, over the course of my life I have had many experiences that have led me to appreciate the importance of critical self-reflection. Throughout my formal and informal education, I have been a person who has never resided in the territories of my Indigenous ancestors, and regardless of whether the learning environment was a residence, a field camp, a campus classroom, or a virtual learning environment, my understandings of Indigenous protocol prompt me to continuously apprehend my own social positioning in relation to the Indigenous caretakers of the local territories where the teachings were taking place. By attuning myself thus, I have experienced some success and I have been further encouraged to continue doing my work in a good way that is considerate of the complex web of relationships that have been in place since long before I ever appeared and which will continue to exist well after my physical presence is no longer felt.

From my understanding as a social work practitioner, this type of critical self-reflection is a key component of what is categorized in Western thought as a qualitative approach to accessing knowledges that can assist in individual, collective, and organizational decision making. Critical self-reflection is fundamental to standpoint epistemologies, which are inclusive

of the principles of Critical Theory in which I have been trained for my formal social work educational schooling. Critically reflective praxis enables me as a social work practitioner to identify my own location(s) in relation to my history(ies) and lived experiences so that I can better react to the variety of life circumstances I may encounter among those with whom I interact professionally.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I have seen the utility of drawing upon this foundational principle of Western qualitative research to locate my analytic standpoint as one that “enables us to see the world from behind, beneath, or outside the dominant group’s conceptual and material practice of power.” (Schwandt, p. 266). This standpoint positions me as an insider and outsider within my research, a stance that also aligns well with a grounded theory research design that encourages researchers to avoid becoming outsiders to the study. (Charmaz, p.49) I believe that my self-location also aligns me with the principles for decolonizing critical theorizing articulated by Maori Critical Theorist, Graham Hingangaroa Smith (2003) that served as a theoretic framework for my research. Smith’s Critical Indigenous theoretic framework highlights the importance of Indigenous individuals taking value-driven transformative actions that are intended to improve an unjust status quo that is simply not working for Indigenous peoples. (2003, p.5) By requiring personal accountability to decolonising community values and practices of myself, I was encouraged to consider the degree of congruency between my words, actions and intentions in relation to the data collection and analysis methods I considered for this study.

Consequently, when I considered that my research question centered technology enhanced learning, I believed that it would be incumbent upon me to use digital computing and communications devices for data collection and analysis rather than attempting to replicate a

face-to-face interaction dynamic that would likely have been inconsistent with many interviewees' previous experiences of post-secondary distance education. I reasoned that because the participants would have had completed on-line studies and likely had never met with their instructors or student peers in face-to-face settings, it would be important for me to reconstitute this type of environment with my data collection activities. Additionally, because of the geographic distances involved (i.e., spanning several time zones), the compressed time frames within which I was operating, and my own personal financial exigencies that proscribed travelling to participants' home communities, I consciously decided to utilize digital communications hardware and software wherever possible for my research.

3.7. Study Design - Data Collection

(Corresponds with Table 3.1, s.3 - Considering the appropriateness of our gear for tasks at hand.)

Over the course of my fifty years of living, I have undertaken numerous journeys where the pre-established outcomes of have been successfully achieved, and many others where these have not. Regardless of the outcome of my stints of itinerancy, these experiences have taught me much about the importance of living life a good life. Lessons of respect, sharing, reciprocity, meeting obligations, responsibility, traditional ecologic knowledge, and relationality have been many. And throughout these experiences, a common theme was to always try to do things in a good way. In Anishnaabe, this concept is contained within the term "*Minobimaatisiwin*" (LaDuke, 1999); in Cree, the good life is referred to as "*Pimatisiwin*." (Hart, 1999) Although I do not live nearby to any Mi'kmaq knowledge keepers whom I might humbly approach for clarification, I do believe from my own limited understanding of Indigenous ways that in order for traditional knowledges of the good way to have real meaning, we must live it. (McGregor, 2006)

In trying to do things in a good way, I have come to understand the importance of Indigenous protocol as a social lubricant for developing and sustaining the types of relationships that are necessary for the good life. It cannot be overstated that every Indigenous nation has its own customary protocols, and by respectfully watching and listening, it has been my experience that guests to another's territory can begin to understand the unique customs of each community. In some localities, this may involve ceremonial gift-giving or greetings. In others, protocol is reflected through deference to higher status individuals, or showing humility. Laughter and quiet side conversations requesting clarification are appropriate in some group settings, where they are frowned upon in others. In my experience, thinking about the appropriateness of one's own cultural beliefs and practices in contrast to their counterparts that may be held by the persons with whom you will be interacting is good thing to do before heading afield, so as to avoid the kinds of misunderstandings that may emerge from inadvertent breaches of Indigenous protocol. I really value the wisdom that Kakwirakeron and Good (2000) put forward with respect to Indigenous protocol: "It is very basic, but if people aren't even aware of it and they try to accomplish things with Native people and they don't succeed, it is probably because they have botched the initial protocol." (p.1)

Taking to heart the advice I have received on getting things right, I have come to see the importance of following protocol when it comes to planning significant events that will likely be recorded in living memories of those who may be asked to witness the proceedings. In my limited understanding of such events, this is particularly important in feast hall ceremonies (e.g., potlatches, settlement feasts) where the mistakes or oversights of a host can necessitate generous compensation being made payable to those whose dignity was offended. Even a typically insignificant scenario such as a guest slipping on spilled liquid is cause for concern in such

situations where Indigenous custom law and protocol may be concerned. In order to minimize the probability that something may go wrong, detailed planning and checking of gear is required before commencing an activity where significant protocol is necessary. In some Indigenous traditions that I myself have personally witnessed, this might take the form of a smoke feast taking place on the evening before the major event where, for example, decisions are made on who will be ushering participants to appointed seats where food will be laid before them at a table pre-set with dinnerware before the work of the event occurs. In other cultural traditions, I have seen much attention given to the amount and conditions of the meal ingredients and the cookware required to prepare it, and guests are expected to sit on blankets they lay on the ground during the proceedings after which they eat the meal with utensils they bring themselves. In each situation, it is critically important that “those seeking knowledge and sacred teachings from knowledge keepers must follow protocol and etiquette.” (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009. p.12)

With respect to my doctoral research, I did try to give due consideration to multiple dimensions of protocol, and accordingly I gave much thought to the suitability and appropriateness of the instruments and processes I intended to utilize before ever venturing afield to contact prospective participants. Knowing that my research design would depend largely on the use of electronic communications and data processing equipment, I realized that I would need to try to control as many technological variables as I could to minimize the possibility of low-fidelity communications and inadvertent data loss. This meant having to consider my own capabilities, as well as those of prospective participants with whom I would be communicating.

In keeping with the relational necessity inherent within Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2010), I used a conversational method for data collection and knowledge gathering. It

is my understanding that the activities associated with this dialogic method of finding things out have been practiced by Indigenous seekers of knowledge since time-immemorial, but are severally referred to under disparate conventions unique to the sites where they are routinely employed. Examples of the activities congruent with a conversational method include: storytelling, yarning, talk-story, or re-membering (Thomas, 2005; Bishop, 1999; Absolon & Willett, 2004). Additionally, I realized that many of the prospective participants would have access to the electronic communications technology that has become ubiquitous in the lives of most Indigenous professionals living in Canada in 2011, including telephones (both cellular and land-lines), televisions, radios, vhf transceivers, and internet capable technologies. Realizing that many Indigenous peoples have adapted to using these types of technologies to enhance their capacity for storytelling and recording important events (e.g., audio recording the stories of elders), I believe that sufficient precedent has established that the digital recording of conversations is not inconsistent with Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies.

For my doctoral research, I also believe that the process of conversation being mediated through electronic communications technology enhanced my data and demonstrated qualitative research integrity. (Watts, 2008) Rather than causing technical distractions that might ordinarily be considered external to the research design, I felt that the complicating actions of trying to coordinate and establish electronic connections with each participant substantially enriched the data collection experience that was specifically focussed on the on-line experiences of each participant. It also minimized costs in that neither the participants nor the interviewer had to travel for face to face interview sessions, which is entirely consistent with the economic dimension associated with the student experience for many mature place-bound learners.

3.8. Study Design - Data Analysis

(Corresponds with Table 3.1, s.2(c) - Ensuring appropriateness of teachings.)

As detailed in the prologue, many of my experiences afield have been conducted as an outsider. While visiting in the territories of other Indigenous peoples, I have been an outsider learner to many of the knowledge holders of these places, and accordingly, I cannot profess to be fully conversant in the cultural practices of any tribal group. However, in order to become at least minimally useful to the tasks at hand, I have learned to be observant of cultural protocol and to be alert to the traditional ecological knowledges appropriate for the places where the event was taking place. Accordingly, over time I have also developed a deep respect for the powerful implements used in harvesting, transporting and processing, such that I can often anticipate which tools will be appropriate for various phases of activity that typically may occur in events of a specific nature.

Over decades of being attuned to the local dynamics of differing communities, I have developed a constant-comparative sensibility within which I contrast new information to that which I previously understood. In many cases, this has involved leaps of faith wherein I just had to trust the advice of relative strangers who themselves possessed far greater knowledge of the protocols and processes associated with the event at hand. Oftentimes, I have had to suspend my own prejudices about the appropriateness of various activities that I have been privileged to observe. I have learned that, simply because I personally may have never seen a given activity undertaken in a particular way before, did not necessarily mean that the way it was being conducted in this setting was inappropriate for the local context. I have come to appreciate that, in many scenarios afield, my own pre-existing conceptualisations cannot be effectively scaffolded to parallel situations that themselves are imbued with cultural and ecological knowledges that have emerged from temporal and metaphysical localities that are external to my

own limited experiential understandings. Knowing that there are many pathways to the center of any circle, I understand that the approaches I might typically suggest for getting to a desired destination may quickly mark me as an outsider who is ignorant of local norms. Fortunately, I have learned to recognize this foible within myself, and this awareness reminds me that I must frequently re-check and revise my assumptions when engaging in purposive activities with Indigenous knowledge holders.

When I came to be considering the data analysis phase of my doctoral research, I was reminded that I would be exposed to important lessons from the stories related to me by the interviewees, and I knew that it would be important for me to consider how these teachings would be documented for future readers. To me, this meant that I would need to consider how to respect reciprocity for the gifts of story being handed to me. I considered that although I was not bringing any younger people along with me on my journey of discovery, I knew that the textual report of my research journey might someday reach an audience who would be looking to see that I had went about the research in a good way. Consequently, when I came to be considering the data analysis phase of my doctoral research, I gave much thought to the methods and tools I had available to me for the tasks at hand. I also weighed these factors in light of my desire to maintain congruency between my purpose, my actions and the methods I elected to employ in the analysis of the data I had collected.

Knowing that I was employing a methodology that relied heavily on Indigenous principles of researcher preparation for exploring the varied dimensions of support experienced by place-bound Indigenous learners who had completed post-secondary coursework in Western academic institutions, I felt that that it would be congruent for me to use qualitative descriptions to organize and present the data. “Description is the foundation for qualitative inquiry, and its

primary goal is to assist the reader to see what you saw and to hear what you heard.” (Wolcott, 1994. p. 55). In consultation with my PhD. committee, I felt that research methods typically associated with grounded theory would be well suited to this aspect of my study. In order to facilitate meaning-making once the data had been collected using survey and interviewing methods, I began seeking emergent themes within the data. Looking for patterns and identifying how the data fits together in this manner is consistent with principles of grounded theory. (Guba, 1990)

Having had transcribed the interview data personally from the electronic files created with Skype and Powergramo technology, I entered this material into a qualitative data analysis software program (i.e., NVivo 9) to facilitate coding of the data and organizing my analytic memoranda as I noted them. Knowing that “(a)tttribute coding is good qualitative data management and provides essential participant information and contexts for analysis and interpretation.” (Saladana, 2009. p. 57), I began my data analysis through attribute coding of the survey and electronic interview data to identify descriptive information about the relevant personal and demographic characteristics of the participants. This type of structural coding “acts as a labelling and indexing device, allowing researchers to quickly access data likely to be relevant to a particular analysis from a larger data set.” (Namey, Guest, Thiaru, & Johnson, 2008. p. 141). I then moved quickly into line-by line coding to assist me in determining which emergent leads I should be following. This descriptive coding process is essential for thematic analysis. (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). I completed my initial coding of the corpus of data in January 2011.

Throughout my analytic coding, I resisted taking an outsider approach to the data, which itself had been predicated upon questions founded in my first-hand experience with distance

learning. Having had conducted and transcribed each of the interviews my own self, I was intimately connected to the stories of the respondents, however within each interview I clearly demarcated my own statements as distinct from those of the participants. This enabled me to establish analytic distinctions among the various voices which assisted me to make comparisons of similarities and differences between the data sources. Rather than relying solely upon my own initial responses to the participants' statements, I constantly considered the appropriateness of the ascribed content within each selective code as new information came to light throughout my working with the data. Later, as I began developing preliminary synopses of the data for inclusion in this dissertation, I routinely revisited the content for similarities and differences of each code in relation to the other established themes. By conducting careful coding and regularly contrasting the data with my own preconceived conceptualisations and personal experiences of 'distance learner supports' at multiple points throughout the data analysis and writing up phases of this dissertation, I feel that I was able to avoid imputing any of my own motives or unresolved personal issues onto the participants in my study.

With respect to theoretical coding, I followed the advice of grounded theorist Kathy Charmaz (2006) to "... reach down to fundamentals, up to abstractions, and probe into experience." (p. 135). In seeking theoretical complexity thus, I found that the substantial codes I observed were more closely aligned with the principles of Indigenous researcher preparations I had already begun articulating, rather than towards any specific Western theoretical current. Rather than viewing the emergent themes from a constructivist or interpretivist orientation, I instead found myself being drawn to the holistic and relational aspects of the narratives that spoke to the community-based and culturally rooted aspects of the participants' experiences.

These interrelated coding families form the substance of the analytic story detailed in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

3.9. Ethical Considerations

(Corresponds with Table 3.1, s.2(d) - Monitoring well-being of participants.)

Within Western scholarly research methodologies, the principle of respect has been subsumed as one component of value-neutral experimentalism that privileges individual autonomy, maximal benefits with minimal risks, and ethical ends exterior to scientific means. (Christians, 2005. p.147). Having emerged from the socio-political dynamics of Europe's Enlightenment era, the idea that an individual's relationships with the natural and spirit world could exist independently from the person's ontological understandings is now canonical within post-secondary institutional research ethics. Respect within the Western paradigm, according to Smith (2007) "is constructed as universal partly through the process of defining what it means in philosophical and moral terms, partly through a process of distancing the social value and practice of respect from the messiness of any particular set of social interactions, and partly through a process of wrapping up the principle in a legal and procedural framework." (p.98) These legal and procedural processes have reduced the concept of respect down to a least common denominator set of practices aimed at eliminating preventable harm from befalling human subjects. As a result, the relational value of interpersonal respect within research has largely been reduced to a formulaic process of completing a checklist of "the 'p's and q's" of etiquette to cultural, gender, and class groups and subgroups." (Smith, 2007 p.98) This actuarial approach to the operationalization of the principle of respect protects the institutional beneficiaries of research, but does little to (re)build reciprocal relationships with marginalized populations - including Indigenous peoples and communities - who largely view research with

suspicion at best and hostility at worst and whose personal interactions with Western researchers have been marked by exploitation, unethical practices and outright theft. (Whittaker, 1986).

The interpersonal operationalization of the principle of respect was most visibly demonstrated in my doctoral research through adherence to Indigenous protocol, as has been discussed elsewhere in this dissertation. In Indigenous communities, relationality is complex as individuals may be known to carry many different roles at the same time. For example, when I was working as a social worker for a First Nation in Northern BC, it was not uncommon for me to be handing out a social assistance cheque to a client in the morning, meeting him/her as a fellow board meeting of a local non-profit agency in the afternoon, and finally seeing that same person in his/her traditional regalia associated with the host clan at a feast in the evening. In such circumstances, issues such as anonymity and confidentiality assume different dimensions than they do in the urban communities I have also resided in.

Additionally, because fewer than three percent of the total population the Canadian post-secondary professoriate self-identify as having Indigenous ancestry, there is always a high likelihood that any Indigenous person working at a Canadian post-secondary institution may well be acquainted with one or more family members of any given Indigenous student. It is truly a small world in Indigenous academe. Accordingly, when I was contacted by people interested in participating in my doctoral research whom I had known either professionally (as a former student of mine- one participant in my sample) or personally (as former students of my spouse whose convocation ceremonies I had attended - three participants in my sample), it did not come as a surprise to me. The complexity of these types of situations is just one facet of Indigenous methodologies. Fortunately, I had forewarned my PhD. committee members and the University

Research Ethics Board that such scenarios might possibly arise well in advance of the data collection phase of my doctoral research and no ethical dilemmas arose.

Additionally, because my research was conducted under the auspices of an academic post-secondary setting, I was required to demonstrate that appropriate institutional standards and quality assurance mechanisms would be adhered to in my research with human subjects. Accordingly, with their consent, all identifying information related to each participant in this study has been anonymized from this dissertation. Each participant was given an opportunity to revise the transcript of her/his interview prior to analysis occurring, and one participant did request several minor changes regarding sentence structure and phrasing of statements she had made. Finally, each participant was advised of their right to withdraw from the study at any time before the defence date of this dissertation for any reason.

3.10. Entering the Field

(Corresponds with Table 3.1, s.1(d) - Ensuring physical/emotional capacity to cope with stressors.)

In the 1990's, Indigenous author, Thomas King signed off his weekly radio program that ran across Canada with the advice to: "Stay Calm. Be Brave. Wait for the Signs." (Hirsch, 2004) Reflecting on this Cherokee storyteller's phrase effectively draws attention to an aspect of *chasseur* preparation I have heard other culturally-informed people mention to individuals who are embarking on a deliberate course of action. I am reminded that if we have faith and prepare ourselves appropriately, we can be better prepared when opportunities or crises happen. This is especially important for individuals whose stated purpose entails them availing themselves of the gifts of another being with whom they share the land.

For hunters, fishers or harvesters heading afield, latent sources of sustenance may be nearby, but only if we have an awareness of their presence can we actually activate their

potential benefits to us/our communities. For example, I have been told that when a game animal (e.g. moose, elk) alters its stance so that it comes to be standing directly broadside to a hunter, the prey is offering itself to that hunter so that it may be taken. At such sacred times it is crucially important to be ready, for if the hunter does not sense the opportunity, nor have her/his equipment ready, the animal's potential gift of itself will be squandered. I have heard similar teachings regarding ocean fishing and berrypicking, and the upshot of these anecdotes is that if we are to effectively "wait for the signs", then we must ensure that our senses are acutely sharpened so that we can see, hear, smell, and then react to the opportunities that do present themselves. I believe that this is the phenomenon Abram (1996) was referring to when describing the good way in which the traditional Western Apache hunters he knew approached their food-gathering tasks: "... the native hunter must often come much closer to his wild prey if he is to take its life. Closer, that is, not just physically but emotionally, empathically entering into proximity with the other animal's ways of sensing and experiencing." (p.140) I believe that the actions of attuning our physical senses prior to an interaction with another being prepares *chasseurs* to be ready to take appropriate action at the exact time required. This is especially important when undertaking an activity upon which the outcome is reliant on the actions of another being.

When physically travelling afield, it is always well-advised to be prepared for inclement weather, dangerous animals, and other environmental conditions that may impede travel or a person's physical well-being. For people who believe in such forces, it is also important to be prepared for trickster energies that may materialize. Forces I have heard variously referred to as *naxnox*, *windigo*, *dzunuk'wa* or simply 'magic' can be influential in determining the outcomes of a trip afield, especially if one or more participants becomes sick or injured, or if no game are to

be found. Many people with whom I have participated in harvesting activities take steps to protect themselves from these forces through ceremony and ritual.

In approaching my doctoral research, I did take steps to watch for potential signs of dissonance that might manifest themselves while I was actively conducting my research activities. In order to be prepared to respond environmental, social and metaphysical forces I might encounter, I took steps to ensure that I would be physically and emotionally capable of coping with stressors that might otherwise impede the success of my ventures. I ensured that my research plan could be accomplished in an economically viable manner that would not unduly jeopardize my current or future living standards. I ensured that I had stable and emotionally supportive relationships in place to minimize interpersonal stress. I considered the temporal exigencies of my research plan with respect to avoiding scheduling conflicts (e.g., interviewing across timezones, accommodating for religious/cultural observances), while also bearing in mind the time limits associated with my academic program and the external pressures to complete placed upon me by my employer and family. I also attempted to anticipate technological glitches that could occur with the equipment I hoped to use; for example using telephones rather than VOIP technology for interviews, or faxing transcript release documents rather than demanding only scanned electronic copies. Finally, I did follow Nisga'a ritual of wearing a Nisga'a *hayatskw* (copper shield) that had been given to me years before while I conducted the various phases of my doctoral research.

3.11. Data Collection Issues

(Corresponds with Table 3.1, s.3 - Ensuring the readiness of our equipment.)

It has been my experience that appropriate local knowledge, proper planning, and pre-testing of necessary equipment can make or break a community event. Such detailed planning

and checking of gear is also germane to fishing and hunting expeditions where things can easily go wrong. In my own travels, I have personally experienced events where things that should have been checked beforehand were not, the consequences of which led to less than optimal harvests being gathered. Despite having returned home from numerous trips afield with little to show, I have however learned much from the oversights that left myself and my companions bereft due to such occurrences as: mechanical breakdowns, frayed bindings, inadequate clothing, misplaced implements, insufficient arrangements to keep warm and dry, equipment theft or breakage, running short of food, water, gas or replacement parts, and inquisitive/hungry animals. Primary among these teachings has been the message to take as long as is necessary to check your gear every time before heading onto the water or the land. Despite realizing that such an approach might try the patience of others, I have tried to incorporate this practice into other aspects of my life routines wherever practical, albeit with only limited success. Unfortunately, the vicissitudes of life in post-colonial Western society do not accommodate so well to traditional conceptions of ‘doing things only when the time is right’, and like many other Indigenous people who benefit from the bounties of the capitalist economic system, I have found ways to adapt reasonably well to situations where it may not be possible to take as much time as I personally think might be necessary to prepare for a trip afield.

Having had considerable personal experience with the substantial infrastructure deficits of many rural and remote villages and the high costs of keeping a home computer updated with the latest software and non-standard outboard communications peripherals, I realized that my research design could not be totally dependent on participants having access to low-cost and reliable internet connectivity and voice-over-internet-protocol (VOIP) capable computer hardware and software. Accordingly, as I considered how I might demonstrate the Indigenous

protocol necessity of gift-giving in advance of knowledge sharing - and what might constitute an appropriate gift for virtual story-telling - I determined that a USB headset (i.e., an internet capable microphone and headphones combination) and printed directions on how to download free digital communications software (i.e., Skype) could be an appropriate gift in advance of an interview taking place. This decision required me to obtain the mailing addresses of prospective interviewees after they had completed the on-line survey, so that I would be able to mail a newly purchased headset to each person before the actual interview could take place. The costs of headsets, packaging and mailing worked out to around \$35 Cdn per interviewee.

Thinking through things carefully, I also realized that not every prospective participant might be comfortable with being interviewed on-line, so I also offered each respondent the option of having a telephone conversation in lieu of the VOIP conversation I initially envisioned as being the communications medium that would be most congruent with my study's overall design for data collection. Consequently, after receiving an electronic consent to participate via e-mail following each respondent making contact with me to participate in the study, I replied to each person's message with a request for a convenient time for me to contact them for an interview, and their preference for me to reach them via either a Skype handle, or at a telephone number. As it turned out, all of the interviews took place over the telephone, with me calling into the place of work for two respondents, and the homes of the others. One participant had not completed the on-line survey before being interviewed, and did not subsequently complete the survey despite some gentle prompting to do so.

In order to capture these technologically enhanced conversations in the digital format in which they occurred - and which are modulated through the technology protocols associated with the internet, and in no way with Indigenous protocol - I purchased a license for a commercial

voice recording software program (i.e., Powergramo) which I installed on a new laptop computer I purchased especially for this project. On my end of the electronic conversations, I utilized a similar USB headset to the ones sent to the interviewees and I purchased a three month Skype telephone license that enabled me to make phone calls to anywhere in Canada from my project computer. I also realized that I would require secure storage for the data I intended to collect, so I purchased a software license (i.e., Mozy Home) that regularly copied the electronic files on my computer to a commercial cloud-based data storage site. With all of the equipment used for this study, I ensured that computer hardware and software was accessible only through secure 128bit software encryption, and I changed the passwords to these systems on a regular basis.

Additionally, knowing that my own experience with on-line and distance learning would likely arise in conversation, I made sure that I was prepared to record my own field notes of the conversations at the onset of each interview I conducted. I kept a spiral notebook and sharpened pencils on hand for each interview so as to not lose any valuable insights that might arise for me during the session.

3.12. Scholarly Contribution

(Corresponds with Table 3.1, s.4 - Ensuring others know what we're doing.)

Upon the return journey from any trip afield, it is always good for participants to take some time to develop a general narrative of events so that a consistent message can be relayed to those who might have an interest in the outcome of the activities. For example, if a hunt was successful, it might be advisable to provide general details of where game was taken so that others might consider trying their own luck in that area. Alternatively, if a situation arose that could have been avoided by more thoughtful planning, it might be good for the participants to develop a consistent message so that others might avoid a similar experience should they

consider attempting such an endeavour in the future. Regardless of the outcome of any trip afield, it is always good practice to reflect on the lessons learned and to establish a consistent narrative surrounding the transpired events that can be transmitted to younger generations or other community members who might be interested. Typically, in my experience of Indigenous food-gathering exercises, such stories might be relayed around a campfire or in some other informal gathering.

With respect to finding a parallel within academic research for the informal sharing of information regarding events that took place in an effort to gather food while afield, I believe that the activities that are most typically associated with dissemination of scholarly research would have the greatest degree of affiliation. When academic researchers write up or otherwise present the findings of their research activities for review by their scholarly peers, notionally they are passing along important lessons that they have learned through their disciplined inquiries. Dissemination of knowledge thus is a key component of the Western scholarly tradition that can lead to scientific advances in new methods and lines of inquiry as the informational narrative of a scholarly research team becomes gradually absorbed or rejected by its' wider scientific audience.

In order to contribute to a wider understanding of the experiences of place-bound Indigenous post-secondary e-learners in Canada, I aim to spread the story of the distinctive understandings that emerged from my research activities through established scholarly venues of knowledge dissemination, such as the publication of articles in scholarly journals and the presentation of my findings and research methods at scholarly conferences across North America. Additionally, because it is unlikely that many community-based Indigenous researchers or practitioners might be in attendance at such events, I also hope to apply to present

a synopsis of my research at least once to an audience at an Indigenous research conference in Western Canada. Should it come to pass that I am asked to give presentations on my research to any Indigenous research gathering, I will strive to do so, and if any person associated with an institution of higher learning requests a copy of my dissertation, I will endeavour to make one available to them in an electronic format.

3.13. Significance

(Corresponds with Table 3.1, s.2(a) - Being clear as to why action is necessary.)

Because little research has been conducted on the experience of off-campus Indigenous adult learners, I believe that this research has much to offer. This dissertation can potentially contribute to public, private, and tribally-run post-secondary institutions that are seeking ways to successfully bridge the gaps facing off-campus Indigenous learners through the development of curriculum, programs and support services that incorporate Indigenous knowledges, practices and community dynamics through appropriate e-learning. It is my belief that this report might someday help fulfil the aspirations outlined in the landmark report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996):

(W)e emphasize that these institutions must sustain dialogue with and between local communities even as they test the possibilities of advanced technologies. ... Emerging telecommunications technologies offer an unprecedented opportunity for Aboriginal institutions to transcend distance and at the same time give primacy to grassroots priorities and participation. (Vol. 3, s.5, ss.10.4)

In undertaking this research, it is my hope that some ‘best practices’ for developing and delivering culturally appropriate post-secondary content in a good way may emerge. I also hope that the manner in which I went about accomplishing this research will be seen as having been done in a good way, and that the integrity of the voices raised herein was represented accurately

and with compassion. As with many of the participants in my doctoral research, I too appreciate the symbolic importance of role modelling the successful completion of extraordinary tasks that is looked for by other peoples of Indigenous ancestry who may themselves be considering entering graduate degree programs.

In this chapter, I have laid out the framework for action and understanding that I employed for this study. Drawing upon an approach that I believe is not inconsistent with an method that an Indigenous *chasseur* might undertake in advance of setting out to accomplish significant activities afield, I established my research framework as having four discrete facets of preparation, namely: 1) preparing ourselves, 2) having a plan, 3) checking our materiel, and 4) ensuring supports are there when needed. Referencing these dimensions of preparation, I articulated the underlying epistemological principles that I believe are associated with each dimension, and I drew an association between each of these principles and the actions that I respectfully endeavoured to accomplish through my disciplined research activities.

In doing so, I believe that I have clearly articulated the methodological factors that guided this inquiry and provided a framework upon which I might discuss the findings that are described in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTING AND DISCUSSING THE DATA

In considering how best to present the theoretic analyses that emerged from the data collected for my doctoral research, I was again drawn back to the transcendental power of stories I have encountered over the course of my life. To me, much of this power rests within the metaphorical dimensions of storytelling. In the historical accounts, teaching stories, and parables relayed by skilled storytellers, the actions of historical, fictional or mythological beings can give guidance, solace and perspective for contemporary decision-making. To me, it is not surprising that metaphors are commonly used in the storytelling methodologies of Indigenous people around the world. (Kroeber, 2004) Bearing in mind that metaphor is also a “literary device [that] is the backbone of social science writing,” (Richardson, 1994, p. 32) my thoughts on how to re-present the data I collected for my original doctoral research naturally pulled me to consider developing a workable metaphor that would be suitable to the setting, plot and narrative of my own research.

As I sat pondering a suitable metaphoric image for my research, I found that recurring images of fishing kept appearing in my thoughts and dreams. In particular, I was remembering situations when I interacted with petroglyphs carved in rocks adjacent to ancient fishing sites, and I was again finding myself being transported across the temporal transom of time that bounds the typical lifespan of human beings. To me, I have come to apprehend petroglyphs as a form of distance education that, rather than transcending the real-time geographical boundaries between knowledge creator/holder and learner, instead transcends the otherwise immutable distance of time to extend the teaching moment across centuries rather than seconds, days or weeks. In thus recalling the teachings that were infused into my consciousness while visiting

ancient fishing sites, I drew a parallel between my own waiting and watching with that done by the old ones who had carved their messages into the stone in the time before time. I imagined patient men sitting on a rocky outcrop amid a powerful, surging river, waiting for predictable cycles (e.g., lunar cycle, environmental conditions, aquatic life cycles) to reappear as anticipated, and praying that unpredictable forces (e.g., dangerous creatures, illness, bad luck) did not find them that day. In my mind's eye, I saw them minding the fish traps they would have prepared and placed at those sites where this method of harvesting was appropriate, and I began to see that the metaphor(s) associated with a net might also have utility for the tasks that I had before me. *

The more I considered it, the more I could see that this 'net as metaphor' literary device could work as a representational framework for my research. It also did not escape me that the term 'net' would also serve as an effective tie-in between my *chasseur* experiences and my 21st century personal and professional experiences with communications technologies. The internet, after all is itself a metaphor that describes the equipment linking together electronic computers to enable human users to modulate digital snippets of information across large geographic distances and variable environmental conditions. Yes, a net could work, but what kind of net?

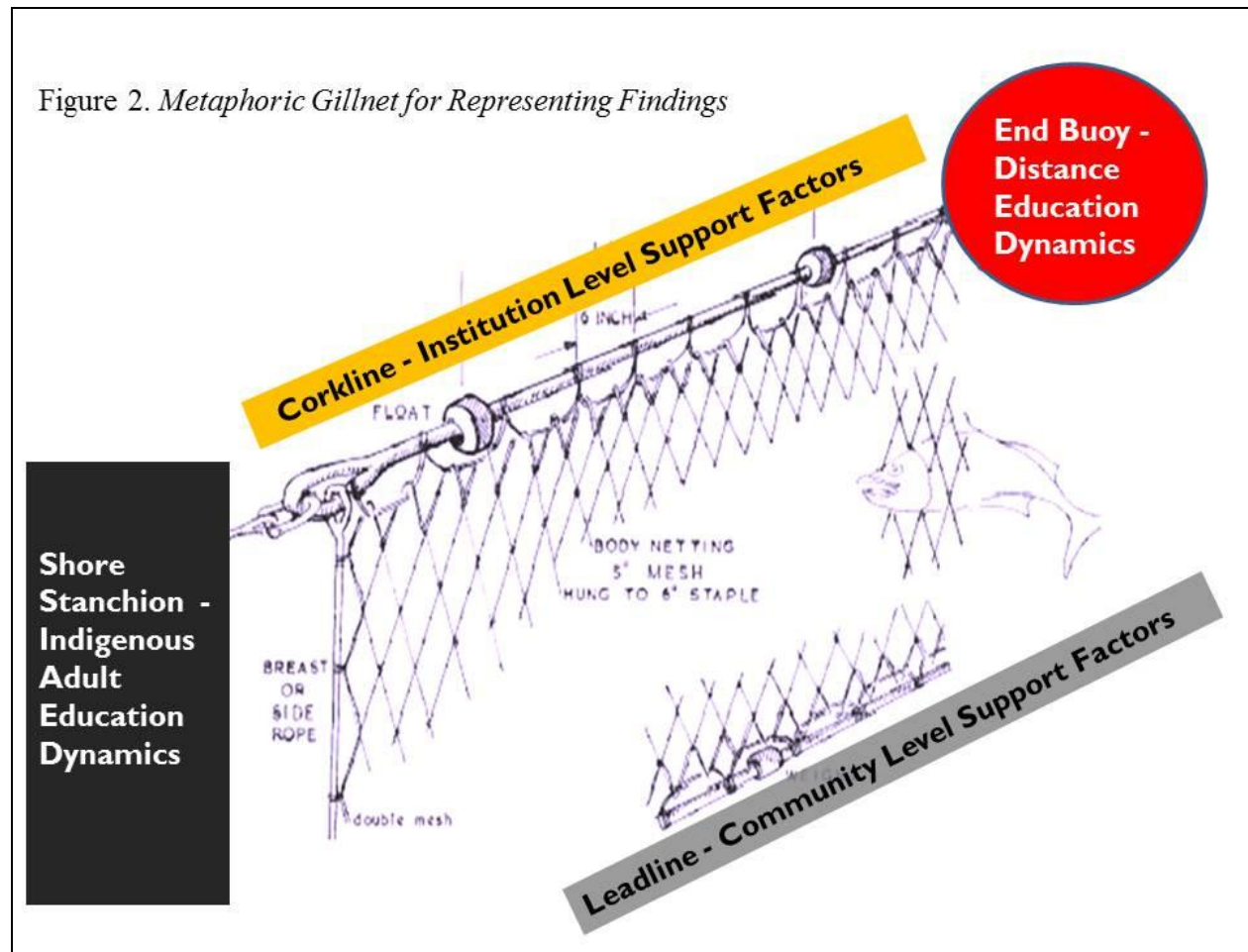
Depending upon the species being sought, the amount desired, the environmental conditions, the materials available and the local protocols and bylaws that govern the harvesting of aquatic of the creatures of the waterworld, a net can be a very effective tool to capture fish. Over the course of my life I have fished with several different types of netting and have witnessed many other types being successfully employed. * Gillnets many fathoms deep are useful in the some parts of the ocean. Long-handled dip nets can work well in some swiftly flowing rivers. Small circular cast nets thrown by hand into still water are another effective method, as is a landing net that can help lift a large fish into a boat or onto a platform. Fine-

mesh nylon monofilament webbing works well in some situations, while large mesh natural netting twine is more effective in others. Whether thrown by hand, unloaded from a mechanical drum on a boat, or employed from a standing position, it has been my experience that each of these netting methods can be an efficient way for human beings to capture and sort fish in an ethical manner. When properly designed and deployed, netting devices can facilitate the catch and release of sensitive and elusive objects of value.

Having thus considered the properties of fishing nets, and their metaphorical utility to the task of describing the stories and meanings of my doctoral research, I again returned to the wisdom of the petroglyphs I had felt while awaiting the reappearance of salmon at ancient tribal fishing sites on the Skeena and Nass River watersheds in Northern British Columbia. I began to imagine my findings in relation to a 3 - 4 m. deep, 30 m. long gillnet with 5 inch seine twine webbing (see Figure 1). This type of net has a line of corks affixed by twine along its upper side to provide flotation, and a similarly affixed leadline providing weight along the bottom to facilitate the net hanging vertically in the water column. Such a net is typically affixed via a strong line to a stanchion at one end, and is set to float adrift in the swift current with a buoy

* Because I do not have Indian status nor am I a commercial fisherman, the Government of Canada outlaws my use a gillnet of my own. Additionally, because the waters where I have actively observed gillnet fishing (i.e., the Nass River that runs through the traditional territories of the Nisga'a) do not flow through the homelands of my Mi'kmaq ancestors in Nova Scotia, I am bound by Indigenous protocol to respect that I have no right to deploy a gillnet into waters whose stewardship has been entrusted by the Creator to another Indigenous nation. When invited to do so by appropriately entitled and/or licensed individuals, I have helped prepare and transport gillnets, have observed that no one was endangered while a net was in use, and have assisted in pulling unwanted objects out of nets after the nets had been hauled out of the water. Just as is the case with many of the other knowledges associated with Indigenous ways of being, the only cursory and acquired understandings that I can profess regarding gillnet fishing are those that I myself have personally participated in this limited capacity, have observed directly while afield, or have heard accounts of.

opposing end. This type of net can be used from a boat (a drift set) or from land (a shore set) and is typically used for salmon weighing less than 5 kg.. From what I have seen in museums and heard mentioned in stories, in the days before synthetic technologies were introduced to net manufacturing, I understand that nets were constructed from local resources, such as the roots of spruce trees for webbing, small blocks of buoyant cedar wood for floats, and river stones for weights.



The characteristics of the net I set for my research differ significantly in composition from those used in either modern day or ancient fishing techniques. Rather than using a physical seine to corral, sort, and process data, I instead reconceptualised my research net in metaphorical

terms. In this conceptual model, I imagined the *shore stanchion* as being representative of Indigenous adult education dynamics, and the net's opposite extremity - the *endbuoy* - as standing for distance education dynamics. I considered the various dimensions of learner support both in terms of the net's buoyant *corkline* (i.e., for institutional-level support factors) and its' subsurface *leadline* that represented community-level support factors. In this conceptual model, the common experiences of the Indigenous research participants (myself included) formed the *mesh* that linked together the top/bottom and right/left extremities; this webbing was figuratively woven into place by *hanging twine*, which in this model is representative of electronic technologies.

In order for this metaphor to work, I imagined that the net I had created was immersed in a *river* - a murky, powerful, and dynamic energy force - that has existed since time immemorial. I suspected that under the surface of this river of knowledge, there lay objects of value that would otherwise remain invisible until they were transformed out of their natural state through the respectful use of appropriate technologies. Through purposive sampling, I identified the preferred physical characteristics of those whom I hoped would voluntarily participate in my data collection, and the characteristics of those participants who did become entangled in my research is provided in Table 3.2. The processes I used to create and monitor this net required me to utilize a constant comparative method that had me preparing myself appropriately, checking my gear frequently, alertly scanning the environment for subtle and significant changes, and being mindful of the time constraints within which this project was to be completed. Through reflexivity, reciprocity and respect, I honoured institutional ethical research standards and Indigenous protocol, without becoming hopelessly entangled amid the complex socio-cultural relationships that exist across these disparate fields of influence.

In order to illustrate the interplay between the components of the metaphoric net I employed for my doctoral research, the following sections of this chapter present the voices of the participants in their own words. In the interest of protecting the anonymity of the participants, I have assigned an alphabetic pseudonym as a unique identifier for each interviewee. The pseudonyms were randomly assigned and do not intentionally correspond to any initial letter of any participant's actual name.

4.1. Shore Stanchion - Indigenous Adult Education Dynamics

With respect to the anchor points for my conceptual net (Figure 1), I imagined the rock outcrop onto which my metaphoric net was fixed as being associated with Indigenous adult education dynamics. Having had conducted an extensive literature review in advance of my data collection, I was eminently aware that Indigenous adult learners are “on average, significantly older than traditional college students, likely to have a history of dropping out and returning to school, and who generally suffer both financially and emotionally while in traditional colleges.” (Sanchez, Stuckey & Morris, 1998. p.5). The contextual evidence for these typifying facts of life for many Indigenous adult learners is described elsewhere in this dissertation, and the findings of my research reconfirmed the reality of this situation within a 2012-era setting. As is the case with many Indigenous post-secondary students, the participants in my study were older than typical university students - ranging in age between 30-55 at convocation (see Table 3.2) - and the fact that more women than men participated in my study is also consistent with typical Indigenous post-secondary participation rates. All of the participants in my study had previously attended one or more post-secondary institutions that were not the ones they had received their e-learning coursework degrees from. Although I did not ask explicit questions about the institutions previously attended by interviewees, many of my conversations with the participants

reminded me of the numerous stress-filled episodes that had marked my own initial experiences as a youth who had moved from a small city to attend classes at a large urban university. One participant detailed one dimension of the stress facing Indigenous students who are participating in on-campus coursework thus:

I found that a lot with general courses that I took. I was always the only Indigenous student in the class. And so, getting asked all these questions, I thought, "Hmm - kinda interesting that I have to speak on behalf of all Indigenous people here." Or feel like I have to speak on behalf, and just, you know, feeling kinda, I guess singled out in a way. (E, 410-413)

As was my own case and those of my study's participants who had enrolled in conventional campus-based models of post-secondary service delivery, oftentimes Indigenous adult learners are required to abandon the cultural safety of our familiar settings and relocate to an urban center to attain a professional credential. This can be stressful for Indigenous adults who may have lived much of their lives in less populated towns or reserves, and who maintain significant cultural, familial or employment responsibilities in their home communities. The off-campus Indigenous students who continue to reside on their traditional territories with whom I spoke described their own shore stanchions in terms of their solid connections to culturally significant places that have existed since time immemorial. This deep cultural relationship to ancestral homeland was reflected one participant's words:

I moved about three times. I had to move to continue. And the problems that came along with it, a lot of the times was just financial problems. It's well - as most Native people, we don't come from rich families. A lot of the times our families ... I know that my parents would ship me a tub full of frozen fish over the plane just so that I can have fish and caribou meat in Saskatoon. That type of stuff. Like, I went through all that kind of stuff. And not only that. When you're in Saskatoon, you definitely gotta have a vehicle to get around. Like, you can't expose yourself. Like as an outsider, you don't know the

people there and you can come across the wrong type of people and all that. So there's all that. You know, it is a big change, but if you wanted to do it, you have to find some way of getting yourself down there. But not with the on-line courses.

My mom - she was saying, "So, you're not moving down there?" I said, "No, I'm going to be doing it at home. I'm going to be doing it on the computer now." And she says, "Is that OK with you?" And I says, "Well, of course. At least I can still get a good paycheque every two weeks." (laughs) You know. So in that way... And then at the same time, I was able to do all my other cultural activities. Like in that way, I was able to do all my other cultural activities in my life here. (D, 394-408)

Although the influence of culture on Indigenous adult student's lives was not the focus of my research, I did realize that many participants in my research would likely identify cultural influences as being important factors for their success as a student. The survey instrument I developed asked each participant to what extent they considered themselves to be a cultural person, and all of the interviewees indicated that their connections to their Indigenous culture had been a spiritually grounding influence for them during their studies. In one participant's words, this positive cultural aspect of Indigenous adult life was reflected in terms of the vibrancy associated with student life and being around others who are learning:

I guess it's an energy. Because I guess you have lots of energy when you're gonna do something. As a Native person, the learning is just a whole bunch of energy that's just going through, and some stays and some continues on. So, with counselling - you see a student learning and stuff like that. And they're just full of energy. You can actually feel it. Something like going walking into the library (laughs), and everybody's working and stuff like that. You can actually - some people can pick up on that. You know, like you're doing something for the betterment of humanity almost. (D, 127-133)

In my experience within Indigenous communities, there also exists numerous stressors that may not be experienced to the same extent by youthful, non-Indigenous students taking

courses in large urban settings. Many mature learners have children, parents or partners whose regular routines cannot be easily disrupted without causing much turmoil and stress, as exemplified in the words of one participant:

Ya - travelling and getting meals prepared and - like - I'm a caretaker of an elderly 92 year old woman (laughs) and sure - well - it's tough. (A, 58-59)

Regardless of whether or not an Indigenous adult happens to find themselves enrolled in post-secondary courses, if they are living in community, s/he will likely have cultural responsibilities to attend to from time to time. In my experience, cultural responsibilities extend beyond ordinary familial responsibilities, such that individuals find themselves fulfilling important functions that are imbued with cultural significance, and which may involve a degree of evaluation by community members who are able to assess whether or not protocol is being followed and/or actions are unfolding in a good way. In this definition, the cultural responsibilities being enacted may or may not be ceremonial in nature, yet the way the in which the activity unfolded will remain with the participants and observers as being culturally memorable. Accordingly, semi-private activities such as harvesting medicinal plants, dispersing a surplus, or relaying a teaching can involve particular cultural responsibilities, just as much as ceremonial public events can involve displays of other cultural responsibilities. One example of a cultural responsibility that was referenced in an interview was related by one participant who described an incident from her/his recent student experience where s/he felt unexpectedly obliged to assume care for youngsters:

Because, like right after my very first semester, you know, ... I'd come home and I was trying to do my homework - the papers that I had to get done - and the father of my daughter's two children was killed in an accident. ... And that was part of the reason that I did allow my children - well, I guess I kinda did - let them dominate my time.

Because I believe with First Nations that we have the strong family bonds. (C, 54-56, 81-84)

This unfortunate incident, although likely atypical of many adult learner's post-secondary experiences, is sadly not unusual in many Indigenous communities. In my own personal and professional experience with Indigenous communities, I have encountered too many accidental deaths, imprisonments, suicides, and hospitalizations than I care to dwell upon, and the scenario described by this student draws attention to the network of responsibilities and relationships which can potentially interrupt an Indigenous student's academic timetable at any time. Cultural responsibilities during times of adversity are simply a fact of life for many Indigenous adult learners, especially if they retain close relationships with their ancestral homelands. The following exchange between myself and a participant reflects this dynamic.

Participant D: The cultural responsibilities never ended. They never stopped. It's totally ingrained. (laughs) You can't - a lot of the times like we set nets like out in the lake and I make time to go out there because I like doing that. It's part of our life to actually go get our own fish out of the lake, and if we were gonna go hunting, the same thing. I made time to. Actually, the on-line courses allowed for flexibility. So, you could actually do your reading driving, I mean riding as a passenger, you can do your reading. So in that way it was - so cultural responsibilities, nothing infringed on it. It just continued along as usual.

Monty: You were able to get things done. 'Cause I know how important it is when you have a responsibility when you set a net in the water to go check it and to make to sure that the fish are taken care of, and that when you get them, you do something. You can't just set it and leave it, and then not come back to it for how many days, or however long. There's, you know, when you get meat, when you get fish - you have to follow through, as well too with that, right?

Participant D: You also have to prepare all the stuff that we catch, and like the meat. You have to actually fix it up so that you can freeze it and so forth. It's just part of life.

Monty: Did you have any crises or obligations or anything other come up, you know while you were taking these classes last?

Participant D: Um - yes. My father was diagnosed with cancer and as a translator, I had to translate for him. So I stayed with him at the medical clinic and hospital. And I carried my books. So a lot of the times when he was in the hospital, the longest time I was away from work was pretty well two weeks. I was in Edmonton when he had to go through a major operation and I had to be there right until they rode him in. Because I needed to translate that they were going to you know, put him under and all that sort of stuff. So that whole entire time that I was there... (D, 89-112)

Another dimension of this shared cultural dynamic that was evident in the participants' narratives emerged when they spoke about the importance of individual integrity and community accountability within Indigenous communities. Because there is little anonymity in many Indigenous communities, the everyday and exemplary actions performed by individual community members are often quite visible to everyone else. In such circumstances, the importance of setting a good example can be a significant motivational force for individuals who are pursuing post-secondary education while continuing to reside in their home community. One participant described how the public accountability associated with being a role model was an effective motivator:

They were amazed. At my age. They were saying that they were just so proud that I'm actually doing it. At my age - that I am still going out and I'm still going back to school. I'm still doing things. I'm - I guess - in a way, a good role model for the younger ones. Like even my sons are saying, "We thought you were finished in 2005." Well, not really. Because that's just a BA. I thought, "Well, that's not where I want to be." I just wanted to continue on. There's lots out there that I still don't know about. And I just feel that at my age - to do things like this - it gives other people something to think about. That they could actually do something like this too. (D, 141-147)

As discussed previously, Indigenous protocol helps to ease social relations by assisting individuals in avoiding embarrassment and maintaining humility. Associated with the omnipresent relational dimensions of community life, the concept of reciprocity is also a tangible force in many Indigenous communities, and particularly so in geographically isolated or remote communities where the acculturating influences of Western society have not been so pervasive. In my understanding, reciprocity is associated with a mutual exchange or trade of sorts, wherein a human being pays respect to another entity through the provision of something of value, be that a service or a commodity. Such an exchange can take place through ceremony or in the everyday actions of caring for the other entities with which we share our lives (i.e., two-legged and four legged creatures, as well as the creatures of the sky, water and land). In my conversations with the participants in my research, I often heard individuals speak of the importance of giving something back and showing accountability to Indigenous communities. One participant looked to the example of my own doctoral research to illustrate the importance that many Indigenous people place on helping and showing reciprocity to others:

I just hope that I was able to be of service and able to help you along the way with what you're doing to try and get your PhD. You know that's admirable - I really respect that and if I can be of help - I hope I have been in this format - it's a pleasure to do so. I think that's another thing with regards to going through and getting my degree and then finally being able to practice is the idea that (laughs) - I lost my thought. ... The education piece. After you go to school, and you start to work in the field and there's other students coming up behind you, you know, and we have a really good working relationship with the School of Social Work. We've had like five or six practicum students. We always make ourselves open for students if they need to come and talk about certain things ... So, like for me, that's cool too because it's bigger picture thinking right? And I think in our Indigenous world, I think especially in the child welfare system, we need to have a lot

more people trained to do the job. So for me, it's about that and - if we can help out - or if I can help out it's what we try and do. (B, 409-413, 425-435)

Although a culturally embedded shore stanchion can fill a significant function for Indigenous adult learners, it was also important for me to avoid abstracting the contemporary socio-cultural realities of geographically place-bound Indigenous peoples out of my metaphor imagery altogether. In order to give perspective to the anchor image, I felt that it was equally important for me to acknowledge that Indigenous learner dynamics have also been firmly cemented in place by the ideologically-driven social policy architects who appeared in colonial times with an aim to advance Euro-American ideas of progress by eliminating the pernicious otherness of Indigenous peoples through assimilation, racism and relegation to the margins of the Western post-industrial economy. The ongoing impacts of colonisation have led to much community dysfunction and lost economic and human potential in many isolated Indigenous communities. When Indigenous people gather together in conversation, the subject of colonisation is always close at hand, as reflected in the words of one participant:

You know, for a lot of the ways people are, there's a reason why they are the way they are. So a lot of the times, you try to figure out the root of the problem. And a lot of the time, it's really based on colonisation. And even me, I'm colonized. Just in the way things are around me. ... You know, you can actually tell it's been passed down through the generations. Through residential schools and stuff like that. (D, 289-294)

Whether resulting from post-colonial residue, historic family rivalries, or some other reason, an additional complicating issue facing Indigenous adult learners that I have experienced in classes involving Indigenous students is the negative interpersonal blowback that can emerge in Indigenous communities when a person expresses a desire to pursue higher education. It has been my experience that, for many historic and social reasons, not all Indigenous community

members perceive personal advancement through formal education in Western institutions as a worthwhile endeavour. Although internalized racism and stereotypical thinking has limited the human capacity development in some Indigenous communities, it has become a very real aspect of Indigenous adult education that has become embedded in contemporary Indigenous community cultures. I believe this dimension of Indigenous adult learning was being referenced when one participant made the following comments:

Native people that are living on the reserve - have a different way of looking at things than me. Because, I don't know how it feels to even live on the reserve. They have a different mentality than me. So a lot of the times, I'm trying to find out, "How could people live like that? How could they?" They didn't have a choice - this is how. A lot of the times these are some of their survival mechanisms they're using. So a lot of the times, it's like a totally different culture altogether. (D, 277-282)

I suspect that this dynamic also surfaced when I asked the participants how they would describe the places where they resided for their most recent programs of study. When they articulated their student experiences of community as having been “*stressful*” (A, 70), “*familiar*” (B, 77), “*tricky*” (C, 41), “*humdrum*” (D, 156) and “*supportive*” (E, 57), it was clear that there was a wide range of community dynamics at work here, and that no one representation could adequately describe the complexity of Indigenous adult learner experiences. Despite these ambivalent terms used by participants to describe the communities they found themselves living in, it is my belief that many Indigenous students do want to retain their connections to their cultural communities. This can be a strong motivator for Indigenous adult learners, as articulated in these words of one participant,

Because they can stay in their home communities and be around family and you know, work on becoming someone that could help their people. So I think that that gives them

the sense of accomplishment. Plus they have that sense of belonging by still staying in their community. (E, 401-403)

Throughout my conversations with the participants in my doctoral research, numerous examples of the encouraging and less-savoury dimensions of Indigenous learner realities were articulated. Later in this chapter, the various institutional and community-based supports for Indigenous learners are discussed in greater detail.

4.2. Endbuoy - Distance Education Dynamics

The opposite extremity of the fixed anchor of a shore set river gillnet is an end buoy (Figure 1). An end buoy is a buoyant object that has been affixed to the terminus of the net's corkline, and its' purpose is to indicate to boaters or other fishers that a net has been set at that place. It is a visible indicator that one or more people are systematically using technology in an attempt to derive something of value from a public resource at that location. Due to dynamic environmental factors associated with rivers or tidal waters (e.g., current flow rate, water level, periodic flotsam), a good end buoy should be highly visible and flexible so as to not negatively impact the functioning of any net set therein.

With respect to the conceptual net I used for my research, I felt that post-secondary distance education dynamics would fulfill the endbuoy function. As the counterpoint to my historioculturally fixed metaphorical shore stanchion (i.e., Indigenous adult education dynamics), I envisioned post-secondary distance education as a practical, technologically-enhanced, man-made device that has proven itself to be capable of adaptation to suit the circumstances and personal interests of off-campus learners. Distance education can be practical for users of varying ages, skill levels, and environmental circumstances, if the delivery mechanism itself possesses appropriate characteristics that enable it to adapt to varying conditions, it's use has

been properly designed for the task at hand, and it is economical. These characteristic dimensions of distance education are parallel to similar aspects of a good endbuoy. Accordingly, in order for my endbuoy metaphor to work, I envisioned distance education as a buoyant floatation device riding atop the swirling waters of conventional practice and wisdom. Being both visible and functional, my metaphorical distance education endbuoy would have to be capable of responding to changing economic conditions that can otherwise tear apart academic best intentions, regardless of whether these had been enunciated by an aspiring student or an innovative post-secondary institution.

Perhaps the largest promise of distance education is its' potential to enrich and transform the philosophic and economic lives of place-bound learners. The competing demands associated with adult life in Canada's developed economy put many pressures on individuals who are wanting to improve their own personal and familial circumstances through flexible and legitimate professional development opportunities. It is my belief that many individuals enrolling in distance education at the post-secondary level are able to empathize and identify with these words of one participant who sought to transform her/his personal and familial circumstances through distance education:

I still had a family to support. I wanted to have a career change. I wanted to further explore my own Métis identity. ... 'Cause I had worked for about twenty years on the tugboats and it was a career change for me, with regards to some health issues that I had with my back and stuff. I couldn't work on the boats anymore. So I had a career change, and that's what got me started with regard to going back to school and eventually getting my degree. (B, 109-111, 79-82)

In the opinion of this person - as well as those of many people the world over - higher education is a worthwhile aspiration, in that it can facilitate personal and intergenerational transcendence of socio-economic barriers. But this transformative potential can only be realized if a prospective

learner believes they have the personal wherewithal to complete a program of studies and if such program is accessible to them. Once a prospective student becomes motivated enough to apply for a program of studies, s/he must then take steps to ensure s/he will have sufficient financial resources to complete her/his studies. This is the case regardless of whether the student is enrolled in an on-campus or distance education program, however for distance education students whose educational programs are dependent upon digital communications and data processing equipment, the financial cost of access is greater than it is for campus-based learners who typically have greater access to subsidized and lower cost goods and services that are available in large urban centers. One participant succinctly described the additional expenses encountered by e-learners in the following terms:

You've gotta budget for this - the on-line stuff. 'Cause you have to have the resources to go in ... (E, 378-379)

Access to higher education requires prospective students to have sufficient resources to enable them to complete their programs of studies, whether these are delivered on-campus or via distance education. Fortunately for many off-campus learners, the flexibility of distance education program service delivery models enables them to continue working while completing their educational programs. All of the participants in my doctoral research indicated they had maintained employment throughout their distance education experience, which is a characteristic that I believe would be consistent with the typical socio-historical profile of many place-bound learners who have completed post-secondary programs in Canada.

And there's always financial issues that always seem to come up when you're going to school. I mean, I can remember working three jobs - three part-time jobs as well as

going to school at the same time as taking four courses for a time there. Whatever you had to do to make ends meet, right? (B, 147-150)

Maintaining a steady income while completing their studies is important for many distance education learners. This is especially important for off-campus learners who reside in remote communities where living and technology costs are higher than they are in urban communities. However, simply possessing adequate financial resources and management skills are not enough if a prospective distance education student is living in poverty or their home community is economically depressed and/or lacks the physical infrastructure necessary to connect them to their chosen distance educational service provider. As reflected in the following interaction between myself and one participant, poverty is also a significant barrier for many individuals who might otherwise pursue higher education.

Participant C: I think that most people probably have computer access somehow. You know or... There's very few people I know that don't even have a cell. So, I'm sure that First Nations communities are fairly connected - unless you start getting into the Northern communities and stuff.

Monty: And unless - if you've got the money and stuff like that for it too. That kinda thing.

Participant C: Yep. (C, 283-287)

The financial pressures associated with maintaining adequate telecommunications capabilities impact low income prospective learners and fully employed distance learners alike. These costs are magnified in remote communities where there is often less market competition, both in terms of internet service providers as well as with vendors of the electronic hardware and software that is required to modulate/demodulate information. I suspect that many distance education students could relate with the circumstances of one participant who resided in a rural

area during her/his studies and had no access to a university-based computer lab to facilitate completion of the required on-line courses:

...you know, the technology changes all the time. So with computers, there's new software - so it's pretty hard to always buy a computer to go up with the times. So if my computer is like let's say six or seven years old, and there's modern technology out there - it doesn't compute. Right? (A, 130-133)

Reasonably-priced access to reliable internet connectivity is also important for distance education learners in Canada in the 21st Century. This financial cost must be borne entirely by off-campus learners, many of whom I suspect draw upon whatever economically viable and practical internet options are available to them in the public and commercial spaces of their communities, as illustrated by the following comments of one participant.

Well, I guess I could've gone to the public library. ... I don't know. I guess Starbucks has free wi-fi - you can sit in there for hours on end. (laughs) (E, 381-384)

One participant who resided on a First Nations reserve had no home internet access at all while completing her/his studies. Additionally, this community did not have a public library, a community college campus, nor were there any local businesses capable of providing free wireless internet access nearby. Although this participant's experience may not be typical of all distance learners, it does provide an example of the additional barriers that some remote place-bound learners can experience when entering distance education programs that rely on robust telecommunications technologies, regardless of whether or not the learner has sufficient financial resources to complete the program of studies.

I had no computer service at all at home. ... But I do, now - in the last six-eight months - I've got a program on my cell phone called tethering. And I just put my phone on and plug it into my computer, and then I have internet at home, because it works like a stick. (C, 268-270)

Although technological access to the internet is becoming more affordable for place-bound e-learners in even the most remote areas of Canada, I believe that until there is less economic disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians, barriers to post-secondary completion will not easily disappear.

4.2.1. Distance Education Delivery Models

As discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, the unconventional circumstances facing populations of place-bound prospective learners cannot be easily addressed within traditional campus-based service delivery approaches, without significant modification. In response to the requests for the delivery of accredited educational programs to placebound learners, many post-secondary institutions have begun incorporating distance education practices into their instructional service delivery methods. Examples of distance education service delivery models include: off-campus face to face delivery of courses with a cohort of selected students, entirely on-line course delivery models, or a blended learning model that combines face-to-face courses with e-learning courses. In my own student experience, I have personally earned professional degrees through off-campus cohort-based and blended distance educational programs. As a faculty member, I have taught students who were enrolled in entirely on-line programs, as well as blended learning programs. In my doctoral research study, I interviewed individuals who had obtained degrees from academic institutions that utilized all three of these distance educational programmatic delivery models. A breakdown of participation in distance education by delivery model type can be found in Table 3.2. In order to differentiate between the different student experiences associated with each of these models, the following sections will briefly illustrate the dynamics of the off-campus cohort, e-learning and blended learning models.

4.2.2. Off-campus Cohort Model

Off-campus cohort based service delivery models can be an administratively cost-efficient method of providing educational services to off-campus learners. In the face to face off-campus cohort model I am familiar with, an identified group of students who share some common characteristic (e.g., residents of a specific geographic area, Indigenous ancestry) comes together at one or more identified sites to take a pre-defined program of courses leading towards a professional credential. One or more instructors travel to the designated off-campus or satellite-campus site to teach condensed courses (e.g., a credit course that would typically run weekly over a 13 week semester instead is delivered over 13 afternoons) during a predetermined timeframe - often as a Summer institute. One participant's experience with distance education provides a good example of the off-campus cohort model I have described:

Well - summertime we gathered in different locations. You know like, for example, The Pas Manitoba for three weeks, and Emma Lake for three weeks. And Hawaii for three weeks ... And then there was one week in Saskatoon, but we didn't stay in class - it was in Urban education. (A, 71-74)

This participant's cohort experience was as a member of an wholly Indigenous student cohort, which was similar in composition to the cohorts that two additional participants experienced over the course of their student careers. One other participant in my doctoral research also identified that s/he had completed distance education as a member of a heterogeneous student cohort who all resided in the same geographical community.

I think probably I talked about the four or five or six of us that hung around together and stayed together through the whole program - I know we used to meet about once a week and just have a session together and talk about what was going on. And then a lot of our work, because we were distance students was group work, so we did a lot of group work together. ... It was very beneficial for us to stick together - know each other from the

diploma and still live altogether up in the _____ area. Because eventually, I think that except for our electives we all had to take the same classes per se, except for maybe just a couple that were different from each other because of our electives. So at one time or another, we all had to do the course. So it's beneficial that way. (B, 302-310, 318-320)

Off-campus cohort models of distance education can lead to the development of good peer-student support networks and they can also insulate culturally distinct groups of learners from the acculturative influences associated with campus-based face-to-face learning in urban areas. One downside to this model is that students are still required to travel and establish a temporary residence at a site that may be hundreds of kilometers away from their usual places of residence while attending their cohort institute classes. The requirement to travel necessitates additional expenses, and also interrupts students' traditional and familial responsibilities.

Because up here - we're so far away. We're far away. Like for me, it takes close to eighteen hours of straight driving from _____ to Saskatoon. But I've done it. I like driving, but a lot of the times it's just too overwhelming for other people. Too much. Especially if they have smaller children. And to move your entire family to a city with total strangers, it's totally, you know, too stressful on everybody. (D, 411-415)

Although student-peer relationships may be stronger with off-campus cohort models, the social disruption and financial costs necessitated by having to adjust to temporary shifts in living arrangements are stressors that do not impact strictly place-bound learners.

4.2.3. E-learning Model

The student dynamics endbuoy metaphor comes into play differently for learners enrolled in on-line courses than it does when they are participating in face-to-face, real-time learning environments. For many years, distance education in Canada was considered a niche market, populated by service providers that tailored their programs and methods to the needs of place-

bound student populations who were seeking educational experiences that could lead to social advancement and/or intrapsychic enrichment. The aspirations expressed by one participant, I believe illustrate a fairly good example of the reasons why many place-bound Indigenous adults enter into distance education programs, especially after having already had experienced some success within an on-campus, face-to-face learning environment:

I'm not finished. I still have one more degree to do. (laughs) Yeah ... It's interesting. It's fun. And not only that, you learn from younger students. And then the younger students learn from the older ones. So there's things for action there. It's interesting that you meet up with likeminded people. You know, scholarly interests. And those, those who are at my age - I don't know. I've always been interested in things like that. So, it makes it fun. Our winters are way too long up here. (laughs) (D, 440, 444-448)

The flexibility, inclusiveness and responsiveness to local situations of e-learning was remarked upon by many of the participants in my doctoral research, each of whom had met the key sampling requirement of having had completed at least one course in her/his most recent program of studies through e-learning delivery. Either as a member of a cohort or as an individual distance learner, all of the interviewees I spoke with had taken at least two courses through on-line studies, and each participant did express an appreciation for the flexibility that came with e-learning courses. One participant detailed the flexibility of the e-learning student experience in the following words:

And to see your instructors in person is nice, but at the same time, for me - like I said - with having to work and do those other kinds of things in life, it was pretty flexible. I like the idea that it was flexible, because there was often times when it might be one, or two, or three in the morning and something would pop into my head with regard to doing a paper, I could go and do it right now and get it done, because the thought was there. (B, 168-172)

While distance education can reduce isolation by connecting like-minded people together across vast geographic distances, the individualistic nature of e-learning coursework can also reinscribe feelings of isolation for some students who find themselves pining for the realpolitik dynamics of the face-to-face on-campus experience, as enunciated in the following words of one participant:

I think what I didn't like was the idea that the isolation - although I had friends to study with and be partners with - the piece about coming to actual in-class and sitting with a group of students and an instructor, that's the part that I missed. That's the part that I maybe didn't like so much. The idea that the camaraderieship of having other students to go through the program in a classroom setting. But I knew that going into the program, that I wouldn't be having that - as a distance student. So I said to myself, "That's not gonna happen", right. (laughs) (B, 238-243)

Feelings of isolation expressed by e-learning students can also be accompanied by feelings of disembodiment that may erase the physical dimensions of a person's identity that would typically distinguish them in a face-to-face environment (e.g., skin colour, accent, body modifications). Although subtleties in an on-line student's writing style and content may distinguish her/him as a person of colour for instance, this may not immediately be evident to other classmates who are also participating in the class. This disembodiment can be disconcerting for some marginalized students enrolled in on-line courses, however for others, this whitewashing of physical characteristics can also be emancipatory, as reflected in the words of one participant who reflected on the feelings of safety s/he felt while operating in stealth mode:

I felt more protected being on-line. And being this anonymous, you know, floating in cyberspace kinda person that I could still get my views across and practice my culture and traditions in a way that protected me and helped me gain strength to complete my courses on-line. (E, 413-416)

The absence of a face-to-face interactional environment is also a benefit to e-learners who may have physical disabilities that might otherwise prohibit them from attending a campus-based program of studies. Where the curbs, stairs and signage typical of campus buildings may restrict physical accessibility for people with mobility or vision limitations, these barriers can easily be eliminated in virtual learning environments - providing that the student has funding to acquire necessary adaptive technology, of course. One student reflected on this dynamic in the following exchange between us:

Participant B: "So what happened for me - when I got Bell's Palsy - like my face froze - the left side of my face kinda froze and I couldn't close my eye, and it was just kinda weird. (laughs) And it lasted about three weeks - right in the middle of school. So that was kind of a challenge to have to deal with - going to school with a frozen face. (laughs)

Monty: Well, at least you didn't have to sit in a classroom, I guess.

Participant B: Exactly - totally. (B, 142-147)

Where historically distance learning course materials and curriculum were delivered through correspondence via the postal system, telephone and televised methods, the dawning of the Information Age in the late 20th Century transformed post-secondary distance course delivery through computerized data processing and telecommunications equipment. Regardless of the technological advancements, however much of the interaction between the e-learning student and their post-secondary institution happens asynchronistically (i.e., not in real-time) as they wait for course materials to arrive, other peer students to contribute to discussions, or even for instructors to respond to their queries. All of the participants in my doctoral research commented on the unique temporal dynamics associated with e-learning, one example of which was stated in the following terms:

I didn't really like the groupwork because it was just too challenging to get together with groups or to find the time to get the work completed in a timely fashion. I found that I was up 'til about 10:30 - I think it was 11:59 that the deadline was - so most of my group members wanted to wait until that minute. And so it just got really tiring. After, you know, four or five group projects going that way. And especially when there's such a weight on the groupwork. It's like, it was just really stressful at times. Especially if I had to work early in the morning - 'cause I got call outs at about six o'clock in the morning. So, 11:59 was a little too late to be doing edits and proofreading and whatnot. (E, 244-251)

In order to function effectively in a computer-based course delivery environment, students must be computer literate so that they can register for courses, acquire necessary curricular resources and complete assignments within a timely fashion. Although many participants in my doctoral research did not express a concern with this data-entry dynamic, one participant did identify it as a source of frustration that differed from the face to face dynamic:

You know some people can go on and on and talk on the computer - you know - and do wonderful. But that's just not me. I'm a chicken peck typer - I type with two fingers and so, even to respond to something on the computer takes longer. (C, 173-175)

Indeed, most of the participants expressed that they had enjoyed their e-learning experiences overall and would certainly enrol in another e-learning course for professional or personal development, should a future opportunity and interest arise - although one participant strongly disagreed (Her/his response when asked if s/he would consider taking another e-learning course was, "Hell No!" (C, 170)). The words of one participant exemplify the feelings expressed by the majority of the interviewees in my doctoral study:

...the first time I took an on-line course, it was totally confusing. (laughs) For the first three weeks and after that I got to enjoy it because I took three other courses after that. I really, really enjoyed those ones. I liked those ones better. Even though they were short

and quick and to the point and everything, you had to be on task. You had to be on the computer all the time. You just had to be there. I liked it. I really did. (A, 98-102)

Although a review of the curricular materials and assignments utilized for the study participants' e-learning coursework was outside the scope of this research study, all of the participants did indicate that the amount of time they felt compelled to allocate to their daily studies was significantly greater than would be equivalent for a face-to-face course offering. Personal time management over the duration of an e-learning course was a significant aspect of the participants' experiences, as exemplified in the following words of one participant:

I for one am no good at on-line courses. I'll be the first to admit it, and she'll be the second to admit it. I miss having ... With my two grown children and three grandbabies and a full-time job, I don't do as well with on-line courses because I don't have the time to check in every day and read everybody's comments and then come back. I don't do good with it. (C, 154-157)

The absence of interactional cues that typify face-to-face communications can detract from the quality of asynchronous discussions for e-learners, and leave some students feeling discomfited in ways which are less likely to occur in learning environments where individuals interact with each other in real-time.

4.2.4. Blended Model

The choices facing post-secondary institutions that aim to provide relevant and high quality distance education experiences to geographically-distant and culturally-diverse fee-payers necessitate creative and flexible adaptations to traditional *modi operandi*. Cohort models that require instructors to travel to a remote site to deliver face-to-face courses can work well for culturally or geographically discrete populations who all are seeking the same level of professional accreditation. E-learning models that are dependent upon technology can offer

much flexibility and convenience to students whose cultural, financial or familial responsibilities and/or physical abilities bind them to one place while they complete their educational programs. However, for students who do not find themselves physically or financially restricted from attending campus-based courses upon occasion, an educational model that includes both face-to-face instruction and on-line learning opportunities can successfully bridge the isolation often associated with e-learning and the cultural safety dimensions of campus-based cohort or individualized educational models.

The blended model of distance education that I am familiar with and referring to herein incorporates both e-learning and face-to-face instruction. Many of the participants in my doctoral research had experienced blended learning models, and as such were neither purely e-learning students, nor wholly face-to-face distance education students. Two participants entered into their distance education programs as registrants into entirely on-line programs: one in an individualized program, the other as a member of an on-line Indigenous student cohort. The remaining participants were enrolled in cohort-based distance education models that required them to take a combination of e-learning courses and face-to-face courses that were held at several sites on the homelands of Indigenous peoples in Western Canada and Hawaii. Because of sub rosa administrative factors associated with the blended learning model that was encountered by several participants who participated in an Indigenous cohort model, several interviewees were unsure as to whether or not to classify themselves as an e-learner or as a cohort student, as was reflected in the experience of one participant, who stated:

You know, I'm not really sure. I was on-campus and I was also off-campus. We registered on-line to Ed Foundations. And actually when we first registered, we were registered with the U of A. And then the next thing you know, we were transferred over

to U of S. So, I'll tell you that I'm not sure about that question. Whether I was on or off campus. Because I was both On and I was also Off campus. (laughs). (D, 172-175)

The distance education program that was the subject of the experience for two entirely on-line participants had been designed with a requirement that all newly-admitted e-learning students attend a brief campus-based orientation to their program of studies. As discussed by one participant, this initial orientation helped reduce isolation and concretize her/his relationships with important actors in the distance education program:

... they had a component where you had to be on campus for a week. And so, I think really solidified those relationships that I needed at the beginning. Because I'm a very visual person, so seeing them face to face - meeting my classmates, meeting the instructors - it just made it really real. (laughs) (E, 113-117)

While a blended model of distance education delivery can realize administrative efficiencies for institutions, this model also presents an attendant concern for students who already have full calendars and who cannot easily afford to frequently take time off to travel to a campus. Evidence of this phenomenon was reflected in the words of one participant who rationed her/his visits onto campus to coincide with events of personal cultural significance, rather than to attend events designed to reinforce institutional (e.g., school spirit) significance.

'Cause, I was in _____, so it's far - quite a distance. I mean, on the odd occasion, I did come down to the university with some other classmates from _____ to attend some Indigenous events and things. (B, 184-186)

Blended learning models can produce efficiencies for distance education service providers that opt to implement this method of instruction, however the increased financial costs and time commitments that this model generates for off-campus learners should be also an important consideration for program administrators and instructional staff.

4.3. Corkline - Institutional-level Support Factors

The most visible aspect of a fishing net that has been put into operation is its' corkline that splay out across the water's surface between the shore stanchion and the endbuoy. Resembling the floating lane markers in swimming pools, the corks are the buoyant oblong bobbles that have been tied into place with mending twine and spaced several meters apart along a robust line. (Figure 1) Like the endbuoy, the floats themselves are highly visible so that when a fish or current borne object strikes or becomes entangled in the mesh hanging below the corkline, an alert observer will know that the net is indeed working, and that action will be required to realize the potential represented in the visible strike. Each individual float demarcates a specific position on the corkline, and thus serves as a visual indicator of any active engagement occurring at that position.

For my doctoral research, I envisioned the corkline for my research as being comprised of the administrative, curricular, and instructional supports that are commonly provided by post-secondary institutions to their students in their efforts to meet their students' academic, social, recreational, spiritual, health, and residential needs. In relation to my net metaphor, I thought of each of these discrete facets of support as being qualitatively distinct from each other function spread along the line between my Indigenous learner dynamics shore stanchion and my distance education learner dynamics endbuoy. As I developed this metaphor further, I began to understand that each discrete mechanism affixed along this student support corkline could assist me - an alert observer - to understand that a latent function could be activated at that position, in response to a wide variety of post-secondary student circumstances. The more I considered the appropriateness of this metaphor, the more I came to realize that the mechanisms associated with an institutional student support corkline would probably work differently for off-campus learners

than they would for on-campus students, given the different circumstances that place-bound learners encounter as they interact with the administrative, curricular and instructional functions of their chosen post-secondary institution. If similarly constituted institutional student support mechanisms were employed with distance education students as were designed for use with on-campus learners, would these same supports fill the same identified need?

During the proposal stage of my doctoral research, I began drawing together the components of my metaphoric net, and for my corkline, I determined that I would employ a series of established institutional student support mechanisms as the individual floats. As a starting point, I first recalled the types of institutional student supports I had personally availed myself of in my on-campus and distance education student days, or had witnessed the use of by other students and instructors. Drawing thus upon my own experience, I developed a series of questions I hoped to use in my interview protocol to elicit information about institutional student support services. The interview protocol (see Appendix B) identified a number of student support mechanisms that many institutions have established to assist on-campus learners in adjusting to urban student life so that they can successfully complete their programs of study.

To assist me in representing the experiences of the participants in my doctoral research in relation to the institutional support mechanisms I enumerated in my interview protocol, I am presenting each identified support mechanism as a distinct float along my metaphorical institutional student support corkline. Each float is presented here in the same order as it's associated institutional support mechanism was discussed in my interview protocol.

4.3.1. Float 1 - Campus-based Facilities and Extracurricular Programs

The first institutional student support mechanism that I enquired about was the programs and services whose purpose is to enhance the social, physical and spiritual well-being of campus-

based post-secondary students. I envisioned student supports in this emphasis area as comprising such extracurricular services as campus athletic facilities and student commons, intramural and varsity sports teams, student recreational clubs, intercultural and interfaith student associations, student health services (e.g., mental health, clinics), student housing offices and employment services centres.

When asked whether or not they had made use of any of these kinds campus-based services, facilities, or social programs, all of the participants in my doctoral research indicated that they had not utilized any services of this nature.

None. None of those we had access to. Like they were all on campus. (D, 186), was the response of one participant who, like others, indicated that geographic distances were too prohibitive to make regular travel to campus feasible.

I wish I did. But I was too far away (laughs) to go there and make use of them. (A, 77), stated another participant.

From the responses of the participants in my study, it does not appear that expending institutional resources to provide extracurricular programs and services for campus-based students produces the same degree of social well-being and physical health benefits for off-campus place-bound learners.

4.3.2. Float 2 - Campus-based Services Exclusively for Indigenous Students

The second institutional student support mechanism that I asked participants about was an off-shoot of the first category that I thought might be of particular relevance for Indigenous students. In this category, I specifically made reference to institutionally-mandated facilities and services that are targeted towards Indigenous students, such as Aboriginal students centres or counselling sessions with local Indigenous elders. As with the institutional student support

mechanisms associated with the first category, none of the participants reported having made use of a campus-based Aboriginal student centre, as was typified in the response of one participant who commented:

I actually didn't. (laughs) It's kinda funny, because I actually didn't know it was here. (laughs) (E, 166).

One participant however did mention that the organizers of the Indigenous cohort program s/he was a member of did invite elders to attend several sessions of place-based Summer institute courses.

They actually brought some elders to us when we were at Kenderdine. And also at The Pas. So, I don't know if they were affiliated with the university or they just got them to come in themselves. (D, 187-188)

There was however, one campus-based service that did draw several participants onto campus. For three participants, the promise of the Indigenous recognition ceremony associated with their convocation was a significant enough event to inspire them to travel hundreds of kilometers to attend. From my own experience with events that celebrate the achievement of an Indigenous person's academic goals, ceremonies that recognize the academic achievements of graduands are very important. One participant expanded upon the importance of an Indigenous recognition ceremony to e-learning students such as her/himself, in the following terms:

It was nice in the end when things came to fruition and we were all gonna get our degrees. I think because we were gonna have our celebrations together at Mungo Martin house, and we had a celebration at the University of Victoria and those kinds of things. So, I was able to meet some of the people that I'd only known on-line because they were at the convocation, and they were at Mungo Martin house and those kinds of things. (B, 244-248)

Although these sorts of events may not be officially sanctioned in the same way as the formal institutional convocation ceremonies, it appears that the prospect of standing amid a circle of honoured people from one's own family or tribal community during an Indigenous recognition ceremony is a very important motivator for many Indigenous students.

4.3.3. Float 3 - Academic Unit Course Planning and Student Counselling Services

Although most Canadian universities often employ large quantities of local staff to perform a wide range of functions necessary for the daily operations of their institutions, it has been my experience that students typically give little thought to either the senior administrators or the groundskeepers whom they may encounter as they hustle to complete their assignments. Rather, it is often the faculty and staff associated with academic units of a post-secondary institution who are often the 'face' of the university to students enrolled in those programs. Although many students refer to an electronic or hard copy University Calendar when planning their degree programs, oftentimes it is their program's departmental staff and faculty advisors whom they turn to for academic counselling. This is particularly true for off-campus learners who instead find themselves communicating with departmental staff via phone, Skype or e-mail on personal matters related to transfer credits, course scheduling, and convocation requirements.

One participant spoke as follows of the important support s/he received from a designated Distance education liaison employed within the academic unit into which s/he had enrolled:

I remember one person ... she was like the liaison for the Distance students. So if we had things we needed to have clarified or information or stuff like that, we could always get hold of her, and she would help us out with information about things that needed to be done. Or if there were certain deadlines or stuff like that right? (B, 192-195)

Another participant spoke to the important counselling function that was provided to members of her/his cohort by the departmental secretary within her program of studies:

Transfer credits and course planning was not really needed. Just these are the courses you take this semester, these are the courses you take this semester. And then at the very end - when I only needed one class - then the secretary, said "Well, there's this class you can take - one undergraduate class." So that was fine. (C, 118-121)

As was discussed in the preceding category of institutional student supports, the ceremonial aspect of the University convocation was also cited as an important motivator for the e-learning alumni whom I interviewed. Because convocation is a function of a University's Senate whose focus is most often directed towards their typical on-campus graduands, it has been my experience that sometimes it can be difficult for distance learners to find information about their convocation ceremony - even so far as not knowing how to find the building in which the ceremony is being held. Accordingly, when off-campus learners are seeking information about convocation, it is again not uncommon that they turn to their established contacts within their academic unit. This dynamic was expressed in the words of one participant who had traveled from western Alberta to central Saskatchewan to attend a convocation ceremony,

Why I chuckled Monty was that the first time that I had ever set foot on the University of Saskatchewan grounds was for that land-based conference on the day of convocation. (laughs). So I got an M.Ed. and I had never set foot on the UofS once. (C, 104-106)

An exchange between myself and another participant gives additional insight into the different association that some distance education students may infer from attending a convocation ceremony than is felt by on-campus learners:

Participant B: So some of the people you talked to on-line for a couple of years that you never saw in person (laughs), that was the first time that I actually saw them was when you came together for a celebration.

Monty: I know - that's pretty weird, eh? That's a cool dynamic.

Participant B: Weird. Because there's people from all across Canada, right. So - it was pretty interesting that way.

*Monty: It's strange. When you hear a comment like "I thought you'd be taller."
(laughs)*

Participant B: (laughs) Exactly. (B, 248-255)

Whether responding to an e-learner's query involving the sequencing of courses, arranging attendance at convocation, or answering questions that require more nuanced information than can be obtained from on-line sources, it is clear that departmental staff do fill an important information brokering function for place-bound learners.

4.3.4. Float 4 - Campus Bookstore Services

In order for post-secondary students to complete their programs of studies, it is important for them to be able to access necessary instructional resources within a timely manner. Campus-based learners who have ready access to a campus bookstore rarely consider the extent to which a simple physical convenience can lessen student stress, unless their bookstore was unable to stock sufficient copies of a textbook or readings packs that they required for a specific course. In my experience as a distance learner, being able to access course materials in a timely manner was important, especially so when I resided in a remote community that had limited access to any bookstore that could provide me with reading materials that could assist me in maintaining balance in my life. The words of one participant who also had resided in a remote community reminded me of my own experience of the psychological solace that can be achieved simply by being able to relate to another person's written experience:

Well, it kinda kept me sane, I guess you can say. In a way it did. I can actually be thankful for some of those readings that I was going through. Like, it gives you a different perspective on life. (D, 114-115)

As is the case with many Canadians, I no longer reside in a remote area. Thankfully, I do now have greater access to bookstores located in my home community than I did previously, although this situation is changing as the Canadian book retailing industry restructures to adapt to the commercial realities of the Information Age. One participant in my research expressed her/his own relationship to the book retailing industry in the 21st Century in the following terms:

I have an extensive collection of books of my own, and what we have at the school, or I would just, if I found a book, I would just order it from Amazon. (C, 134-135)

In response to competition from on-line book e-tailers such as Amazon, many campus bookstores have developed their own websites to facilitate the ordering of course materials by students. This has not necessarily been a smooth transition for distance learners however, as was reflected in the comments of another participant:

It was pretty much - the website's pretty straightforward in accessing those kinds of services. I just found that not having a credit card was really frustrating. Because I would have to send a money order, so it would take longer for services. (E, 196-198)

None of the participants in my doctoral research reported having any other difficulties accessing materials from a campus bookstore, however. One participant who had participated in cohort-based distance learning summed up her/his experience of acquiring necessary course materials in the following terms:

When they said that we were gonna take this course, they just told us how much it was going to cost, including books. So we just sent them the money and the books came. With everything in it. (D, 210-211)

In order for the instructional design associated with e-learning curriculum to operate smoothly, off-campus learners must have ready access to required course resources. If a course requires specialized materials (i.e., a readings coursepack) that cannot be conveniently obtained from

other commercial sources, campus bookstores can provide a helpful and timely service to place-bound learners.

4.3.5. Float 5 - University Library Services

One of the longest standing functions of Western universities has been the establishment of repositories for text-based information and archival materials of scholarly interest. Housing such diverse materials as books, academic journals, reports, papers, audio recordings and theses/dissertations, university libraries provide an important service for individuals who are interested in pursuing their academic goals. Accordingly, many post-secondary students make use of campus-based library facilities and the services of university librarians over the course of their academic careers. Whether as a quiet place to study or as an encyclopaedic source of both arcana and orthodox knowledge, it has been my experience that a university library can be a very useful support for students and scholars alike.

None of the participants in my doctoral research reported using the services of their university's library to any great extent, however. A typical response to my query regarding university library utilization was made by one participant who stated:

I can't say that I used them a whole lot, but I think when I did, there was never any issues or problems that came up for me. (B, 203-204)

I did not differentiate between campus-based library services or the on-line services that many university libraries in Canada have begun providing over the past several decades, yet several participants did refer to their experiences with accessing library resources through their institution's virtual library function. One participant cited as a transferable skill her/his ability to access library resources that s/he had learned as a campus-based student at a previous institution:

But I think because I already had post-secondary schooling, I found it a lot easier to navigate. Just different resources, especially like the on-line databases for the library. Like I had already done that before at another institution. So it was just figuring out what this institution did. And I found it really easy to navigate. But I've heard from other people that it can be difficult, especially coming with no post-secondary experiences, I guess. (E, 336-340)

Another participant who did have post-secondary experience, but who had attended a previous institution in the days before virtual librarian services were being routinely provided by university libraries spoke to her/his difficulty with accessing on-line library services as an off-campus learner:

You know, I remember finding difficulty getting the library resource on-line. Looking for a certain book. Like, I just gave up. I remember just giving up. And so I actually had to think about changing what I was going to write about. Because I was going to use that book as a resource, but you know I just couldn't access it. (D, 200-206)

Perhaps because all of the participants had already completed previous campus-based coursework before entering into e-learning studies, their experiences of utilizing the services of their institution's libraries may not be representative of the majority of place-bound learners. Regardless, the voices of the participants in my study do provide authentic evidence regarding university library utilization by some Indigenous e-learners.

4.3.6. Float 6 - University Internet Technology (IT) Support Services

Although the experiences that the participants in my doctoral research shared with me covered a spectrum of distance educational delivery modalities, it had been the primary intent of my study to explore e-learning student experiences. Having myself had many situations where I required the assistance of a computer technician arise in my student and professional associations

with Canadian post-secondary institutions over the past several decades, I knew from first-hand experience the importance of university Internet Technology (IT) support services.

Accordingly, when devising my interview protocol, I deliberately included a question related to the utilization of university IT support services. An example of one interchange between myself and a participant on the topic of IT support services occurred as follows:

Monty: Did you use any on-line helpdesk or personal assistance to help you understand how to get the technology to work?

Participant A: Yes.

Monty: You did. So - On-line - did you call them or...?

Participant A: No, I just e-mailed them. (A, 147-151)

This participant's response was atypical of the responses given by the other participants when asked if they had made personal contact with a technical support person. Although none of the other participants indicated that they had contacted their institution's IT support services over their program of studies, one participant did indicate that s/he had accessed on-line technical support resources to assist her/him in setting up on-line user accounts necessary for student registration and library access.

I got instructions. Distance education instructions. So there was like a tutorial that you could watch. Accessing the net-link. Setting that all up. And getting an e-mail address. (E, 330-331)

Additionally, one participant who had participated in cohort-based learning did refer to the campus-based tech support services s/he received during a Summer institute orientation to the typical on-line software programs that s/he would be required to interact with as an off-campus student enrolled in the institution's distance education program.

They walked us through that. So we were able to bring our computers in, and we tried it and all that sort of stuff. So that was really good. If there was problems, they fixed the problems there before we brought it home. (D, 354-356)

The services provided by Information Technology helpdesk staff can be useful to place-bound e-learners, depending on the nature of their technology-related queries, the timeframe that resolution is required within, and availability of other qualified tech support services that the learner may have access to within her/his local community.

4.3.7. *Float 7 - University Admissions and Financial Aid Services*

Many Canadian universities have embraced the efficiencies of Information Age and have implemented computer software programs to facilitate their interactions with campus-based and off-campus students. On-line self-registration processes and fee-payment mechanisms have largely become automated functions commonly associated with university registrar and bursar offices. Post-secondary students are also now able to search university databases for available scholarships, bursaries, and fellowships simply by typing their student numbers into on-line user interfaces - a process that would previously have required a registered student to present her/his student card to a financial administrator during a banking-hours visit to a campus-based administrative services building in the not too distant past. For off-campus students who no longer require a student card and appointment with a financial administrator, the automation of university administrative services is now much more efficient than it has ever been in the past.

Despite the convenience associated with eliminating the need for registered students to produce an official student card to access institutional services, one participant in my doctoral research did however express a sentiment that I have frequently heard expressed by other distance education students who feel intrinsically disadvantaged by being denied the opportunity

to formally identify themselves as a full-time student. Although expressed jokingly, her/his sentiment,

I couldn't even get a student discount, because I didn't get a student card. (laughs) (C, 114)

spoke to an experience of being made to feel 'less than' that can be very significant to some off-campus students. Only one participant in my doctoral research indicated having any difficulty in accessing administrative services as a distance education student. This participant mentioned her/his experience with the administrative functioning of her/his institution's bursar office as a personal stressor, in these words:

I had never done it before. For my BA and my Social Work Diploma, I was funded by my Band. And for this Bachelor of Social Work that I just completed, I had to take out a student loan. ... It's a very tedious process. ... And then, once you do all that work, sometimes you just don't get it on time. You know, that was another frustration. ... But that's like that whole program. It just makes it more difficult when you're not there, and you can't just walk the paper over and set it on somebody's desk and say, "Here." (E, 207-219)

With respect to the student registration experiences mentioned by the participants in my doctoral research, all of the participants reported having been enrolled in either an Education or Social Work program. All of the participants had previously achieved a professional credential from a different educational institution than the one they were enrolled in while completing their e-learning studies, and accordingly each participant was required to submit transcripts of her/his previous studies to the university registrar before being permitted to enrol in courses. One participant who applied to a distance education professional program after having completing a general Bachelor of Arts degree as an on-campus student in her/his home community was faced

with having to apply for transfer credit between the institutions, and relied on competencies s/he had developed with her/his previous on-campus experience.

I was kind of, I guess I was adept at doing it. I just did it on my own. But I did ask for guidance when I was at VIU still about transferring my credits over. I guess I talked to undergrad admissions a bit to make sure that it had gone through. But I think that's pretty much it. There's the BC transfer guide that tells you what credits transfer over. ... I was kind of tuned into that resource earlier on, so I was making sure that I took courses that would transfer over. So that I wouldn't have to repeat a couple of the things. (E, 184-191)

Digitized course calendars, admissions forms, and on-demand videorecorded tutorials that walk prospective place-bound learners through institutional procedures can provide useful information to incoming students, especially when they do not happen to reside within easy commuting distance to the university administration offices that may be more convenient for their campus-based peers.

4.3.8. *Float 8 - Services Aimed at Building Community and Student Mutual Aid*

As an alumnus of a distance education program myself, I have often found myself as the recipient of communications sent from employees and/or administrative units within the post-secondary institution that eventually became my alma mater. Although many of the received messages were germane to the completion of my degree program, I also recall many incidents that reinscribed the sense of 'otherness' I felt as a distance learner. For example, e-mails distributed via institutional listserves that were intended to improve attendance at upcoming campus-based athletic competitions, cultural events, or scholarly presentations were not really very useful when I resided in a community that was a thousand kilometers distant from the event's location. Although apparently designed to build community and school spirit, these sorts

of broadcast messages instead made me feel less connected than I might have been had I not received the message.

In designing the interview protocol I used for my doctoral study, I included questions that I hoped would delve into the participant's experiences of either the 'otherness' I associated with a distance education experience or a sense of community. I hoped that by asking them to reflect on their experiences of communicating with student peers, I would be able to gain some valuable insights into the dimensions of support that can emerge as students interact among themselves.

All of the participants reported that they enjoyed the connections they made with other students in the on-line courses they participated in. The following statement expressed by one participant exemplified the commonly expressed sentiment of student peer connection thus:

But the other things that I liked about it was getting to, you know, once I was on line, I was getting to meet the people through on-line and sharing a dialogue with them. You know it was a good learning experience. (A, 109-111)

Although few participants went into much detail about their experience of establishing relationships with student peers in on-line classes, one participant did describe how her/his interactions with other e-learners created an opportunity to develop an enriched understanding of the course materials.

You know, when you start thinking about how other people think, a lot of the times, you kinda get an understanding of who they really are - you connect with them. You know, sometimes you actually even have a glimpse of how they were brought up, just by the way they think. "Why are they thinking that way?" You start asking yourself questions about who they are. So you have a better understanding of the other students and their background. (D, 268-272)

Overall, I am unsure as to how well the specific questions I crafted for my interview protocol regarding the connections the participants did make with their student peers actually

prompted the sorts of responses I hoped would illuminate this dimension of e-learner support. None of the participants in my doctoral research went into much detail regarding the extent of mutual aid they experienced within e-learning environments, although all of the interviewees who reported having completed coursework in a cohort-based distance education model did refer to the connections they had made in that format as being an important supportive factor for them personally and academically in their distance education studies.

The nine student support mechanisms presented thus far have illustrated the varied experiences of the participants in my doctoral research with the administrative and extracurricular programs, services and facilities that are typically made available to students enrolled in post-secondary education coursework. In particular, the participant's experiences with campus-based facilities and extracurricular support programs (float 1), services to Indigenous students (float 2), counselling services (float 3), and community-building services (float 8) all animate the breadth of support services that may be accessed by members of a post-secondary institution's student body. As important as it was to document the experiences of the participants with these types of administrative and extracurricular support services, it was also another aim of my doctoral research to explore the curricular supports that e-learners may draw upon to assist them in the completion of their programs of study. The following three student support emphasis areas shed light onto the curricular mechanisms that the participants encountered as they conducted their e-learning studies.

4.3.9. Float 9 - Technologies That Facilitate Coursework Completion

Just as with the programs, services and facilities that support students to achieve their socio-educational goals, post-secondary students also can be exposed to a range of technological supports within their classroom learning environments. Based upon my own experience however, it is my belief that courses delivered within virtual classrooms require a different suite of services from those that are typically delivered in a bricks and mortar campus-based structure. One of these areas of divergence is with the technologies that instructors may use to deliver course content to distance learners.

As global citizens of the Information Age, many post-secondary students attending Western universities in the 21st Century are increasingly being asked to partake of course content through delivery models that blend face-to-face instruction with the digital repositories of the internet. It is now not uncommon for campus-based students to come into daily contact with such diverse instructional aids as traditional technologies (e.g., chalkboards, textbooks), electronic communications equipment (e.g., data projectors, smartboards), and digitized content (e.g., portable document format (.pdf) files, podcasts). Place-bound learners however do not often interact with these technologies in the same way as their campus-based colleagues, unless they have elected to enter into a blended model of course delivery. This difference is not necessarily reflective of the fact that many distance learners are older and perhaps less technologically savvy than their typical campus-based student counterparts, although this dynamic was reflected in the comments of several participants in my doctoral study (average age at convocation: 46 years), as exemplified by the following statement:

It was a bit of a learning curve. Because I am not of the computer age. That's the thirty-five and unders, you know. I had some difficulty at first. You know, finding my way around the computer, and sometimes even learning that sometimes you just have to double click on something to get it to open. (C, 128-130)

By necessity, the virtual classroom experience of many e-learners is much more dependent upon electronic technologies than it had been in the olden days of correspondence courses that utilized the postal service as the preferred course material delivery mechanism. This can present problems for students who do not have a reliable internet connection with which to access on-line services, as described in the words of one participant:

I was paired up with one of the girls that was living on the reserve down south in Manitoba and she couldn't access the internet. We had to get some work done together and the deadline was coming up and I was saying, "Well, I'll just do this part." You know, we just had to just wing it for the deadline, and we'll get this part done, and see if you can get yours in right away. So instead of working collaboratively together - because her internet wasn't working - I did my part and sometimes I would fax it off to the school she was working at. And she'd read it and a lot of the times, if there was something she didn't agree with, she would fix it and then she would do the same thing with me. (D, 316-323)

Simply having reliable access to the internet is not enough, however. As was mentioned by nearly all of the participants in my doctoral research, it was equally important that they have access to robust computer hardware and software that could enable them to demodulate and process data in a variety of formats.

Well see, the thing is there's always new technology. Once a person gets used to being on one type and getting used to it and getting familiar, then the next time you get on-line they switch it altogether. Then you have to re-learn everything - throw yourself in a loop (laughs). (A, 114-117)

All of the participants reported having had used their university's proprietary on-line learning management system (e.g., Moodle, Blackboard, WebCT). However, I do not get the sense that many of them found the learning management system to be a particularly stress-free environment within which to complete their studies. Many of the participants expressed frustration at having

to continually adapt to upgraded versions of their institution's learning management system, requiring them to have to relearn standardized functions that had been revised in the newest version.

I'm a person that doesn't have a lot of computer skills to begin with and some of the stuff on-line maybe was a little bit hectic to learn in the beginning, but once I got onto it, it wasn't a problem. I felt frustrated at times throughout the process when maybe I would get myself onto a program - have it down pat how to use it - and then they would change it to something else (laughs). Then you had to start once again to learn that format. (B, 230-235)

Electronic communications technologies have significantly impacted the lives of all distance learners in Canada, especially since the not too distant past when postal service correspondence and televised courses were the norm for place-bound learners. Despite the advances that have been made in the capacities of computer hardware, software programs and connectivity infrastructure to respond to the needs of distance learners, these systems still depend upon actual human beings to transform electronic bits of data into meaningful information and action. Despite administrative drives to realize financial and technological efficiencies, modifications to existing processes that do not sufficiently accommodate for the change management needs of off-campus end-users may lead to frustration with post-secondary institutions themselves. In order to avoid 'turning off' future classes of off-campus learners through adverse word of mouth, post-secondary distance education service providers would be well advised to take steps to avoid proprietary technologies that create undue financial or technological stressors for student users.

4.3.10. Float 10 - Instructional Design of e-learning Courses

Over the course of my professional career within academia, I have had several opportunities to develop courses for use in entirely on-line environments. The graduate level and

undergraduate courses I designed, developed and piloted on-line were intended for self-identified Indigenous students in one case and a heterogeneous student audience for the other. As I designed these courses, I drew upon my own experience as a distance learner and educator when considering how best to meet the learning objectives of the course, while also taking steps to ensure that students' unique social, cultural and psychological experiences would be respected.

Having a good sense of the potential of e-learning courses as a vehicle to uphold Indigenous knowledges in an typically assimilative learning environment, I wanted to explore the instructional design dimension of student support in my doctoral research. However, I also understood that a discussion about one's experience with instructional design would be difficult to introduce in my conversations with the interviewees. Although, I did not ask the participants directly about their experiences of the instructional design that underpinned the e-learning courses they completed, one participant did make reference to the feelings s/he experienced after finding significant Indigenous content incorporated into the on-line courses of her/his program:

... I could still get my views across and practice my culture and traditions in a way that protected me and helped me gain strength to complete my courses on-line. So, I don't know - I thought it was really neat that, you know, the on-line component really celebrated that. I didn't know how much of an Indigenous perspective would be incorporated in the Social Work courses, but I found a lot of content was. So I felt really supported in that way. That there was a lot of acknowledgement of Indigenous ways and being in the coursework. (E. 414-419)

For a variety of pedagogical and practical reasons, groupwork assignments are often assigned within e-learning course design. Groupwork assignments can help reduce the isolation that e-learners may experience, and they can also assist learners to develop collaborative competencies that are valued within the helping professions. However, as noted in the following comments expressed by one participant, groupwork can also become a large source of frustration

for e-learners, especially if the process of assigning students into groups was not considerate of the temporal constraints necessitated by the geographic locations of the student group members:

I can see the importance of it, because I mean obviously if you're going to be working in organizations or working out in the field, you're gonna have to work in a team at some point. So, I can see the importance of groupwork. But it's just really challenging in an on-line capacity. I noticed that one on-line groupwork process was easier than others. Because the teacher put us in timezones, which was REALLY helpful. (E, 255-259)

Other participants articulated another commonly expressed drawback to groupwork that I have often heard expressed in both campus-based and e-learning settings alike:

I was in some groups where there are one or two who will do most of the work and then there's a few that just get kinda get dragged along. So, again - it's a balance. You've got to have the individual work stuff too, because if you don't fully agree with what you're doing, you've still gotta do it because you're part of a group. (C, 258-261)

Despite these expressed drawbacks to including groupwork assignments within e-learning courses, most of the participants in my doctoral research did express tacit gratitude to the instructional designers of their courses for having created opportunities for e-learners to connect with student peers for support and friendship. As described by one participant, the overall experience of groupwork for e-learners such as her/him did foster a sense of mutual aid among virtual classmates:

On the WebCT we had different assignments that we had to do. Some of them we had to do by ourselves and some were done in more of a group kind of way. So I always thought it was good because, everybody was participating. You know, it really depended on the group that you got into sometimes. Most of the students were pretty keen to do the work, so if you got into a group of others and we had to do a group assignment kind of thing, I can't remember there ever being any kind of situation where someone wasn't pulling their weight or things got taken down because we weren't all on the same page. (B, 348-352)

While collecting data for my doctoral research, I heard many of the participants speaking of using e-mail as a common medium for making connections and sharing information. I did not however, enquire as to whether or not they were using a university issued e-mail address or the services of some other e-mail service provider. Being interested in the services that e-learners do find useful to the completion of their coursework, I did make enquiries as to whether or not any of the participants had used social networking or Web 2.0 technologies to communicate their student peers.

None of participants in my doctoral research reporting using social networking sites (e.g., Facebook) as a means of communicating with their classmates, although two participants did recount being part of student groups that did make use of user-generated content provider websites (i.e., Prezi and YouTube) to assist in them in the completion of an assignment. An example of one conversational exchange that occurred between myself and one participant on this topic area went as follows:

Participant E: Well, there was different tools that we could use. We used one that was almost like a chatroom. Like it was a group chat thing. I found that really helpful, but kinda challenging at the same time. 'Cause reining in what we were supposed to be talking about was kinda difficult. (laughs) ... It just turned into a chat. So keeping focussed in that kinda regard. I don't know if that was effective. We certainly got to know each other, but...

Monty: Did you use anything like Google docs, or Prezi or any of those kind of things? Or Dropbox?

Respondent E: Not really. We just e-mailed each other a lot. Also, I actually invited classmates on phone so we could talk about it. I found that effective in two cases. And we actually got to talk back and forth and get a sense of what we were focussing on in our project. (E, 274-283)

Although on-line collaboration tools are available becoming more widely available for integration into on-line courses, I believe that unless there is a clear pedagogical reason for incorporating these tools into groupwork, collaboration-dependent tools should be only deployed alongside existing communications technologies with which place-based learners have already developed some familiarity through practice.

4.3.11. Float 11 - Personal Contact with University Faculty

Most Canadian post-secondary institutions that offer distance education services utilize a variety of technological resources to facilitate connections with and among their off-campus learners. Learning management systems, e-mail, and student listserves are commonly utilized by many departmental staff and faculty. Less frequently, faculty members make attempts to engage groups of students enrolled in their on-line courses via voice-over-internet protocol technology, chatrooms or web-conferencing. Often the aim of these group communication exercises is to serve a pedagogic purpose associated with a defined learning outcome or to create opportunities for real-time interactions that parallel the face-to-face classroom dynamic. In my own experience as a place-bound learner and as an e-learning instructor, it is my preference to avoid situations that require a group of geographically dispersed individuals to gather together on-line at the same time whenever possible. I personally feel that coercing group participation where it is pedagogically unnecessary diminishes individual autonomy and adds institutional rigidity to situations where personal flexibility is highly valued.

In many ways, the instructors of on-line and distance education courses are uniquely positioned as the “face” of the university to the students enrolled in their courses. Accordingly, an instructor can often find themselves as the first person a place-bound learner will turn to for information or support during a time of personal crisis or academic distress. Sensitive,

knowledgeable, and understanding instructors can provide timely and valuable psychological supports that may not be otherwise available to e-learners within their own geographic, cultural or peer-support networks.

In order to assess the extent of this dimension of support, I felt that it would be useful for me to include a component of my interview protocol that asked whether or not each interviewee had encountered any crises or personal obligations that had impacted their e-learning studies. Two participants identified having personal health issues arise during the course of their e-learning studies, two others made reference to health crises experienced by close family members, and one participant reported having to deal with the outfall of a family member's untimely death. Four of the participants reported that they had discussed their personal circumstances with their instructors, and that they had found their instructors to be sensitive and supportive to their circumstances. The comments of one participant exemplify the level of support s/he received after advising her/his instructor of her personal circumstances:

I think that if it wasn't for that, and having that personal connection with my instructors, I think that I probably wouldn't have done as well as I did. I probably wouldn't have completed it without that extra support. Because it was really challenging. 'Cause I was in and out of the hospital, so it was really, you know, just not a good time. (laughs) And they helped me. They just picked me up and helped me along the way. (E, 101-105)

One participant however, chose not to lighten the psychological burden s/he experienced during a time of personal crisis, and instead attempted to soldier on rather than turning to her/his instructor for support:

... I'm trying to look after her two children for her - to give her the room to grieve. And my instructor said, "You started out so good - What happened?" And I was like, "Ah well, we had some problems at home, you know". I wasn't one to let my instructors know, "Hey, I'm doing - this is happening at my house." because I didn't want to rely on

excuses. I just wanted to just get it done. ... and that's where I fell down. Because I didn't take the 'me' time. I just tried to fit it in wherever - where I could - and so the work that I submitted to my instructors was not the work that I was capable of. (C, 60-64, 72-73)

Of course, there is much variability in the extent to which different university instructors feel that they should or may foster empathetic relationships with the students enrolled in their courses. In many post-secondary fields of study, the provision of psychological support to student enrollees is not a pedagogic standard upon which instructors are evaluated, and in some fields I believe such relationships are actively frowned upon. However, all of the participants in my doctoral research had convocated with social science degrees (i.e., Bachelor of Social Work, Masters of Education) from within the helping professions, the training for which typically includes instruction in courses intended to foster empathy and understanding for other human beings. As a Social Work instructor myself, it is my belief that situations can arise over the course of a semester where psychological health outreach to students is both expected and warranted.

With courses involving students who are taking a full campus-based course load, it may be easier for faculty to assess situations where instructor outreach may be indicated. In face-to-face classroom interactions, instructors can observe student affect, behaviour, energy levels, and attitudes towards others and the assigned activities. When a potential problem is noted, an instructor may consult with peers with whom they know the student is also taking courses, or they can elect to discuss their concerns for the student's well-being with an Associate Dean (or equivalent) in order to determine whether or not some sort of intervention may be necessary to ensure the "at-risk" student is offered supports that might be appropriate for her/his circumstances. In fully on-line coursework environments however, the electronically-mediated interactional dynamics between instructors and e-learners significantly alter the opportunities for

instructors to gauge whether or not any particular student may be experiencing psychological distress at any given time.

One participant provided a good example of the instructor outreach support s/he had experienced in her/his recently completed e-learning courses in the following terms:

... unless there was something important, they would phone us. Like, "We never heard from this student for a long time, did you hear from them?". Anything like that. "Do you know why they're not responding?", that sort of thing. (D, 371-373)

Another interaction between myself and one other participant demonstrates the ways that on-line instructors can uphold the on-line methodological pedagogy inherent in the instructional design of a e-learning course through the use of internet-based communications technologies to facilitate instructor outreach with e-learners.

Monty: How about the instructors? Did they totally rely on the course management system - like the Moodle system - or did they make efforts to contact you in other ways? Like illuminate or e-mail, chat sessions?

Participant E: if you wanted to go on Skype, they would do that too. It just depended on which professor felt comfortable with it. I don't know. I didn't really Skype anyone. (laughs)

Monty: Did they phone at all or that kinda thing?

Participant E: Generally not. Unless you requested it, I guess. But I just stayed in touch through e-mail a lot. If I had concerns - whether it was my health or with groupwork, or with other information - I felt free to ask questions through e-mail.

Monty: And they would get back to you? That's great.

Participant E: Oh yeah - they would get back to me very fast, I found. They were very quick that way. Which was good, because it didn't leave me guessing on what to do next. (E, 352-353, 356-361)

Clearly, the telephone is still a communications device that continues to have relevancy for place-bound learners, although how many of the participants had access to the technological advantages of mobile telephone devices within their residential communities was not explored within the scope of this study.

4.4. Leadline - Community-level Support Factors

During the proposal stage of my doctoral research, I began pulling together the components of my conceptual research net. I looked first to my own experience as a distance learner, course developer and instructor, and from that I established a shore stanchion (i.e., Indigenous adult education dynamics) for my research. As I fleshed out my proposal and research ethics board application with the academic literature that referenced the subject area of my research, I found an appropriate endbuoy (i.e., distance education dynamics) for my net. Having had my doctoral research proposal approved by my PhD. committee and my human subject ethics research application approved by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board, I then devised an interview protocol that would guide me in my data collection activities. After having put my interview protocol into action and completing interviews with several participants, I was able begin to discern the components of the corkline (i.e., institutional-level support factors) that could link together the two endpoints of my research net. As I further worked with the data, I also began to notice that an additional dimension of student support was emerging, one that appeared to present a counterweight to the institution-level supports that were most visible upon first examination.

The final dimension of e-learner support that I identified within the data I collected for my doctoral research was one which is largely invisible when viewed from the typical vantage points of academia's lofty towers. Although operating largely sub rosa to campus officials,

faculty and staff, there exists a wide array of social support mechanisms to be found in situ within many place-bound learners' geo-cultural communities (e.g., town, city, reserve). Like the submarine leadline affixed to the bottom of a net strung across a river, a community-level support system operates out of sight to many casual observers who are more inclined to view the corkline running across the top of the net as the place where all the important action takes place. (Figure 1) For example, as a student recruitment or donor solicitation device, it is not uncommon to hear university leaders speak glowingly of the highly publicized array of student support services employed by their institutions as the primary mechanism that enfolds their voluminous shoals of learners. However, without the weighty grounding that can be provided by familial and local community networks, many post-secondary students slip through holes they find or create in the institutional safety net. Absent a sufficient leadline, a beautiful looking corkline will simply float atop a river's current with little more than a random chance of successfully engaging the schools that are drawn within its catchment area.

Although community-based supports are rarely institutionally acknowledged - except perhaps at a convocation or Indigenous recognition ceremony where proud parents are in attendance - many of the functions of these local support mechanisms can be quite useful for students. Whether the student makes their home in a metropolitan or rural geographic community, it is very unlikely that many students will not have access to some nearby personal, public or private support systems, unless s/he is a visiting International student or happens to reside in a very remote or severely economically depressed area of Canada. Such supports can be informal (e.g., familial, friendship network), formal (e.g., governmental programs, facilities) or traditional (e.g., cultural, faith-based).

Emerging from the data collected for my doctoral research, I identified three general areas of community-level supports that I believe are particularly important to Indigenous e-learners. The three domains of community-level supports that I discerned from the data are employment related supports, local low-cost public facilities, and interpersonal networks.

4.4.1. Employment Related Supports

A signature aspect of distance education is its capacity to enable the residents of rural and remote communities to gain local access to accredited educational programs that are not otherwise available to them. Most of the employers that are typically located in rural and remote communities - governments, non-profit organizations, corporations, for example - realize that they can reduce recruitment costs and improve employee retention rates by offering local residents opportunities to improve their psychosocial circumstances through skills development training, self-improvement courses and accredited post-secondary education. Many employers provide subsidies to their employees (and their employees' adult children) to assist them in retaining qualified staff who are likely to remain in the vicinity due to their pre-existing familial, cultural or social links to place. One example of the benefit that employers can receive from investing in the continuing education of their employees was expressed by one participant in my doctoral research as s/he described the experience of a family member who was taking on-line courses while also working at the airport that serves their remote community:

So the on-line courses, I think can actually be promoted. Like, I know with my son - my youngest son - he is taking courses from the University of Athabasca here at home. And he's working at the airport. Even though he says, "I would wait for a couple - a year or so - to go back into the classroom," he thinks, "I like to be able to learn here at home." You know, how many other students can we actually get to do that? ... Because I know the stress that he went in at the U of A. (D, 415-419, 425)

Rather than sending their staff out of country to access educational services in far away cities, distance education has become a cost-efficient way for employers to ensure a ready supply of qualified labour in the rural and remote areas of Canada. Although distance education necessitates increased expenditures in terms of employee backfill and equipment usage, the investments made by employers in developing their local human resource capacity can pay significant dividends over the long-run. The words of one participant illustrate what I believe to be a fairly typical scenario related to the support provided by an employer to their part-time distance education student/full-time employee:

And actually, my Board really did support me with taking my courses. They didn't penalize me. Like I did some homework over the lunch hour or whatever - took an afternoon. They were fine with that. They thought as an educational institution for me to continue to do my education was good. (C, 93-95)

In my doctoral research, four participants acknowledged having had financial and in-kind support provided to them by their employers during their e-learning studies. Many of these participants reported being allowed to use their employers' telecommunications equipment to assist them in completing their studies. The types of employer equipment they reported using included internet-connected computers, telephones and another student's employer's teleconference account. Many of these participants who had taken e-learning courses on a part-time basis also expressed appreciation for the workplace accommodations made for them by their employers. One participant who completed her/his e-learning degree through full-time studies described the scheduling adjustments made by her/his employers that enabled her/him to complete necessary course activities:

... I was, you know, with full courseloads and that's pretty much a full-time job right there in itself. And my employers were very, very accommodating to that as well. They

understood that, because I was a casual in the district, I was able to block off time when I was going to be in a practicum, so that I wouldn't be called. (E, 136-139)

By thus demonstrating consideration and making allowances for the unique practical necessities that face Indigenous employees enrolled in e-learning programs, the employers of such place-bound learners are better positioned to retain qualified staff, and in so doing, demonstrate their organization's commitment to employee development from within the community.

4.4.2. Local Low-cost Public Facilities

In the urban settings where many post-secondary campuses are located, increased population densities create higher taxbases and drive demand for higher quality publicly funded infrastructure than is typically found in rural, remote and First Nations reserve communities. The transfers of funds from senior levels of government to universities and municipalities subsidize physical infrastructure development for public buildings and bus routes in many cities, and the monopoly licenses granted to telecommunications and utility companies in the early 20th Century ensured that a minimum level of service would be available to all users, albeit at the expense of competition that can reduce costs to individual subscribers. Additionally, the Canadian philanthropic organizations and individuals that fund infrastructure development (e.g., university buildings, libraries) more typically focus their attention on urban settings than they do with rural areas. Consequently, many of the public spaces and services that post-secondary students may potentially look to as low-cost public supports for their studies are not typically located in the rural, remote and reserve areas of Canada. It is simply a fact of life that place-bound learners often will not have access to the same kinds of low-cost public infrastructure than campus-based learners do.

Accordingly, when I invited the participants in my doctoral research to briefly describe their usual place of residence while they were taking on-line classes, I did not expect them to identify any locally available public facilities as having had been useful supports to their studies. However, three participants who had previously achieved professional certification through face-to-face educational delivery models did draw my attention to the fact that they had used the campus-based services of their former institutions. Two participants described making use of campus facilities within commuting distance of their homes as places to meet in person with student peers or simply as a quiet place to go study. In the words of one participant:

I guess we were lucky too because we were able to use Malaspina sometimes as a space to meet and things like that. And then some of us got some practicums at different agencies and locations and offices, so sometimes we were able to get rooms in those offices and meet as a group on our schoolwork. (B, 311-315)

Although one participant who resided in a remote community continued to use the on-line library services of a former institution while completing her/his e-learning studies, another participant expressed feeling uneasy about using the library services or the open wireless network that were available to her/him on the nearby local campus, although s/he did mention that s/he continued to draw upon the services provided by the Aboriginal Student Centre from time to time. In her/his words:

I didn't really feel comfortable going into another institution's library to do coursework in another institution. (laughs) So, I didn't really access the university in that regard. ... But I did have a good relationship with VIU, and their Indigenous students' support services. So, I accessed a lot of people from home. (C, 381-383, 168-170)

A further dimension of the low-cost support function that public institutions can provide to place-bound was expressed by another participant who resided in a rural area while completing her/his on-line studies. This participant's home was situated in a place that had no capacity to

access high-speed internet connections, which required her/him to find other sites where s/he could make a data connection to complete required on-line course activities. The following quote from this participant presents a particularly poignant example of the importance of having local low-cost public services and facilities, the experience of which is likely beyond the comprehension of people who live and work within the metropolitan areas of Canada:

Well - with my computer, because it was very slow internet, like it was very slow to get on, and sometimes it takes ages (laughs) just to shoot out some discussions or reply - this is my computer at home. Trouble with the landlines, so I have to wait until the next day, and then go to the library. I used to spend a lot of time in the library - the town has a good library. (laughs) You know, like after work or for the first year there, I used a lot of my courses through my break times at work and after work. I'd do a lot of my reading at home. And then I'd comment at work. The last year when I was taking my Masters, I spent a lot of time in the library. I'll say - out of the 24 hour period, maybe about four or five hours. Or sometimes six. (A, 186-192)

Although this extreme example of the lengths this participant went to in order to complete her/his on-line studies may not be typical of all Indigenous e-learners' experiences with place-based distance education, it does illustrate that successful e-learners must be determined enough and prepared to locate and access local community-based public facilities if they are to overcome technological barriers to the completion of their studies.

4.4.3. *Interpersonal Networks*

It is my limited understanding that since the time before time, individual Indigenous seekers of knowledge have always been surrounded by a community of supportive forces capable of monitoring the person's safety and observing their progress. Those individuals who are able to assimilate new information and master new skills can experience the tremendous transformative power of knowledge - a power that can change their lives in profound ways.

Where historically, the transmission of knowledge was mediated by the instructional technology of the day (i.e., largely real-time, voice-to-ear modalities and more recently, asynchronous, correspondence methods), the widespread adoption of low-cost Information Age technologies has transformed education practices. However, it is my opinion that just because instructional methods have changed, does not mean that either the transformative potential nor the relational dynamic of education has diminished. One participant in my doctoral research described the transformative effect that s/he experienced after having had taken on-line courses, in the following way:

You have a choice - life goes on that way. Like you have a feeling of control over your own life. You're able to make choices. That's what on-line courses are doing. That's what they done for me. And also I made sure that it's good with my family. Because this is what I want for my son as well. (D, 422-424)

As discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, the network of relationships that exists within the traditional territories of tribal peoples throughout the world is a key component of many Indigenous people's socio-cultural lives. Regardless of whether they reside on their traditional territories or in urban settings, extended family connections and informal friendship networks serve important psycho-spiritual functions for many Indigenous learners. It is been my experience that such informal networks can support students of all ages and religious creeds through the provision of loving psychological comfort and/or spiritual guidance in times of stress or loneliness. I personally have seen that informal support networks can also assist Indigenous adult learners in more pragmatic ways, such as through childcare, housework, procuring traditional foods, or even in providing financial aid to help a student acquire needed academic supplies or travel home to their traditional territory to participate in cultural activities. As the post-secondary co-ordinator for a First Nations Band, I have also acted in a professional position

that enabled me to see how these kinds of informal supports can be augmented by formal student support programs that may be available from within an Indigenous student's tribal organization.

In designing my interview protocol, I did include one question that I hoped might illuminate the informal and formal dimensions of community based interpersonal supports that prospective interviewees may have experienced in their e-learning studies. In response to my queries however, none of the participants gave very explicit examples of the types of support they received from within their cultural communities nor from their kith and kin networks. The comments made by the participant who best described the informal and formal support services s/he had received over the course of her/his educational journey in the were expressed in the following terms:

I think for me, inside my house of course - with my own family, I had great support from my [spouse]. I mean we've been together for thirty six years now (laughs) so [s/he] was a great support for me. And my kids, they respected the idea that I was going to school and I needed some space somedays to get work done. And, because they were - we have three kids - and at that time they were all still at home. They were in their teenage years, so they were all still at home and I guess to make ends meet, I was able to get some funding from Métis Community Services. (B, 92-97)

At the outset of my data collection activities, I realized that I myself would have been unlikely to have had developed anything more than a tentative relationship with any prospective participant. Consequently, I did not feel comfortable making specific enquiries about whether or not any of the participants had received financial assistance from a Band or other Aboriginal organization to assist them in their studies. Two of the participants however did volunteer that they had received financial assistance administered on behalf of their tribal communities over the course of their post-secondary careers.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Although the successful completion of this dissertation will benefit me personally through perceived social mobility associated with receiving an earned doctorate, that accomplishment alone does not entirely justify this exercise however. As a tenure-track novice into academe, I realize that not only is a completed dissertation intended to contribute new knowledge to the collective wisdom of humankind, but it is also intended to establish a platform upon which a junior academic can begin to build her/his scholarly research agenda. Concomitant with the assistant professorship appointment I have become privileged to hold, there is an expectation that I begin to profess a degree of expertise in my field of scholarship as I disseminate the knowledge I have gleaned to a wider audience through publication in scholarly journals, book chapters and at conference presentations. However, as a person who has openly and proudly acknowledged my mixed Indigenous and European ancestry in numerous public functions and published scholarship in the past, I am also patently aware that all of the information I present will be filtered through the socio-cultural lens that each reader may hold with respect to Indigenous people and Indigenous knowledges. I am not by any means an ‘expert’ on any Indigenous knowledges or practices however, and it is incumbent upon me to ensure that all audiences to my scholarship have been cautioned to understand that the positions I put forward are my own alone. Yes, some of what I have to present has been informed by my own experiences relating to the Indigenous people with whom I have interacted over the course of my personal and professional life and the limited training in Indigenous ways that I have had opportunities to develop, but much of what I have to present is derived from my own colonized experience of being marinated in Eurocentric colonial thought that is informed by the scientific,

social and religious principles associated with positivism, colonialism, and Judeo-Christian religion (Dei, 2006). I am in no means a trained keeper of Indigenous knowledges, however I can use the platform of my acquired social position to lend my voice to others who may be, and in so doing, I hope to cut some trail for upcoming Indigenous students who might aspire to someday achieve the same sort of academic accomplishments that I have.

Because my personal experience with distance learning has been central to this inquiry, it is important that I avoid abstracting out my own embodied understandings of the Indigenous distance learner support phenomenon that is the subject of this dissertation. Therefore, to retain continuity with the metaphors I introduced into this dissertation and better describe my methodological choices and representation of the data, I believe that it is appropriate for me to return again to my hunting/fishing heuristic as a platform for my discussions on the findings and conclusions of this research. By describing the tasks associated with the activities that I have seen routinely performed at the conclusion of successful food gathering exercises, it is my hope that any readers who come across this completed dissertation should be able to discern that I have minimally attempted to represent a reasonable facsimile of a typical range of activities associated with traditional food gathering - at least as far as I have come to understand them. By bringing this metaphor full circle, it continues to be my hope that my examples can serve to illustrate the parallels that I believe can be drawn between disciplined knowledge-seeking within academia and the purposive activities associated with some Indigenous food-gathering traditions.

From my own recollection as a person of Mi'kmaq ancestry of those times when I have observed and participated in salmon (i.e., chinook, sockeye, coho, chum, pink and steelhead) fishing in the Nass River watershed that delimits the homeland of the Nisga'a people in what is now known as North-western British Columbia, the work of fishing does not end with the setting

of one's gear in the water in the hopes of catching something worthwhile for immediate or future use. As was recognized by one of the interviewees for this study who is also not Nisga'a, it is not enough to simply check a net once it has been set in the water - you still have to sort, process, package, share the catch, and store the gear once it has been hauled from the water. Whether the net is pulled by hand or with the aid of suitable technology, it is my assertion that, just as with the actions of preparing oneself before heading afield, it is equally important that fishers have also prepared themselves for the tasks that will inevitably await them upon their retrieval of their fishing gear.

With respect to my own research, I admit that any sort of efficiency coefficient that may be correlated between gillnet mesh size and desired outcomes may not be a lasting metaphorical image I would ever want to plant into the consciousness of the readers of my dissertation. It was never my intent to in any way position the human beings who volunteered to participate in my research as dehumanized objects who had become deliberately entwined in some kind of prey/predator relationship with me. On the contrary, I have much respect for the lived experiences they shared with me through their stories, and it is my aim to uphold and validate the teachings they provided to the best of my ability. In order for me personally to do that, it was necessary for me to find a metaphor that could permit me to interweave my own narrative and the messages I had gleaned from the existing literature with those of the participants so as to create a coherent and integrated representation of the dynamics associated with supporting place-bound Indigenous adult distance learners in their post-secondary studies. Accordingly, and in keeping with the metaphors already introduced in previous chapters, the key tasks that lay before me for this concluding chapter will also be introduced in terms that would be consistent with those I have come to associate with the successful conclusion of a successful foodfishing event.

Although the tasks may differ due to the context, I do believe that a workable parallel can be drawn between the following tasks and my own research-related activities.

5.1. Pulling My Research Net

From my personal experience with gillnet fishing, the primary purpose for setting a net into the water is to catch desirable species of fish which can then be retrieved, sorted, processed and distributed to others for immediate or future use. Gillnet fishing is not a catch-and-release process; the gillnets that I am familiar with are intended to entangle suitably sized prey species which can then be removed and humanely killed once the gear has been hauled out of the water. Gillnet fishing is food fishing and should not be mistaken for sportfishing methods (e.g., rod and reel fishing with tackle intended to catch only one fish at a time) that can also procure fish for consumption, if the fish are not returned back into the water upon capture. The knowledges associated with creating and deploying gillnets have existed since time immemorial for Indigenous peoples who still utilize this method of fishing. For example, I personally know Nisga'a food fishers who use gillnets to catch salmon, Cree food fishers who deploy gillnets under the ice to catch pickerel, and Anishnaabe food fishers who use gillnets to catch smelt. I have also read written accounts of ancient Mi'kmaq using gillnets, although again, this is not a practice that I personally was ever introduced to by any of my own relatives. Thanks to the precedent setting decision of the Supreme Court of Canada in their 1990 decision that upheld the Aboriginal fishing rights of Musqueam salmon fisher Ronald Sparrow, being able to fish with a gillnet is seen by many of the Indigenous fishers I know as symbol of Indigenous pride that is not subject to extinguishment through colonial jurisprudence. (R. v. Sparrow, 1990) In this way, gillnets can be seen to have become a visible symbol of societal decolonisation that many Indigenous peoples dream of.

Regardless of the symbolic attributes associated with gillnets, it is also true that they are themselves powerful objects that deserve much respect. Gillnets themselves cannot discriminate how many fish become entrapped within their confines, so it is important for fishers who use this method to understand local traditional ecological knowledges and to follow human-animal relational protocols to ensure that no more is taken than is needed. It is my understanding that the principle of maintaining good stewardship of communal sustenance resources (e.g., prey fish, animals, birds) is upheld within many Indigenous traditions globally. This principle is manifested in local protocols relating to the seasons of the year when certain species may be taken, as well as the appropriate climatic and environmental conditions for harvesting. When respectful food-gatherers set out to collect nature's bounty in accordance with these protocols and knowledges, their determination of the appropriate gear for the task at hand can ensure that the spawning, nesting and calving cycles of game species are not jeopardized in a manner that may imperil future generations of humans and animals alike. It is simply not good to misuse powerful equipment in order to capture more than one person can give away, use immediately or process quickly enough to minimize unnecessary spoilage.

Because of the lethality of gillnets, it is also important that people using this method of fishing take steps to minimize bycatch (i.e., unintended species or undersized fish). One of the primary methods for reducing bycatch is achieved by hanging different sized mesh on a corkline. For example, if the webbing is not in a state of disrepair, a one inch mesh can work for smelts that weigh less than one pound, a four inch mesh can work for sockeye or coho salmon that weigh up to fifteen pounds and a six inch mesh can work for chinook salmon that can weigh up to fifty pounds. A net with a larger mesh size will allow smaller species to pass through without becoming entangled, and a net with a smaller mesh size should tear apart if a larger species

encounters it. Knowing that a torn net will be less effective in producing worthwhile outcomes, it is important to access local knowledge of water conditions and the habits of various sized species in order to minimize unwanted bycatch and equipment damage. Of course, an unlucky fisher can sometimes encounter submarine snags, flotsam or water animals (e.g., seals, otters) that can periodically appear and tear apart or raid a net once it has been set into the water, which can also reduce the effectiveness of the net, so constant vigilance of the net while it is in use also leads to more successful outcomes for the human beings deploying it.

5.2. Sorting the Catch

With respect to the research I conducted for my study of place-bound Indigenous learner supports, I believe that the metaphoric mesh that I hung beneath my figurative cork-line was capable of effectively encircling numerous aspects of different Indigenous learner experiences simultaneously. Although I am loathe to represent any one specific aspect as being a ‘bigger’ or ‘smaller’ fish that may have a greater ‘value’ than any other, I have undertaken to sort this catch - the findings of my study - in order to enable prospective users to benefit from the conclusions that I have been able to tease out of the agglomerated biomass of content that was produced through my purposive research activities. Given that the purpose of this chapter is to introduce conclusions based on study results, it is my intention to present my categorized conclusions by again returning to my established metaphorical allusion that is associated with different netting gap dimensions, namely fine mesh (i.e., implications for place-bound Indigenous students), medium weft (i.e., implications for program delivery), and large webbing (i.e., implications for institutional leaders). Detailing the parameters of my findings for these institutional and community-based actors in this manner enables me to better animate the roles that they may play in supporting place-bound Indigenous learners.

However, I must also reiterate that Indigenous peoples have long been the subjects of research with little voice in how the data they have contributed will be portrayed (Smith, 1999; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001); consequently it is important that I caution readers to avoid making inferences between the experiences of the Indigenous individuals whose voices contributed to this study - including my own - and those of any other population of Indigenous peoples who may have participated in post-secondary distance education via e-learning methods in Western Canada since 2000. This study was not a case study that could be associated with any one identifiable post-secondary institution, and the findings I present are in no way intended to represent the entirety of any one individual's story of her/his experiences with e-learning at the post-secondary level.

An overview of my findings regarding the dimensions of support experienced by place-bound Indigenous adult learners is presented in Table 5.1 - Learner Supports for Place-bound Indigenous Post-Secondary Learners. This synopsis presents a number of nominal scale references that were reported by the participants in my research project in such a way as to permit me to categorize these statements to align with the five key dimensions of formal and informal post-secondary student support that I outlined in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. The five key dimensions of formal and informal support that I focussed my data collection and analysis activities upon comprised Academic Institutional supports, Non-Academic Institutional supports, Personal supports, Indigenous Cultural supports, and Off-campus learner supports. (Chapter 1. p.6). First-hand accounts of the participants' experiences of these formal and informal support mechanisms were detailed in Chapter 4.

Table 5.1 - Local Supports for Place-bound Indigenous Adult Learners (reported or not)		
	Reported use by one or more participants	No report of having been used
Academic Institutional supports	registrar; library; academic counselling; student financial assistance; bookstore; Information Technology support; academic departments; professoriate; off-campus facilities; convocation ceremony; course management systems; culturally sensitive curricular activities and resources	on-campus facilities; tutoring/writing services; research or teaching assistanceships; scholarships
Non-Academic Institutional supports	satellite campus facilities; program elders; student peers; communications software programs (e-mail); student loans	recreational facilities; student housing; Aboriginal Students' Centre; listserves; employment services; student clubs or societies; faith-based organizations; computer labs; intramural sports
Personal supports	spouse, parents, children; friends; employment (managers and policy); professional colleagues; financial aid (Aboriginal organization); personal communications technologies; on-line services (book retailers, tutorials, academic counselling, alumni institution library); personal interest reading material; personal motivation	financial aid (non-Aboriginal organization); organized religion; professional counselling (psychological, academic, employment); community-based organization assistance.
Indigenous Cultural supports	private ceremonies; natural helping systems; traditional foods; traditional knowledges; place-based cultural activities; public ceremonies (Indigenous student recognition)	local elders; recorded historical accounts (textual or oral); translation services; public ceremonies (feasts, powwows, other tribal gatherings)
Off-campus learner supports	facilities of local post-secondary institutions; employer facilities and equipment; local public facilities (libraries); local private facilities (free wi-fi)	postal services/couriers; printing services; computer tech support; local Aboriginal organizations

5.2.1. Fine Mesh Conclusions - Implications for Students

The findings of this study suggest that place-bound Indigenous adult learners do draw upon numerous formal and informal supports while they are enrolled in off-campus post-secondary studies. This finding is consistent with my own experiential understandings of the phenomenon of support that informed my research activities, and confirms that my hunches regarding the dimensions of support I had personally drawn upon while I was a place-bound adult learner were congruent with many of the experiences recounted by the participants in my study. This holistic conceptualization of support spanned a range of physical, emotional, spiritual and mental dimensions of assistance that can be activated with the aid of animate and inanimate entities whose influences transcend the temporal bounds normally associated with Western conceptions of human existence. Support, within this holistic framework of understanding, is a multi-dimensional and complex set of actions that are differentially accessible to all individuals who pursue psycho-educational goals, regardless of their capacity or willingness to recognize and/or articulate the existence of this boon to humanity.

Recognizing that the circumstances of no two place-bound Indigenous adult learners are alike is an important pre-condition in determining what supports they may benefit from as they enter into distance education programs. Mood (1995), indicated that: “In a sense, every [distance education] user is a special group of one.” (p.127). Accordingly, there is no ‘typical’ Indigenous adult learner, just as there is no ‘generic’ Aboriginal community in Canada. Conceptualising individual learners as a homogenous group creates a convenient fiction that can engender a policy and program response that aims to meet the perceived needs of the group at the expense of the actual support needs of individual learners. In order to avoid becoming involuntarily associated with any other group of one, it is my opinion that individual learners would be well

served to have a good sense of their own educational objectives and local resources before entering into a distance education program of studies.

Knowing one's own post-secondary educational objectives before ever having had entered into a program of studies can pose problems for place-bound learners. For this reason, I believe that students who have already experienced some academic success within a program of studies delivered in an on-campus learning environment will have a reasonably realistic understanding of the knowledge, skills and abilities they will be expected to draw upon to achieve their educational objectives. For some self-directed students, such previous post-secondary experience could take the form of a certificate or diploma garnered from a local community college or adult learning centre. For other students who have not yet a post-secondary credential, it may be enough that they have successfully completed the equivalent of at least one full semester of pre-requisite credit courses through face-to-face instruction.

Depending upon the distance education service delivery model prospective place-bound learners may be considering (i.e., self-directed e-learning or off-campus cohort learning) or have access to, individual learners may encounter differing levels of formal support services provided by the institution in which they enrol. For example, many of the participants in my study who had completed off-campus cohort coursework, reported developing personally supportive relationships with the faculty, program staff, and other institutional staff (e.g., academic librarian, information technology support) who had travelled to a temporary satellite campus site where summer institute courses were being held. Other participants who identified more as self-directed e-learners, spoke more to the capacity of the curricular content to validate their cultural knowledges and place-bound experiences, and to the flexibility demonstrated by individual professors as they made accommodations for unanticipated personal circumstances of their

students. Accordingly, place-bound Indigenous adult learners should ideally weigh the benefits and drawbacks of differing distance education delivery models before enrolling in a program of studies to meet their personal educational objectives.

Upon reflecting on the findings of my study, I believe that an additional dimension that place-bound Indigenous adult learners should factor into consideration before enrolling in any distance education program is a thorough identification of the practical and latent resources that exist within their local communities. I believe that, at an early phase of their distance education studies, place-bound learners would be well served to prepare a map of the unique combination of supportive assets that exist or may be realized within their local communities. (Kretzman & McKnight,1996) I believe that an individualized asset map prepared by Indigenous place-bound learners can establish an inventory of the holistic range of supports - the gifts, skills and capacities of local individuals, businesses and public entities - that could later be referenced in times of personal need. An individualized tool of this nature would pre-identify existing and latent local public and private resources in advance of unanticipated troubles arising. For example, in my study (see Table 5.1) several participants described having had made use of local public buildings (e.g., libraries or meeting rooms), their employer's facilities and equipment (e.g., offices, telecommunications services) or private businesses that provide free wireless internet access to their clientele as examples of locally available public and private community assets that differ from community to community and learner to learner.

Public and private community-based support assets are important to identify, but I would also advise that an Indigenous support asset map should not be limited to those services or programs provided by the helping professions, corporate entities, the non-profit sector or governmental services providers. In order to tap into cultural and place-based sources of support

that may emerge from the earth, sky and water or through traditional knowledge systems, I would suggest that an Indigenous place-bound learner's support system asset map should also identify resources from within the learner's natural helping system, including assets such as those that can keep her/him culturally grounded and connected within the relational web of her/his cultural community. For example, in my study (see Table 5.1), the participants had indicated that they had drawn upon their own traditional knowledges, foods and relational protocols as well as place-based activities and ceremonies in times of personal stress or familial crisis.

An additional conclusion relating to the implications of my findings with respect to Indigenous place-bound learners relates to personal motivation to complete distance education studies. The comments made by several participants in my study reminded me of the pride that individuals may feel that comes with having been seen to have completed an extraordinary accomplishment. It is my understanding that within many Indigenous traditions, individuals were/are not discouraged from bringing honour to their family, community or tribe through performing routine tasks or acts of exemplary bravery in a good way so as to benefit the entire community. From time to time, I have seen young children publicly honoured in feast halls for acting as positive role models for others through their good behaviour, and I myself have personally felt the pride and sense of responsibility that comes from receiving community-based acknowledgement for the completion of a meaningful task (e.g., earning a university degree). To my mind, being acknowledged as a role model by an Indigenous community is an act of decolonisation, in that it is the community members themselves who recognize the goodwill that has been generated through that person's actions. Although all Indigenous communities have been permanently scarred by colonial regulations that have disrupted many of the historic

avenues for individuals to bring honour to one's people, the importance of seeking honour has not been entirely lost, even in the most economically impoverished Indigenous communities.

In the not too distant past, the opportunity to complete post-secondary education was one such proscribed avenue of honour for Indigenous peoples in Canada, although this has changed somewhat in recent times. However, because of the authority granted to the Provinces to grant university charters within their jurisdictional boundaries, few post-secondary institutions have ever been established within Indigenous communities in Canada, and accordingly, many Indigenous students have had to relocate to metropolitan centres in order to achieve their post-secondary accomplishments. Consequently, the day to day participation of students in post-secondary courses is simply not an activity that is regularly witnessed within many Indigenous communities in Canada. Distance education is beginning to change that colonial construct somewhat however, as greater numbers of students are now able to achieve post-secondary accreditation without ever having to abstract themselves from their place-based context.

To me, this raises issues relating to the quality of the educational services and products being delivered to place-bound learners, especially with respect to the many internet-based educational programs that have emerged since the mid-1990's. While many of these virtual entities promise to provide a rich educational experience to fee-paying registrants, it not always be possible to determine how credible or culturally relevant the curriculum might be, in which case it falls upon the learner her/himself to assess the quality each educational service program before committing months of effort and thousands of dollars to an academic pursuit that may not further their educational or employment objectives. I would recommend that place-bound Indigenous adult learners be cautious when exploring the range of options made available to them by the buffet of internet-based educational service providers, and not simply select what is

offered based what they might encounter on the institution's website. Yes Indigenous adult learners should chase 'the new buffalo of post-secondary education' (Stonechild, 2006) wherever it may lead them, but first they should take steps to ensure that that which they are pursuing is indeed not something that is seeking to prey upon them as they follow their educational aspirations.

5.2.2. Medium Weft Conclusions - Implications for D.E. Program Delivery

A second set of findings emerged from my exploration of the formal and informal supports that place-bound Indigenous adult learners reported having drawn upon in completing their off-campus post-secondary studies. As with the first set of findings that linked the voices of the participants in the study with my own lived experience as a distance education student, this second set of findings took shape as I reflected upon my professional experiences with distance education instruction, curriculum development and instructional design. Drawing upon the constant comparative dynamic of grounded theory as an analytic tool for understanding the data I had collected, I routinely found myself contrasting the various points raised by the participants with the personal understandings that I myself recalled from my own experiences of e-learning course development and delivery as a sessional instructor and tenure-track academic. By having had professional experience in developing e-learning curricular resources for both heterogeneous and Indigenous student bodies and delivering such courses at two accredited universities in Western Canada since 2002, I believe that the rudimentary understandings of distance education that I now possess served as an adequate comparator to the voiced experiences of the participants insofar as these related to the curricular and program supports they described.

The recommendations that I would offer with respect to distance education program delivery are all supported by the voices of the participants in my study. Their reports of having drawn upon various formal and informal supports that were provided by their educational programs of study are presented in detail in Chapter 4 and in summary in Table 5.1. Although the interviewees spoke to their experiences with both self-directed e-learning and off-campus cohort-based educational program delivery models, the focus of my study was not on the efficacy of either of these models however. Accordingly, I would again caution readers to try to avoid conflating the reported personal experiences of felt support expressed by individual participants in this study with the programmatic and administrative contexts of distance education delivery within academia.

The findings of my study support McMullen and Rohrback's (2003) claim that effective distance education programs "take steps to reduce student isolation through the introduction of study centers, telephone contact between students and instructors, on-site support staff and other initiatives that linked the student to the instructor and the education institution." (p.89) Although that report on best practices in Canadian distance education in remote Aboriginal communities centrally describes off-campus cohort-based approaches to distance education, many of the participants in my study did report having had generally positive interactions with their instructors and the program support staff with whom they interacted. As place-bound Indigenous adult learners who were surveyed about their experiences with on-line coursework, however it is clear that many of their interpersonal interactions with departmental faculty and staff were mediated through electronic telecommunications technologies (i.e., telephone, e-mail, course management systems), and that much of this interaction was asynchronous in nature (i.e., not in real-time). Apart from fleeting phone conversations with administrative staff employed within

the student support departments of the institutions in which they were enrolled, none of the e-learner participants reported having had any meaningful interactions with any other campus-based staff, including university library, bookstore, Aboriginal Students' Centre, or Information Technology support staff. Based on this information, and comparing this dynamic with my own recollections of the on-line courses I have taught over the past decade, it appears to me that, to a large extent, e-learners are invisible to many campus-based staff, and many campus-based student support services are largely irrelevant to place-bound learners.

Effective interpersonal communications requires that two or more human beings possess a capacity to create messages, transmit queries, receive data, process information, and provide feedback in a timely manner, and if one of the individuals involved happens to be out of the sightline of the other(s), the chances of misinterpretation and confusion increase. Because campus-based post-secondary institutions were designed around a communications model that necessitated face-to-face interaction and the physical couriering of text-based content between individuals, the real-time face-to-face mode of communication has become privileged as normal practice within many university departments. Certainly the advent of telecommunications technologies have altered this dynamic somewhat, but in my opinion, the normal administrative workflow of the academic institutions where I have worked is still oriented to a model where someone in a subordinate position requesting something from another individual should ideally present themselves in person during regular office hours. Unfortunately, this model does not work well when barriers to face-to-face communication exist, such is the case with place-bound Indigenous learners who do not reside within commuting distance of the campus that is hosting their academic program.

Accordingly, I would recommend that academic departments within post-secondary institutions that aim to develop and deliver high-quality e-learning experiences for their students reprioritize their departmental resources (e.g., human, financial, administrative) to ensure that the unique needs of distance learners can be received and acted upon appropriately and efficiently. Rather than relying solely on their institution's various administrative departments that are oriented to servicing the needs of campus-based students, I would recommend that academic units that aim to offer quality e-learning courses should reallocate one or more administrative and clerical positions and to have these positions be specifically designated as the point persons for off-campus and e-learners. In order to provide an efficient service, these distance education support positions should be knowledgeable enough of the institution's administrative functions to permit them to broker the queries of place-bound learners across institutional units. I have personally worked in one academic unit of a Canadian post-secondary institution that has become a leader in e-learning course delivery that utilizes a designated distance education student support model, and in my opinion, it is able to offer far more responsive student supports than are other programs that attempt to deliver e-learning and off-campus cohort-based education via their existing campus-based administrative model on an *ad hoc* basis.

Commonly, the participants in my study also mentioned having had relied upon a variety of convenient services, facilities and programs that could be accessed from locations proximal to their places of residence for support when they required it (i.e., 24 hours a day, 7 days a week). In some cases, the participants reported having turned to an internet based retailer (i.e., Amazon.com to order books) or content provider (i.e., university Information Technology department or on-line library website) for help with accessing 'how-to' tutorial support or other resources. For other matters, they described having made use of local services such as their

community library (i.e., for internet access), local computer technician companies (i.e., for computer repairs or lost data recovery), or nearby post-secondary institutions (i.e., for academic counselling assistance in course planning and transfer credits).

It is not practical for academic departments to establish inventories of support services and programs that may be locally available in every community where a place-bound learner may reside. However, it is also of foremost importance that departmental leaders, faculty and staff not assume that incoming students do not have any such supports available to them. As functional citizens of a distant geographic area, academically qualified prospective adult e-learners already have immediately accessible networks of support, many of which enabled them to be able to arrive at the virtual doorstep of their chosen educational institution with a pre-existing capacity to find ways to succeed. In order to not create confusion or disrupt the local adaptations that place-bound learners might be able to draw upon to complete their studies, it is important that academic e-learning programs produce their official policies and unofficial student expectations using a communications medium that is readily accessible to their students. Place-bound Indigenous adult learners are not looking to their chosen institution to provide them with a support network, but rather they do want to know how to negotiate through the bureaucratic, administrative, and policy mazes they expect to encounter over the course of their studies.

Fortunately, the internet is especially well suited for this exact purpose. However, in order for place-bound learners to be knowledgeable about the appropriateness of accessing internet-based services and resources, it is necessary for their academic departments to provide them with relevant policy and guidelines in an easily accessible format. To this end, I would recommend that departmental websites be designed in a manner that facilitates the efficient

retrieval of up-to-date information for their learners at a distance. A departmental website that was structured to support e-learners would ideally include a robust orientation to the on-line and automated services that can directly impact fee-paying institutional clientele over the course of their student careers, regardless of which institutional department it is that typically provides the service to campus-based students. ‘How to’ videos that may be viewed at the e-learner’s leisure should be created and posted to departmental websites so they can ‘walk through’ the typical policies and procedures associated with common institutional functions, for example: student self-registration, academic calendar, institutional bookstore, financial aid, library, student associations, applying for convocation, and the convocation ceremony itself.

Also, because students who permanently live in distant locations will be unlikely to intuitively know the names of the campus buildings that house the libraries, administrative offices, etc. that are taken for granted by on-site users, I would suggest that special care be taken to avoid the use of acronyms in communications wherever possible. Additionally, because off-campus students may not know how to get to the city, the campus or public parking facilities, it is also useful to provide a map for students to use for navigation, should they decide to physically travel to the institution’s main campus for any reason.

Many of the participants in my study also described their student peers as having been important sources of social support for them. Several participants mentioned having taken encouragement from reading the various opinions and arguments made by their classmates in on-line forums (e.g., especially when these related to messages of decolonisation), and numerous references were made to situations where the participants made contact with other students in their e-learning courses for assistance in determining how to operate more efficiently within the university’s electronic course management software system. However it was also clear that

many of the participants had experienced some frustration with their student peers when it came to collaborating together on time-sensitive graded groupwork assignments. Typically, the experiences of student peer on-line interactions were expressed by the participants as transient collegial relationships that centered on the functional completion of mutual tasks, rather than as nascent friendships capable of transcending the individualism of the virtual classroom into a sustaining source of ongoing mutual aid.

Perhaps this relational dynamic may have some connection with the fact that the ages of the participants in my study were consistent with Sanchez, Stuckey & Morris' (1998) characterisation of Indigenous distance learners as being "on average, significantly older than traditional college students" (p.5), however the search for a correlation between any two such factors was not the focus of my research. In my opinion, I view this relational dynamic from a perspective that place-bound learners who have been successful with on-line courses are likely to have had a pre-existing circle of supportive friends, coworkers, and family *in situ* within their home communities while taking on-line classes. It seems plausible that place-bound learners may not be looking to develop close personal friendships with other individuals with whom their only mutual experience is a shared virtual classroom. For instructors of on-line courses, this dynamic is important to bear in mind, as it may well be the case that, as much as the instructor may aim to facilitate the building of intimate relationships among her/his students, the students themselves may not actually want to invest themselves in developing new friendships.

Although all of the participants self-identified as having Indigenous ancestry and each of them considered themselves to be a 'cultural person' when asked, none of them mentioned feeling comfortable enough with their student-peers or instructors to attempt to connect with the cultural practices of other Indigenous participants with whom they found themselves taking a

cross-tribal on-line course. I believe that this phenomenon may be a reaction to the colonial narrative of Canadian history that perpetuates a homogenized image of the great variety cultures of Indigenous peoples under the generic label of “Canadian Aboriginals”. It has been my experience that many individual Indigenous people chafe when they encounter situations that position their own particular ethnic experiences in contrast to some manufactured image of one “authentic” Indian culture, although it is not uncommon for people who find themselves in such situations involving authority figures (e.g., police, instructors) to repress their discomfort/outrage. Even if the representation of Indigeneity that students become exposed to in their curricular materials may be appropriate enough for the locality where the materials were developed, does not mean that the depicted representation will be appreciated as being culturally accurate for Indigenous individuals who reside within the ancestral homelands of some other tribal group. The privileging of one place-based narrative - albeit one that may be lauded as being appropriate for the main campus locality of a post-secondary institution - over one or more other Indigenous narratives that are equally accurate for the geographic contexts where other place-bound learners reside can easily become a curricular irritant within virtual classrooms comprised of Indigenous students of differing tribal ancestries.

In on-line instructional situations where this type of curricular mismatch occurs, I have personally witnessed that some students may manifest this cultural disconnect by hesitating to engage in conversations that may run counter to the Indigenous protocol of another tribal nation. Unlike the real-time classroom dialogic of face-to-face instruction with learners sitting beside one another, the asynchronous text-based interpersonal communications that typify the virtual classroom e-learning environment do not lend themselves well to the kinds of social lubricants (i.e., spontaneous sidebar conversations or appropriate laughter) that can ease tension when

discussing potentially sensitive subjects. Although functional, it has been my experience that virtual classrooms can become semi-sterile learning environments, especially if the curricular resources have not been designed in such a way as to invite a diverse range of voices into the structured conversations that the asynchronous format dictates. Just as may be the case with campus based instruction, e-learning course curriculum can create a very isolating and dehumanising experience for students who feel that their unique experiences are absented from officially-sanctioned narrative(s). Accordingly, it is important for instructors, curricular content producers, and instructional designers to create spaces within on-line courses that provide opportunities for the voicing of anti-colonial and anti-oppressive narratives that are capable of representing the wide diversity of Indigeneity that exists.

There is one final recommendation emerging from the findings of this study that I would offer for academic departments that are looking to provide quality on-line educational experiences to registered place-bound Indigenous learners. Building upon the comments made by several participants and my supported by own experience with on-line course design and delivery, I believe that the provision of a culturally sensitive face-to-face orientation for incoming e-learners can do much to build supportive relationships between place-bound Indigenous learners and departmental staff. Unless the incoming student is a member of a place-based cohort who will be meeting with academic and program staff when s/he attends scheduled face-to-face courses, distance education programs would be well served by requiring incoming off-campus registrants to attend a mandatory on-campus orientation early in their academic program. Whether as a pre-or corequisite for their first on-line courses, newly admitted registrants should be invited to travel to the academic institution's campus from which their e-learning program is administered so that they can attend information sessions designed to

introduce them to the typical institutional administrative systems (e.g., self-registration (including student card), student financial services (including financial awards and student loans), academic studies support mechanisms (e.g., library services, student information technology services, course management systems, academic writing centre) and program support staff (e.g., distance education co-ordinator, academic counsellor) with which distance education students routinely interact as they progress through their studies. Although registrants may balk at having to expend personal funds to attend a 2-3 day e-learning orientation session, the outcomes of having attended the orientation should enable them to access student discounts within their home communities (i.e., once they receive their student card), develop an understanding of financial awards and academic support services they may not have known of otherwise, and to put faces to the names of individuals with whom they will be interacting over the course of their e-learning program of studies. Ideally, an orientation for incoming distance learners should occur when travel will be unlikely to be impacted by inclement weather, low-cost on-campus student housing can be accessed, and registrants will be more likely to be able travel with their children (e.g., Spring/Summer intersession), if so desired.

My own experience with incoming distance education registrant orientations, as supported by the statements of several participants, enables me to view incoming student orientation sessions as catalysts for the development of new relationships among prospective student peers who will all be undertaking the same process of e-learning. Having had participated in several such sessions, I have seen incoming registrants connect with other students who reside within reasonably close geographic proximity to one another, and have noted numerous incidences when these same groups of students have enrolled in tandem throughout their program of studies. Often, these student-peer relationships form based upon geographic

proximity rather than any other demographic or cultural characteristic the students may have in common. However, these orientation sessions also provide an opportunity for the host program to model anti-oppressive and/or decolonising methods of interrelating for their incoming registrants. Rather than simply replicating the well-established institutional order of academia that is exemplified by the “town vs. gown” phenomenon, wherein the geo-cultural characteristics of incoming learners are downplayed as students undertake their academic journeys in search of the universal truths associated with their chosen discipline, academic departments can choose to reconstruct normative student orientation processes to permit the expression of counternarratives, such as those represented in the voices who have historically been excluded from academic discourse.

To this end, a ‘welcome to territory’ introduced in the language of the local Indigenous peoples upon whose ancestral territories the institution has been situated is a good starting point for all incoming students who may never have encountered this form of Indigenous protocol in their lives heretofore. By introducing this dimension of Indigenous protocol as a normal practice within mainstream professional programming, academic departments can begin to bridge the historic and ontological distance that many Indigenous adult learners typically expect to encounter in their academic studies.

5.2.3. Large Webbing Conclusions - Implications for Institutional Leaders

From the outset of this study, it was my intention to provide a forum wherein the experiences of Indigenous e-learning post-secondary alumni might be given voice and represented in ways which could lead to improvements in the educational experiences of place-bound Indigenous adult learners across Canada. By asking questions aimed at illuminating the utilization of the formal and informal supports these alumni drew upon to assist them in

completing their distance education studies, I attempted to elicit information that might be useful to academic and administrative staff, faculty, and institutional leaders who are interested in expanding the reach of their institutions with Indigenous student populations in rural and remote Aboriginal communities. Given the low participation rates of post-secondary education among Indigenous adults in Canada, I considered that any insight my research might produce that could lead to an improvement in post-secondary completion rates among Indigenous adult learners might well be of interest.

Foremost among my recommendations to post-secondary leaders is a reminder of the importance of creating a welcoming institutional relationship for off-campus learners throughout the university campus-based community in general. In much the same way that International students are not generally expected to be able to function with 100% confidence when first arriving on-campus, so too may some distance education students also experience feelings of unfamiliarity and institutional chilliness at those times when they perceive a necessity to interact in person with an employee of their chosen institution of higher learning. Although distance learners rarely travel onto a campus to access services, this does not mean that they are not accessing programs and services altogether however. Distance learners, like their campus-based counterparts, must register and make arrangements to pay for classes and other university functions (e.g., convocation), purchase curricular materials, establish electronic communications linkages with faculty and departmental staff, and access academic library services, even though they may never set foot within the physical confines of the main campus of their chosen alma mater. Unfortunately, the erasure of a physical presence of distance learners within the ordinary spaces and constituencies of campus life can lead to a sense of alienation for these students who are unaware of the geographic landmarks, academic protocols and administrative processes that

form the workaday context of campus-based institutional staff and student constituencies.

Accordingly, it is my recommendation that institutional leaders develop strategies to ensure that campus-based institutional staff realize that they may be asked to respond to periodic inquiries from off-campus students.

Whether facing telephone or in-person queries from off-campus students, institutional staff should be prepared to respond in ways that acknowledge the respondent as a valued member of the institution's student body. In much the same way that institutions have made accommodations for students with physical disabilities who experience barriers to access in different ways than able-bodied individuals, so too should institutional staff be prepared to sympathetically respond to students whose barrier to access arises from their geographic isolation from the programmatic and physical infrastructure norms of the employee's physical workspace. If administrative departments are looking for local examples of services that can accommodate to the needs of users who find themselves unable to receive face-to-face services, such a model might be found within their own institution's information technology support centre. By adapting common IT support's model business practices (e.g., creating work tickets, treating service users in non-patronizing ways), it is my belief that improved levels of service could be provided to off-campus students than are currently being achieved by many administrative units within the institutional hierarchies of mainstream post-secondary education.

Because they do not register for or attend campus-based lectures, labs, tutorials, or other instructional or extracurricular events, the post-secondary experience of distance learners differs significantly from typical on-campus students. The findings of my study provide qualitative evidence that distance learners rarely travel to campus to access services that have been established to support the undergraduate and graduate student population who reside within

commuting distance to campus-based facilities and programs. Although many of the student support services and programs that have been developed to enhance typical student's overall post-secondary experiences, it simply appears to be the case that many distance learners seldom avail themselves of these institutionally-mandated academic and social supports to the same extent as campus based learners. This finding is not new, and itself has led to the situation with many post-secondary educational institutions wherein students who register as distance learners already receive discounted student fee rates, on account of the low likelihood that they will ever utilize campus facilities and extracurricular activities.

Fortunately, institutional resources that have been invested in supporting distance learners have led to the creation and implementation of pedagogically appropriate curriculum, technologically current course management tools, and academically sound resource materials that are being successfully implemented by knowledgeable and proficient instructors within many academic departments across Canada's post-secondary education landscape. Expenditures of limited institutional resources on such curricular and administrative pedagogical devices continues to reap ample rewards for those institutions that enact distance education delivery models for off-campus learner populations in a strategic and purposive manner.

With respect to the unique needs of Indigenous place-bound learners, the research undertaken for this study indicates that Indigenous students may also benefit from the development of more welcoming relationships with their post-secondary educational service providers. As was detailed in Table 2.1, the educational programming that has been implemented for Indigenous students within Canadian higher education utilize service delivery approaches that fall along a continuum that includes assimilationist, integrated, independent and federated models. (Barnhart, 1991) All of these service delivery models were initially

developed in the interests of non-Indigenous leaders who sought to invite the participation of local Indigenous students into their institution's libraries, lecture halls and laboratories. Some institutions have become more successful than others in their efforts to recruit Indigenous students. However, because the focus of institution-Indigenous nation relationship building has largely centered on populations that lie within close proximity to the main campus, many isolated and remote Indigenous communities find it difficult to retain continuous eye contact with the prospective institutional partners that have received charters to provide services to their members. To a great extent, even the most progressive post-secondary educational service providers are still locked into institutional and scholarly traditions that perpetuate colonised relationships between settler populations and Indigenous communities.

Although the steps taken by forward-thinking post-secondary leaders that were aimed at developing relationships with local Indigenous communities have been, by extension, supportive for local Indigenous students who make their homes in those communities, these efforts have not necessarily benefited Indigenous distance education enrollees to the same extent. This is especially the case in jurisdictions where only one institution has received a charter to provide accredited training in specialized professional degree programs (e.g., social work, veterinary studies, architecture), and it is to this institution that the residents of geographically isolated Indigenous communities look first, regardless of whether or not the institutional leadership have been proactive in reconstituting historic relationships that still bear the marks of colonialism. Accordingly, in situations where an institution's charter extends to across a catchment area that transcends the ancestral boundaries of two or more Indigenous peoples, it is important that institutional leaders take active steps to ensure that the cultural and linguistic practices of geographically proximal Indigenous peoples do not become misrepresented as the ONLY

recognized Indigenous cultural groups that are worthy of representation in institutional communications strategies. Although the expenditure of resources spent on reflecting the diversity of Indigeneity within the institution's catchment area may not necessarily be apprehended by the students hailing from the Indigenous nations that are more geographically proximal to the institution's main campus, the leadership of local Indigenous communities will understand the need to display protocol, and the more distant Indigenous communities will likely feel a greater sense of ease at the prospect of their students participating in virtual or face-to-face coursework offered by that school. My own personal experience and the comments of the participants in this study indicate that cultural sensitivity that reflects the diversity of Indigenous traditions and cultural practices across the catchment areas of Canadian post-secondary institutions is greatly appreciated by Indigenous place-bound learners.

A further corollary of this study also indicates that place-bound Indigenous learners do not appear to utilize the services of campus-based Aboriginal Student Centres to any great extent, and apparently not more than any other campus-based student focussed organization. This is not to say that the services and programs delivered by Aboriginal Student Centres - where such Centres exist - are not important sources of support for Indigenous post-secondary students in general. Aboriginal Student Centres that facilitate the integration of Indigenous students into campus life and the urban environment of the city in which they are studying do provide critical support services for campus-based students, however, by their very nature these same programs are largely antithetical to the interests of place-bound Indigenous learners who cannot or are unwilling to relocate to an alien urban environment simply so that they can obtain professional credentials. Accordingly, it is my opinion that institutional leaders who are looking to increase the enrolment of Indigenous students in their on-line course offerings should develop e-learner

recruitment strategies that do not focus solely on the services provided by an Aboriginal Student Centre that are oriented toward local Indigenous students rather than place-bound learners whose own Indigenous cultural traditions and experiences of colonisation may differ significantly from those practiced by Aboriginal Student Centre employees. Rather than simply adding another set of deliverables related to servicing the needs of Indigenous place-bound learners on top of the services already being to campus-based learners, institutional leaders should continue to look to Aboriginal Student Centers as important linkages between the university and local Indigenous communities, including communities of campus-based students whose Indigenous traditions are anchored to ancestral sites far distant from the main campus of the institution.

A final recommendation of this study is for the leadership of post-secondary institutions to develop comprehensive Indigenous e-learner recruitment strategies. Through incorporating appropriate aspects of Indigenous protocol, leaders of academic departments that have the resources, capacity and interest in delivering a suite of on-line courses to place-bound learners should be encouraged to develop mutually beneficial partnerships with geographically distant Indigenous communities that are currently underserved by existing service delivery approaches. Following a path of consultation, it would be appropriate for an Indigenous e-learner recruitment strategy to invite participation of key informants from within the geographic catchment area of the Institution, perhaps in the form of an off-campus Indigenous learner advisory group. Examples of discipline-specific off-campus learner advisory groups have been successfully implemented in numerous professional schools across Western Canada, and several faculties have already developed Indigenous community advisory groups that invite members from across the institution's catchment area to provide meaningful input into program planning and course development on matters of interest to Indigenous communities.

5.3. Sharing the Haul

As an undergraduate social work student, I was required to complete a required social science research methods course. During this course, I remember the instructor explaining to my cohort of place-bound Indigenous learners that the English word “data” is derived from the Latin word “*dare*”, which corresponds to the phrase “that which is given.” “Data”, explained Dr. Brown, “... is a gift.”

It is my understanding that within many Indigenous worldviews and customs, the receipt of a gift carries with it some responsibility. Any gift, regardless of the its’ physical characteristics, is a manifestation of the generosity that is a central value within many Indigenous cultures. Whether imparted as a component of ceremonial protocol or as an everyday token of gratitude, gifts are to be treated with respect and the reciprocal imperative of Indigenous protocol implicitly asks at a minimum that the story of the circumstances of the gift-giving are to be remembered. Just as with Nature’s bounty, it is not simply enough to receive a gift only to then forget about it and leave it to rot into a state in which it is of use to anyone. Gifts are meant to be remembered, used, or enjoyed, and if the recipient has no immediate use or capacity to store for later use that which has been given, then the object should be passed along to another who might be able to make use of it. Inherent within the exchange of gifts is a responsibility to ensure that that which was given does not go to waste.

As described in Chapter 3, I presented the participants in my research with small tokens of appreciation (a USB headset) before each interview in order to demonstrate a modicum of respect for Indigenous gift-exchanging protocol. In appreciation for the stories of their experiences as place-bound e-learners, I promised that I would respectfully analyse whatever

data was provided to me with an aim to presenting the findings of the research in ways that might be of benefit to future cadres of Indigenous on-line post-secondary students.

Rather than focussing my findings in relation to a community of individuals who might share similar Indigenous ancestry or who happened to live in close proximity to one another within the confines of manmade territorial markers, I instead adjusted the focal point of my analytic lens to describe the characteristics of a virtual community of Indigenous e-learners. In no way did I intend to (mis)represent the participants in my study as citizens of some pan-Indian virtual reality world, but because I have never yet encountered a human community that is comprised of a significant population of Indigenous adults who have completed post-secondary studies through on-line studies, I had much difficulty in identifying a human community that could be an immediate beneficiary of this research. Perhaps one day this may change.

In keeping with Kovach's (2009) imperative that Indigenous methodologies should ultimately serve Indigenous people, it is therefore my intention that the gifts that I have received/produced through my data collection and analysis be presented to individuals who find themselves in positions of being able to provide support to place-bound Indigenous post-secondary e-learners. Whether the audience of this research is comprised of individuals associated with Indigenous education who are being asked to support a community member, or employees of post-secondary institutions that aim to provide on-line courses to off-campus Indigenous students, it is my hope that this research might contribute to making at least one Indigenous e-learner's educational experience less isolating.

Accordingly, in order to disseminate the findings of this study to as wide an audience as it can possibly reach, it is my aim to adapt the information presented in this dissertation so as to produce at least one article for publication in an on-line or print-based academic journal.

Additionally, because I also believe that other graduate students and/or prospective doctoral committee members may be interested in the methodology I employed for this study, I also aim to produce at least one other article on this subject for publication in another academic journal. I also hope to be accepted to give several presentations on this research project at academic conferences throughout North America for as long as it remains relevant. Finally, I intend to submit applications to present this research at one or more of the annual Indigenous research symposia that take place across Canada, and if invited, I will endeavour to utilize the gift of this research for presentation to Indigenous community gatherings on the subjects of distance education and/or e-learning involving place-bound Indigenous adult learners.

Welalioq.

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APPENDIX I - Behavioural Research Ethics Board Application



Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB)

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROTOCOL

1. **Name of supervisor:** Dr. Patrick Renihan,
Department of Educational Administration
College of Education
- 1a. **Name of student:** Harpell Montgomery, PhD. Candidate (Educational Administration)
College of Graduate Studies and Research
- 1b. **Anticipated start date and expected completion date of the study.** Anticipated start date will be May 2011 and expected completion date will be November 2011.
2. **Title of Study:**
Important elements of learner support articulated by off-campus Indigenous alumni in recalling their experiences of post-secondary e-learning course delivery.
3. **Abstract (100-250 words)**
This qualitative study will provide new theoretical insights and practical approaches towards supporting off-campus Indigenous learners at the post-secondary level. The student researcher proposes to examine the experience of Indigenous adult learners who have completed coursework delivered through internet-based modalities (e-learning) so that the evolving constellation of student support programming for Indigenous learners at a distance can be more thoroughly understood.

Drawing upon the researchers' lived experience as an Indigenous alumnus of off-campus post-secondary programs at the baccalaureate and graduate levels, the study will be undertaken using a research design that comprises a complementary qualitative methodological approach. The study proposes to employ an Indigenous methodology for researcher preparation and data collection, and principles of grounded theory for data analysis and presentation of findings.

The central question this research seeks to answer is: "What are the perceptions of off-campus Indigenous alumni regarding the procedural, content and pedagogic elements of

e-learning coursework as being supportive factors in the successful completion of their graduate programs?”

4. **Funding:** Non-funded.

5. **Expertise:**

The Student Researcher has substantial professional experience with obtaining interview evidence as a former child protection investigation social worker. He has worked extensively with local, national, and international Indigenous communities and is familiar with the application of Indigenous protocols and practices in research.

6. **Conflict of Interest**

There is no anticipated conflict of interest in this study. None of the participants will have participated in any coursework directly with the student researcher, however it is likely that each of the participants will recognize the student researcher as a former research assistant (camera operator) at several Aboriginal graduate student gatherings wherein many of the participants were present.

7. **Participants**

It is anticipated that data gathering will occur as soon as possible following each participant's convocation from their most recent post-secondary program of study.

On-Line Survey: Survey participants will be recruited through the student researcher's existing social networks. Prospective participants will be invited to participate through an electronic **Survey Recruitment Invitation**. Participation in the on-line survey is entirely voluntary. Participants may withdraw from the survey at any point, with no penalty.

Individual Interview: Up to six participants who have completed the on-line survey and who have indicated their willingness to participate in an individual interview session therein will be selected. Participants will be selected to participate in in-depth interviews using purposive sampling methods, namely:

- self-identification as a person of Indigenous ancestry;
- prior registration as an off-campus student of a post-secondary institution in Canada for at least one semester at the graduate level;
- completion of at least one course through e-learning delivery;
- convocation from their post-secondary program of study;
- access to information and communications technology (i.e., computer, modem, internet connection, software) necessary to participate in the study.

Each prospective interviewee will be asked to participate in one interview. Interviews will be conducted using **Voice-Over-Internet-Protocol (VOIP) telephony technology**. Each prospective interviewee will be provided via e-mail attachment with the interview schedule and consent form in advance of their interview.

- 7a. Please see attached **Survey Recruitment Invitation** and **Individual Interview Invitation**.

8. **Consent**

Participation in the **on-line survey** is entirely voluntary and free of coercion. All responses entered by the participants will not be submitted to the student researcher until the end of the survey, at which point they will need to click on a box to submit their data. When they click on the box, a pop-up window will advise them that:

“By agreeing to submit your responses to this survey, you are consenting to participate in this research study and you are authorizing the researcher to use the data you are submitting in the manner described. If you do not consent to the use of your survey responses, you may withdraw from the study by not clicking on the “submit now” button and exiting this window.”

Completion of the survey and subsequent submission of their inputted data will be taken as consent to participate.

Please see the attached **Consent Form for Telephone Interviews**. Consent forms will be sent via e-mail attachment to prospective interview participants who have completed the On-Line Survey and who have agreed to participate in an interview. Each interviewee must return the signed form prior to the interview via fax or e-mail attachment of a scanned photographic reproduction (e.g., .pdf file). At the beginning of the interview, the student researcher will review the consent form with the participant to ensure that they understand and agree to the terms outlined in the form. Each interviewee will be able to withdraw from the interview at any point, with no penalty.

Upon transcription of the interview, participants will be asked to review the final transcript of their interviews and sign a release form wherein they acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what they said or intended to state. The participants' signature on the transcript release will be taken as consent for data analysis and presentation of findings. Should a participant not elect to sign a transcript release, her/his data will not be included in any aggregate reporting of the study findings.

9. **Methods/Procedures**

Research data will be collected through an on-line survey and a personal interview. One individual interview will be held with up to six participants.

On-Line survey (see **Electronic Survey)**

Having received an electronic **Survey Recruitment Invitation** via e-mail, prospective participants will be asked to reply to the student researcher via an e-mail that indicates their interest in participating in the electronic survey. Each participant will be provided with a unique code that will enable them to access the University of Saskatchewan survey tool. The introductory components of the **Electronic Survey** will serve as a cover letter for the study, and as such, will clearly indicate the purpose of the research, the established methods for contacting the research team, and the procedures for withdrawal

from the study. On-line surveys will take less than 15 minutes to complete. Only the Student Researcher will have access to the survey data.

Individual Interview (see Sample Interview Questions)

Each participant interview will take less than 90 minutes to complete. Up to six people will be individually interviewed using VOIP software (e.g., Skype) and hardware (e.g., universal serial bus (USB) headset) technology. Because the interviews will not take place in a face to face environment, each participant will be able to select a location that is convenient to them. The student researcher will be the only interviewer.

Prior to interviews occurring, participants will be provided with a website link as an orientation to VOIP interviews (e.g., <http://www.slideshare.net/dkaye/skype-for-interviews>). In order to minimize the potential for data corruption arising from equipment malfunctions, all individual interview participants will be provided with a USB headset (earphones/microphone suitable for VOIP telephony) as a gift, to be sent via mail to an address of the participant's choosing. Each interview session will be recorded using digital recording software that is compatible with VOIP telephony (e.g., Powergramo).

At the commencement of the interview session, participants will be reminded that they may withdraw, without penalty, at any time from either the interview or the research project. During interview sessions, participants may request at any time that electronic recording functions be turned off. Participants may also refuse, without penalty, to respond to any question if they so desire.

The digital recordings of each interview session will be transcribed into separate electronic documents using word processing software (e.g., Microsoft Word), and one copy will be printed to minimize the risk of loss of digital format data. The student researcher will be the only person to transcribe each interview.

In order to undertake meaning-making once the data has been collected, a constant comparative method will be utilized to identify emergent themes within the collected data. The process of looking for patterns and identifying how the data fits together is consistent with a grounded theory method of data analysis. (Guba, 1990) This inductive analytic approach will facilitate the stated goal of grounded theory (i.e., that of building theory), while also fulfilling a practical necessity to aggregate the data so that any potentially identifying contextual information can be excised.

Electronic files of the interviews will be analysed using qualitative research software. NVivo 9 will be used to facilitate the coding of the data and to assist with the creation and organization of analytical memorandums generated in the analysis process. In order to strengthen analytic reliability, the student researcher and one Committee member will undertake independent coding of the electronic data associated with one randomly selected interview. Excepting the sample interview, the student researcher will be the only person undertaking data coding, and he will be the only person with access to aggregated participant interview data.

10. Storage of Data

Research data associated with this study will comprise both electronic and hard copy recordings. Examples of data sources include, but are not limited to: tapes and videos, transcripts, interview notes, original survey responses, and all supporting correspondence and documentation.

All electronic raw data, transcribed files and recordings will be stored on a password encrypted computer at the student researcher's home office and backed up weekly on an external hard drive in the same office. Following analysis, two copies of the original data files will be backed up on DVD media and stored in a locked filing cabinet at the student researcher's residence. The electronic files will then be deleted from the computer used for analysis and the external hard drive. All electronic data files will be retained for a period of five years. After this time, the data will be destroyed beyond recovery.

All hard copy materials (including, but not limited to: signed consent forms, interview transcripts, participant master list) will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the research supervisor's campus office for a period of five years. After this time, the data will be destroyed.

Only the student researcher will have access to have access to the data, regardless of the format.

11. Dissemination of Results

Results from this study may be submitted for scientific publication and/or used in presentations at professional conferences. Results may also come to be represented in a book or other publishable format.

12. Risk, Benefits, and Deception

There are no known risks to participants in the research and participants will not be exposed to harm, discomforts or perceived harm. Should any participant request the study be reviewed by a Tribal ethics review board or other Institutional Review Board, the student researcher will fully participate with the procedures and recommendations of that review process to the extent that this University of Saskatchewan Ethics Committee authorization permits.

Potential benefits of this research include opportunities for Indigenous off-campus learners to voice their experiences and insights in a project that will generate research publications that will be accessible to scholars, administrators and Indigenous community members around the world. Another potential outcome of this study is the contribution to an enhanced understanding of the experiences of Indigenous off-campus learners and subsequent changes to educational policy, curriculum and programming that may support improved outcomes for this group.

Consistent with Indigenous cultural protocol, individual participants will be provided with a small gift (i.e., USB headset under \$40.00 in value) for sharing their knowledge.

13. Confidentiality

All interview participants will be offered the choice to utilize a pseudonym. The identification of the geographic location(s) where the participants resided while taking e-learning courses (schooling community) is important to this project and each named locality will be assigned an anonymized identifier that indicates only community population and geographic region. The data link between participants and their associated schooling community(ies) will be destroyed upon completion of data collection.

Data will be reported in formats that are consistent with grounded theory analytic methods, including categorized themes and direct quotations from participants that exemplify the identified theme. Direct quotations used in any public report will be anonymized so as to protect participant confidentiality.

14. Data/Transcript Release

Each prospective participant will be informed of their right to control their data, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without explanation. If any participant does choose to withdraw, any data that have been collected from or regarding that individual will be destroyed immediately and without question. All interviewees will be asked to review a transcribed electronic copy of their interview and to sign a **Transcript Release Form** wherein they acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what they said or intended to state.

15. Debriefing and feedback

Participants will be provided copies of their interview(s) to allow them to edit or delete material, including clarification of any potential misinterpretations. Addresses of all participants will be retained, and all reports or papers derived from this research program will be offered to all participants.

16. Required Signatures

Harpell Montgomery
Student Researcher

Dr. Patrick Renihan
Supervisor & Acting Department Head

17. Required Contact Information

Harpell Montgomery
Educational Administration
College of Education
University of Saskatchewan
28 Campus Drive
Saskatoon SK S7N 0X1

Dr. Patrick Renihan
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phone: 306.664.7378 or 966.7521
fax: 306.664.7131 or 966.7020
ham710@mail.usask.ca

phone: 306.966.7620
fax: 306.966.7020
pat.renihan@usask.ca

The following communication will be distributed via e-mail to all prospective participants in the study:

Hello there. Perhaps you remember me as a graduate student in the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. My name is Harpell Montgomery, but I go by Monty and I'm a PhD. student in Educational Administration. The area my doctoral research is in is distance education with Aboriginal post-secondary students, and my research question is:

What are the perceptions of off-campus Indigenous alumni regarding the procedural, content and pedagogic elements of e-learning coursework as being supportive factors in the successful completion of their graduate programs?

Basically, I want to understand your experience and that of other off-campus adult learners who have taken at least one university class over the internet. I will use the information you provide to try to find ways of making the whole e-learning experience better for Indigenous students who aren't taking the course on-campus. I will also try to identify ways to prepare university instructors, administrators and support staff to be more responsive to the needs of Indigenous learners. Hopefully, this research will be used to create strategies that can help off-campus students access appropriate and timely support services to help get them through their classes and degree programs. If your experience was negative, I want to hear about it. If it was positive, I want to hear that too. I need to know why it was either way.

The overall design for my research project has two parts - an on-line survey and a follow-up interview. For the on-line survey, I am hoping that you can take about 15 minutes to log on to a secure website to complete a short series of questions that will provide me with some background information about you and your experiences with on-line learning.

If you decide to participate, all of the information you provide will be confidential, and I will not use your name unless you specifically give me permission to do so. I will not let anyone have access to the information you provide me with, except in ways that make sure your identity is not made public.

You are free to withdraw from the survey at any time by logging out of your internet browser, and I will not be able to use any information you might have already entered.

At the end of the survey, you will be asked to click on a button that will ask if you want to submit the information you have entered into the form. If you click on the 'submit' button, you will be indicating your consent to participate in the study, and the data you have inputted will be forwarded to me for analysis. If you don't click on the 'submit' button at the end of the survey for any reason, none of the information you might have entered will be submitted, and you will

not be contacted again about participating in the interview phase of the study. In case you don't happen to recall the process for granting consent for me to use your data once you log in to the survey, these procedures relating to the submission of your data will also be described in the survey tool itself.

Thanks for considering participating in my research. If you want to start the survey process, please reply to this e-mail message, and I will see to it that a participation password and link to the survey website gets sent to you. If you don't want to participate in this study, please disregard this e-mail, and you will not be contacted again.

If you happen to have any questions about this study, you can contact me either by return e-mail, or phone at harpellm@gmail.com, 306.382.2888. Alternatively you can also contact the University of Saskatchewan Ethics Office at ethics.office@usask.ca (306.966.2975) with questions or concerns you might have.

Thanks again for giving some thought to participating in my research. Take care. /monty

Document management and confidentiality:

All data collected stay in the possession of the researcher. These items are under the sole control of the researcher and are not available to anyone else. All computer files are password protected. Upon completion of the study, the digital and hardcopy files associated with survey responses, interview transcripts, other communications, and audio recordings will be archived for five years, after which time they will be destroyed beyond recovery.

The following communication will be distributed via e-mail to all prospective interviewees:

Hello there. Thank you for recently participating in the on-line survey phase of my research project at the University of Saskatchewan. As you may recall from what I sent to you before you completed the survey, my name is Harpell Montgomery (Monty) and I'm a PhD. student in Educational Administration. My doctoral research focuses on distance education with Aboriginal post-secondary students. Through my research, I want to understand the experience of off-campus adult learners who have taken at least one university class over the internet so that I can try to find ways of making the whole e-learning experience better for Indigenous students who aren't taking on-campus courses.

As I mentioned in a previous e-mail, the design for this study has two parts - an on-line survey and a follow-up interview. I am inviting now you to participate in a follow-up interview, and this message describes the process we will use to conduct the interview, if you want to take part.

For the interview phase of my data collection, I am asking you to voluntarily join me in one interview using internet-based electronic communications hardware and freely available commercial software (i.e., Skype). Using this type of technology for this study is consistent with my overall research methodology and it also eliminates the costs associated with either of us having to travel to attend a face-to-face meeting. This interview will be between only you and me, but I will be making a recording of our conversation using digital audio recording software that works with Voice-Over-Internet technology. In order for the internet-based technology to work, you will need to download and familiarize yourself with the Skype software before the interview. (see: <http://www.skype.com/intl/en/get-skype>)

If you don't have Skype-enabled PC or Mac computer and internet connection available for our interview, the Voice-Over-Internet software I will be using also permits me to call and record conversations made to regular telephone numbers. If you are interested in participating in an interview but are uncertain about the technological aspects of a Voice-Over-Internet conversation, you can review a 22 minute internet presentation that clearly explains the use of Skype to conduct interviews. (see <http://www.slideshare.net/dkaye/skype-for-interviews>)

In order to reduce the possibility of technology problems that could impact our conversation, I would like to mail you a USB headset that can connect to any computer. Regardless of whether our interview happens over a computer or a telephone, the USB headset (\$40 value) is a gift that you can keep even if you decide not to complete the interview. This gift is offered in the spirit of Indigenous protocol - a computer-age adaptation of a traditional practice that I hope reflects the uniqueness of an internet-based interview that I'm quite sure none of my ancestors would have been able to conceive of.

Once I hear back from you that you are interested in being interviewed I will contact you to set a date and time for the interview. Within 24 hours of the scheduled interview time, I will send a consent form to you via e-mail. If you want to participate in the interview, you can reply to the consent form e-mail that you agree with the terms as written. Your return e-mail response will stand as your affirmation of the terms for participation, and you will not need to fax or scan any signed document back to me.

For this study, I am asking that you participate in one interview only. I anticipate the interview will take up to 90 minutes to complete, and you can participate from wherever you feel comfortable as long as I am able to electronically connect with you where you're at. Once our interview has begun, if the conversation becomes suddenly disconnected for any reason (e.g., technology failure, unexpected hang up), I will attempt to contact you again to conclude the interview at a later date.

You are free to withdraw from the interview process at any time for any reason, simply by informing me that you wish to withdraw. If you let me know that you have withdrawn, I will not use any parts of what we talked about.

Following the interview, I will transcribe our conversation into an electronic file to assist me in analysing the research data. Once completed, I will send a copy of your interview transcript to you through registered mail or e-mail (your preference). You will be able to revise the statements you made, if you want. I might also ask you some clarifying questions and give you the opportunity to respond to any points which you feel might better describe your experience. You have the option at any time to give me additional information up to the point where my dissertation is approved by my PhD. committee.

If you decide to participate in an interview, all of the information you provide will be confidential, and I will not use your name unless you specifically give me permission to do so. If at any point following our interview, I want to use any of your information in any way that is not consistent with what is stated above, I will ask for your permission through a separate written consent process. Finally, once you consent to participate, you will be also assuring me that you will not ask for money for our conversation.

If you happen to have any questions about this study, you can contact me either by return e-mail, or phone at harpellm@gmail.com, 306.382.2888. Alternatively you can also contact the University of Saskatchewan Ethics Office at ethics.office@usask.ca (306.966.2975) with questions or concerns you might have.

Thank you again for considering participating in this research. If you are interested in being interviewed, could you please send me an e-mail confirming your interest? If you could also let me know your mailing address, I will arrange to send you a USB headset before the interview date. Talk to you soon.

H. Monty Montgomery

harpellm@gmail.com
(306) 382-2888

Document management and confidentiality:

The digital interview recordings, written notes and transcriptions stay in the possession of the researcher. All computer files are password protected. These items are under the sole control of the researcher and are not available to anyone else. Upon completion of the project, the digital and hardcopy files related to the coding, interview transcripts, other communications, and audio recordings will be archived. The researcher will retain control of these items to maintain confidentiality.

The following communication will be distributed via e-mail to all prospective interviewees:

My name is Harpell Montgomery (Monty) and I'm a PhD. student in Educational Administration at the University of Saskatchewan. My doctoral research focuses on distance education with Aboriginal post-secondary students, and my research question is:

What are the perceptions of off-campus Indigenous alumni regarding the procedural, content and pedagogic elements of e-learning coursework as being supportive factors in the successful completion of their graduate programs?

The design for this study has two parts - an on-line survey and a follow-up interview. By submitting your on-line survey information, you have already consented to the researcher using that data for this study. **This consent form relates solely to the use of information you provide during the interview stage of the study.**

For the interview phase of data collection, I am asking you to voluntarily join me in one interview using internet-based electronic communications hardware and freely available commercial software (i.e., Skype). This interview will be between only you and me, but I will be making a recording of our conversation using digital audio recording software that works with Voice-Over-Internet technology.

For this study, I am asking that you participate in one interview only. I anticipate the interview will take up to 90 minutes to complete, and you can participate from wherever you feel comfortable as long as I am able to electronically connect with you where you're at. Once our interview has begun, if the conversation becomes suddenly disconnected for any reason (e.g., technology failure, unexpected hang up), I will attempt to contact you again to conclude the interview at a later date.

You are free to withdraw from the interview process at any time for any reason, simply by informing me that you wish to withdraw. If you let me know that you have withdrawn, I will not use any parts of our conversation.

Following the interview, I will transcribe our conversation into an electronic file to assist me in analysing the research data. Once completed, I will send a copy of your interview transcript to you through registered mail or e-mail (your preference). You will be able to revise the statements you made in the interview, if you want. I might also ask you some clarifying questions and give you the opportunity to respond to any points which you feel might better describe your experience. You have the option at any time to give me additional information up to the point where my dissertation is approved by my PhD. committee.

If you decide to participate, all of the information you provide will be confidential, and I will not use your name unless you specifically give me permission to do so. If at any point following our interview, I want to use any of your information in any way that is not consistent with what is stated above, I will ask for your permission through a separate written consent process.

The digital interview recordings, written notes and transcriptions of the interview stay in the possession of the researcher. All computer files are password protected. These items are under the sole control of the researcher and are not available to anyone else. Upon completion of the study, the digital and hardcopy files related to the coding, interview transcripts, other communications, and audio recordings will be archived. The researcher will retain control of these items to maintain confidentiality.

As was previously explained in the invitation to participate sent to you on _____, within 24 hours of the scheduled interview time, you have received this interview participant consent e-mail.

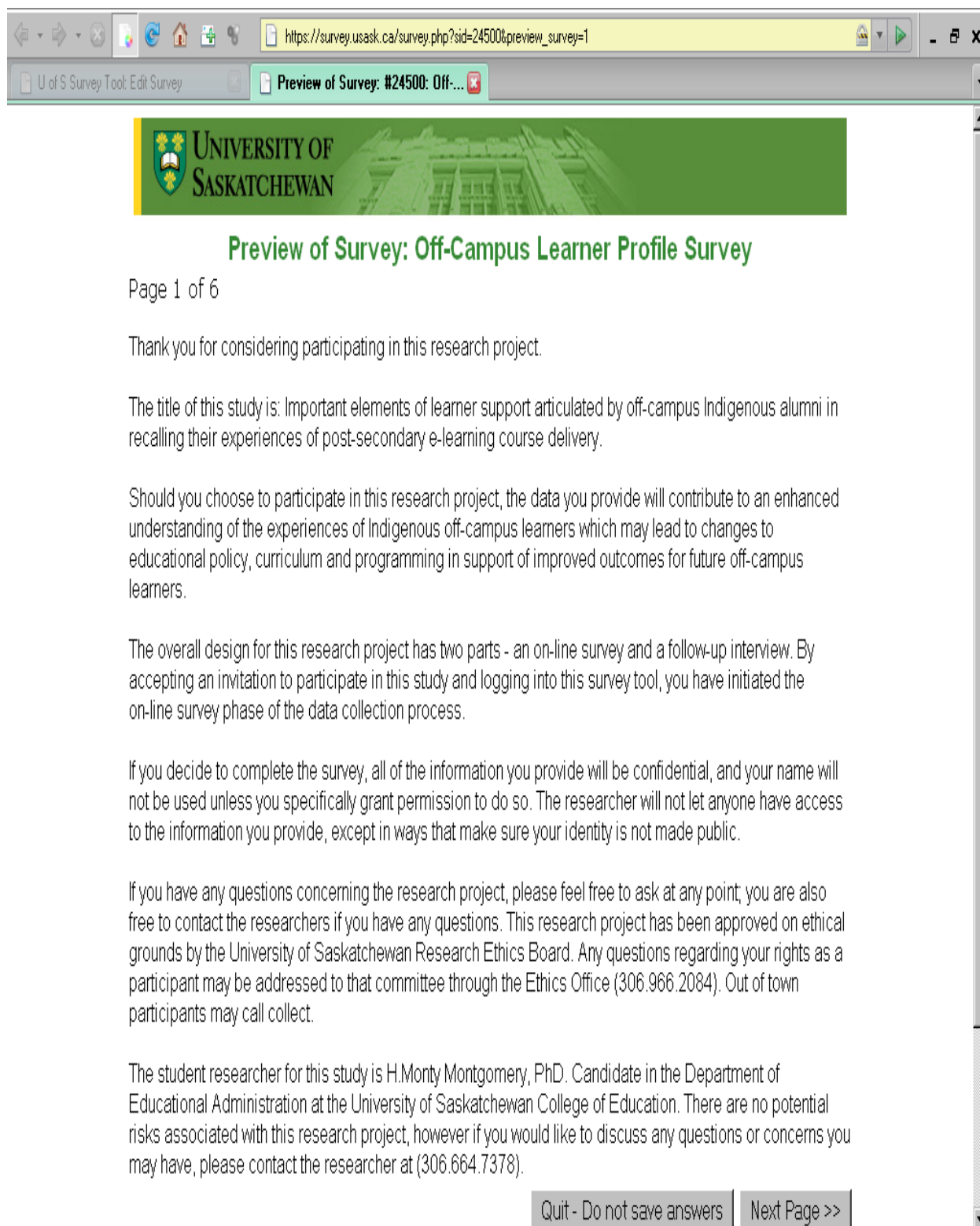
If you want to participate in the interview, you are to reply to this e-mail that you agree with the terms as written. Please clearly indicate in your e-mail response to this communication with a statement that indicates your consent to the terms contained herein.


Your return e-mail response will stand as your affirmation of the terms for consent to the use of the information you provide in your interview. You do not need to fax or scan any signed document back to the researcher; your electronic signature to this e-mail is adequate proof of your understanding of the terms of consent for this study.

By consenting to participate, you will be also assuring me that you will not ask for money for our conversation.

I. *(please type your name here)* have read the above statement and agree to participate as an interviewee under the conditions stated herein.

(date)



 UNIVERSITY OF
SASKATCHEWAN

Preview of Survey: Off-Campus Learner Profile Survey

Page 1 of 6

Thank you for considering participating in this research project.

The title of this study is: Important elements of learner support articulated by off-campus Indigenous alumni in recalling their experiences of post-secondary e-learning course delivery.

Should you choose to participate in this research project, the data you provide will contribute to an enhanced understanding of the experiences of Indigenous off-campus learners which may lead to changes to educational policy, curriculum and programming in support of improved outcomes for future off-campus learners.

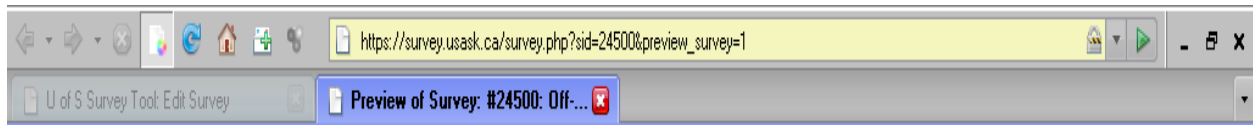
The overall design for this research project has two parts - an on-line survey and a follow-up interview. By accepting an invitation to participate in this study and logging into this survey tool, you have initiated the on-line survey phase of the data collection process.

If you decide to complete the survey, all of the information you provide will be confidential, and your name will not be used unless you specifically grant permission to do so. The researcher will not let anyone have access to the information you provide, except in ways that make sure your identity is not made public.

If you have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researchers if you have any questions. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (306.966.2084). Out of town participants may call collect.

The student researcher for this study is H.Monty Montgomery, PhD. Candidate in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Saskatchewan College of Education. There are no potential risks associated with this research project, however if you would like to discuss any questions or concerns you may have, please contact the researcher at (306.664.7378).

Quit - Do not save answers Next Page >>



Preview of Survey: Off-Campus Learner Profile Survey

Page 2 of 7

This survey is the initial step in the study's data collection process and it should take less than 10 minutes to complete. It poses a short series of questions that will provide the researcher with some background information about you and your experiences with on-line learning.

There are 15 questions in this survey, including yes/no and short answer questions. There are no right or wrong answers - the survey is an opportunity for you to provide the researcher some details about your own experience as an adult learner in a systematic way.

Please try to answer the questions in a way that you think represents your situation accurately. If you don't understand any question or feel uncomfortable answering a specific question, you can skip the question and you will still be able to complete the survey. If you require additional room to record your comments, space has been set aside near the end of this survey.

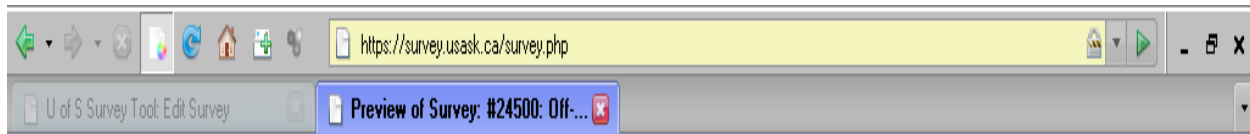
Collecting background information through the use of this kind of electronic survey instrument is consistent with the overall methodological design of this study, and it also will expedite the overall data collection process.

You are free to withdraw from the survey at any time by logging out of your internet browser, and the researcher will not be able to use any information you might have already entered.

At the end of the survey, you will be asked to click on a button that will ask if you want to submit the information you have entered into the form. If you click on the >submit< button, you will be indicating your consent to participate in the study, and the data you have inputted will be forwarded for analysis. If you do not click on the >submit< button at the end of the survey for any reason, none of the information you might have entered will be submitted, and you will not be contacted again about participating in the interview phase of the study.

Within 1-2 days after you have completed this survey and submitted your data, the researcher will contact you to set up a time for a follow-up interview, where a more fulsome conversation can occur regarding your most recent post-secondary experiences. Consistent with the overall methodology guiding this study, individual follow-up interviews will only be conducted via telephone or voice-over-internet technology, and there will be no face-to-face meetings scheduled.

Only those individuals who complete the survey and submit their data electronically will be contacted to participate in a follow-up interview.



This first short series of questions will provide the researcher with some information on your personal circumstances as a adult learner.

1. What is your name?

(255 chars max)

2. What community and province do you live in now?

(4000 chars max)

3. What Aboriginal group do you most identify with? (e.g., Inuit, Plains Cree, Anishnabe, Blackfoot, Metis, etc.)

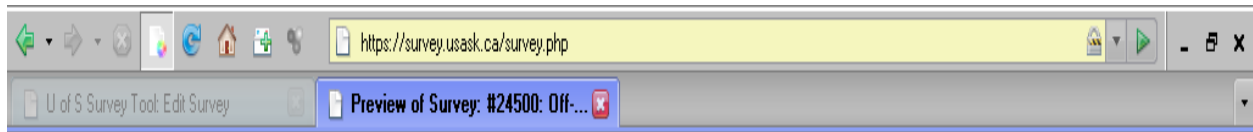
(4000 chars max)

4. Do you consider yourself to be a cultural person? (i.e., Would you present yourself to your family/friends as being a person who regularly participates in Aboriginal cultural activities? - not necessarily as a recognized leader, though).

Yes Don't Know No

5. Over the course of a typical year, how often do you participate in community or cultural events that can impact your academic or professional responsibilities? (e.g., Aboriginal cultural events or unscheduled ceremonies?)

Always Often Rarely Never



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This next series of questions refer to your overall experiences with post-secondary education, and are not specific to the last program of studies that you completed.

6. How many university degrees have you completed?

- 1 2 3 4

7. Even though you might not have lived in the city where the college or university was based, have you ever been registered as an on-campus student?

- Yes Don't Know No

8. Have you ever had primary care responsibility for others living in your home while you were a student?

- Yes Don't Know No

9. Have you had help from an Aboriginal organization (e.g., First Nation/Band, Friendship Centre, Metis Association) to assist you in completing your degrees?

- Yes Don't Know No

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This final series of questions are specific to the on-line coursework you participated in during your post-secondary schooling.

10. How many on-line courses have you ever taken?

 (255 chars max)

11. When did you complete your last on-line course?

 (255 chars max)

12. Have you registered for or completed any on-line courses from any other program since completing your most recent degree?

Yes No

Would you consider your overall academic experience as being more like:

13. (a) a traditional campus-based learner?

Agree
 Disagree

14. (b) a distance education learner?

Agree
 Disagree

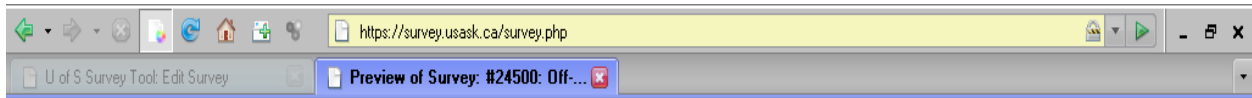
15. Will you agree to an interview about your experiences with on-line learning?

Agree
 Disagree

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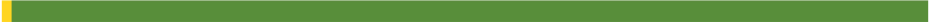
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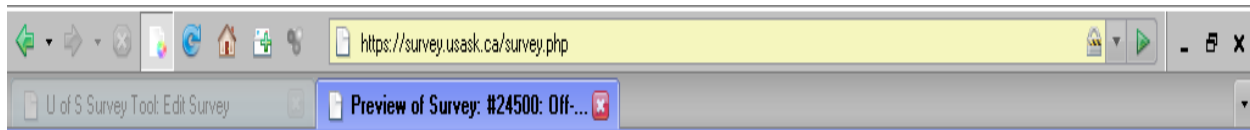
16. If you have any additional comments, questions or concerns regarding this survey, please record them here.

(4000 chars max)

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Thank you for completing this survey.

The researcher will be in touch with you within 1-2 days of your completion of this survey to establish a time for a follow-up interview.

If you would like to clarify any aspect of this study or the questions posed in this survey, please contact Monty Montgomery at 306.664.7378 or ham710@mail.usask.ca.

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Finish

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Responses to the following questions will be sought from interviewees in the study:

General Post-Secondary Experience Questions:

Thinking back to your most recent program of studies:

1. How did you come to be taking on-line coursework?
2. How many communities did you live in?
3. What words/phrases would you use to describe the community you lived in at the time?
4. Did you have much family and friends living nearby?
5. Did any crises or obligations that come up that you had to deal with?
6. How comfortable would you say you are with using computer-based communications technologies and taking on-line courses?
7. What did/didn't you like about the on-line courses you took?
8. If you could change the technology associated with your on-line courses, how would you do that and why?
9. What was the best/worst technology experience that you ever had in your educational program?

Personal Context for Learning Questions:

Thinking back to your most recent program of studies:

10. What year did you complete the coursework for your most recent university degree.
11. What was the program of studies, institution and degree?
12. How old were you at the time?
13. Were you registered as an on-campus or off-campus student?
14. Did anyone at the university or an Aboriginal organization (e.g., Band, Friendship Centre) level assist you with academic counselling regarding your program of studies (e.g., transfer credits, courses planning, etc.)?
15. What were the university's administrative processes like in regards to getting registered, paying fees, and enrolling in courses?
16. Do you remember having any difficulties in accessing library resources, the bookstore, or any computer helpdesk services?
17. Did you take any classes on the university's main campus or satellite campuses?
18. Did you make use of any campus-based programs or services while you were a student?

On-Line Studies Questions:

Thinking back to the on-line courses you took in your most recent program of studies:

19. How many on-line courses did you take in your program?
20. How many course instructors and/or teaching assistants did you have in each of the on-line courses you took?

21. Did you experience any difficulties getting registered for classes or receiving course materials?
22. Did you use any on-line or personal assistance to help you understand how to get the course technology to work?
23. To what extent were instructors able to guide you through using the technology to complete course activities and assignments?
24. Did you connect with any other students in real-time (e.g., face to face, via chat functions, or through social networking software)?
25. Did instructors rely totally on the course management system, or did they make efforts to connect with you in other ways (e.g., via telephone, e-mail or eluminate)?
26. How comfortable were you with keyboarding and submitting written comments in the course management system?
27. Did you have any difficulties accessing people and resources necessary for the completion of your courses?
28. Were you satisfied with the way the structure of the courses allowed you to interact with other students and the instructor?
29. Did you experience any computer or internet connection difficulties that interfered with your ability to participate in coursework?

Place-Based Learner Questions

30. In your opinion, to what extent did the on-line course resources, activities and assignments reflect life/work realities in Aboriginal communities?
31. How did you manage your responsibilities to household, family and community members while you were taking on-line classes?
32. Did your family, friends and community respect that you were a registered university student when you were taking on-line courses?

The following communication will be distributed via e-mail or registered mail to participants along with an electronic or paper copy of their transcribed interview. Participants will be asked to return the signed form to the researcher. :

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 Harpell Montgomery. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Harpell Montgomery 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.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Signature of researcher

APPENDIX II - Individual Interview Protocol

Title - Important elements of learner support articulated by off-campus Indigenous alumni in recalling their experiences of post-secondary e-learning course delivery.

Question - What are the perceptions of off-campus Indigenous alumni regarding the procedural, content and pedagogic elements of e-learning coursework as being supportive factors in the successful completion of their graduate programs?

- Equipment Set-up: ÷ ensure that Powergramo and Skype are preloaded and operational;
 ÷ have participant's telephone number on-hand;
 ÷ ensure notepaper and pencil are nearby to facilitate memoing;
 ÷ ensure that receiving headset is operating properly;
 ÷ start recording: indicate that this recording is interview #__ on date.
- Introductions ÷ thank them for participating in survey phase;
 ÷ confirm receipt of gift
- Review Electronic ÷ confirm receipt of e-mail Consent for Telephone Interview attachment;
Consent for ÷ go through orally in as much detail as necessary - ask if any questions;
Telephone ÷ ask them to reply to send a return email indicating their Consent to the
Interview Form participate - no attachment is required;
 ÷ ensure that e-mail authorizing Consent has been received in your in-box.
- Begin Interview ÷ advise it's a digital recording - interview won't be interrupted by having to
 flip tapes;
 ÷ advise that during the recording they can ask to have the recorder turned
 off at any time;
- Structured Questions ÷ indicate that questions have been grouped into 4 general areas, that they
 can take as long as they like with each question, they can skip any question
 they like, and that at the end of each section, there will be a place where
 they can add anything they feel necessary;
 ÷ indicate that unless otherwise stated, their responses should best reflect
 their most recent program of studies
 ÷ ask questions in sequence for the most part;
 ÷ visually scan each successive question to see if it has already been
 addressed before asking it;
 ÷ make sure the essence of each question has been spoken to at some point.
- Timekeeping ÷ check recording device 10 minutes into interview to see if it's functioning
 properly;
 ÷ keep an eye on the clock and let participants know when there is about 10

minutes left in the scheduled time.

- Ending
- ÷ thank them for participating;
 - ÷ ask if they have any additional comments they'd like to make;
 - ÷ advise them they will have an opportunity to review & revise the transcribed interview later, and they will be asked to sign a transcript release form before their data is included in the study.
- General
- ÷ process is meant to be conversational and organic;
 - ÷ appropriate responses can clarify unclear statements, affirm understanding, summarize general points made.

The first set of questions relates to your personal context for taking university courses. Thinking back to your most recent program of studies:

- What year did you complete the coursework for your most recent university degree.
- What was the program of studies, institution and degree?
- If you don't mind me asking, how old were you when you completed your degree?
- How many communities did you live in while you were completing your degree?
- Did you have much family and friends living nearby?
- What words/phrases would you use to describe the community you lived in while you were a student?
- How did you manage your responsibilities to your household and family members while you were taking classes? How about various cultural responsibilities?
- Did any crises or obligations that come up that you had to deal with?
- Did your family, friends and community respect that you were a registered university student when you were taking on-line courses?

The next set of questions relates to your relationship to the university that you took your degree from. Thinking back to the university you were enrolled in when you completed your degree:

- Were you registered as an on-campus or off-campus student?
- Did you take any classes on the university's main campus or satellite campuses?
- Did you make use of any campus-based programs or services while you were a student? (e.g., athletic facilities, Aboriginal student centre, university elders, etc.)
- Did anyone at the university or an Aboriginal organization (e.g., Band, Friendship Centre) level assist you with academic counseling regarding your program of studies (e.g., transfer credits, courses planning, etc.)?
- Do you remember having any difficulties in accessing library resources, the bookstore, or any computer helpdesk services?

The next set of questions relates generally to the on-line coursework you took when completing your degree.

- How did you come to be taking on-line courses?
- How comfortable would you say you are with using computer-based communications technologies and taking on-line courses generally?
- What did/didn't you like about the on-line courses you took?
- If you could change the technology associated with your on-line courses, how would you do that? Why?
- What was the best/worst technology experience that you ever had in your educational program?

The last set of questions relates to the specifically to on-line courses you took when completing your degree. Thinking back to the on-line courses you took:

- How many on-line courses did you take in your program?
- How many different instructors did you have in the on-line courses you took?
- Did you experience any difficulties getting registered for classes or receiving course materials?
- Did you use any on-line or personal assistance to help you understand how to get the course technology to work?
- To what extent were instructors able to guide you through using the technology to complete course activities and assignments?
- Did you connect with any other students in real-time while you were taking your on-line classes? (e.g., face to face, via chat functions, or through social networking software)?
- Did the instructors rely totally on the course management system, or did they make efforts to connect with you in other ways (e.g., via telephone, e-mail or eluminate)?
- Were you satisfied with the way the structure of the courses allowed you to interact with other students and the instructor?
- Did you experience any computer or internet connection difficulties that interfered with your ability to participate in coursework?

One final question:

- In your opinion, to what extent can the on-line course resources, activities and assignments reflect life/work realities in Aboriginal communities?