

**Conversations About Wellness and Support
In An Aboriginal Teacher Education Program**

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By

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ABSTRACT

Traditional Indigenous societies had intact ways of teaching, learning, and education. After contact with non-Indigenous peoples, educational orientations and practices which respect and reflect Aboriginal context, community, and culture were influenced and changed. In the present context, Métis and First Nations peoples in Canada have been in the process of reclaiming educational authority of their children and youth. One way that this educational authority has more recently been realized is through the establishment of Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs (ATEPs) where Aboriginal individuals are being prepared to be teachers for the teaching profession.

Aboriginal TEPs are distinct entities within university teacher preparation programs. Aboriginal TEPs are unique in approach and functioning and reflect the ideological orientations and practices of the Aboriginal communities in which they are situated. This study explored the understandings of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff and faculty in relation to wellness and support within the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP), in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada. This is a case study of one site. The findings provide a meaningful conception of the functions of wellness and support at the research site and were described from the participants primarily as relationships with self, family, and community.

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I also want to express special words to my mother. You always taught me to never give up and you taught me to work hard if I wanted to achieve my goals in life. I needed your teachings many times as I proceeded through the Ph.D. program. Thank you Mom.

DEDICATION

TO MY CHILDREN

Nathan, Lysanne, Lucien

I love you,

Mom

Researcher's Story

In one of his writings, Eber Hampton (1995) makes the point that memory, as an Aboriginal self, comes before knowledge making, meaning, or inquiry.

Every person's life contains experiences and memories of these experiences. The way it works for me is that I forget those things until I unwrap them, until I actually roll out the sacred medicine bundle of my life and look for those memories. I pick them up and touch them and feel them. (Hampton, p. 8)

Not unlike Hampton, experiences and memories have led me to the topic of my study.

When I unwrap and reflect upon the memories of my life, I recognize that I am drawn intuitively to my topic of interest from both personal and professional experiences. This helps me to define the motivation for my endeavours and the focus of my research interests. I also recognize how I am participating in a present context which is based on a series of historical events and occurrences, one of which is the very development of Aboriginal TEPs in a university setting.

In 1986, I stepped into the history of education in Canada as experienced by Aboriginal peoples by having the opportunity to enrol in an Aboriginal TEP. At the time, I was not aware that my educational experience was consistent with some other Métis peoples who travelled nomadically from community to community, and subsequently from school to school, in extreme poverty. Regardless of this lack of knowledge about a much larger social reality than what was mine personally and for my family, I wanted to become a teacher and so I began my journey to becoming a teacher by enrolling in the Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP), College of Education, University of Saskatchewan.

At the time I began my studies, I was not aware of how my relatively unconscious choice and the opportunity available to me in ITEP would literally change my life and the lives of my entire family. I was mistaken to think that I was simply attending ITEP with other Aboriginal students at the University of Saskatchewan in preparation to become a teacher. What I discovered was that ITEP is a program designed and delivered to students of Aboriginal ancestry and I began to be given an education which was significantly different from any of my experiences in elementary or high school. As a student in ITEP, through wellness and support I found recognition and encouragement for my personal and professional development needs. For the first time in my educational experience, I found an environment which promoted Aboriginal ways of knowing and ways of being as central to this development process. Unknowingly, I had stepped into the historical past of my ancestors and the legacies of their educational philosophies and approaches.

When I reflect further back to my childhood, I recognize that my family was transient. We were the nomadic uneducated Métis, alcohol and drug abuse were prevalent, and violence and extreme poverty were a way of life. As a young woman, I thought that once I grew up I would be able to leave, not my family, but that lifestyle, behind. I had a strong spiritual sense of this possibility but I was very naive about how to achieve my desired change in reality. As a young adult, I thought that if I changed where I was, then I would change who and what I was and the environment that I came from. But my familial origins continued to influence my life choices and before I could understand the consequences of my choices, I was re-creating my childhood lifestyle in my adult life. With the primary experiences from my family of origin and my choices as an adult, I began ITEP relatively unconsciously but firmly committed to improving my life and the

lives of my children as I studied to become a teacher. What I did not recognize at that time in my life was the extent to which my personal life affected my dreams of becoming a professional teacher and living in a good way.

As I studied to become a teacher, my personal life issues affected my professional studies and performance. In retrospect, all of the ways in which I was unwell became the points of conflict in my endeavours. I now recognize how my struggles have also been gifts. As I came to resolution of one life issue after another, based on what I experienced as a child and what I continued to create in my adult life, I have grown and learned to live in a better way. I have learned about seeking wellness from life experiences. As I have recovered from unconsciousness and maladaptive ways of functioning which resulted from addictive, abusive, and transient experiences in my early and adult life, I realize that wellness is a process which, for me, has required many and different types of support. Significantly, the process of wellness and support began in my life when I engaged in the ITEP program as an undergraduate student. I was given so much more than preparation to become a teacher. I was given an opportunity to begin a journey of wellness through support which led to the real lifestyle changes that I was seeking.

From the entire experience of preparing to become a teacher in ITEP, I had the opportunity to develop all aspects of myself which included my spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual development. In coming to understand myself and my family in a much better way by gaining more complete knowledge, I was able to develop personally as an Aboriginal person and as a professional teacher. In the spring of 1989, I graduated from ITEP and I began to look for employment. To my surprise, I was offered a junior position in ITEP as a full-time staff member. In August 1989, I began working in the very

program that had nurtured and developed me through a personal and professional development experience. I felt very excited and anxious at the same time. I began the school year under the tender care of seasoned ITEP staff persons and with this new beginning my life journey changed once again. I now became responsible to give back to ITEP students what had been given to me as an ITEP student.

As an ITEP staff member, I was given two main duties as employment tasks. I was expected to support Aboriginal students enrolled in our program and I was required to teach university classes. These duties embody the personal and professional development goals available for Aboriginal adult learners in ITEP as they prepared to become teachers. In order to accomplish these duties, during the first years of my employment I was mentored by ITEP staff members and other professional colleagues. In this environment, I had the opportunity to grow into my job. Over time, through my employment, the raising of my children, and engaging in graduate studies work, the two main employment duties required of me became more and more understandable. As I grew into my professional role, I soon learned that the very issues that I had faced as an undergraduate student, and I continued to face as I grew personally and professionally, with few exceptions were one and the same. I began to acknowledge the many expressions of individual spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual needs. After a number of years, I recognized how wellness and support are integral functions in ITEP which respond to these development needs, and from this experience I have become more and more curious about a deeper understanding of wellness and support in Aboriginal TEPs.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The Circle

Many years ago my Dad had a serious heart attack and was lying in a hospital bed when he said something to me that has never left my consciousness. He asked me to remember that everything exists in a circle and that in understanding the circle, I would always be taken care of. At that time, I recognized that he was trying to tell me something of great importance to him but the meaning of his words were obscure and yet to be significantly embraced and understood by me. Since neither he nor I knew if he was going to leave this physical world, in that moment I realized that he was giving me a part of himself that was central to the way that he saw the world. I understood his words to be his way of showing love and care for my future life. My Dad did survive that initial heart attack and went on to live for a number of years. Eventually, he succumbed to heart failure and passed into the spirit world. The pain of his passing has been relieved somewhat by time, but his words to me have never left my consciousness and they are stronger today than they have ever been. This study represents an understanding of his words to me.

Introduction

In my life journey, I have been led to university studies, professional practice as an educator in an Aboriginal Teacher Education Program since 1989, and subsequently the topic of my research. In contemporary Canadian society, universities design and deliver many different types of programs. One such type of program pursues the mandate of training individuals to be teachers in preparation for professional practice in various educational systems. Within this larger context of teacher preparation there exists a unique entity, Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs, or Aboriginal TEPs. Since the early 1970s, these programs have been associated with and developed by universities across Canada and have been offered in both on- and off-campus settings. Each Aboriginal TEP is funded and administered differently based on the intended Aboriginal target group and its respective institutional affiliation. As such, Aboriginal TEPs are embodiments of strength and resilience on behalf of the Aboriginal community and educational efforts from many different peoples, institutions, and governing agencies. As well, Aboriginal TEPs are distinct entities within teacher preparation in approach and functioning as they offer ideological orientations and practices which respect and reflect Aboriginal context, community, and culture. Aboriginal context, as defined here, is represented by the epistemological orientations of different Aboriginal groups and reflected in unique ways of being that are embodied in various approaches to everyday life among Aboriginal groups. Aboriginal context exists as an integral function within Aboriginal TEPs (Archibald, 1986; Bouvier, 1984; Freeman, 2001; Goulet, 1998; Hill & Freeman, 1998; Hodson, 2004; Kirkness, 1999; McAlpine, 2001). For example, space for discussion of Aboriginal ways of knowing and being is woven into the ATEP program;

however, Aboriginal ways of knowing and being are not the focus of this research. I recognize that through the circle that my father emphasized to me, I am inextricably connected to a circle of teaching and learning which is historically grounded yet lived in a present context. What existed in the distant past is alive in Aboriginal TEPs today.

Definition of Terms

In this study, for clarity it is prudent to explain up-front definitions for the terms wellness and support, Aboriginal, and Aboriginal TEPs. In this research project, the specific understanding of wellness and support means a searching for spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual nourishing for the purpose of being whole and balanced, or well in life (Hart, 2002; Little Bear, 2000; Michell, 2005). Hodson (2004) explains:

Learning and Healing embraced a distinctly Indigenous understanding of personal growth that is not intended to further problematize Aboriginal peoples by suggesting that we are in some way unwhole or incomplete. Instead, *Learning and Healing* should be viewed as a wellness model that understands that we are all on a healing journey and that journey to a large extent is in our control....

The structure of education, as we currently understand and practice it, discourages this process of self-discovery. The role of the Aboriginal adult educator/trainer is to facilitate this process by co-creating an environment that addresses the spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical. Only then will individuals have the opportunity for reflective analysis that encourages new understandings and new ways to move closer to wellness in their lives.

Learning and Healing is not new educational theory, nor should it be considered emerging knowledge. *Learning and healing* is the contemporary expression of our traditional forms of education which were conceived as a way of promoting and maintaining balance in the individual, the family, the community, and the Nation. (Hodson, pp. 27-29)

From my many years of experience, individuals in an Aboriginal TEP environment express the need for wholeness and balance in many different ways and the nature of wellness and support is offered as responsive interactions which are based in relationships

with others. The needs of individuals come from their own respective world views and life experiences and consequently there are wide ranges of spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual aspects of self seeking support for the purpose of wellness. Each individual brings his or her own perspectives and needs and these aspects of self change over time. The nature of the need for support indicates growth in an individual and this process of development is encouraged and welcomed in Aboriginal TEPs. Individual needs for support are viewed as positive; it is an opportunity to learn about ways to attain and maintain balance in life (Hart, 2002).

In my role as an Aboriginal TEP staff member and support person, I have recognized that, in the context of relationships, identifiable qualities which invite and promote wellness are based in certain foundational concepts. Hart (2002) identifies these foundational concepts as principles of wholeness, balance, harmony, healing, and self responsibility. With these principles in mind, and situating myself, I am not an Aboriginal Elder; I am a professional practitioner who believes in caring for all aspects of myself and others. From within relationships, I attempt to connect expressed spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual needs with support from myself, with others, and from available services. In this way, I seek to be a caring connection between expressed needs and the foundational concepts and principles which guide us toward balance by engaging in wellness and support as a way of life.

An understanding of the term “Aboriginal” specific to my study also requires definition. There are many discussions and points of view regarding what terms are best used to describe the original Indigenous inhabitants of the land area that is now called Canada. In the Canadian context, as a part of the evolution of relationships and legal

governance agreements, identifiable names for groups have been determined and can be understood at the personal, tribal, national, and international levels. Personally, each individual understands his or her own sense of identity and/or tribal affiliation. For myself, I am a Métis woman primarily of Cree and French ancestry. As well as this personal and tribal understanding, Michell (2005) explains, “I use the term “Aboriginal” to refer to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit who are recognized under section 35 of the Canadian Constitution (1982). I use the term “Indigenous” to refer to the original peoples (worldwide) who have a long-term connection, relationship and occupancy of a particular geographical land base” (p. 33). In using the term Aboriginal, I am respecting each individual person’s own sense of identity as an original inhabitant of this land area and his or her own relationships and legal governance agreements in Canada. Each Aboriginal person understands his or her own relationship to being Aboriginal from his or her own point of view. As well, by using the term Aboriginal I recognize and respect each individual’s and nations’ unique historical past.

Although each Aboriginal TEP is intended to serve individuals from a specific Aboriginal group, to claim that all participants in an Aboriginal TEP are from only one Aboriginal group is to deny the reality of the composition of Aboriginal TEPs. The Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP), College of Education, University of Saskatchewan is intended primarily for First Nations students, however, Métis, Inuit and occasionally non-Aboriginal students are enrolled in the program. In this study, students are not my participants rather the focus of data collection for this research was to have conversations with the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff and faculty at my research site. In terms of functioning, Aboriginal TEPs are teaching and learning environments which recognize

and develop Aboriginal approaches in a teacher preparation program. They primarily function to serve Aboriginal individuals wanting to become teachers. Specifically, this study focused on one Aboriginal TEP site in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada. In the province of Saskatchewan, there are five established Aboriginal TEPs. Their geographic location, founding date, governing body, funding source, university affiliation, and primary Aboriginal target group are outlined in Table 1 below.

Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs In Saskatchewan, Canada					
	Geographic Location Founding Date	Governing Body	Funding Source	University Affiliation	Primary Aboriginal Target Group
Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP)	Saskatoon 1973	University of Saskatchewan	Federal Government of Canada	University of Saskatchewan	First Nations
Northern Teacher Education Program (NORTEP)	LaRonge 1977	Northern Lights School Division and NORTEP and Aboriginal Community Representatives	Federal Government of Canada and Provincial Government of Saskatchewan	University of Saskatchewan and University of Regina	First Nations and Métis
Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) 3 Sites					
SUNTEP Saskatoon	Saskatoon 1980	Gabriel Dumont Institute	Provincial Government of Saskatchewan	University of Saskatchewan	Métis
SUNTEP Regina	Regina 1980	Gabriel Dumont Institute	Provincial Government of Saskatchewan	University of Regina	Métis
SUNTEP Prince Albert	Prince Albert 1980	Gabriel Dumont Institute	Provincial Government of Saskatchewan	University of Saskatchewan	Métis

As will be described in the historical section that follows, there are numerous Aboriginal TEPs which have developed across Canada. As mentioned previously, the site of the research for this study, however, is at the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP), in the city of Prince Albert, province of Saskatchewan, Canada.

Background to the Study

In pre-contact North American society, Indigenous peoples had intact ways of teaching and learning, or 'education' each of which were unique to each nation (Hampton, 1995). "In its guiding vision, a culture isolates a set of ideals that guide and form the learning processes inherent in its educational systems. In turn, these ideals reflect what that culture values as the most important qualities, behaviours, and value structures to instil in its members" (Cajete, 1994, p. 25). And, even though each traditional Indigenous nation had its own distinctly different way of educating, there were strikingly similar philosophical values and beliefs between nations (Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier, & Archibald, 1997).

In the Canadian context, Kirkness (1992) described traditional Aboriginal education as a natural and informal process which occurred in the environment as an organic everyday lived experience. In relationship to the self, family, community, and environment, all teachings were based on a core belief in the Creator, or Great Spirit. Teaching and learning were holistic and designed to ensure intergenerational cultural continuity and survival by understanding and practicing well being based on natural laws of spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental wellness (Armstrong, as cited in Kirkness, 1992; Barman, Hébert, & McCaskill, 1986). Education was accomplished through many

and varied methods, and generations of tribal members learned to live in a good way based on the foundational philosophical principles and practices of their nation (Friesen & Friesen, 2002; Kirkness). Teaching and learning, or becoming educated, was not just about acquiring skills necessary to ensure one's livelihood as an adult in a community; it meant being able to function as a whole human being connected to the family, community, and the environment in which one lived. The process of education was also viewed as a life-long endeavour and in each stage of life certain 'learnings' were afforded to individuals (Kirkness). For these reasons, teaching, learning, and the traditional process of education for North American Indigenous peoples and nations prior to Contact was culturally unique, and distinctly defined and lived. It is these very teaching, learning, and traditional processes of education that determine and identify Aboriginal approaches to living in a good way.

With the arrival of primarily European peoples over 500 years ago, traditional North American Indigenous societies and their ways of life became significantly influenced and changed. European impacts grew over time with the arrival of fur traders, settlers, and missionaries. Eventually Canada as a nation became established and governed based on European laws and social structures. In this historical process, the state began "to implement their desired relationship with the aboriginal population ... The goal became their assimilation as individuals into the dominant culture, which was premised on European values and patterns of behaviour" (Barman et al., 1986, p. 4). The philosophical premise of the goal of assimilation is found in a Eurocentric perspective which assumed superiority over Aboriginal peoples (Barman et al., 1986; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Bear Nicolas, 2001).

Herbert Spencer is often cited as the person providing the impetus for social Darwinism which assumed that Europeans' complex societies were at a pinnacle of the "civilized races." In this conceptualization, the other so-called races of the world were deemed to represent the less developed primitive precursors of this superior "race of men". (Haig-Brown et al., 1997, p. 23)

Based on this philosophical assumption of superiority and the non-recognition or denial of teaching, learning and education as intact processes within existing Indigenous nations prior to contact, the state's approach to attaining the goal of assimilation was to target Aboriginal children and use schooling as the vehicle to develop future Canadian citizenship. The ideal of this future citizenship envisioned recreating a European society in the newly formed Canada, and Aboriginal peoples were to become like Europeans in all ways (Bear Nicholas, 2001). This meant that the developing educational systems in newly forming Canada would deny inclusion of Aboriginal context, philosophy, and practices in schools. The following historical overview of educational experiences describes how this happened for many Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

Historically, Aboriginal communities have had educational experiences which are consistent with European assumptions of superiority, but their respective experiences have been different. In 1867, Canada was born as a nation under British control and was governed by the British North America (BNA) Act of 1867. Within the BNA Act of 1867, the Indian Act legally defined a relationship between some original Indigenous individuals and nations. These persons and nations are referred to as First Nations in Canada and historically they have experienced four general periods of educational history. The first of these four periods of educational history has been identified as assimilationist in nature. Up to the turn of the twentieth century, formal education was delivered from a European perspective in schools which were primarily established and

financed by different European church organizations. At the turn of the century, there was a huge influx of immigrants to Canada, mostly of European ancestry, and the role of First Nations peoples in the Canadian context assumed significantly less importance. In the attempt to further assimilate Aboriginal peoples into a growing European social order, educational practices changed to a more aggressive form when

In 1879, the federal government commissioned a report evaluating the American policy favouring separate Indian residential schools. The Americans believed that Indian children were best prepared for assimilation into the dominant society if they were removed from the influences of home, family and community. (Barman et al., 1986, p. 6)

The Canadian commissioned report, The Davin Report (Barman, 1986), subscribed to this same philosophy and recommended that Indian children be educated in residential schools far away from their families and homes. These schools were to be operated by missionaries as a continuing commitment to civilize and assimilate Canada's First Nations peoples. From these policy directives, the second period of educational history emerged.

From the late 1800s to after World War II, First Nations children were taken away from their familial and cultural environments and placed in residential schools where they became targets of forced practices of assimilation. This period of educational history, commonly referred to as the time of residential schools, was devastating to First Nations individuals, families, and communities. Children who were forced to attend these schools experienced many violent acts and there are long-lasting, intergenerational consequences which still reverberate for First Nations peoples to this day (Jaine, 1995; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1993).

As a result of post-World War II social consciousness, from 1945 to approximately 1970, the third historical educational period developed where policy directives promoted the practice of integration which was designed to allow First Nations children entrance into existing mainstream public education institutions. The integration experience for First Nations students was not one of success as they often encountered hostility and racism in schools, along with inaccurate and often offensive historical and curricular materials. By the mid 1960s, as recorded in the Hawthorne Report, there was approximately a 97% drop out rate for First Nations students in public schools, and integration by simply providing the opportunity to attend public schools was obviously not successful.

This third period of educational history changed when, in 1970, at Blue Quills, Alberta, representatives of five bands occupied a residential school and assumed authority over the educational services in the building. Initially, this occupation led to a temporary agreement between the First Nations surrounding Blue Quills and the federal government of Canada. This temporary agreement was solidified and Blue Quills Native Education Centre became the first band-controlled school in Canada (Barman et al., 1986; Bear Nicholas, 2001; Friesen & Friesen, 2002; Haig-Brown et al., 1997). This event ushered in the fourth and current period of development in education which claimed self-determination as a fundamental philosophical and practical goal for First Nations peoples and communities in Canada.

Historically, educational experiences for Métis people have been in some ways similar to, yet different from, their First Nations counterparts. For the Métis, as non-

registered 'Indians' in Canada, educational services became governed by provincial authority as determined in the British North America Act of 1867.

After the defeat of Louis Riel in 1885, the Métis basically gravitated toward one of three [educational] routes. *First*, there were those who opted for the more traditional Native way of life whose communities became targets of missionary education. Métis children too were educated in Indian day schools and later residential schools. (Friesen & Friesen, 2002, p. 120)

In residential schools, Métis children were used to manipulate student body compositions mainly for securing funding for schools as these schools were not required to accept them (Chartrand, Logan & Daniels, 2006) and they experienced cultural abuse.

Métis were culturally abused in a way that emphasized their differences from both Indian and white children alike in a negative way. Logan stated that: In mainstream Canadian society and in the school system, the Métis were made to feel they were lesser than either of their halves, not Indian enough for benefits or Aboriginal rights, but not "white" enough to be seen as equal to the dominant society. (Logan, as cited in Chartrand, 2006, p. 22)

From these and other experiences, it became apparent that the Métis were considered outsiders in residential schools (Chartrand et al.).

A second educational route developed historically for the Métis "who migrated west of Manitoba and engaged in various limited or seasonal job markets. Their children got potluck by way of education" (Friesen & Friesen, 2002, p. 120). Métis children who came from more traditional or nomadic families, or families who gathered on road allowances on the outskirts of developing Euro-Canadian communities, received less and less schooling over time. Due to poor attendance from constant relocation, lack of funds to run schools in smaller communities, or being turned away from schools for being too white or too Indian, these children successively created generations of Métis who became less and less educated (Chartrand et al., 2006).

The third educational route experienced by Métis peoples included those who integrated into Euro-Canadian society and became educated in developing mainstream public education systems (Friesen & Friesen, 2002). For this group of Métis who were successful in school, the experience of education provided the benefit of an education which led to employment and integration into Euro-Canadian society. For some Métis, the experience of education contributed to or forced denial of Aboriginal roots. Even though educational success was attained in terms of Canadian social norms, there was a significant cultural cost. The destructive element or cost for educational success has often been at the expense of a sense of self. Friesen and Friesen (2002) explain:

The Métis, who adapted most successfully, from an economic point of view, were those who opted for integration into the dominant EuroCanadian culture. Most of them gave up or denied their Aboriginal roots and strove to be accepted by and be successful at jobs approved by the Canadian majority (Giraud, 1956). The late Howard Adams, a Native activist and for many years a professor at the University of Saskatchewan, admitted his own academic and social success came at the expense of abandoning his Native ancestry and connections. Suddenly, in 1948, when his 52 year-old mother died, he realized that what he had perceived as a cultural albatross really constituted the essence of his very being (Adams, 1975: pp. 41-43). (p. 121)

For Métis peoples, the history of educational experiences in Canada has had mixed results of success and failure.

For both First Nations and Métis peoples, even though there has been some success from educational experiences, failures in schooling have led to positive developments in a contemporary context. As a result of historical failures, First Nations and Métis peoples began to claim self-authority over the education of their children and youth. After meetings with National Indian Brotherhood (NIB), political leaders, and representative Elders from different Aboriginal cultural communities from across Canada,

the “Indian Control of Indian Education Policy Paper” was published in 1972 (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972). Contained within the 1972 NIB Policy document are the foundational principles of self-determination for Aboriginal peoples in Canada. It stipulates that “Our aim is to make education relevant to the philosophy and needs of Indian people. We want education to give our children a strong sense of identity with confidence in their personal worth and ability” (NIB, p. 3).

In order to accomplish this primary goal of self-determination which embodies respect for Aboriginal communities, cultures, and contexts, Aboriginal individuals need to be prepared to be teachers as “Native teachers and counsellors who have an intimate understanding of Indian traditions, psychology, way of life and language, are best able to create the learning environment suited to the habits and interests of the Indian child” (NIB, p. 18). This statement claims that Aboriginal peoples are the keepers of Aboriginal ways of knowing and ways of being and with such a predisposition are key to promoting a holistic approach to Aboriginal teaching and learning in professional education.

After the 1972 NIB policy document was prepared and presented to the federal government, Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs began to be established across Canada (Barman et al., 1986; Bear Nicholas, 2001; Friesen & Friesen, 2002; Haig-Brown et al., 1997). These TEPs developed in direct response to the history of First Nations and Métis school experiences in Canada. Aboriginal TEPs have developed to serve specific Aboriginal communities and groups with the overall mandate to prepare First Nations and Métis individuals to be professional educators. Over the years in the development process, Aboriginal TEPs have grown into distinct and unique entities through establishing and maintaining important integral functions. One such function incorporates

“attending to the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions of learning and personal development” (Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, p. xiii) in a holistic and positive learning environment. This study, then, seeks a deeper understanding of one aspect of a holistic learning environment and that is the fundamental and interconnected functions of wellness and support which exist within an Aboriginal TEP in a contemporary context.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore a deeper understanding of wellness and support as they are perceived to exist as integral functions in an Aboriginal TEP. This purpose was explored from the perspective of core staff members at the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP), in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada. The stories given in conversations with core staff members sought to provide meaningful perceptions of wellness and support from participants involved in this study.

The research questions for this study were:

- What is your understanding of wellness?
- How is wellness practiced in your Aboriginal TEP?
- What is your understanding of support?
- How is support practiced in your Aboriginal TEP?

Significance of the Study

In Canada, Aboriginal TEPs have developed and been incrementally successful since the early 1970s (Barman et al., 1986). The study was significant as it provided an

opportunity for the expression of working within an organization that upheld Aboriginal culture and context from the perspective of core staff members at one Aboriginal TEP site. In this way, the inquiry was significant as it intended to add to scholarship about Aboriginal TEPs and the role of wellness and support in the development of Aboriginal education (Battiste, 2000). This knowledge can subsequently be used to make recommendations which influence program and policy development. In the form of scholarship, this expression has value and is significant for individual participants, for Aboriginal TEPs, for Aboriginal peoples, and for society in general as it has the potential to build relationships based on deeper understandings between peoples. This relationship and understanding building process can be viewed conceptually as the expression of a set of ideals which guide educational practice.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The scope and limitations of this study are narrowed to the topic of wellness and support within the periphery of Aboriginal TEPs in Canada. It is prudent to explain my focus from a Canadian geographical context and the focus of Aboriginal teacher education within the larger area of teacher education in general. When I began investigating scholarship about Aboriginal teacher preparation environments, my inquiry was very broad. Initially, I explored the topic of Aboriginal peoples engaged in different teacher preparation environments from around the world. From this very broad global investigation, I decided to limit my research to Aboriginal TEPs in the Canadian context for the following reason. My research focuses on Aboriginal TEPs which are limited to the Canadian context as there have been specific relationships and governance agreements which have been constructed over time between original Aboriginal Nations in Canada

and peoples primarily of European ancestry. The results of these relationships and governance agreements have defined and provided directions regarding developments of educational history in the Canadian context and in response to this history, the specific nature of Aboriginal TEPs in Canada.

Although Aboriginal TEPs have been the focus of some academic scholarship as described in the literature review for this study, there are many aspects of successful functions within Aboriginal TEPs which have not been researched. By limiting this study to Aboriginal TEPs in Canada, one unique function can be explored in detail without disrespect to or comparison with literature which examines functions with teacher education programs in general. This scope serves the purpose of the study which was limited to exploring a deeper understanding of wellness and support as they are perceived to exist as specific functions in an Aboriginal TEP which is located in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada.

Summary of Chapter One and Overview of the Dissertation

Traditional Indigenous societies had intact ways of teaching, learning, and education. After contact with non-Indigenous peoples, educational orientations and practices which respect and reflect Aboriginal context, community, and culture were influenced and changed in ways which have not necessarily been beneficial. In the present context, as a way to promote positive change, Métis and First Nations peoples in Canada have been in the process of reclaiming educational authority for their children and youth. One way that this educational authority is being realized is through the establishment of Aboriginal TEPs where Aboriginal individuals are being prepared to be

teachers. Aboriginal TEPs are unique educational sites which embody epistemological orientations and approaches consistent with an Aboriginal context. My study explored a deeper understanding of one integral function within an Aboriginal TEP. From the perspective of core staff members, my study sought a deeper understanding of wellness and support in an Aboriginal TEP which is located in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada. In Chapter Two, I present a review of the literature on Aboriginal TEPs in Canada. Chapter Three explains and describes the methodology and method used to conduct the study. Chapter Four presents and discusses the understandings which were shared in conversations with the core staff members from my research site. Chapter Five provides a discussion of these research results as they connect to literature about Aboriginal peoples in terms of context, community, and culture. The chapter also contains a reflection on the research findings as they pertain to Aboriginal teacher education program developments. The chapter concludes with comments regarding future research possibilities which have the potential to influence Aboriginal TEPs and policy development.

CHAPTER TWO

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Since the early 1970s, Aboriginal peoples and educational institutions have promoted initiatives which focus on the development of Aboriginal TEPs. As a result, Aboriginal TEPs have developed as distinct and unique learning communities. Since “Aboriginal peoples have long known that their philosophies and approaches to education are distinct” (Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000, p. xii), it is these holistic ways of knowing (epistemology) and ways of being (approaches) that differentiate Aboriginal TEPs within mainstream teacher preparation in general and that are the intended foundations of Aboriginal TEPs as identified and determined by Aboriginal peoples in Canada (NIB, 1972). From this conceptual framework, the following review of the literature explores the multifaceted range of human activities which define Aboriginal TEPs in the Canadian context. As each distinct Aboriginal group “isolates a set of ideals that guide and form the learning processes inherent in its educational systems” (Cajete, 1994, p. 25), Aboriginal TEPs have responded by embodying Aboriginal peoples’ specific holistic approach to teaching and learning.

The overall intent of the chapter is to identify and understand the research related to Aboriginal TEPs to date and to situate this study as a potential contribution to this area

of scholarship. Since Aboriginal TEPs have only been in existence developmentally since 1972, the following literature review encompasses all studies to date and consequently some of the literature reviewed is significantly historical in nature. From this historical to current overview, it can be noted that over time literature about Aboriginal TEPs has changed and shifted from primarily a discussion of program mandates, objectives, administrative efforts and programming to specific topics of discussion. The nature of this change can be attributed to advancements in society's recognition of the need for unique and responsive learning communities which serve the Aboriginal community in Canada. As well, the literature recognizes how Aboriginal TEPs have grown and changed as a result of efforts by Aboriginal individuals and communities, universities, and government agencies. It is also important to recognize that my study focused on wellness and support in an Aboriginal TEP and not wellness and support in Aboriginal communities in general. There may be similar wellness and support issues and discussions related to the Aboriginal community, however, this study focuses on wellness and support as an integral function in an Aboriginal TEP.

Accordingly, the chapter begins with an introduction and a discussion of the foundational principles of Aboriginal TEPs. This discussion is followed by an overview of on- and off-campus/community-based Aboriginal TEPs which describes the nature of program mandates and objectives, administration and programming, and students and staff. As well, literature about Aboriginal TEPs contains evidence of specific topics of discussion, namely field-based experiences, women, language, and culture. The final section of the chapter explores how my study, which intends to examine support and

wellness in an Aboriginal TEP, has value, is timely, and has the potential to contribute to scholarship topically, methodologically and theoretically.

The Foundational Principles of Aboriginal TEPs

When Aboriginal Elders from across Canada articulated the need and purpose for the preparation of Aboriginal teachers as one aspect of self-determination, they also stated very clearly that this initiative must come from Aboriginal peoples themselves (NIB, 1972). “Native teachers and counsellors who have an intimate understanding of Indian traditions, psychology, way of life and language, are best able to create the learning environment suited to the habits and interests of the Indian child” (NIB, p. 18). This statement espouses that Aboriginal peoples embody a unique Aboriginal contextual approach and that this predisposition is critical to realizing the goals of education for Aboriginal peoples. From this point of view, respect for this approach is of benefit for Aboriginal peoples and Western society in general. However, support for this perspective is not necessarily embraced by all. “While the majority of Native Indian people will perceive this suggestion as a given There are those who will oppose outright the suggestion that Indian teachers rather than any teacher are a key to progress in Indian education” (Kirkness, 1999, p. 47). A lack of recognition for the uniqueness of Aboriginal TEPs or the omission of scholarship about Aboriginal TEPs in published discourse can also be a form of opposition.

From the perspective of Aboriginal peoples, Aboriginal teachers are critical to realizing the goals of quality education for Aboriginal students.

Throughout the literature we witness the concepts of Indian identity, traditions, psychology, culture, language, and history as being important in the education of

Indians. It is appropriate to suggest that Indian teachers would be the most effective in transmitting these concepts. (Kirkness, 1999, p. 51)

As Kirkness (1999) states, Aboriginal teachers may best understand how to infuse teachings within all subject areas given specific preparation, latitude, and support to do so. Regardless of the educational setting, Aboriginal teachers then have the capacity to increase home and community participation as Aboriginal parents see the presence of Aboriginal teachers to be inviting, representative, and accepting of Aboriginal students. Aboriginal teachers “make the schooling experience more productive for Aboriginal students. More specifically, they ... help [to] reduce the high dropout rate and low achievement of students, enhance school community relations, and [this] lead[s] to more relevant programming and community control” (King, as cited in McAlpine, 2001, p. 105).

In educational settings, the inclusion of Aboriginal pedagogical practices can be beneficial and complementary to developments in Western educational systems as well (McAlpine, 2001). Not only is the Aboriginal community served, Western civilizations, which have had a significantly dominant influence in education, become more representative of the diversity within Canadian society. In the past, teacher preparation has marginalized minority peoples, including Aboriginal peoples, but as a group Aboriginal peoples want to teach their own children and all children as a redress to the influence of Western dominance in education (McAlpine, 2001). Aboriginal TEPs are sites which can respond to this diversity need and at the same time sustain university level competencies and the existing standards of the teaching profession. In order to accommodate differences however, Aboriginal TEPs require alternative models in the teacher preparation process. If viewed as complementary, Aboriginal TEPs are worthy

additions in already available teacher preparation programs as the unique and diverse needs of the Aboriginal community are served, and all systems of education become affected and developed in a more culturally representative way.

There are difficulties, however, regarding the validity of inclusion of Aboriginal pedagogical practices as this point of view has been challenged in teacher training even though demographically there will be significantly and increasingly more and more Aboriginal students in educational settings in Saskatchewan (Tymchak, 2000). Also, the hiring of Aboriginal TEP graduates in mainstream public education systems which advocate inclusion will require changes in many aspects of educational services. Since Aboriginal TEPs have been graduating professional teachers increasingly more so over the past 40 years, it is too early to interpret the impact of Aboriginal teachers but Aboriginal TEP graduates are transforming education incrementally and McAlpine (2001) suggested that they will have a significant impact in the future.

Having a space to recognize and develop Aboriginal individuals as representatives of their respective nations which can complement education in Canadian society is not necessarily embraced by all persons or in practice. The extent to which Aboriginal TEPs are required to reproduce institutional values and practices compared to the extent to which they can develop in the educational profession are contradictory. Hesch (1999b) concluded that Aboriginal TEPs are required to follow many mainstream teacher preparation practices but Aboriginal TEPs have challenged this process incrementally and they do have some autonomous space in teacher preparation environments. As well, some Aboriginal students have challenged the status quo in teacher preparation environments. Some “Métis interns do not accept official conceptions of good teaching practices without

question and do in some cases act to develop alternative teaching practices” (Hesch, 1994, p. 39). In this space, different Aboriginal TEPs and students are working to incorporate Aboriginal knowledge and pedagogical practices into programs and professional development experiences.

Opposition to the recognition and development of Aboriginal TEPs also exists in the subject of publications or scholarship. Authors, editors, and publishers make decisions about what is published and these decisions can reflect a myopic view in terms of the focus or choice of what is to be published. These decisions may also reflect a general consensus that institutions are reluctant and slow to change, and publications of works which describe or explain different educational offerings in institutions of higher learning are limited or omitted. Even though Aboriginal TEPs have significantly impacted and contributed to many educational developments, they have consistently been neglected or omitted as a focal topic in publications (McNinch, 2000).

Descriptive Overview of Aboriginal TEPs: On-Campus

Regardless of the struggle for validity and inclusion, since the early 1970s there have been programming efforts aimed at establishing and developing Aboriginal TEPs. These efforts are described in the literature as overviews of Aboriginal TEPs which are situated in both on- campus and off-campus/community-based educational settings. For both on- and off-campus sites, writings include details about mandates and program objectives, administration and programming, and information about students and staff.

Program Mandates and Objectives

The overall mandate to establish Aboriginal TEPs has been promoted and supported by different stakeholders from the Aboriginal community, government

departments, and senior University administrators (Aldous, Barnett, Claus, & King, 1974). This mandate supports the objective to prepare Aboriginal individuals to teach in both mainstream and Aboriginal educational settings (Archibald, 1986). The intent of this objective is also to increase the number of Aboriginal teachers by recognizing the background of its students and developing alternative teacher education programs which are more appropriate to and recognize the unique and distinctive culture of Aboriginal peoples in Canada (Kirkness & More, 1981). The Aboriginal TEP “program of studies was designed with the recognition in mind that students entering the program were representative of a distinct and unique cultural group in Canada and that they would be expected to acquire certain knowledge and develop skills” (Bouvier, 1984, p. 3) in order to be responsive to Aboriginal students.

The intended outcome of this mandate is to assist Aboriginal individuals in re-establishing historical and cultural ways of knowing and ways of being as a way to develop a positive self-image, and to allow for the development of knowledge and teaching skills which are responsive to the needs of Aboriginal children and youth (Bouvier, 1984; Whyte, 1981). For this development to occur, Aboriginal individuals prepared as teachers require a sense of their own Aboriginalness. From this cultural center, Aboriginal individuals can develop teaching skills which respond to and meet the needs of the Aboriginal communities they serve and it is this knowledge that they then can pass on to others as educators (Bouvier, 1984; Dorion & Yang, 2000). Aboriginal teachers have the potential to directly influence the success of Aboriginal children and youth and to improve relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples by fostering an appreciation of the role of Aboriginal culture in Canadian society (Bouvier).

Teachers of Aboriginal ancestry subsequently have the potential to create educational environments and systems where Aboriginal children can succeed with their unique cultural self intact and educational systems where society benefits as well (Bouvier; Whyte).

Administration and Programming

In order to accomplish the mandates and objectives of Aboriginal TEPs, unique administration and programming efforts have occurred. The purpose of gathering information about Aboriginal TEPs and providing public discourse about the benefits and need for an alternative teacher preparation environment which serves the Aboriginal community helps to develop potential support for the initiation of new projects where joint partnerships between Aboriginal organizations, governments, funding agencies, and researchers can be realized (More, 1981). Information gathered assists in the recognition of past and ongoing efforts in Aboriginal TEPs and it also identifies needs for change and directions for the future. Consequently, the generation of information about the nature of governance, administrative and advisory features of a program, and its other unique and important aspects is one way to promote this change and provides the basis of information needed in order to establish directions for the future.

Within this information there is also an analysis of effectiveness and problematic areas of concern in different programs. From the proactive and successful to the issues or areas requiring improvement, Aboriginal TEPs have the opportunity to advance based on information about administration and programming efforts to date (More, 1981). For example, the nature and security of funding for Aboriginal TEPs is very diverse and often tenuous at best. In pooling information and discussion of this one problematic area in the

establishment and development of Aboriginal TEPs lies an opportunity to address the issue with proactive actions which have the potential to create beneficial results (Aldous et al., 1974; More).

The gathering and sharing of information about the working operations of Aboriginal TEPs is also beneficial as it provides an opportunity to explain and describe the unique and essential parts of the programs. From respective programs, the following types of information are provided: (a) the people involved; (b) the guiding principles and program objectives; (c) funding sources; (d) programming requirements and course descriptions; (e) unique aspects of individual programs; (f) student inputs; and (g) the impact of Aboriginal TEPs on education in general (Aldous et al., 1974; Barnett, n. d.; McEachern & Kirkness, 1987; More, 1981). The value of gathering and pooling information is but one way to describe and respect the uniqueness of one Aboriginal TEP site, and to recognize that each site is also inextricably connected to all other Aboriginal TEPs based on certain commonalities.

One unique aspect of an Aboriginal TEP is the nature of the diploma or degree requirements and the general descriptions of curriculum offerings (More, 1981). In Aboriginal TEPs there exists a tension between serving the Aboriginal community and the institutional and professional educational community. This tension is housed in serving Aboriginal ways of knowing and ways of being first in teacher preparation and, as well, the expectation of professional practice which is based in Western institutional and professional norms (Archibald, 1986). In order to respect the bicultural nature of the philosophy and mandates of Aboriginal TEPs, mainstream expectations and standards are maintained but the position of the philosophical orientation in teacher education begins

with Aboriginal perspectives (Kirkness & More, 1981). In this way, Aboriginal holistic worldviews are the centre from which teacher preparation occurs.

An example of this point lies in the practice of the student requirement to complete all and similar courses as determined by the educational institution in order to receive a diploma, degree, or certification. This implies stringent maintenance of academic standards and expectations determined by the policies of governing institutions (Whyte, 1981). Standards of quality are expected of Aboriginal TEP students and “this standard is the same for anyone entering the third year in the Faculty of Education” (Archibald, 1986, p. 38). Maintaining standards is upheld along with differences as complements such as an opportunity for the Aboriginal student to participate in student teaching or internship experiences in an Aboriginal setting or recognizing how experiential learning precedes theoretical course learning in the delivery of the program (Kirkness & More, 1981). In this example, the standards of the in-school student teaching or practicum requirement of the institution is upheld but the ways in which this programming requirement is accomplished may be different with respect to Aboriginal worldview as a first consideration. This example is but one way in which Aboriginal TEPs serve the Aboriginal, institutional, and professional communities, and it identifies one aspect or uniqueness which determines Aboriginal TEPs as different within teacher preparation in general.

The course offerings and requirements in an Aboriginal TEP are similar to the expectations of educational institutions and the teaching profession and, at the same time, include Aboriginal pedagogical learning opportunities. The similarities of Aboriginal TEPs within teacher preparation in general exist in that students are required to complete

a complement of courses which include academic and professional teacher training in subject areas as determined by educational institutions across Canada. These courses are housed in teacher preparation with orientations to strong skill development in English and Math, all other subject areas, special education, psychology, and courses in educational foundations (Whyte, 1981).

An Aboriginal TEP is an alternative in teacher preparation as programming is designed which is more appropriate to Aboriginal cultural heritage and the educational background of the students (Kirkness & More, 1981). In this design, program offerings include a mandatory expectation to successfully complete Native Studies courses (Archibald, 1986; Kirkness & More) as well as preparation which can include access to Aboriginal language training and development opportunities, special Aboriginal field-based and teaching activities, and relationship building with Aboriginal Elders. An overall aspect to all course offerings and requirements in an Aboriginal TEP is the expectation to adapt content which intends to develop and nurture existing background knowledge and competencies for teaching which is relevant to an Aboriginal context (Aldous et al., 1974; Barnett, n. d.).

As emergent entities in teacher preparation in general, Aboriginal TEPs are not without their difficulties. In the gathering of information about the administration and programming efforts in Aboriginal TEPs, there also exists the opportunity to highlight, describe, and discuss problematic areas of concern, and the effectiveness of particular developments and initiatives. For this reason, information gathering not only has the potential to identify the need for and nature of Aboriginal TEPs; it can also provide

information which can lead to program evaluation, effectiveness, and research initiatives (Barnett, n. d.).

Students and Staff

The nature of the student body, demographic and statistical data, and student attitudes and opinions are highlighted and given focus in the literature. As well, the nature of staff in Aboriginal TEPs is discussed.

When Aboriginal TEPs were initiated in the early 1970s, only Aboriginal students were accepted into the programs (Kirkness & More, 1981; More, 1981). Aboriginal student participation was identified as the key to successfully building Aboriginal TEPs (Robertson & Loughton, 1976). The choice to accept only Aboriginal students fulfilled the foundational principles, mandates, and primary objectives of Aboriginal TEPs. Admission of students also followed the admission policies and guidelines of the institution by adhering to accepted practices of recruiting, screening, and personal interviews (Archibald, 1986; Barnett, n. d.).

Demographically, the average student accepted into an Aboriginal TEP was an Aboriginal female, of varying age, without a completed Grade 12 and/or an explanation of previous educational background, having at least two dependent children, with interrupted or no work history. As well, information about the Aboriginal community from which the student originated completed the demographic profile (Aldous et al., 1974; Loughton, 1974; More, 1981; Robertson & Loughton, 1976). Statistically, there is also information about retention and attrition rates, numbers of graduates, their

achievements and academic performance and success (Aldous et al.; Archibald, 1986; Barnett, n. d.; Loughton; More).

Information about Aboriginal TEPs is also expressed by students in the programs. Students describe their attitudes and opinions about their needs for academic and personal support in the Aboriginal TEP, and their expectations of personnel. Academically, students expressed needs for individual tutorial assistance when required as a way to address any academic deficiency from their previous educational background (Aldous et al., 1974). “Tutorial assistance is essential in enabling students to complete a quality university teacher education program. Lack of tutorial aid would, in all likelihood, result in a high number of student failures and drop-outs” (Barnett, n. d.). In terms of being prepared as a teacher, students also want to be better prepared for classroom management issues and undertaking the demanding requirements of student teaching experiences and the extended internship practicum (Loughton, 1974). Feedback which identified other effective components of the Aboriginal TEP included inter-program functions and community-based functions. Within the program, students felt supported when able to interact as a class group within their respective programs. The students also indicated that having small classes and having a high proportion of mature students helped to support them during their studies.

Other components of the program which were deemed purposeful included the opportunity to develop interpersonal and group skills which enhanced and promoted Aboriginal identity (e.g., attendance at culture camps and Aboriginal conferences). The opportunity for students to attend workshops within the program or events such as specifically designed orientation and other on-campus experiences was also welcomed

(Aldous, 1974; Lang & Scarfe, 1986). As well as these more academic and programmatic features of the Aboriginal TEP, students had attitudes and opinions about program support services which were more personal in nature (More 1981).

Students also expressed the need for human service support in many different ways. Human service support in an Aboriginal TEP is integrated in the delivery of certain aspects of the program (Kirkness & More, 1981) as a way to respond to student needs. In general, students felt that human support services should be increased and consistently available to them during the completion of their studies (Loughton, 1974). Students claimed that personal counselling opportunities are an integral requirement in the functioning of the Aboriginal TEP (Barnett, n. d.; Kirkness & More, 1981).

Essential skills should be taught and practiced and used through-out the program in order that known and emerging issues and problems can be dealt with, and so that group support for the individual and the achievement of program goals can be better achieved. (Lang & Scarfe, 1986, p. 9)

As well, students want academic program advising and financial advice, assistance with decision making in general, and more support when they are in school situations (Loughton). Students also identified factors which limited their success as having many family responsibilities, commuting issues, reliable transportation services, heavy course loads, many different cultural groups in the Aboriginal TEP, and financial issues (Lang & Scarfe).

The role of staff and personnel in Aboriginal TEPs such as information regarding contact people in the programs, staffing positions, and a determination of job responsibilities has also been documented (Aldous, 1974; Loughton, 1974; More, 1981). In general, Robertson and Loughton (1976) contended that staff and personnel need to be

culturally sensitive to and aware of Aboriginal peoples. This was reinforced by students who identified the need for consistent and supportive staff and personnel interactions, and an ability to share problems as well as cultural values (Lang & Scarfe, 1986). Loughton identified the need for more personnel to serve Aboriginal students in Aboriginal TEPs as the current complement of personnel is not adequate to respond to the needs in an Aboriginal TEP. Regardless of this limitation, staff and personnel in Aboriginal TEPs are identified as being positive and committed to their professional responsibilities (Loughton).

Descriptive Overview of Aboriginal TEPs: Off-Campus/Community-Based

Off-campus or community-based teacher preparation opportunities have developed alongside on-campus Aboriginal TEPs by accommodating the distinctive needs and demands of Aboriginal individuals aspiring to become teachers. In general, the off-campus/community-based TEP sites have similar and consistent mandates and program objectives, administration and programming initiatives, and information about students and staff but differences do exist in order to accommodate the realities of being off-campus as an educational site.

Program Mandates and Objectives

The mandates and program objectives of Aboriginal TEPs which are housed off-campus in community-based educational sites are the same as on-campus sites but they serve Aboriginal individuals who primarily (a) want to stay in their own communities for personal reasons, (b) want to study on a part time basis, or (c) aspire to move from a paraprofessional position to become a fully certified teacher. Study in the community is the least disruptive to their entire family system. In response to this need, several pre-

service and in-service teacher education programs have been offered in isolated communities (Sharpe, 1992) or in communities which did not necessarily have higher education offerings such as those which would be available in college or university settings (Archibald, 1986; Barnett, n. d.; Sloan, 1981a). In order to accommodate the needs of individual Aboriginal adult students, part time options have also been established. As an option in teacher education, part time and off-campus/community-based delivery requires “partnership and team building between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, between the university and Aboriginal communities and between Faculty and Teacher Candidates involved in the program” (Hill, 1998, p. 4).

Programs have also developed in off-campus/community-based educational sites to serve the needs and desires of Aboriginal adults working as teacher assistance who want to move from a paraprofessional position in the school to become a fully qualified and certified teacher.

The Department of Indian Affairs sponsored special training courses from time to time for teacher aides; however a measure of frustration developed as a result of them. Teacher aides were expected to attend these courses, yet no official credit towards a certificate or degree was granted by teacher training colleges or universities. (Owston, 1978, p. 5)

For paraprofessional adults with extensive classroom experience, the off-campus/community-based qualification program provided an opportunity for full certification without having to leave either/or their homes or employment situations (Heimbecker, Minner, & Prater, 2000; Owston & MacIver, 1981).

Administration and Programming

Unique administrative and programming initiatives needed to be developed in order to attain the goal of certifying fully qualified Aboriginal individuals to be teachers

from educational opportunities which were off-campus or in community-based sites. In general, two initiatives have been developed. One initiative blended on- and off-campus delivery expectations where some students were given the opportunity to take the first two years of their degree in their own communities. After these first two years, they would be integrated into the regular Aboriginal TEP on campus for their third and fourth years of study (Archibald, 1986; Kirkness & More, 1981; Owston, 1978). A different program was designed to offer studies during the regular academic year in a community setting with participation in an on-campus experience during the summer months (Owston & MacIver, 1981). This enabled the students to maintain their regular employment in federal and/or provincial schools for the course of a school year. The Aboriginal students travelled from their home communities to the university for on-campus offerings during the summer and teacher program personnel from the university would travel to the Aboriginal students' communities over the regular school year.

Another programming option was delivered over the course of two years at a site which was geographically close to the communities of the Aboriginal students; hence there was no need for them to leave their homes and families (Sloan, 1979, 1980, 1981a, 1981b). Yet another program initiative provided an entire educational experience off campus and was entirely community based. Program delivery models included options such as providing broadcasting of classes, teleconferencing and correspondence courses to individuals in remote communities as well as flying instructors into communities for education sessions (Heimbecker et al., 2000). The latter facilitated more direct teacher to student interaction only over the broadcasting/teleconferencing/correspondence method but it also required finding university personnel willing to commit to this teaching

experience, finding accommodations for them in communities where accommodation was lacking, and some students who still needed to travel in order to receive class instruction (Sharpe, 1992).

Community-based programs are also different in that stakeholders in the community are in a relationship with the university and Aboriginal TEP personnel. Stakeholders from the community can serve in a management capacity, usually in the form of a committee, which is directly involved with program financing, content, scheduling, delivery of courses, and staffing. This committee often became responsible for lobbying, providing advocacy for students, and input into developmental issues in Aboriginal education at the community and larger societal level (Hill, 1998). In off-campus/community-based sites, support of Aboriginal students is integrated both from the university on-campus Aboriginal TEP and from the community itself (Archibald, 1986; Kirkness & More, 1981).

In general, the nature of the diploma or degree requirements in off-campus/community-based programs was not dissimilar from regular standards as determined by the diploma or degree granting institution (Owston & McIver, 1981; Sharpe, 1992). Teacher mentors and other personnel were available to students either directly or indirectly for support. As with on-campus Aboriginal student needs for support, students who stay in their community to study also require personal and academic support for success in completing their teacher education program. The courses offered were interesting and challenging (Heimbecker et al., 2000) and even though the Aboriginal TEP was offered off-campus in a community based educational site,

academically equivalent standards to the regular university program were maintained by employing common assignments and evaluation expectations (Owston, 1978).

Sharpe (1992) and Heimbecker et al. (2000) identified difficulties encountered by Aboriginal TEPs which have been offered in off-campus/community based educational sites to include a lack of text books and reference materials, and access to research materials for assignments and supplies. Support for use of technologies such as computers and fax machines were also not available at times. Community tutors and support persons were crucial for student success but this service was not necessarily immediately available for students who also had to negotiate the scheduling of their classes in addition to employment demands and to secure teacher aide substitutes while attending their university studies. Lack of student input into addressing their needs was also identified as problematic as was the lack of instructors who could relate to Aboriginal people, were familiar with distance education methods and requirements, and who were able to travel in harsh winter weather and negotiate the language difference that they experienced once in the community setting. Instructors identified teleconferencing as marginally successful but this was based on increasing actual conference time in order to build relationships with students who were studying in their communities. Another general concern is the issue of needing more time and personnel to serve the needs of the students in communities (Roberston & Loughton, 1976) and, in terms of professional development, supporting Aboriginal students as they develop the requisite competencies required of a teacher (Hill, 1998).

Students and Staff

The educational level of students wanting to participate in off-campus/community-based educational sites presents challenges and opportunities. In the community, teachers and teacher aides included individuals who had extensive cultural knowledge but may not have completed high school. These students were considered mature entrants needing extensive support and upgrading of skills to be successful in university level courses (Owston, 1978; Sharpe, 1992). Being a teacher or teacher aide with prior teaching experience, as a student in the off-campus/community-based programs, they learned more than their less experienced peers (Duquette, 2003). As well, demographically these students were consistently female, 25 to 35 years of age, married with children. “Many of the students were carrying family, work and community responsibilities as well as doing four courses during the fall and winter sessions. Some students commented that balancing all these duties was difficult” (Duquette, 2000, p. 138). As well, students in off-campus/community-based centers often are teacher candidates who are fluent in their own Aboriginal language. This becomes a real challenge when English is the predominant language which is used by the instructional staff in off-campus/community-based teacher education programs. However, it is also a significant opportunity when considering preparing teacher candidates who are fluent in their own Aboriginal language and cultural ways (Heimbecker et al., 2000).

From a student perspective, off-campus/community-based programs offered an opportunity for Aboriginal individuals to continue to participate as role models in the community setting. The presence of being Aboriginal and a teacher in a school was viewed as significantly positive. Students believed that off-campus/community-based

opportunities should continue and it benefitted them by providing training which improved their employment opportunities and increased their cultural awareness (Sloan, 1981b). The students also commented on the positive aspects of having certified teachers as mentors who were available to support them in their programs, and the field centre concept was viewed as positive as it eased the transition from community life to the demands of university training.

Other comments included a general agreement that the cultural component of the program was adequate but still in an evolutionary state where improvements could be made (Heimbecker et al., (2000). In order to be successful, however, due to the complex and diverse demands of students choosing to stay in their own communities and to participate in an off-campus/community-based Aboriginal TEP, some students thought of discontinuing studies. But, personal qualities of “goal orientation, complet[ing] my dream of becoming a teacher [and] ... self-confidence, flexibility, and determination were reported as personal traits that assisted the students to complete the [Aboriginal TEP] and graduate” (Duquette, 2000, p. 138). Not all students enrolled in off-campus/community-based Aboriginal TEP were successful. Some reasons for not completing a program included (a) feelings of guilt for neglecting their families as a result of such strenuous and demanding schedules; (b) loneliness during summer sessions or practicum requirements; (c) being overwhelmed by the multitude of demands and obligations from family, community, work and school commitments; (d) being assigned responsibilities without clear direction or feedback; (e) lack of support from family, friends, employers, and colleagues; (f) poor organization and lack of time management skills; and (g) social problems and/or unresolved personal life issues (Heimbecker et al., 2000). Regardless of

the challenges present when delivering off-campus/community-based educational initiatives, there was a generally positive attitude among the professional personnel associated with Aboriginal TEPs which were offered in a community setting (Robertson & Loughton, 1976).

The descriptive overviews of on- and off-campus/community-based Aboriginal TEPs in terms of mandates and program objectives, administration and programming, and the nature of students and staff show evidence of similarities and differences based on needs associated with student and program success. For either initiative, there are barriers to success, but many opportunities for proactive development have also been identified and created over time.

Aboriginal TEPs: Specific Topics of Discussion

In the literature about Aboriginal TEPs, the four specific topics of discussion include field-based experiences, women, language, and culture. Field-based experiences examine the relationships between the student, the co-operating teacher, and the college/university supervisor (Lamont & Arcand, 1995; Ralph, 1991, 1993); the influence of institutional expectations and dictates (Hesch, 1995); and developmental aspects of becoming an Aboriginal teacher during the practicum experience (Duquette, 2000, 2003; Goulet, 1995; Smith, 1995). Studies which focus on the experiences of Aboriginal women in Aboriginal TEPs describe the perceptions and use of technology (Luther, 1997); understanding the basic experience of participating in an Aboriginal TEP (Freeman, 2001); and the perspective that Aboriginal women teachers have a role and responsibility for cultural transmission (Hill & Freeman, 1998). Language is necessary for cultural

survival and native Aboriginal language speakers are challenged to pass on their knowledge of different Aboriginal languages to future generations. However, incorporating Aboriginal language use and development in teacher training is both beneficial and challenging at the same time (Campbell & Smallface-Marule, 2002; King, 1995; Maheux & Simard, 2001).

Aboriginal culture defines the essence of Aboriginal TEPs. In order to capture this cultural essence, the design and development of Aboriginal TEPs requires cooperation with Aboriginal peoples, Elders and the community (Hesch, 1999; Kompf & Hodson, 2000). Upholding Aboriginal worldview does not diminish the goal of academic excellence. Rather, cultural relevancy in Aboriginal TEPs challenges dominant Eurocentric epistemologies in schools and allows for the reclamation of Aboriginal philosophies and approaches which is one way to overcome personal and cultural disconnection (Goulet, 1998).

Within an Aboriginal TEP, Elders share important cultural knowledge and spirituality through storytelling (Goulet, 2002). Spirituality is fundamental in Aboriginal TEPs and a purposeful pedagogy of healing and wellness is one way to address the transformational needs of Aboriginal students in Aboriginal TEPs (Curwen Doige, 2003). Healing and wellness is significantly important as Aboriginal individuals who graduate from Aboriginal TEPs become the teachers of tomorrow who influence the next generation of children and youth (Hodson, 2004).

Field-Based Experiences

For Aboriginal TEP students, field-based experiences are heavily influenced by the relationship between themselves, their cooperating teacher, and the college/university supervisor. When persons in this relationship are from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds, the perceptions of respective roles in this professional development relationship indicate that the groups generally agree on the supervisor's most important tasks. These tasks are to facilitate feedback, to observe, to provide moral support and encouragement for the student teacher, and to review time lines and other requirements and responsibilities of the internship practicum model (Lamont & Arcand, 1995). The role of supervisors, cooperating teachers, or college/university supervisors in the field-based experience has been conceptualized as a supervision model which identifies a supervisory process and generates strategies as a way to guide supervisory practice (Ralph, 1991, 1993). "CS [Contextual Supervision] incorporates a developmental approach by which the supervisor (the cooperating teacher and/or the college supervisor), in a reflective and moral manner, seeks to match his/her supervisory style to the particular situation involving the teacher-intern" (Sergiovanni & Strarratt as cited in Ralph, 1991, p. 113). As a way to address interpersonal dilemmas and resolve tensions and problematic areas of concern, "supervisors are to synchronize one of four general leadership approaches with one of four basic developmental (or readiness) levels of teacher-interns for a certain teaching task" (Ralph, 1991, p. 113). The intent of the advocacy of this position is to "nurture, and *not* to hinder, the positive and unique relationship between Aboriginal groups and teacher education that has already been carefully built up during the past 30 years" (Reginer as cited in Ralph, 1993, p. 44).

Aboriginal student teachers, cooperating classroom teachers, and college/university supervisors are also influenced by the dictates and expectations of institutional norms. In the process of becoming a teacher, the administration of principles which are outlined and defined by the university prevail and determine relationships which develop in the context of a field-based experience (Hesch, 1995). In the attempt to homogenize the process of becoming a teacher, there can be stresses and contradictions for Aboriginal student teachers. Specifically, if an Aboriginal student teacher attempts to produce conducive and ideological experiences which support Aboriginal students in a school setting, this position may be challenged. There may be an expectation to “uncritically reproduce [ways of knowing and ways of being as a teacher] which have historically led to the departure and exclusion of Aboriginal children in schools” (Hesch, p. 195). When fundamental teaching ideologies are incompatible, Aboriginal student teachers in a field experience situation can either resist or conform. The praxis of some Aboriginal student teachers includes the negotiation of this context, and the reconciliation of the criteria demanded by university dictates and the individuals’ own ideological commitments can be in conflict. Essentially, predetermined dictates and expectations of institutional norms can be coercive and a powerful mechanism of control which reproduces Eurocentric schooling principles and practices (Hesch).

The influence and expectations of field-based dictates can also determine aspects of the developmental experience of Aboriginal student teachers. For non-Aboriginal student teachers in field-based experiences, there may be no tension or contradiction between their cultural worldview and the in-school field experience. For Aboriginal student teachers, there may be a continuing tension between their Aboriginal cultural

background and mainstream experiences during field based practice (Smith, 1995). Upon reflection of field-based experiences, some students designed and used techniques which were appropriate for Aboriginal students in schools. Aboriginal student teachers felt that even though they use alternative methods and strategies, they could be better prepared for the integration of Aboriginal pedagogy as a formative teaching practice during their in-school experiences (Goulet, 1995). As well, in the developmental process of becoming a teacher, Aboriginal student teachers have identified a personal support network and personal characteristics which consist of positive and realistic goal setting and an attitude which includes a persistence to complete their programs of study, even when adversity occurred as main factors which lead to student teaching success. Another significant contributor to success for Aboriginal student teachers in field-based experiences is the opportunity to experience social and institutional acceptance, respect, and the integration of being Aboriginal and a student teacher (Duquette, 2000, 2003).

Women in the Context of TEPs

In the literature, studies which focused on the experiences of Aboriginal women in Aboriginal TEPs describe (a) the perceptions and use of technology (Luther, 1997), (b) understanding the basic experience of participating in an Aboriginal TEP (Freeman, 2001), and (c) the perspective that Aboriginal women teachers have a role and responsibility for cultural transmission (Hill & Freeman, 1998).

Aboriginal women defined technology as any use of computers and from a cultural lens thought that technology which would be used for financial gain would not be consistent with traditional Aboriginal family values. As teachers, however, Aboriginal

women recognized that in order to become role models and leaders, and to enhance and further develop self-confidence, knowledge of using technology was advantageous. Even though this benefit was acknowledged, Aboriginal women in Aboriginal teacher programs felt that they were not prepared to teach or negotiate technology in the classroom or school (Luther, 1997). They felt this apprehension due to lack of access and exposure to learning about technology, and a general lack of positive self-image in regards to technology as a result of few, if any, women role models. Other significant deterrents included intimidation by men. Aboriginal women suggested that Aboriginal TEPs should include studies which prepare them for using technology as a teacher and, once in the Aboriginal community, bands and school environments need to be supportive of Aboriginal women having access to and using technology (Luther, 1997).

The basic experience of women participating in an Aboriginal TEP helps to define an understanding of meaning based in lived experience from the perspective of Aboriginal women themselves. “Relationships with others as an Aboriginal teacher education student; survival and success as an Aboriginal learner; personal change during the teacher education program; and “I am an [Aboriginal] woman” (Freeman, 2001, p. iii) are the themes which capture the main meanings and understanding of the experience of an Aboriginal TEP by Aboriginal women students. As well, Aboriginal women identified “interpersonal, community and cultural connections ... and cultural continuity and a sense of social responsibility in their activities and concerns as teachers-in-preparation” (Freeman, p. iii) to be significant in their understanding of their educational undertakings.

Aboriginal women also discuss their responsibility for cultural continuity and a sense of responsibility for maintaining and transmitting Aboriginal worldview. For some

Aboriginal women in Aboriginal TEPs, the most significant role is to be a transmitter of culture. In terms of participation in a profession, being a teacher allows them the opportunity to transmit culture by employing traditional Aboriginal educational practices. In this way, culture is maintained from generation to generation through active mentoring and being a role model. As a teacher, an Aboriginal woman is also in a position to fulfill a sense of community responsibility, and to care for children and youth in the community. Aboriginal women are, however, challenged to be role models and cultural transmitters in a school environment which expects and demands Eurocentric ways of being. For Aboriginal women preparing to be teachers, this challenge is met by being committed to developing education in ways that advocates and demonstrates Aboriginal ways of knowing and ways of being. These goals are pursued within the limitations and constraints evident in a university environment. Aboriginal TEPs are sites where the goals of Aboriginal women are supported and recognized (Hill & Freeman, 1998).

Language

Language is necessary for cultural survival (King, 1995). The importance of the use and revitalization of Aboriginal languages is particularly significant in Aboriginal TEPs. As sites preparing future teachers, Aboriginal TEPs have a responsibility to include native language development in the teacher training process. Native language speakers are expected to pass their knowledge on to future generations, so incorporating Aboriginal language use and development in teacher training is both beneficial and challenging at the same time. Students in Aboriginal TEPs must be engaged in their education to become a teacher and their role as language users is vital to the future of all Aboriginal peoples. “I am one of those people who strongly believe that our cultural identity is intimately tied to

our languages. Our world views expressed through our languages carry with them our systems of cultural knowledge which are complete and distinct” (King, p. 8).

Traditionally, the mandate of the Aboriginal community was to accept responsibility for the education of Aboriginal children and youth. This is understood as developing people who are bilingual and bicultural (King, 1995; NIB, 1972). In order to accomplish this goal,

Each and every one of us must accept the responsibility for doing something about preserving and guarding our cultural identity. Those of us who speak the language must start speaking it whenever possible. Those of us who write the language must write down what we have learned for others to read. (King, p. 9)

Aboriginal TEPs are sites where we can include language programming and “put [our] collective genius and resources in place to create institutions and processes that ensure that our cultural knowledge is maintained, expanded and celebrated” (King, p. 9).

Aboriginal language programming in Aboriginal TEPs has been both beneficial and challenging. By offering language courses as part of the professional development process, pedagogy is influenced by Aboriginal cultural values and traditions based in an Aboriginal language which enhances practical and professional knowledge about teaching and learning from an Aboriginal perspective. Course design and delivery is accomplished by joint efforts between native language speakers which includes Elders and communities, instructional staff, and institutional affiliates. There is a profound effect from offering native language retention and renewal in pre-service teacher training. Aboriginal individuals are given the opportunity to live their languages and values in the classroom setting. The benefits of language use accrue to many peoples. Campbell and Smallface (2002) noted:

If [Aboriginal] Teacher Preparation is to come to fruition, the two communities [Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal] need to trust (*ainakowa*) that what each group and person brings to the program is worthy and important. The groups need to share this knowledge so we can all grow and develop. The knowledge each has is a gift (*isspomotsisinni*) to the other. It is a gift of understanding and appreciating...When we live knowing we are all related and have a purpose (*isskanaitaptsi*), anything is possible. (p. 4)

There are issues and challenges which do emerge when renewing and revitalizing Aboriginal languages as part of teacher preparation in Aboriginal TEPs. Even though the “process we call ‘language building’ is part of a larger process of knowledge construction in formal education” (Maheux & Simard, 2001, p. 2), integrating Aboriginal worldview through language use can be contradictory. The analytical and cognitive tradition in mainstream academic culture can conflict with Aboriginal language development and use. As a part of offerings in an Aboriginal TEP, language building activities and processes need to be collaborative in nature. Aboriginal language users know the language and culture of their nations, and university personnel have expertise in mainstream curriculum expectations. For harmonious development of language projects, principles of equal status and understanding are required.

For Inuktitut language users,

Isumaqsayuq is the way of passing along knowledge through observation and imitation embedded in daily family and community activities, integration into the immediate shared social structure being the principal goal. The focus is on values and identity, developed through the learner’s relationship to the other persons and the environment. (Maheux & Simard, p. 11)

The analytical and cognitive model of mainstream academic culture is described by *ilsayuq*. “*Ilisayuq* is teaching which involves a high level of abstract verbal mediation in a setting removed from daily life, the skill base for a future specialized occupation being the principal goal ... conventional formal schooling reflects many *ilisayuq* features”

(Maheux & Simard, p. 11). The integration of Aboriginal worldview with the analytical and cognitive models of mainstream academic culture demands attention to the issue of differences in cognitive cultures. As a part of Aboriginal teacher preparation, this is but one issue in providing opportunities for Aboriginal language retention and renewal (Maheux & Simard).

Culture

Aboriginal culture defines the essence of Aboriginal TEPs and in order to capture this cultural holistic essence, the design and development of Aboriginal TEPs requires cooperation with Aboriginal peoples, Elders, and the community. Cultural relevancy in Aboriginal TEPs challenges dominant Eurocentric epistemologies in schools and allows for the reclamation of Aboriginal philosophies and approaches which is one way to overcome personal and cultural disconnection. Within an Aboriginal TEP, Elders share important cultural knowledge and spirituality through storytelling. Spirituality is fundamental in Aboriginal TEPs and a purposeful pedagogy of healing and wellness is one way to address the transformational needs of Aboriginal students in Aboriginal TEPs. Healing and wellness is significantly important as Aboriginal individuals who graduate from Aboriginal TEPs become the teachers of tomorrow who influence the next generation of children and youth.

Designing and delivering Aboriginal TEPs which are culturally based requires cooperation with Aboriginal peoples, Elders, communities and professional educators. Culture becomes infused in the development of skills and knowledge about teaching and learning; curriculum design, delivery and evaluation; and organizational and

administrative requirements (Kompf & Hodson, 2000). The primary aim of culturally relevant TEPs allows Aboriginal students the opportunity to achieve academic excellence while still identifying with cultural ways of knowing and ways of being. With cultural relevance in Aboriginal TEPs, social realities have the chance to be reconstructed by the inclusion of culturally relevant pedagogical practices, goals of academic excellence, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. In turn, Aboriginal teachers can promote and affect movement towards a more egalitarian society. Social equality improves the social status and consciousness of all peoples (Hesch, 1999b).

Cultural relevancy in Aboriginal TEPs has other benefits. In the claiming of a cultural position, Aboriginal students are able to overcome personal and cultural disconnection as they prepare to be teachers. As a goal in Aboriginal teacher preparation, there is a need to respond “to the students’ need for connection to traditional cultural knowledge in order to overcome personal and cultural dislocation resulting from past and present racist structures and practices” (Goulet, 1998, p.3).

One significant way to affirm culture in Aboriginal TEPs is with the contributions made by Elders from the Aboriginal community. Elders participate in the classroom, in outdoor settings, ceremonies, traditional activities and storytelling events (Goulet, 1998). As Aboriginal students reconceptualise inequities and misconceptions through affirmation and reconnection with culture, critical thinking begins to inform their teaching knowledge and skills. Challenges and barriers when creating an environment in Aboriginal TEPs include (a) availability of Elders and community peoples, (b) culturally appropriate and accurate teaching materials, (c) the fact that some schools and communities are resistant to change which includes Aboriginal perspectives in teaching, and (d) recognizing the

need to support Aboriginal students personally and professionally in culturally affirming ways (Goulet).

Within Aboriginal TEPs, there are specific ways that cultural knowledge is shared or given. In storytelling, Elders share stories of the self, rather than of others, as a way to impact and promote connections and reconnections with students. When stories are told, Elders raise awareness in students by connecting the students to themselves, their families and peoples, and their cultural communities. In this way, within the context of Aboriginal TEPs, story is used to contextualize Aboriginal peoples' present realities as they are a condition and consequence of a historical past. "Aboriginal teacher education needs to consider the historical and societal context in which it takes place ... Elders speak for the need for connection: the connection in time and place, of past, present and future" (Goulet, 1998, pp. 3-4).

Elders also use storytelling to claim and participate in a form of resistance against inaccurate knowledge of the past. In this way, storytelling becomes a form of truth telling where intercultural, historical, and societal connections are made and knowledge get passed on from one generation to the next. For Aboriginal peoples in Canada, and those Aboriginal individuals preparing to be teachers, this has significant importance since schooling of the past has resulted in a legacy of isolation and cultural disconnection. From this past, stories promote an opportunity for Aboriginal individuals to understand and accept a sense of who they are in the world and to claim a cultural connection rather than personal dislocation and fragmentation. In an Aboriginal TEP, Elders and cultural storytelling provides a context for healing to take place (Goulet, 2002).

Elders also provide a spiritual center in Aboriginal communities and in Aboriginal TEPs. Spirituality is an essential ingredient in culturally appropriate education. Through spirituality, individuals find connections between the self and others. It unites the human part of us all and it is the perspective from which individuals learn to respect differences which exist between and among people. In Aboriginal TEPs, education is culturally relevant and spiritually based (Curwen Doige, 2003).

Within Aboriginal TEPs, there also exist healing and wellness pedagogies which are based from culturally appropriate perspectives. As Aboriginal individuals participate in Aboriginal TEPs, transformational needs for healing and wellness emerge. These needs include examining the origin of visions, the importance of relationships, and apprehensions and fears encountered when attempting to build healthy communities (Hodson, 2004). Healing and wellness are individual issues which are inextricably connected to the entire Aboriginal community. As an Aboriginal individual engages in an Aboriginal TEP, individual needs for healing and wellness emerge and this occurrence provides an opportunity for change. “At its very essence the Aboriginal healing movement is about personal, familial and community change through a process that is at the same time, simultaneously learning and healing” (Hodson, 2004, p. 7). Hodson maintained that it is important to recognize the needs of Aboriginal individuals in Aboriginal TEPs and by going “further to inform the next generation of teacher education programs through the promotion of healing and wellness” (Hodson, p.9), individual, familial, and community functions have an opportunity to change. As a redress to personal and social issues, the wellness of an individual directly affects wellness in a family and in the community.

Summary of Chapter Two and the Literature Review in Relationship to My Study

Scholarship about Aboriginal TEPs can be understood by recognizing its foundational principles, descriptions of on- and off-campus/community-based educational sites, and specific topical discussions which include field-based experiences, women, language, and culture. The foundational principles of Aboriginal TEPs embody the notion that Aboriginal peoples are the keepers of Aboriginal worldview and from this cultural perspective; Aboriginal TEPs are unique entities within teacher preparation in general. Aboriginal individuals who want to become teachers can participate in Aboriginal TEPs as a way to offer and develop their philosophies and approaches as a teacher which is beneficial to the Aboriginal community, the teaching profession, and to society as a whole. Validity and recognition of Aboriginal TEPs based on cultural foundations is negotiated between existing institutional and professional entities. Aboriginal TEPs are not necessarily embraced by everyone, as seen in the area of publication where Aboriginal perspectives can be neglected or omitted. Regardless of these tensions, Aboriginal TEPs have been developing significantly over the past 40 or so years.

In the literature, the nature of Aboriginal TEPs is described for both on- and off-campus/community-based educational sites. In general, the mandates and objectives of Aboriginal TEPs are supported by the Aboriginal community, governments, and educational institutions. They are mandated to prepare Aboriginal persons to be teachers. Administrative and programming efforts are uniquely designed to support the mandates and objectives of respective Aboriginal TEPs; however, on- and off-campus needs are significantly different. These differences are articulated in information about (a) the working operations of different educational sites, (b) the nature of diploma or degree

requirements based on institutional affiliations, (c) curriculum offerings, and (d) difficulties when offering alternative educational opportunities. Students and staff are described in the on- and off-campus/community-based educational sites literature by description of the nature of the student body, their demographic and statistical data, attitudes and opinions, and the role of staff and personnel in Aboriginal TEPs.

Specific topics of importance are also discussed in the literature about Aboriginal TEPs. The topic of field-based experiences examines the relationships between students, their cooperating teachers, and the college/university supervisor. The influence of institutional expectations and dictates are also discussed as well as the developmental aspects of Aboriginal students becoming teachers. There is also discussion which focuses specifically on the experiences of women in Aboriginal TEPs. This discussion centers around Aboriginal women's (a) perceptions and use of technology, (b) understanding the basic experience of participating in an Aboriginal TEP, and (c) the perspective that Aboriginal women have a primary role and responsibility for the transmission of culture.

Language is also discussed in the literature about Aboriginal TEPs. Language is necessary for cultural survival, and native language speakers are given the challenge to pass on their knowledge of Aboriginal languages to future generations as a responsibility to the culture. In teacher education, however, incorporating Aboriginal language use and development is both beneficial and challenging.

A final topic of discussion centers on Aboriginal culture in Aboriginal TEPs. Aboriginal culture defines the essence of Aboriginal TEPs and in order to capture this holistic cultural essence, the design and development of Aboriginal TEPs requires cooperation with Aboriginal peoples, Elders, and the community. Being located in

Aboriginal worldview upholds academic excellence while deconstructing dominant Eurocentric epistemologies that are the basis of mainstream Western schooling systems. Aboriginal pedagogical practices, which are promoted within the Aboriginal TEPs, works to revitalize Aboriginal philosophies and approaches and assists Aboriginal TEP students to overcome personal and cultural disconnection. Within Aboriginal TEPs, Elders share important cultural and spiritual knowledge through storytelling. Spirituality is fundamental in Aboriginal TEPs and pedagogies which embrace healing and wellness as a way to respond to the transformational needs of Aboriginal students in Aboriginal TEPs provide an opportunity for Aboriginal students, the teachers of tomorrow, to influence the next generation of children and youth in healthy ways.

There is a relationship between this literature and my study. As stated above, a central aspect of an Aboriginal holistic pedagogical approach is the significance of the relational and the role of support and well-being within the learning context. In my study, I explored the concepts of wellness and support from the perspective of core staff within an Aboriginal TEP. To date, there are no studies which specifically address this topic from this unique perspective.

In terms of the structure of this literature review, the first section basically describes the foundational principles of Aboriginal TEPs. In the second and third sections of this review, the literature basically describes both quantitatively and qualitatively the nature of on- and off-campus/community-based educational sites. In the fourth section of the literature review, the topics discussed do relate to my intended study, but they do not embody the same specific focus in terms of my topic, research participants or intended methodology. For these reasons, my study is unique. As topic of study, wellness and

support as two main concepts within an Aboriginal TEP site have not been examined.

Theoretically, my study has the potential to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of wellness and support in an Aboriginal Teacher Education Program.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

Introduction

In chapters one and two, I contextualized and reviewed literature about the topic of my study. Chapter three explains and describes the methodology and method used as I sought to engage in the purpose of the study which was to explore a deeper understanding of wellness and support as they are perceived to exist as an integral function in an Aboriginal TEP. I have situated myself personally as an Aboriginal person at the beginning of this study. This research design is a qualitative case study which seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the inquiry question. This is a case study of one site. This study is situated within the philosophical assumptions of constructivist research traditions and influenced by an Indigenous epistemological approach.

Indigenous methodologies are often a mix of existing methodological approaches and indigenous practices. The mix reflects the training of indigenous researchers which continues to be within the academy, and the parameters and common sense understandings of research which govern how indigenous communities and researchers define their activities. (Smith, 1999, p. 143)

In this chapter, as well as describing my orientation to an Indigenous methodology and constructivist traditions, I situate my research activity in terms of ethical positioning; narrative inquiry as storytelling and conversations; and trustworthiness of the project. The research plan is also described in this chapter by the site, the participants, engaging in our conversations, and meaning making by weaving conversations to prepare the final text.

The following is a description of the set of guidelines that I used to conduct the research project.

Mixed Methodological Approach

The research method used in this study was based in a mixed methodological approach consisting of constructivist traditions and influenced by an Indigenous epistemological approach found within Indigenous methodologies.

Indigenous Methodology

In research activities, philosophical orientations are defined ontologically by the nature of reality, epistemologically by the nature of knowledge, and methodologically by the ways in which knowledge is obtained and understood (Wilson, 2001). The sum of these orientations determines the choice of methodological position of the research activity as it emerges from the personal set of beliefs which guide the actions of the researcher (Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As a researcher, I believe that there are multiple understandings and interpretations of reality; I co-create knowledge for myself and with others from lived experience, and I am drawn to conversational narrative and storytelling experiences as a way to understand reality and share knowledge. From this orientation, I employed an Indigenous methodology in conducting this research together with narrative inquiry as a complementary method which flows from constructivist traditions.

Foundationally, my orientation is bound by my foremost belief “that location is essential to Indigenous methodologies and Aboriginal research/world view/epistemologies...one of the most fundamental principles of Aboriginal research

methodology is the necessity for the researcher to locate himself or herself” (Absolon & Willett, 2004, p. 97). I also believe that “we are all relatives” [and] when taken as a methodological tool for obtaining knowledge means that we observe the natural world by looking for relationships between various things in it” (Deloria, 1999, p. 34). The concept of relational knowledge was central to my research activity and my being an Aboriginal researcher. Wilson (2001) offers this view of paradigms:

One major difference between the dominant paradigms and an Indigenous paradigm is that the dominant paradigms build on the fundamental belief that knowledge is an individual entity: the researcher is an individual in search of knowledge, knowledge is something that is gained, and therefore knowledge may be owned by an individual. An Indigenous paradigm comes from the fundamental belief that knowledge is relational. Knowledge is shared with all of creation. It is not just interpersonal relationships, not just with the research subjects I may be working with, but it is a relationship with all of creation. It is with the cosmos, it is with the animals, with the plants, with the earth that we share this knowledge. It goes beyond the idea of individual knowledge to the concept of relational knowledge. (pp. 176-177)

Based on the concept of relational knowledge, my way of knowing, being and values is consistent with an Indigenous paradigm as cited above by Wilson (2001), emanates from relationships and it is through relationships that are ever-changing that I come to know what I know, establish truth and reality, have values and live. “Urion writes, ‘living is knowledge’ ...knowledge is regarded as having come from the Creator, hence knowledge is also understood as sacred. Urion describes Indigenous knowledge as having four components: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual” (Stewart-Harawira, 2005, p. 35). In relationships, I searched for meaning and understanding in this research activity.

As an Aboriginal woman, I am relationally connected to myself, family, different communities, and the world. My sense of autonomous self and connected self is encouraged, recognized, and understood in an Aboriginal worldview as

Any individual within a culture is going to have his or her own personal interpretation of the collective cultural code; however, the individual's worldview has its roots in the culture – that is, in the society's shared philosophy, values, and customs. (Little Bear, 2000, p. 77)

With this in mind, a relational framework provides a rationale which describes my understanding of the spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual connected sense of knowing and being in relationships with self, family, community, and the world.

Relationships begin with an understanding of self. It is my responsibility to know and care for myself. This knowing and caring provides me with the opportunity to be responsible for all aspects of myself which includes the spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual essence of my being. This sense of self-responsibility and care is not for the purpose of self-centeredness; rather, it is a purposeful journey into a subjective understanding of self, an inner knowing. From this place of centeredness, I have the best opportunity to develop myself and to contribute to others from an authentic internal source which has become “the basis of continued personal development and of Aboriginal epistemology” (Ermine, 1999, p. 102).

Another significant dimension of knowing the self is the recognition of both an inner and outer consciousness. Exploring the self includes recognizing how our subconscious is an equal source of information and reality. This type of knowing of self emanates from one's sense of spirit which is manifest in human experience through energies such as dreams, visions, and intuitive senses of the world. Many Aboriginal

people recognize and confirm this sense of knowing (Ermine, 1999; Little Bear, 2000). The overall purpose for knowing and caring for all aspects of self in relation to all other beings, animate and inanimate, is, by design, a humbling experience which does not presuppose superiority or arrogance about knowing and being. Knowing the self is designed to give direction and for understanding ones place in the world.

Relationships with family provide another valuable context from which the development of knowledge and being occur. I am of Aboriginal and European descent and I use both worldviews and many other experiences to grow my values and determine my personhood. “No one has a pure worldview that is 100 percent Indigenous or Eurocentric; rather, everyone has an integrated mind, a fluxing and ambidextrous consciousness, a precolonized consciousness that flows into a colonized consciousness and back again” (Little Bear, 2000, p. 85). I value the mixed blood nature of my family; this is a very important understanding of my being.

Community relationships provide another context to develop knowledge and ways of being. The relationship that one has with a community, Aboriginal and otherwise, is lived in the present as a result of the past. Each individual person has a history with his or her Aboriginal community and that relationship with community is as varied and distinctly unique as individuals themselves. For this reason, there are many ways to understand community and the relationship of connection or disconnection within a community. With respect to the choice of personal participation with any community, in an Aboriginal community there are many opportunities to develop relationships as a way to live. In essence, Aboriginal communities create places where the teachings of Aboriginal ways of knowing and being are practiced through special events and the living

of everyday life. Communities also give an individual the opportunity to renew self and to create continuity with the present based on the past. "Creation is continuity. If creation is to continue, then it must be renewed. Renewal ceremonies, the telling and retelling of creations stories, the singing and resinging of the songs, are all humans' part in the maintenance of creation" (Little Bear, 2000, p.78). Connection and renewal are created in communities.

From an Aboriginal perspective, my relationship with being in the world begins with an understanding of the power of Mother Earth and her ability to teach about natural cycles and interconnectivity which includes a connection to the cosmos. From Cree teachings that have been given to me, we are dependent on the Earth for our existence. I cannot exist without the functions of Mother Earth, but she can and does exist without me. From this point of view, Mother Earth teaches that cycles are natural and continuous (Little Bear, 2000). When all things are in constant motion and flux, change is natural and this creates intricate and interconnected patterns of relationships. Another aspect to understanding a relationship to the world is to recognize that all things have a spirit and at that level of being, we are all connected, we are all related. The relationship of self with Mother Earth, natural cycles and the inherent interconnectiveness of being gives Aboriginal persons, families, and communities guidelines for obtaining knowledge and understanding ways of being. I am but part of this larger whole and participate by engaging in relationships. From this location and authority, as a researcher, I subscribe to a relational framework based on understanding the spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual sense of knowing and being as I engage in relationships with myself, my family, my communities, and the world.

Constructivist Traditions

“A *paradigm* is a way of looking at the world. It is composed of certain philosophical assumptions that guide and direct thinking and action” (Mertens, 2005, p. 7). As a purposeful activity of systematic inquiry, research is situated within paradigms and each paradigm is determined by the philosophical assumptions which guide different orientations or ways of looking at the world. In her work, Mertens identifies four major research paradigms: post positivism, constructivist, transformative, and pragmatic. She claims that these four paradigms can be defined by considering three basic questions which have been outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These questions are:

1. The ontological question asks, “What is the nature of reality?”
2. The epistemological question asks, “What is the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the knower and the would-be known?”
3. The methodological question asks, “How can the knower go about obtaining the desired knowledge and understandings?” (Mertens, p. 8)

Based on the different philosophical assumptions which identify the four research paradigms by the questions which define each paradigm, this study was based on my personal philosophical orientation to the constructivist paradigm. Within the constructivist paradigm, there are numerous types of qualitative research activities which are guided by assumptions which “grew out of the philosophy of Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology and Wilhelm Dilthey’s and other German philosophers’ study of interpretive understanding called *hermeneutics*” (Eichelberger as cited in Mertens, 2005, p. 12). The basic tenet of the constructivist paradigm is that “reality is socially

constructed” (Mertens, p. 12) and the constructivist researcher seek to understand these socially constructed realities.

Ontologically, in the constructivist paradigm reality is socially constructed and determined by individuals involved in an understanding and interpretive process.

“Understanding *is* interpretation ... [it] is not an isolated activity of human beings but a basic structure of our experience of life. We are always taking something *as* something” (Gadamer as cited in Schwandt, 2000, p. 194). As individuals process taking something as something, an understanding of social realities is attained and meaning is constructed.

This process of understanding and the construction of meaning changes over time within individuals and is different between individuals. For this reason, constructivist researchers seek understandings which emanate from multiple viewpoints and “assume that they deal with multiple, socially constructed realities or “qualities” that are complex and indivisible into discrete variables, they regard their research task as coming to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them” (Glesne, 1999, p. 5). As a result of the understanding and meaning making process, multiple constructions create expressions of no objective reality. Rather, the goal of research in the constructivist paradigm is to understand difference of meanings and acknowledge multiple realities which are co-created through understanding and interpretation.

Knowledge results from lived experience. I am using the term lived experience to mean that the participants in the study have the direct experience of everyday practice as professionals in an Aboriginal TEP environment. In the constructivist paradigm, researchers

Share the goal of understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it. This goal is variously spoken of as an abiding concern for the life world, for the emic point of view, for understanding meaning, for grasping the actor's definition of a situation, for *Verstehen*. (Schwandt, 1998, p. 221)

In constructivist research, the researcher and participants engage in an interactive process where knowledge is co-created by the self and from others based on lived experience (Mertens, 2005). Therefore, knowledge emerges “based on experience and insight of a unique and essentially personal nature” (Burrell & Morgan, 1985, p. 2). As a result of the subjective nature of knowledge, in constructivist research, objectivity is replaced by confirmability where data interpretations are explicit expressions of individual expressions of lived experience. For this reason, the values of the researcher or participants cannot be removed from the research activity and do emerge in the research process. In order to understand and interpret knowledge, biases and prejudgements are

Necessary to make our way, however tentatively, in everyday thought, conversation and action... The point is not to free ourselves of all prejudice, but to examine our historically inherited and unreflectively held prejudices and alter those that disable our efforts to understand others, and ourselves. (Schwandt, 2000, p. 195)

Hence, constructivist research is value laden and subjective in nature based on the values and lived experiences of the researcher and the participants. Knowledge is validated in constructivist research by using multiple sources from data (Mertens, 2005).

In constructivist research, obtaining desired knowledge and understandings involves efforts which invite hermeneutical and dialectic processes. For this reason “qualitative methods such as interviews, observations, and document reviews are predominant in this paradigm” (Mertens, 2005, p. 15). By employing these methods, multiple perspectives can be sought as research questions evolve in the interactive

research process between the researcher and participants and the constructivist researcher must also provide information about the backgrounds of the participants and the context of the research activity (Mertens, 2005). From my orientation as a beginning Aboriginal researcher employing an Indigenous methodology and constructivist traditions, narrative inquiry through storytelling and conversations was the method I preferred to use for the promotion of the hermeneutical and dialectic processes which formed the basis of my research activity.

Research Method: Narrative Inquiry Flowing from An Indigenous Methodology and Constructivist Traditions

The research method used in this study was consistent with both Indigenous and constructivist philosophical orientations, and were guided by my ethical position; my understanding of storytelling and conversations in narrative inquiry; and the trustworthiness of the study.

Ethical Positioning

My research activity was designed and based foundationally upon ethical considerations. “For indigenous and other marginalized communities, research ethics is at a very basic level about establishing, maintaining, and nurturing reciprocal and respectful relationships” (Smith, 1999, p. 97). Respectful relationships are more than

Devising a set of rules to guide researcher behaviour in a defined task. Ethics, the rules of right behaviour, are intimately related to who you are, the deep values you subscribe to, and your understanding of your place in the spiritual order of reality. (Brant Castellano, 2004, p. 103)

My own rules for right behaviour in the research process were guided by the four principles of “relational accountability; respectful representation; reciprocal appropriation; and rights and regulation” (Pualani Louis, 2007, p. 133).

The ethical principle of relational accountability demands attention to recognizing that “all parts of the research process are related, from inspiration to expiration” (Pualani Louis, 2007, p. 133). My research project was inspired by many years of association both as a student and as a professional practitioner within an Aboriginal TEP. Over time, I recognized how wellness and support in an Aboriginal TEP was expressed as a need and interest which was not simply a topic of personal interest to me. In many ways, the learning community defined my topic.

Respectful representation recognized that even though I can only view my research through my own lens, I also appreciated and welcomed the diverse and common views of others. This required humbly listening with patience, and respecting and accepting the decisions of the people involved in regards to the use of knowledge which was shared in the research process (Pualani Louis, 2007; Thomas, 2005). In this way, I respected my belief that the participants and the community shared knowledge with me by processes which included following Aboriginal community protocols and of informed consent for the purposes of the research project.

Reciprocal appropriation (Pualani Louis, 2007) was also a guiding principle for my research practice. As noted by Battiste (1998),

Indigenous people should control their own knowledge, should do their own research, and if they should choose to enter into any collaborative relationship with others that the research should empower and benefit their communities and cultures, not merely the researchers. (p. 16)

In the research project, my participants controlled the amount of knowledge that they wished to share with me both when we were involved with our conversations and afterwards when they had the choice to release their transcripts to me for the purposes of writing the text for the project. Our collaborative relationship existed by my participants sharing of knowledge and my efforts to share their knowledge with the Aboriginal and other communities.

A final guiding principle ensured that the rights and regulation of research be “driven by Indigenous protocols, contains explicitly outlined goals, and considers the impacts of the proposed research” (Smith as cited in Pualani Louis, 2007, p. 133). In my research, I respected Aboriginal protocols as I understand them from my own teachings. Very early in the research process, I began a specific relationship with an Elder associated with my research site. I was also invited into the participants’ community for initial consultations and information-sharing about my project. Within these interactions, I explicitly outlined my goals, and we discussed the anticipated impacts and outcomes of my research interests. I was also instructed by the Elder about cultural protocol expectations. I subsequently followed his guidance and directives. I was also welcomed and encouraged by the participants in my project. In many ways, the ethical foundations of the research informed the research plan by the gaining of prior approvals from the Elder and the prospective participants at the Aboriginal TEP research site.

I was also ethically bound by the foundational principles of the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board. I prepared and have attached my ethical research approval which was granted from this authority. I respect the nature and need for ethical approval from the University Research Ethics Board and I engaged in

data collection for the research project only after all required approvals were granted to me from the University of Saskatchewan.

Storytelling and Conversations

As a beginning Aboriginal researcher employing methodology following Indigenous and constructivist traditions for my research project, an effective way of sharing knowledge for me is found in the act of storytelling and having conversations. “Learning to listen well to others’ stories and to interpret and retell the accounts is part of the qualitative researchers’ trade qualitative researchers seek to make sense of personal stories and the ways in which they intersect” (Glesne, 1999, p. 1). A fundamental premise and consistent principle within inquiry which searches for stories and expressions of lived experiences is the claim that individual persons make sense of their world and lived experiences in life by the telling and retelling of stories (Bruner, 1991; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1994).

In an Aboriginal context, storytelling has long been recognized as a way to share knowledge and life experience (Hart, 2002; Kovach, 2009; McLeod, 2007; Wilson, 2001). Expressions of knowledge through story are unique and linked to a specific sense of the world and self in the world. Stories are also told which connect past generations to the present day.

Collective memory is the echo of old stories that links grandparents and their grandchildren. In the Cree tradition, collective narrative memory is what puts our singular lives into a larger context. Old voices echo; the ancient poetic memory of our ancestors finds home in our individual lives and allows us to reshape our experience so that we can interpret the world we find ourselves in. (McLeod, 2007, p. 11)

Our stories and lives are ours as individuals but we are also inextricably interconnected and enmeshed with the stories of our families, communities, and the world. When we tell our individual stories, we add to the ongoing nature of the sharing of knowledge which has been a constant over time and is connected to ancient wisdom (McLeod, 2007). From this worldview, storytelling is a method of practice which is fundamentally found in relationships (Barton, 2004), and the telling of stories embodies epistemological expressions of Aboriginal worldview.

From my interest in lived experience and the stories told about these experiences which are expressions of forms of knowledge, I have a mindset which places people and their experiences centrally in the research process rather than approaching research from a discipline-specific and/or defined theoretical framework (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). With this perspective, I was able to listen to stories in terms of the people involved, the time, the actions, the context, and the certainty of what was being shared. These key concepts formed the basis of thinking narratively but with the view that stories are more than fiction or a form of entertainment (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Individuals usually tell stories of the self and of others. People are always in the process of personal change and when thinking narratively, the stories of people become expressions of this change, usually through the telling of different experiences. These different experiences take us through many and different phases in life as we are always in the process of experiencing life. As a researcher in my research activity, I was aware that I “take for granted that people, at any point in time, are in a process of personal change and that from an educational point of view, it is important to be able to narrate the person in terms of the process” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 30). What this allowed,

as a benefit for my research project, was that all of my participants had the opportunity to express a sense of self in terms of their individual life and professional experiences in relationship to my research questions.

Closely connected to the idea that people are in a constant process of change through life is the notion that narrative thinking considers how action and the timing of actions are contextually relevant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Individuals experience life in the context of the present which is based in a historical past, and this can determine actions and the timing of actions. As a researcher, in my project I explored how actions and the timing of actions were contextually relevant in the conversations with my participants. This allowed for a multi-layered awareness of the stories by inviting expressions and interpretations of meaning and subsequent significance in the context of lived experiences. As well, in terms of my research project it seemed apparent to me that if I invited subjective perspectives and interpretations, I could access authentic and organic thoughts and ideas. Therein lies a gift; storytelling can provide a richness of text which is the best possible offering, in context, at any particular point in time, of a life experience and the relative subjective interpretation of that experience.

In terms of my research, I also knew that I could not ever fully understand or absolutely accurately interpret the lived experiences of others. From this, I realized that my research activity and subsequent text would at best be an approximation of the collective efforts of knowledge from storytelling which emerged as a result of the conversations that I had with my participants. “The attitude in a narrative perspective is one of doing ‘one’s best’ under the circumstance, knowing all the while that other possibilities, other interpretations, other ways of explaining things are possible”

(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 31). As a researcher, I found this to be enlightening as I preferred others to interpret and make meaning for him or herself. I actually believe that this is what participants in storytelling and readers of texts do when they participate in knowledge sharing activities. As a researcher, I can never be certain that my understandings and interpretations represent an absolute truth and I can rely on others to define and interpret a sense of truth for themselves.

Trustworthiness

The goal of qualitative research is not generalizability and thus is not about the quantity but the quality of data gathered and analysed. As noted by Creswell (2003), “Overall, however, reliability and generalizability play a minor role in qualitative research” (p. 195). Rather, validity in qualitative research rests upon the ability to demonstrate trustworthiness through various strategies such as triangulation; member-checking; rich, thick description; recognizing bias of the researcher; peer debriefing; and use of an external auditor (Creswell, 2003).

In this research, trustworthiness began with the ethical framework which guided my research. I began my research journey by contacting an Elder who is directly related to the research site. I followed, and continued to follow, his directives throughout the research process. I also asked my participants at the research site for their consideration to participate before I began any writing of my proposal. The reason for this preparation lies in protocol which is consistent with my values as an Aboriginal woman. I asked for individual and community permission before I began my work. In this way, my intentions for a relationship are clear for myself, I shared them with the Elder, prospective

participants and their community. From my request, I was granted permission to proceed. These activities formed the basis of relationship building with the intent to establish trust and honesty based on collaboration. It established trustworthiness from the Elder and the community as I did not automatically assume that I could enter into the research site and be given approval to proceed.

After completion of my proposal defence and University of Saskatchewan ethical approvals, and during the first conversation of the actual gathering of data for the research project, trustworthiness was also checked when I was in dialogue with the individual participants. I checked their communications with me for clarity and understanding as needed. After our first conversation, trustworthiness in terms of member-checking was assessed by reviewing individual transcripts and, subsequent to that process, approval for use of participants' information was given to me by consent from the participants before I began writing the research text. After this approval, I wrote the final text with ongoing assistance from my supervising committee which demonstrated the use of peer debriefing and external auditor processes to ensure the validity of my work. Upon completion of my degree, I will share my work with the Elder and participants. Trustworthiness of the study was governed by the ongoing checking of the research process by these mechanisms.

The trustworthiness of the study also related to the nature of trust in the relationship between myself in the role of researcher and my participants. Even though truthfulness in conversations can be contested, it is important to recognize that all stories are constructions of lived experiences to varying degrees. Trust is therefore supported by the perspective that participants would not willingly or knowingly construct "a less-than-adequate, even unhealthy, story" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 85) with the purposeful

intention of misinforming with inaccurate narratives. Dependability also recognized that the participants present an emic view as their individual expressions in our conversations was dependent on their real lived experiences. In this way, I considered the knowledge that was shared with me to be authentic and truthful.

Trustworthiness was also required of me as the researcher. As a cultural insider and long-time practitioner in an Aboriginal TEP, I am 'one of them'. Based on this, I depended on the trust, confidentiality, and connection that existed in the common experience of professional practice that I had with my participants. I assume that this positioning led to conversations which were rich, sincere, and authentic in nature. As a researcher, since I did not have to settle into a significantly unknown environment for a prolonged period of time for this particular research project, I recognized another strength which was the result of our pre-existing commonalities and relationships. From this insider status, I understood some of those things that are said, and not said, in a different way than an outsider might. As well, my lived experience did affect the trustworthiness of my study in another way. I recognize that I could be blind to alternative meanings or viewpoints which may be evident if I was an outsider to my topic or research site. I needed to be cautious about my own biases and relativism as this could affect the trustworthiness of the study.

One way to address the issues of my own biases and relativism was to confirm the trustworthiness of the study by maintaining an audit trail where raw data was kept and reflective notes were taken during the research process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this way, I attempted to examine contradictions and inconsistencies, and expose my biases and preconceptions in a space of critical self-awareness. I also addressed relativism

by seeking meaningful perceptions with my participants and supervising committee. We all had our relative experiential knowledge to share and contribute to the project, but I wanted my study to demand more rigour than my singular point of view or individual interpretation of lived experience. The “moral message for narrative inquiry is clear and apt. Mere relativism will not do” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 86). Confirmation of rigour in my study was accomplished by professional practices and personal reflections which intended to seek understandings which were larger than my individual claim or sharing of knowledge from others. As well, trustworthiness also meant that I was conscious of the three main sources of data which, when triangulated, informed the writing of the final text. The three main sources that I considered were my own experience, secondary research in terms of the literature reviewed for the study, and the original research data which was provided by the participants in the study.

The Research Plan

The research plan used in this study is described below in terms of the site, participants, engaging in conversations, and making meaning by weaving the conversations to prepare a final text.

The Site

My research activity employed a case study technique. “Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied” (Stake, p. 443). My study was conducted at the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) which is an Aboriginal TEP site located in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada. This site was best suited for the purpose of my study as this location is representative of a

learning community (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001) which seeks to promote wellness and support in an Aboriginal TEP.

SUNTEP Prince Albert was established in 1981. As a unique learning community, SUNTEP provides a teacher preparation site for Aboriginal students in an off-campus setting through its unique activities and functioning. SUNTEP is governed by and directed through the Gabriel Dumont Institute (GDI) in Saskatchewan, Canada, and through a contractual agreement is affiliated with and accredited by the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada. As such, SUNTEP adheres to the requirements and policies of the University of Saskatchewan, yet it functions to serve Aboriginal individuals aspiring to become teachers in an off-campus setting.

The study was designed to seek out what was particular at SUNTEP in relationship to the purpose of the study. In “seeking a different purview from that of most designers of experiments and testers of hypotheses, qualitative case researchers orient to complexities connecting ordinary practice in a natural habitat” (Stake, 2005, p. 448). The reason for using a case study at this particular site supported the identified purpose of the study as SUNTEP had the best potential to exemplify the integral function of wellness and support as ordinary practice in an Aboriginal TEP setting. My study intended to seek a deeper understanding of these concepts as representative of a complexity of relationships at this site and the knowledge shared in the research activity has potential to add to the literature which has already been written about Aboriginal TEPs. The end product of the research has the potential to portray what is not commonly known or previously written about.

Through the case study technique, I was also afforded the opportunity to be part of research which allowed self-reflection. “Perhaps the simplest rule for method in qualitative case work is: “place your best intellect into the thick of what is going on.” The brainwork ostensibly is observational, but more critically, it is *reflective*” (Carr & Kemmis as cited in Stake, 2005, p. 449). In the process of being reflective, I recognized that there was a subjective element to my observation at the case study site which allowed me to be open to different possibilities and alternative meanings as the research process evolved. As well, I was also challenged to consider the bounded space of the case study as it related to interactions which were personal, professional, and social; being situated in a learning community which has a past, present and intended future; combined with the notion of the uniqueness of this particular Aboriginal TEP in terms of situation and geographic place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

With case study as technique, I was also afforded the opportunity to speak from the particular as I sought a deep-rooted insights and meanings of wellness and support at SUNTEP. This allowed me to present knowledge as it emerged in the research process which was authentic and represented organic expressions of unique lived experiences. The results or truths of the study are transferable only to the extent that one truth can be applied to another based on similarities which may or may not be found between myself, the participants in the study, other contexts, and/or readers of the product of the study. A case study does not represent the truth of all people or peoples, groups, contexts, or larger populations (Stake, 2005).

The Participants

Lived experience is a key concept in constructivist inquiry and knowledge sharing (Schwandt, 1998, 2000). It is for this reason that I wanted the participants in my study to have the lived experience of wellness and support as an ordinary practice in an Aboriginal TEP. For this reason, I employed purposive sampling and invited all core staff and faculty at the research site to participate in the study, and consequently the participants who volunteered were both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal persons. Specifically, there were seven participants in total, six participants identified as Aboriginal and one participant self identified as non-Aboriginal. In the sample group, there were five female participants and two male participants. In terms of position titles within the group, one participant was the Director, five participants were Faculty members, and one participant was a Staff person. I also recognized that I have a similar lived experience which is consistent with the participants. From this similarity of background experience, it made good sense to me to pursue research which captured expressions of how the participants live and work together. My interest in lived experience has its origins in human experience. Through sharing of lived experience in conversations, there is “a life and a ground to stand on for imagining what experience is and for imagining how it might be studied and represented in researcher’s texts” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxvi).

Further to the point of having the lived experience of an Aboriginal TEP, I wanted to have conversations specifically with all of the core staff members in SUNTEP regardless of position titles as this particular group of individuals has intimate knowledge and experience with the practice of wellness and support in their professional environment. “The workaday life of the professional depends on tacit knowing-in-action”

(Schon, 1983, p. 49) and this knowing-in-action is the result of practice in a professional context. By having conversations with the core staff persons at SUNTEP, I was searching for an expression of an epistemology of professional practice which may not necessarily be dependent on established norms in terms of professional educational preparation and expectations. Rather, the research sought inquiry into the expressions of proactive and professional constructs as responses to wellness and support needs which emerge spontaneously in everyday experience at SUNTEP. Inquiry which studies knowing-in-action can identify and promote an epistemology of practice which places the real lived experiences of individuals into the context of everyday professional life. Reflection on this way of knowing can provide a foundation for research in terms of professional practice and in terms of academic research activity (Schon, 1983).

Engaging in Our Conversations

As previously mentioned, very early in the research process I met with an Elder who was directly associated with my research site, and I followed his direction in terms of protocol for my research activity. As well, I was invited into an Aboriginal discussion circle with my participants where we discussed my intended research project. In the circle, I identified the research questions to be: 1. What is your understanding of wellness? 2. How is wellness practiced in your Aboriginal TEP?; 3. What is your understanding of support?; and 4. How is support practiced in your Aboriginal TEP? By all participants, I was welcomed and encouraged and given consideration from them in terms of participation in the study; they granted me full support for my work. It is important to note that the intent of my initial contact with the Elder, research site, and participants was to seek approval to continue with the writing of my intended research

plan. There was no gathering of information or data at these initial sessions; rather it was an approval process where I asked to be granted access to participants and the research site for the purposes of my study. My actions were based on Aboriginal community protocols as I have been taught. After I was given approval for my research by completion of my first three chapters and the University of Saskatchewan ethics board, I contacted my participants again, made appointment times for our conversations, and I travelled to the research site and began our conversations for data gathering purposes.

At our first conversation, I met with my participants individually. I followed a template of practice with each of the seven participants. To begin, I connected my previous explanations and our discussions which were held in our circle activity, I restated the intention of my study (Appendix A), and described my work to date. Then, I turned to their role in my plan. I explained and then asked each participant to sign a consent form (Appendix C) indicating their invited participation in the project as determined and approved by the University of Saskatchewan Ethics Board. I explained that, as a participant, they could withdraw from the research project at any point in the process, and they would also have the opportunity to withdraw any contribution that they make after our conversations when they reviewed their transcripts which would be provided to them. I further explained that another form would require their signature, a release form (Appendix D), which would allowed me to use their knowledge which was shared in our conversation for the purposes of writing my research text. By placing the authority of both participation in the project and release of findings for writing the final text with the participants, I was giving them the choice of whether or not to participate in the study. In this way, my role as researcher was one of facilitator and disseminator of the

knowledge which is owned by individual participants in my study. Other than my own stories, I honour the ownership of knowledge to be that of the participants; however, I did have a responsibility for the creation of the final text.

Also at the time of the initial conversation, I asked about the use of pseudonyms and explained ethical requirements and considerations of confidentiality as outlined by the University of Saskatchewan Ethics Board. I asked my participants what best suited them and then I respected their wishes. I did not want to cause any harm to any person and for this reason, I left the decision regarding personal confidentiality and anonymity in the hands of my participants. Anonymity is a critically important issue in terms of confidentiality and I recognized that I had a responsibility to protect my participants from any harm, however, not all participants wanted to be renamed (Thomas, 2005). In the initial discussions that I had with the participants, they requested that they wanted to claim, be recognized, and own their own stories personally, professionally, and publically. At our first conversation, they reconfirmed their intentions and all participants asked to be named in the study. All participants indicated this desire by signing the official Consent Form (Appendix C).

In the study, I was involved with the participants in terms of living an experience, thinking about and expressing lived experiences, and reflecting on experiences both in a present moment and after our conversations together. As researcher, in order to become fully engaged in the storytelling experience, I did not want to be writing as a form of recording data; rather, I audio taped our conversations. In our first conversations together, by explaining this position to my participants, I anticipated that a deeper meaning for the use of an audio taped conversation would result. All individual participants agreed and

consequently all conversations were audio taped. As well, even though I restated our research questions in order to focus our thoughts and subsequent discussion, I explained that I did not want to conduct an interview per se; rather, I wanted to have a conversation. Conversations “take the representation of experience far beyond what is possible in an interview, there is probing in conversation, in-depth probing, but it is done in a situation of mutual trust, listening, and caring for the experience described by the other” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 109). When I was in conversation with the participants, I wanted to be conversing, not writing or thinking about the larger context of the research project.

In our first conversations, as researcher I also maintained awareness that I could influence the nature of our discussions and sway participants’ contributions in our dialogue. In my project, I wanted to take the stance primarily of being a listener so my voice in the research process was mostly intended to be supportive and interactive (Chase, 2005). I accomplished this by explaining the general focus of our topic of discussion and then becoming part of the flow of the conversation by listening as my first activity, and not directing or governing the discourse. In this dialogical space, I anticipated creativity and authentic expression from the participants as they could determine what they wanted to say based on their own natural responses and explanations. In this way, our conversation processes allowed for the natural rhythm of our dialogic patterns to emerge rather than being contrived and directed by me. In the free-flowing form of our conversations, I also anticipated that my participants would offer expressions which jump around to different ideas, times, places, and events as they expressed knowledge about wellness and support as a form of lived experience in an Aboriginal TEP.

As a researcher, even though I planned to take mostly the position of listener in our first conversations, I also intended to use all of our conversations as an opportunity to continually check my research activity for quality in terms of trustworthiness (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lincoln, 1995; Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). These checks established criteria for the soundness of the study. I checked for the soundness of my research project during my first conversations with participants and their subsequent approvals, after our conversations by the use of personal reflections and field notes, and during the preparation and writing of the final text.

At our first conversation, I also explained to my participants that I planned to construct field notes, their nature and their purpose, immediately after our tape recorded session. I wrote and audio taped personal field notes and reflections privately after conversations with each participant. I took time to write field notes in-between my time spent with the participants so that I could capture some of my own thoughts and feelings which emerged during the conversations. Immediately after our first conversation, taking time for my own reflections helped me to gain thoughtful insights of our conversations, and it gave me a record of my thoughts and feelings at that particular point in time. Had I not done this, I would have lost those moments and would not have had access to that information when I wrote the preliminary and final texts. Field notes were useful memory triggers. Being reflective by keeping field notes and audio taping some of my thoughts in the moment allowed me to challenge myself, and to grow and express my perceptions, ideas, and preconceptions.

While in this reflective space, I wanted to be aware of writing from an authentic place. It was important to me that I try to be genuine and true to my real thoughts and

feelings, and this included not just the physical or tangible aspects of my experience. In my field notes and reflections, I wanted to write and talk about the tensions I was experiencing and even the negativity and/or counterproductive elements I encountered. In this way, I did attempt to not sanitize or idealize my work or attempt to fit it into a framework which would be easily digestible or necessarily acceptable for an audience. In my field notes, I expressed a personal and authentic set of writings and thoughts which “supplant[ed] pathologizing silences, and challenge[d] existing beliefs and practices” (Shields, 2004, p. 111) by being truthful and honest. The reason for this authenticity was so that I could refer back to my notes and reflections in a more genuine way. The field notes demonstrated rigour in the research process and from these notes I decided upon how to use the real experiences, feelings, thoughts, and ideas about my experiences during the research process and in my final written text. Composing field texts was ultimately an interpretive process and the notes are imbued with valuable interpretations of many kinds.

After I finished the conversations with the seven participants in the study, I transcribed the audio taped conversations. I then sent a paper copy of our conversations to them and asked for their feedback. They were reminded again that they had full authority over the text, and could add or delete information as they deemed appropriate. Once they completed their readings, made any necessary changes, and signed the release form (Appendix D), I began to prepare a first draft of my findings.

Meaning Making: Weaving Conversations to Prepare the Final Text

Meaning making in this research project came from the dominant lens of an Indigenous paradigm, constructivist traditions in research and the process of narrative inquiry. With this in mind, once the participants approved their transcripts, I began to prepare a proposed research text which constituted Chapters Four and Five of the final research document. This process involved weaving voice and literature into a scholarly text. The process began by thematically chunking data; determining the nature of the first draft of work in terms of voice of participants and my own; and engaging with response communities and integrating scholarly writing into the text. During the writing process, I intended to maintain strong communication and relationships with the supervisors of my project.

With raw conversational data in hand, I began by chunking information thematically and identifying significant quotes or passages from participants. Chunked information identifies common “meanings and social significance [of the raw data] which ultimately shape field texts into research texts” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 31). In the past, when I have been thinking and writing, I have been significantly informed by spiritual practices. My personal ways of engaging in a spiritual way of living are represented by behaviours which include, but are not exclusive to, having quiet, uninterrupted time for myself. During this time, I pray, smudge, write in my personal journal, and I listen intuitively. Listening to me is a process of recognizing messages from my body in terms of physical feelings as well as spiritual, emotional, and intellectual messages. This connection to the self while in relationship with others, namely the participants, existed through their words and my personal experience of the conversations

we had. In my process, I was given the intuitive direction that I sought when thematically chunking information and considering how I might write the research text. In this way, the relationships that I had with the raw data were not just between myself and the participants, which was merely the result of physically sharing words in a conversation about the topic of study. The chunking of data involved a sense of holistic understandings which included recognizing not just the intellectual sense of what was being shared in our conversations.

Chunking of data also included recognizing the primary significance and power of spiritual influences as well as emotional and intuitive senses of the data. When thinking and writing, I am always influenced by this process and being connected to it requires assembling many practices and ways of thinking that I have learned from many different influences in my life. This process shaped my final research text. I weaved stories: the stories of the participants, my own story and ways of telling our story in writing which was informed by a complex process of making meaning from my position as an Aboriginal/Métis woman, and the stories of scholarly literature to “create the effect of reality, showing characters embedded in the complexities of lived moments” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 744).

I anticipated the task of writing interwoven stories to take a yet unknown series of steps which produce interim writings which were not necessarily accomplished in a linear fashion. The writing process involved the creation of different texts in terms of form as I attempted to interweave voice, stories, and theoretical input to create a seamless work which reflected my own style or form of writing. “In gaining a voice and a signature for

it, researchers put their own stamp on the work. The text that follow[ed] from the signature ha[d] rhythm, cadence, and expression” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 148).

After chunking information thematically, I also engaged in the writing process by considering the issue of voices of the participants and myself. In composing the text, I tried to maintain a balance between the voice of my participants and my own voice. The writing process was a challenge regarding the struggle

To express one’s own voice in the midst of an inquiry designed to tell of the participants’ storied experiences and to represent their voices, all the while attempting to create a research text that will speak to, and reflect upon, the audience’s voices. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 147)

The struggle with representation of voice in my writing was sorted out based on judgements and decisions about the form of the final text on my behalf.

One aspect of judgement in writing the first draft of the text was centered in my desire to construct writing which was at its core representative of the voices of the participants and their lived experiences. I recognized that I wanted my research text to present

A more personal, collaborative, and interactive relationship, one that centred on the question of how human experience is endowed with meaning and on the moral and ethical choices we face as human beings who live in an uncertain and changing world. (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 743)

In using the voice of the participants as chunked themes which are the central element to the structure of my writing, I was able to offer their lived experience as knowledge and in this way contribute to what is already existing in scholarship about Aboriginal TEPs.

As a second consideration in terms of judgement, I balanced my own voice with that of the participants. I was conscious that

The argument may run either that voices are heard, stolen, and published as the researcher's own or that the researcher's voice drowns out the participants' voices, so that when participants do appear to speak it is, after all, nothing more than the researcher's voice code. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 75)

My own voice does not override the voices of the participants. Self-expression is important and I placed myself in the writing but my story does not constitute the central knowledge base of the text. With this intent in mind, I addressed the issue of focus in my writing and avoided creating work which is self-centered.

Another potential risk of reflexivity is to use research as a kind of self-therapy or to focus as much on self as on other. Cynically referred to as ethno-narcissism, some reflexive accounts appear to be ways for people to make more of themselves than of the world around them. (Glesne, 1999, p. 177)

Since there is a whole world of knowledge outside of myself, I sought a balance between other and the self in my writing. My writing has the potential to be strongly autobiographical but this cannot be the central reason for my pursuits. Rather, my story has been presented in the text secondary yet alongside the lived experiences of my participants.

When creating the first draft of my research text, in addition to the issue of voice, I also considered developing response communities as described below to help me to co-create my document as I attempted to weave scholarly writings into the text. In writing the first draft, I shared my works in progress with my supervising committee in written form and in informal conversations where I asked for clarifications to make meaning. As a researcher, I wanted feedback from others so that I could reflect on my work and not be isolated in the creation of my text. Feedback provided me with clarity in my writing and it pushed me to reflections which I could not perceive entirely on my own. This is another value that I have recognized while being in relationships during the research and writing

process. When writing, I also planned to weave existing scholarship into my study. In this way, I wanted to investigate and connect the knowledge shared from the participants with scholarship which was already available. By engaging in this co-creative process, I completed the final draft of my study. Once I am totally finished, I will personally share my completed work with the Elder and the participants in the study.

Summary of Chapter Three

This chapter described the methodology and method used in the study. The premises which guided the study are based on Indigenous methodology and constructivist traditions as these orientations are consistent with my philosophical views about the purpose and process of research endeavours. The chapter also described my ethical positioning, my interests in storytelling and conversations as method, and my desire to ensure the soundness of my study by engaging in practices of trustworthiness in my work. As well, the chapter outlined a research plan by identifying the research site, the participants for my study, engaging in conversations, and how I made meaning in the study by weaving conversations to prepare a final text.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore a deeper understanding of wellness and support in a specific Aboriginal TEP located in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. In order to accomplish this purpose, I had conversations with practicing professionals about wellness and support in their Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (TEP) environment. The data I collected represented individual expressions, meanings, and lived experiences of seven participants. My participants, namely Donna Biggins (D), Liza Brown (Li), Leah Dorion (Le), Bente Huntley (B), Michael Relland (M), Sandy Sherwin-Shields (S), and Corey Teeter (C) unanimously requested that I use their given names in my study. They all preferred to claim authority and public acknowledgement of their words and the insights that they shared with me during our conversations. This option was also approved by the University of Saskatchewan Ethics Board. Accordingly, this chapter presents the findings from our conversations by use of direct quotations from the individual participants named in the study. Other than to edit text which was redundant, repetitive, or inconsequential, the writing also implies a spoken dialect from within the group. In presenting the research findings in this way, I intended to capture the essence and expressed meanings of the topic for this study as well as the dialect of my participants' spoken words.

My influence in the writing of the chapter existed to the extent that I expressed my view of the data gathered in our conversations in a conceptual framework which describes the nature of relationships at my research site. This constitutes the lens through which I made meaning of the data. After having conversations with my participants about wellness and support in their Aboriginal TEP, having our discussions transcribed, and receiving approval from my participants to use our conversational texts, I began the task of meaning making through prayer and being open to making sense of each individual conversation and the ways that they connected relationally to each other. The result of this process is presented in this chapter thematically as wellness and support in relationships with self, family, and the community at my research site. Relationships with self are described by my participants as understandings of wellness being an ideal of holistic balance in life; descriptions of influences which develop the idea of wellness; and the notion that as individuals, we are not always balanced or well spiritually, emotionally, physically, or intellectually. The second main theme which emerged from the data involved descriptions of relationships with family. This theme presented the most substantive data and it includes descriptions of the concept of family in an Aboriginal TEP as well as detailed explanations of what is meant by spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual wellbeing in the family. The third theme described relationships with community in terms of building the cultural community, building community in an institutional setting; and building a community of professional educators. This chapter presents the findings of the study according to this relational conceptual framework.

Wellness and Support in Relationships with Self

The research findings describe wellness and support in relationships with self at the research site as wellness being an ideal of holistic balance in life, influences which develop the ideal of wellness, and recognition that we are not always balanced or well.

Wellness Is an Ideal of Holistic Balance in Life

Overwhelmingly, my participants had a common view of wellness as a state of being which emanates essentially and primarily from a relationship with the self. As a part of this common view, wellness was also perceived as a holistic balancing of all aspects of the self. “I think that wellness is, I like to look at it from a holistic perspective and I try to find balance within my life” (C, P1). From Sandy’s point of view, “When I think of the word wellness I think of it pretty holistically that wellness to me would be a wellness of your body, your mind, and your spirit...particularly at this time I’m focused a lot on the wellness of spirit” (S,P1). Donna recognized wellness as being aware of her “physical well being, mental too like mentally but more physically being active and looking after yourself, something I think about more as I’m getting older but that, that’s my own view is physical and mental well being” (D,P1).

Bente reiterated the idea that wellness is a state of being which requires maintaining balance in the self and that these ideas are connected to Aboriginal teachings about the medicine wheel.

Wellness is a state of wellbeing but I guess it’s individually; it is a balance and a state of keeping yourself balanced and healthy. And to do that we have to look at all four aspects of ourselves...so I look at that whole concept of the medicine wheel and the wholeness of a person. I think you have to have a well being in all

of those aspects to be a healthy individual, that's sort of my understanding of the concept of wellness. It's how you live your life (B, P1)

Liza also stated that wellness was a balancing first and foremost of the four aspects of self by the self and for the self and that this concept is linked to Aboriginal teachings about the medicine wheel:

Wellness would mean how a person is doing in a number of different areas and more specifically in terms of the whole being. So I tend to immediately think of the medicine wheel and I think about the four aspects of ourselves that are quite commonly displayed in the medicine wheel. So you're looking at your mental wellness and how that's carrying out or how it's functioning or how you're taking care of it. And then you have your physical which is very straight forward. The emotional wellness in terms of dealing with emotions and sort of how you're able to have those emotions and have a good balance with your emotions I guess you could say in different situations. And then the spiritual part, which is of course having to do with any type of a spiritual type of belief or faith of some kind. And taking the time for each of those, for taking the time to address each part of the self so that you're making sure everything is going well for your being. Wellness, it's an ongoing kind of practice. (Li, PP1-2)

Mike specifically referenced an Elder in his conceptual understanding of wellness and expressed his views of wellness by noting "a lot of wellness comes to knowing self and it's sort of life is a process of self discovery and learning your place in the world, how you make meaning of that world but also how do you balance things in your life" (M, P1).

When the participants spoke about understandings of wellness in relationship to the self, they also recognized that the pursuit of wellness is an individual quest, and personal wellness significantly affects the nature of relationships with others.

I think all of us are given, we'll call it a burden for lack of a better word, that is meant to test and challenge us in our life and that's the sort of thing that we have to come to understand. It's sort of like we learn far more from the challenges we've been given in our life than we do when things unfold in an easy manner... So wellness is coming to know self, it's learning discipline, it's sort of a process of discovery and it's a very, very individual thing, it's all about self. (M, P1)

In the pursuit or journey of coming to know the self, volition is viewed as an individual attitude which cannot be forced on anyone. Through the living of life, opportunities for self-knowledge occur and from Mike's point of view, wellness is an individual pursuit but we also have an important role to play in not interfering with the growth and development of others as they pursue their own wellness. He summed up these ideas of wellness as a primary responsibility for self and our concurrent responsibility to others with the following story:

I found something. I had an incident that I found; it's a metaphor for life I think and especially for me as a teacher that I really, well for me it was quite profound. And, it was so simplistic. The library is across the street, so one day I was going to the library and just as I was crossing the street there was this young mother with her little child. When we were, I was walking up parallel to them and just when we were maybe twenty five feet from the door the child bolts and hey those doors are big heavy steel doors. So the child, four or five years old, grabs that door and they're wrestling with the door and they get it open a crack. And then they kind of get enough of their foot in and they squish so by the time their mother and I got to the door I thought, I guess I expected the mother to grab the door and pull it open. But she didn't, she stopped so then I stopped. And we waited until this little kid got their body in-between the door and the jam, got their hands up and then they pushed the door open and held the door open so that the mother could walk through. And I thought well isn't that a profound thing. The easy thing for that mother to do was to grab the door and pull it open but she let her struggle with the door. And, I think that's a good metaphor for life as teachers and as people...you have to allow people to wrestle with the door. You can't save people, you can't rush to save people, you actually do them a disservice and I think many times we do that and it's not an altruistic act, it's actually a selfish act because it tells more about us than it does about them. So you have to, by doing that she actually was telling that girl that she's competent and that she can, through perseverance, she'll be successful. And there's so many teachings there and they're so subtle but it all comes down to allowing people the freedom to figure things out on their own and to wrestle with the door...So, wellness is the whole idea of discovery, it's the whole idea of balance, it's the whole idea of learning your place...and, I think lots of times people have to struggle to be well. (M, P2)

Wellness as a pursuit from within the self and in relationship with others as they pursue their own wellness can lead to healing. Leah explained that wellness and healing are directly connected and inextricably intertwined with each other.

Wellness is definitely connected to healing because to me the greater levels of wellness come with deep, deep levels of self healing. And, for me, I guess you can be well and go on a wellness journey, that's all wonderful, but to me healing is a much deeper level of commitment to yourself and your healing as a person. (Le, P1)

And Mike described how the research site has the intention to be an exemplar of a place where wellness and healing are practiced.

I think this place, I think why it works is cause it is a place of healing where people can sort of learn about who they are... They learn all those things that are elements of wellness that you have to learn how, you have to learn who you are, and learn your place in the world, your relationship to all aspects of that including the spiritual and then to live in a balanced way... You have to find that balance. (M, P1)

By offering an environment where healing and balance can be learned and occur, the research site offers uniqueness as an educational place.

Influences Which Develop the Ideal of Wellness

The conceptualization of wellness was understood and described by Liza as beginning in insights about the self from childhood experiences.

I guess with wellness, I'm learning... that my parents generation they tried to practice good healthy living practices to the best that they could... as a child, for my young years, I actually had to go through the process of watching my parents do that and then I also would help. As I got older, I should do that too and it's actually a very healthy way to live... So when I look back at that and how I was raised, I realize how fortunate I was to have that sort of upbringing. (Li, PP2-3)

Liza also described the connection between specific childhood experiences and adult conceptualizations of wellness as being

very simple things like as a woman when you began to have your periods you were very strongly taught to me by my mother you don't get your feet cold when you're on your time and I never understood that. Basically it was because if you got your feet cold you would get very, very sick. That's all it was described to me as...So all these kinds of practical little pieces of what I would have thought of as little wives tales or superstitions or whatever, they were to promote you taking care of yourself. (Li, PP2-3)

From childhood experiences, Liza expressed how she was taught to take care of herself. Liza also connected her childhood experiences to more abstract understanding of wellness that she encountered as an adult.

When I learn something that is maybe specifically found like to do with the medicine wheel for example, it might trigger something that I was taught when I was younger, that I was taught even though it wasn't taught in the medicine wheel format. So there's lots of those carry overs that happened. (Li, PP2-3)

And Liza further attributed her adult understandings and conceptualization of wellness in the self to teachings from Aboriginal Elders.

For myself, I probably didn't really start to think of wellness until I was an adult and that probably had a lot to do with the learnings that I was able to learn as an adult. When I was a child, I wasn't specifically taught the medicine wheel but at the same time a lot of what I understand of my wellness, I just sort of plunk it into those four quadrants. It might be from something I was taught when I was younger so it seems to be the case too for a lot of people anyway for the historical kind of teachings from Elders that are passed on. (Li, P1)

We Are Not Always Balanced or Well

As well as claiming an individual responsibility to care for the self in terms of wellness and to understand how personal wellness affects relationships with others, and adult conceptualizations of wellness which are based on childhood experiences and Aboriginal Elders' teachings, the participants also spoke about different influences which could affect their sense of wellbeing. They spoke about how in the relationship with self and continually trying to establish and maintain the ideal of wellness in their lives, they

have the responsibility to care specifically for all aspects of their spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual wellbeing. This relationship with self was viewed as not only for the purpose of self care; the idea was continually reinforced as having meaning in terms of how wellness in the self affects others in an Aboriginal TEP environment.

In the caring of spiritual wellbeing, Corey connected his responsibility for personal spiritual wellness and his practice in the classroom as a teacher in this way:

It's kind of like when I do have a good strong lesson where you know there's good dialogue taking place and there's a nice energy within the classroom and we've had a good day, that often is, when I look back on why was that, it's because I entered that day in good balance. I entered that day from a healthy perspective, from a balanced perspective and you know when I'm not in balance where I don't take that time like what I do every time before I teach a lesson because I, I pray before I do. I always go in and I burn sweet grass and I ask a prayer just for guidance to you know that when I'm standing up there that the words come to me cause those, when they're, when it's a really good day and a really good teaching is taking place it often feels like it's not me that's talking. I'm like a conduit for something else and so I think that taking that time to pray and to be in balance and enter that classroom in a good positive state of mind, that's where the best learning takes place. That's where I can you know and I also think it's important when I'm too stuck in my own stuff and with my own issues then I find that...the dialogue in that takes place and like the classroom is almost like, it's almost guarded or something. (C, PP2-3)

The importance of individual spiritual self care and how it affects relationships with others was also connected to wellness by Sandy.

How can we look at it [spirituality] without talking about religion? Just by talking about our own spirit, the importance to nurture our own spirit in order to be well and to be good teachers. Then we have to work on our wellness, we have to work on being whole and nurturing our inner selves because if we're not whole and happy then it's going to affect who we are as teachers. (S, PP1-2)

For Leah, taking responsibility for personal spiritual wellbeing was critical in her role as a teacher and as an Aboriginal person working in the Aboriginal community. She spoke of the importance of recognizing how

Our communities have been traumatized by all sorts of historical pain, trauma...we're all collectively recovering from historical trauma. So with that I think it's really important to be educated about trauma and the effects of trauma on the individual, the family and the community because we're working with traumatized people, people who are in post colonial stress. I call it a post colonial hangover. (Le, PP1-2)

Leah also connected the idea that spiritual wellness as a person is important when working as a teacher in the Aboriginal community for the reason that

If you're not prepared to look at trauma and look at our community it can really throw you into a state of dis-balance really. And I think it leads to burnout and general ineffectiveness as an educator and just difficulties as a person...So, I really believe that getting educated about trauma and healing is really important when working with our people and our families and our communities. It's really, really important to do that ourselves. (Le, PP1-2)

Spiritual wellness and healing dance with each other and are positive responses to trauma which are wounds of the soul. One example of family and community trauma of the human spirit was spoken about by Liza when she talked about her childhood experiences of alcoholism in her family. Liza described the intergenerational impact of alcohol addiction in her family and how that affected all members of her family including herself.

There were issues of alcohol and so of course having to deal with that in terms of wellness really affects everything. It affects the person who's battling the addiction... my Dad...Grandpa and Grandma both...I think a lot of that has to do with just the wellness of the people like the First Nations or Métis people...But it affected our family because then my mother had to deal with it and then it affected me for many years and then there's my younger siblings that came along. (Li, PP2-3)

In terms of emotional wellbeing, the participants recognized the ways that they felt an individual responsibility to be emotionally well as it has such a significant impact on relationships with others. When working with students who deal with difficult life issues, Corey explained that he can rely on his colleagues to respond to his need for emotional nourishment which then provides him with the support that he needs to maintain emotional balance for himself, and that this balance is needed when working with students:

One of the things that I think that I do a great deal is what I would call counselling. All of these students come from diverse backgrounds and are often dealing with difficult things in their lives and they come to me with personal problems...what makes SUNTEP a special place is it's like family. When I'm feeling down or I'm worn out, I can go into other offices and just completely be myself and not be afraid that I'm coming across as unprofessional or unstable or anything like that. I can really just let loose, sit down, I could go actually to any one of these offices and sit down and have these types of conversations. It actually happens quite often when we're dealing with the everyday stresses of everyday life...you always have the ability to sit down with people [colleagues] and talk it through and you don't ever feel that you're being judged on it. So, that's nice to be able to have that support so that you can give yourself to the students because it does take a lot of energy to be there on a personal level for your students. (C, PP1-2)

Liza reiterated this thought when she expressed her point of view that her ability to support students had much to do with maintaining a sense of balance in terms of her own emotions.

One of the biggest things is to sort of relay the importance of maintaining a bit of your own personal emotional health and well being from a more Aboriginal point of view...So when you have students in your classroom who are in situations that are not very well and you can visibly see it, that it's affecting them and it's academically affecting them, their whole emotion person is affected, then what can you do to perhaps shed some light on that or do what you can to make it somewhat better? That is one of the key things to teaching that you have to be able to sort of balance it all in emotion which is really quite hard at sometimes. (Li, P5)

The participants also spoke about physical wellbeing and their personal responsibility to recognize caring for the physical self, how this affects their overall wellbeing and how it affects relationships with others. “I find that when I’m at my best and I’m feeling good about myself, I am incorporating physical activity into my life” (C, P1). Liza spoke about her own relationship to keeping well in a physical sense in this way.

The whole role of being physically well is of course important to teaching for a number of different reasons like for the energy factor, for the ability to do things and participate with your students and all kinds of things. But just to be well physically is good because if you’re dealing with the aches and pains or things that could be prevented for example then in some way shape or form you’re distracted by it unless it’s something that you have no control over. (Li, P2)

The participants also spoke about needing to take into consideration more serious and chronic health issues in themselves and the need to physically take good care of the self in this regard as this affects how they are able to be with others.

When I do get sick it takes me a long time to get over it because I’m a diabetic. So that really affects me in a lot of other ways. So I do have to think about that, I have to think about looking after myself and not to get too stressed because I know stress adds a lot...it does affect my job because if you’re physically not well then you’re emotionally a little bit run down because of that. Then because of that you’re not, you’re not up to par in terms of your teaching and I feel that I don’t give the students what they need as if I was on healthier in terms of my physical health and spiritually as well. I mean they’re all so totally connected. (B, P2)

At the research site, the physical environment was also recognized as playing a part in physical wellbeing and can affect physical health for staff and students alike.

Your environment is very, very important. I really do wish that we could take students out into nature more, out into the fresh air more than we do sometimes... This building is not a healthy building and I think you need that and you can see it in the students. When you have a large population in a small confined area, germs flow (laughs) quite easily and people you know one gets sick and the other one gets sick and another one gets sick...It’s not good at all so I think a healthy environment is so important. (B, P2).

Added to the idea that the immediate physical environment affects the physical health of the self and students, Liza added another consideration regarding physical wellbeing in the self and others when she raised the point of external social influences and physical health issues.

This year was really quite trying, or actually last year in the fall because of that new H1N1 thing that came out...where I'm speaking from is more about sort of recognizing that there's these other things happening that I have absolutely no control over...I just realize that I have my own little part to do so here at work. (Li, PP4-5)

In terms of intellectual wellbeing, or taking responsibility in the self for mental processes, Corey expressed the view that he needs to be conscientious about addressing his own thinking patterns and the importance of receiving trustworthy support from colleagues as a way to maintain his intellectual wellbeing.

When I am getting out of balance it's kind of that voice within my own head that's telling me that I'm not good enough or I'm simply things like not managing my time well. Those types of things is what creates the stress. Now the way that I go about dealing with stress is to try sitting down and talking with people. A mentor of mine is Mike Relland. Often when I have these types of thoughts, just the opportunity for someone to sit down with me and listen to what I have to say really helps a lot. I think it's important to take time for yourself and be able to have an opportunity to reflect on the causes for that stress and then try to organize myself so that things are better for everyone else. (C, P1)

Donna added a similar sentiment regarding mental wellbeing and her sense of self responsibility to care for that part of herself.

For me wellness means mental well being, trying to keep my life in control and not letting things worry me as much as I used to. But there again with age it changes a lot. I feel a little more secure in a lot of ways that I didn't when I was younger but I just try to keep my life on an even keel so that there's not a lot of stress, unnecessary stress. Sometimes there's no choice but the self induced mental stress, I am trying to get rid of that. (D, P1)

Liza expressed maintaining intellectual wellbeing as a personal responsibility which comes from her own attitudes.

I come to a firm understanding that the more happy I am with my own personal self and which is very much the wellness of myself greatly affects how I am around other people...Wellness is just about being happy in life, being happy with who you are, being happy with where you are at that time in your life whether it's like it could be at any time. And being able to be satisfied and happy with what is happening for you in any given moment. (Li, P4)

In this passage, Liza shares her teaching of how acceptance and gratitude contribute to being well intellectually.

In summary, the participants in the study described wellness as an ideal of holistic balance in life, the influences which develop the ideal of wellness, and the notion that individuals are not always well in the Aboriginal TEP environment.

Wellness and Support in Relationships with Family

Another significant theme indicated in the research findings at the research site described wellness and support in relationships with family to include the concept of family in an Aboriginal TEP and expressions of spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual wellbeing in the family. In the expressions of wellness and support in relationships with family, the participants did not disregard difficulties and problematic situations and issues which occur in the Aboriginal TEP environment. Their contributions describe their ideas about wellness and support in the family as well as how they respond to challenges which arise.

The Concept of Family in an Aboriginal TEP

From the conversations with the participants at my research site, the most substantive and detailed amount of data described understandings of wellness and support in relationships with family. The participants continually referred to the meaning of their Aboriginal TEP environment as a site which is much more than a workplace. Over and over in our conversations, as the following text will express, there is a pervasive ideology that the Aboriginal TEP is a family; it is a form of kinship relationships.

I'm sure you would hear all the students refer to our SUNTEP family and our SUNTEP community here and we do all sorts of things to promote that...so students to have a voice and I think that makes it all the more close and all the more, more like a kinship and a family...Definitely our staff is that way too...it's because we are family, we're close and we get along well together. I think we're all connected together and I guess it's because of our similarities and our beliefs, they're so similar. I think that's why we are so close, we're a family. (B, PP5-6)

In order to establish and maintain these familial bonds in the Aboriginal TEP as a group, the participants described how wellness and support exist in spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual relationships in the family.

Spiritual Wellbeing in the Family

Spiritual wellbeing in the Aboriginal TEP family was described in terms of opportunities for spiritual wellbeing, spiritual wellbeing in group contexts, and spiritual wellbeing in classroom practices.

Opportunities for spiritual wellbeing. In our conversations, the participants expressed ways of offering possibilities for taking care of spiritual wellbeing in the Aboriginal TEP family as a unit. Opportunities for spiritual wellbeing are offered and

considered to be important in one regard specifically in terms of student growth and development.

I think for sure the nurturing of human spirit is just the most important part of education. I think right from the first year when students come in here, the more nurturing, not in the patronizing mother way, but just nurturing that human being. And the more you help them with that healing process, that sense of identity and who I am, the stronger they become. (S, P10)

Offering spiritual opportunities for student participation as a part of the Aboriginal TEP functions is connected to teaching about wellness.

In terms of wellness here, we look at that aspect of self in terms of spirituality. For example, we do offer all sorts of opportunities, we don't force students to do anything but we do give them all sorts of opportunities to balance their lives. We offer sweats whenever anyone requests one. Mike is very good about that and Leah. We do have sweats throughout the year, we do have sweats at our fall and spring camps and they're overwhelmingly used. (B, P2)

Opportunities for participating in activities which provide occasion for developing or maintaining spiritual wellbeing is offered and inclusive for all persons connected to the research site.

I guess a lot of people go into the sweats for healing and for other reasons and throughout the year if they, our students know that all they have to do is ask and a sweat will be put on whether it's a women's sweat or a men's sweat or a mixed sweat whatever, and all people are invited to attend so we do have a number of sweats throughout the year...we all go...at different times but we all are very spiritual people. I don't mean that in a religious way but I mean in a very spiritual way. (B, P2&P6)

Spiritual wellbeing in group contexts. As well as understanding the importance of spiritual growth and development for all individuals in the Aboriginal TEP family and the opportunity for individual persons to request spiritual types of support, other purposeful events for developing spiritual wellbeing are created and offered in group contexts.

We have cultural camps...That first camp people are shy and feeling like they're trying to get to know one another and we eat together, we have opportunities, we listen to Elders, we camp out and get to know people. The more time that you spend with people the more you're going to get to know them...Then that's the start, that's where we start. And then we go on a field trip, we go out to Batoche and so we spend the first week or two just getting to know one another. (C, PP10-11)

In keeping with the understanding that the Aboriginal TEP is a family which is viewed as a form of kinship relationships, all members of student or staff families are invited to become a part of activities which take place in group contexts.

Part of culture camp, part of its family night. It's the night that we put on the entertainment night and so the families come and we have a big potluck...It's an amazing experience, anybody, just anybody could come. Spirit yea, it just does, it just lifts...I think that that's important, is that work shouldn't feel like work, it should be life...It's amazing, that's just the way it is. If people wanted to see, just have a little glimpse of how the TEP programs are a little bit different, just come check out a day like that, just check it out and see the energy and how things are developing on. (C, PP20-21)

One of the significant results of culture camp opportunities is the beginning of establishing and nourishing relationships which promote understandings of individual persons' spiritual essence which is considered to be important and a contribution to the Aboriginal TEP as a family.

I think what's neat about our program is that we, if we see gifts in our students we try to nurture those...We try to see the gifts of our students and we try to encourage them to share those gifts with the rest of the SUNTEP community...I think that's what we do really good...we really have a keen sense of observation of the gifts of our students. And we don't just watch, we do something about it (laughs). I like that about our program. I think we do a really good job that way and I love that we have that ability to do that. (Le, PP6-7)

From recognizing individual students' spiritual essence, everyone in the family has the opportunity to get to know their place and to encourage gifts in others.

We have a lot of people here that do a lot of different things. We have artists and writers and all kinds of things. And lots of times, especially in the lounge, people

will tend to gather there and that's where you go that's beautiful, oh I wish I could write like you or I wish. We support each other in our things that sometimes we're not very good at yet it's that kind of thing where everybody gets a chance to show their stuff. (D, P6)

Spiritual wellbeing in classroom practices. Opportunities for spiritual wellbeing in the Aboriginal TEP family were also created intentionally in specific classroom practices. Corey expressed creating spiritual wellbeing in the classroom in this manner:

I think belonging in terms of having a healthy environment to be in, it's my job to make sure that everyone feels that they belong and that's just ensuring, make sure that everyone has a voice and they're sharing. With that you're talking about it's important for them to discover who they are, what their stereotypes are, what their strengths are, what their weaknesses are, what their gifts are. And often when we're working with those students it's through story. It's through the opportunity for having that person speak and giving them opportunity to express who they are as human beings. We can help guide that person to where their gifts and their passions are, their spirit. (C, P4)

In terms of other specific classroom practices, Sandy spoke about the importance of inviting opportunities for spiritual wellbeing in this way.

One of the things that I've recognized in the way society is now we're busy, busy, busy and we move so often and that a really important part of wellness and nurturing our spirit is with silence. We really need to give ourselves times of silence and how important it is to do that in the classroom... So we kind of practice that in the classroom, just having, being able to have quiet moments and just go wherever your thoughts can go... Our spirit is who we are and we get to know that there. (S, P3)

The development of spirit in group contexts does not only involve recognizing and nourishing student spiritual wellbeing. Sandy spoke about how she participates in exposing her spiritual essence in classroom practices.

I was going to say there's finding a balance in that spirit as a teacher. Here, to me, I have to let them know who I am on the inside. I have to be willing to take some risks. If I'm asking them to, I can't ask them to share their stories if I'm not going to share mine. So, it's a balance there of where you go with that in terms of the

professional but we have weaknesses and we have strengths and we're on a journey ourselves too. (S, P14)

In the Aboriginal TEP environment, the participants described spiritual wellbeing as a function at the research site in terms of opportunities for spiritual wellbeing, spiritual wellbeing in group contexts, and spiritual wellbeing in classroom practices.

Emotional Wellbeing in the Family

Emotional wellbeing in the Aboriginal TEP family was described by the participants thematically as staff relationships, an open door ideology in action, and student relationships.

Staff relationships. In terms of emotional wellbeing in the family, staff relationships were discussed and acknowledged beginning with the idea that collegiality between staff members evolves over time and reflects a collective process which includes reviewing experiences and determining intended outcomes for the group. In Mike's words:

When I first started working here, I started as a faculty and it was a very good program. There was a high degree of collegiality...the faculty has evolved but what also has happened is it's been a slow process and it's been a group effort...I think this is just good teaching, each year you look back, you reflect as a practitioner and you say what did we do good and what would we want to keep and what are some of the things that maybe we could tweak or fine tune...The program we have today is very, very different than when I started twenty years ago, much more steeped in culture. I think it's a better program but it's not a reflection of the individuals, it's a reflection of the process. It's an evolutionary process that changed subtly and incrementally over time. (M, PP11-12)

The process of growth at the research site may well have been evolutionary, part of a collective group process; however, individuals also remarked invariably that strong collegial capacity emerged from the leadership approach which was taken in the group. In

Corey's words, "from my experience working here, it's you couldn't ask for a better environment, and I think it all starts from our Director, with Mike" (C, P5). One of the consequences of a circular and not hierarchical leadership style is that strong emotional and supportive bonds are established in the group. From the leadership's point of view, Mike expressed that his views and approach stem from a belief that:

My job is to, I sort of run out ahead and remove obstacles so that other people can do their job. And if I do a good job, not that you can always do this, but if I do a good job people won't even really know what you do...I think a lot of it comes down to, and again this comes back to the teachings, leadership is not about ego or shouldn't be about ego, and it shouldn't be about power. It's about service...it relates to the traditional teachings. (M, PP8-9)

This description of attending to outside influences which affect staff and program functions is but one component of Mike's leadership style. He continued to describe his role as:

If there's toilets to be cleaned, you clean toilets. You can't ask anybody to do anything that you wouldn't do and you can't do anything you don't believe in... and the staff have all their own skills and I think that's one of the things, I defer to other people...People kind of find their own way and you use their strengths. (M, P8)

Leah reiterated this idea by saying that, as a staff, they have "a really good understanding. We all have, the staff, it's we all understand that we have strengths and limitations and we all have gifts and a true purpose in life. And we're pretty good at that philosophy" (Le, P8).

With the knowledge of individual strengths and limitations, an understanding of one's role in contributing to the wholeness of the group can be realized. In practice:

We kind of know we could go to each other for certain areas if we needed help in certain areas or assistance, staff to staff...So I don't have to feel like I have to do

it all by myself. And, I think everybody sort of understands that about each other here. (Li, PP10-11)

The recognition of individual strengths provides an opportunity for service in the group and helps to define the wholeness of the group in its' entirety and creates a sense of a team approach:

Everybody, every staff member has a different thing...So I think we have a really good team approach at the center. I think that's really one of the gifts that we have is the ability to work well as a team and then know where we fit in so that you know where the student can get the better support from one of the faculty. We're pretty good that way, we don't try to be everything... We just do whatever we can do to support each other and we have a lot of supports too. (Le, PP6-7)

The nature of this collegial support was also described by Donna as an offering for assistance if need be:

With staff, I try to help them with their work if I can or if they want me to. Some of us have been here a long time and do things pretty quickly and do things themselves cause they know their job very well...when we have some newer staff on I try to help them as much as I can with things that way. (D, PP7-8)

In the Aboriginal TEP family, the participants claimed that emotional wellbeing resulted from collegial relationships which are developed over time as a result of a circular leadership style where strengths and limitations of individuals are known and each person depends upon the other in order to create a supportive team approach. They also spoke about how emotional wellbeing in the family is developed through communication. In order to establish and maintain emotional strength in the family at my research site, as leader of the group, Mike spoke about the reasons for meaningful communications from his perspective in this way:

We've had many good talks and I think that's one of the reasons why this place works. When we're having a staff meeting, I might start over here and say this is what I think. And then it'll go around the table and there will be a variety of views and we give each other the permission to change our opinion. And sometimes

that'll happen where I started out over here and after I listened to everybody and we talked it through, I find I make better decisions when I don't make them in isolation...there has to be that full discussion and I think that does a couple things. Number one, it helps me from my perspective to make better decisions...I think it also empowers the staff...I think it's very frustrating if you're not part of the decision making and life just happens to you...So there's a lot of discussing, a lot of dialogue but it's meaningful, it has to be meaningful. It's not for show, it actually will impact the environment so to speak if that makes sense. So it's not just that communication occurs, it has to be a certain quality of communication. (M, PP9-10)

Corey described the process and emotional impact of being invited into quality types of communication experiences when he said that:

Whenever there's issues to be dealt with, things always are based upon consensus, if an issue comes up, it's talked through. Then everybody, we come to that consensus and then when we leave everybody is comfortable with where that's going or understands why something is happening. I can't even think of an incident where we are being told that this is how it is, there's going to be changes in this program and this is what you're going to do and this is what you're expected to do. There's always a dialogue that takes and a sharing that takes place. So that makes you feel a part of things and that your opinion counts and you feel supported. (C, P5)

Sandy described her experience of staff communication practices in the following text:

You really couldn't work in a more supportive environment. At a staff meeting you can throw out ideas and you can go around in a circle and come out with an opposite idea than you went into that meeting in a trusting way...there's always time to listen. You can talk to anybody anytime whether it's on a personal or a professional level, there's always that support there...I would always feel totally comfortable to be open and honest. (S, PP6-7)

Quality communication which is meaningful was also described as being honest.

Honest communication had value in the group as it provided the avenue for discussions which could confront and then deal with difficult situations in a respectful but straight

forward manner. Honest communication practices were viewed as the way to understand and resolve issues rather than letting them fester. In Mike's words:

I think communication with the students and with your faculty, the people you work with is really, really important. And, not only communication but the quality of that communication. It has to be honest. If you're doing something to piss me off I got to tell you you're doing something to piss me off. I can't let it fester but we do it in a way to resolve it. I'm not saying even the word piss you off but if something is bothering me, I'll let you know and we have to work through it. And the same with the students...it's an open dialogue, I won't use the word confront, but that's kind of what I mean. You have to deal with things, it's how you deal with them that's important. It's open and it's honest and you're being your true self. I never lie even when it's hard. I'm this way and this is the way it is and I don't sugar coat it. This is cause I'm not a good liar, I can't lie and I can't live with myself. So it's honest, number one, this is it and you always try to lead by example. (M, PP8-9)

Donna also valued communications which is honest and confronts for the purpose of leading to resolution of issues.

We're not scared to ask each other something or if you're not happy with someone, if I'm not happy, I'll let you know and I probably wouldn't do that at a different work place but that's where we've come to here...the most important thing about this job for me is the people, the people here. (D, P2)

For Bente, honest communication practices in her workplace gave her a sense that she was:

Supported because we communicate...if something bothers us about another person we won't say oh well, whatever, it doesn't matter. We usually try to talk about it...we talk about issues and stuff which is I think very important in terms of the wellness. To know that your voice is heard, which I think is really important and everybody has a voice, well Mike is a very good coordinator because he believes in equality of voice. Everybody has a voice and he will hear everybody and we will hash things out. (B, PP4-5)

Liza spoke about other emotional benefits which result from honest communication practices in the Aboriginal TEP family:

I guess communication, really good communication between staff members leads to, we do staff sort of get together. We try to get staff not associated to work and get together and just relax, socialize. We also have a lot of laughing which is really good (laughs) because you need to laugh, you need to laugh and we do. (Li, PP5-6)

Liza also attributed emotional wellbeing in her workplace family to extend to her personal family. She talked about valuing being able to be honest about attending to incidental personal family demands. She acknowledged the benefits of flexibility in her workplace and that this dimension of support is based in an honour code of honesty between staff members:

If I were to say a couple things that I would highlight about my job it would be the fact that I work with a really great group of people...when it comes to things like family situations. If your kids get sick cause I have kids, I have two so if my kids get sick or if I have to run and do errands because of hockey or things like that, because of the good communication, because of how we are here, it's that we put in long days here, but at the same time, if I need to I can have those moments where I can go and run those little errands. And it's not a big deal so it's as if I were to work someplace where it was a little bit more regimented in terms of following time lines, I guess you could say or something, I couldn't easily just whip off to the rink to deliver hockey equipment because you know I'd have to work around that. So that's the other thing I appreciate about working here too, the honesty. (Li, P15)

Emotional wellbeing in the family in terms of staff relationships were also described by Mike when he spoke about the feelings that he has towards the people he works with and how this connects to his ideas of leadership:

I think how you approach the concept of leadership, you know, I love these people I work with and I really like the students, they're my friends. The faculty I'm very close with and I enjoy coming to work and I want to keep it that way. So if you love and respect the people you work with, why wouldn't you listen to them? They've got tons of experience. (M, PP9-10)

Emotional support and bonds are also created by specific behaviours and attitudes:

The support, and I don't know if you just saw Sandy there, but us giving each other hugs when we need it because sometimes you're going through a really rough time in your life...It's always good to have a listening ear and she's just kind of instinctively knows so she'll come and ask me if I'm okay. And, so we do that, we keep tabs on each other. If somebody is not okay then there's somebody there to listen to and in terms of our health again it's all tied together. (B, PP4-5)

Emotional support was also described by Corey as having the feeling that he was not alone:

You never feel like you're doing anything alone. If you come to a situation where you're unsure there, anybody here you can go and sit down with and talk and everyone is willing to share their knowledge and experiences with you so you know you feel, you feel supported. (C, P5)

Sandy described her recognition of emotional bonding and support in the group by being able to process issues as they emerge in everyday life:

I try to not carry baggage...we can always go to each other and say this really bad thing is happening and talk about it. This helps to not let it affect who you are when you're here...there's that processing, I can vent. I can always sit down and talk and sometimes it's my own spirit and just being able to tell my story or experience, it really helps. It helps you make meaning of it and have the strength and the courage to deal with things sometimes when it's not always pleasant...to be able to come here and have that support is really, really valuable to me as a person, as a human being and I don't know how I could do it if I didn't have that. (S, PP6-7)

In order to preserve emotional wellbeing in the family, Donna recognized that change happens in any professional community and she expressed her concerns about the nature of staff persons and their affect on the group:

Change is always scary...we're getting some staff that are ready to change and retire and are looking to do things a little differently and sometimes I have to step back and go change can be good, we've done things very good for a very long time...so change, change is good I guess...I've been here for a very long time but I worked for another organization and it wasn't a healthy working place and the relationships were bad. That was very, very stressful. I was surprised on how much that stressed me out because I didn't think it really mattered to me but when I worked in that environment it really did matter to me and how people treat you

and speak to you. So when I came back here I thought oh I'm not going to do that again (laughs)...so in a lot of ways I considered myself spoiled too in that I've been very lucky with healthy working relationships here... We had a staff person who was very unhappy and very unhealthy here and it affected everybody in here, students included, it was like a domino effect... So, it's a lot more than credentials because things can be really hard if, if you're unhappy or some people just have that personality where they're unhappy period. So it's not the work or the students or you it's just that's the way they are and it can be very hard. (D, PP8-10)

Bente spoke about her understanding of the need to preserve the emotional wellbeing and integrity of the Aboriginal TEP family by inviting new participations which support the healthy group philosophy which is already established:

We have so many things in common our staff, our beliefs and what we need are also similar. The way we teach, what we teach, what we value is so similar and I think that should be kept, that's what makes it kind of unique as well in terms of this program... we also look for people who are similar minded when it comes to the terms of hiring, people that believe in the same kind of philosophy. (B, PP5-6)

With these words, Bente connects the values orientations of the staff and how similar values are part of what makes this Aboriginal TEP environment unique. She also claims that this uniqueness should be protected.

Open door ideology in action. Another way to promote emotional wellbeing in the family which was identified by the participants was the practice of consistently maintaining open doors which provides opportunities for interactions to occur between colleagues and with students. Corey spoke about his experience of the open door going back to when he was a student in the Aboriginal TEP:

I felt so supported coming through the program. Without having this program, I don't think that I would have had success... there were times I wasn't sure what I was doing yet. By having the faculty here to sit down and talk to and help me through those low times... I always felt welcome. (C, P15)

When Corey was offered a faculty position on staff at SUNTEP, he felt it was:

Such an honour to be asked...And, I know that coming back how important that is to treat people as human beings and to be there for them...when that student comes through that door they deserve my respect and I give them a hundred percent of my attention for that time and to deal with whatever and then the relationships develop with those students...Yea we're family. (C, PP15-16)

Sandy recognized that having an open door practice in the workplace is an important process. She describes it as “just being good listeners, giving and being there, just sitting down with somebody and asking them how are you doing and do you want to tell me what’s happening and opening the door often for students who aren’t sure” (S, P7).

The open door practice was also viewed as a way to help others to regain balance in their lives.

In terms of supporting students, we have a policy here of having an open door so the students always have access to come in and talk to us about anything. When students are not in balance, see this is tough when they're not in balance, how do I go about dealing with them and helping them? (C, P3)

The open door ideology in practice promotes an opportunity for meaningful awareness of students and their needs. From these deeper understandings, more supportive relationships are able to develop:

So we all have the open door policy and people come in and other people maybe they don't know a side of the student. Then that gives me the opportunity to say hey did you know about that? And they say, well no, because the student never said anything. And then I say well they've confided in me and said it was okay if I talked to you and tell you. So that lends a little different perspective on things... Then you can help them, as long as somebody is there on their side then you can. I think that's a big part of it, they're not just numbers and the students know that. (B, PP4-5)

The open door ideology in action does not just occur in individual offices or in specific conversations. Having an open door policy also involves welcoming students into a way of being that is part of everyday life activities. Leah explained that this promotes

and invites an emotionally supportive environment to develop and exist between students and staff:

We do a lot, it just comes right down to the open door and the welcoming. We eat together, we pray together, we try to have fun together, we try to do those things and we make ourselves available...we make traditional sweats and information and ourselves available. We're always making those opportunities for students. We've started a drumming group, we take women to full moon ceremonies who want to so we try to make those things available to our students as an option. So we have that here and we always leave the door open for that. (Le, PP6-7)

As well, in practice, having an open door ideology promotes individual relationships to develop between specific staff persons and students. There is a freedom of choice in terms of developing relationships which are more interpersonal and these relationships appear to emerge organically in the group:

There is the wellness of the center cause we have an open door policy. So students can come and talk to us at any time and everybody is different so there'll be different people who'll come and talk to me than who'll come talk to Sandy or to Mike or Liza or Leah or even Donna. They [the students], everybody has their own personality I guess and people feel comfortable with different people. (B, PP4-5)

Liza also commented on how the relationships which develop for student support by having an open door ideology in practice emerge and are determined organically:

We're really good at talking to students on a one to one basis. If they are open to come and see us, our doors are always open to students to come and talk to one of us. If they feel more comfortable talking to a certain staff, then the students do that, you'll see students talking to a staff member throughout the time that they're here. And they will talk about anything and everything from school to, to their life at home and it doesn't happen for every student although the door is open for every student. (Li, PP 6-7)

With the overall sense that relationships develop organically within the practice of an open door ideology, students have the opportunity to connect with like mindedness of staff members. Often, that like mindedness is representative of connections with similar

life experiences and common struggles. By allowing the students to engage in their own selection processes in terms of seeking staff support, they are the best judge of getting their needs met in the Aboriginal TEP environment.

Student relationships. As well as practicing an open door ideology at my program site with the intent to establish emotional wellbeing with students, my participants spoke about other understandings which determine the nature of student relationships. One factor which influences student/staff relationships is found in the diversity of the student body:

The students that are here, they're so interesting, you just love all the different dynamics that come in, it's just like wow. You have people coming from the north, northern places to urban city folk, to young, to old, it's so interesting and diverse. (Le, P15)

Another factor which influences the nature of student/staff relationships is the common practice at my research site of encouraging a differential age demographic in the student group:

Even with grandparents, they learn from each other. We do have some right now, and they learn from each other, the young learn from the old. I think that's another thing that probably doesn't occur other places. They feel that they can come here and have that support and be valued, a lot of them come into the program thinking well I'm too old and what do I got to offer. And pretty soon a lot of these young people, I have to give them credit too, they're looking to the older people for advice and help. And listening to them, they're well respected and I think that says a lot too for the diversity. (B, P 19)

Even though all age groups are encouraged to participate at my research site, Leah explained that the general age of the student body is getting younger:

There's a major gap now and we're seeing a lot right out of high school. We never have that before, the first year, it's like oh my God almost half of them are from high school, direct entry. We're used to having at least half of them over thirty five and it's not happening anymore, under twenty now so we've had a new

demographic shift just recently. But we're still getting the mature students, but not in the levels we were so obviously used to, that's interesting. (Le, PP10-11)

Having a younger group in terms of the overall student body has ramifications on the ways that emotional support and relationships are developed. Donna explained that with younger students it often takes a longer amount of time to establish more mature types of adult relationships:

I don't have the close relationship with students that I used to have but I think it's our age difference now. Our students are very young now where something that wasn't so, the gap is getting bigger. I'm feeling older and I do think I have a good relationship with students but I find that because of that gap where it used to be more, I'm treated more like a staff person by them. There seems, they're a little bit leery about me and I notice that with other staff. But it's the age, it's a lot of high school mentality like I'm going to give heck if they're doing something wrong. But that's just the age difference I think. It's our students are changing what a SUNTEP student was and what a SUNTEP student is now is a lot different. (D, P3)

But, whether or not a student is younger or older, all students are invited to be part of the Aboriginal TEP family, and their extended families are welcome too. One of the ways that extended family becomes part of the Aboriginal TEP environment is to respond to needs for infants and children to be on site for specific reasons:

In terms of support and wellness because when you don't have to worry about a sitter, it helps. Students know that if their kids don't have school and they have them in daycare, or if they're sick they can bring their kids here and they put on a movie for them while they're in class. Or if they're babies, nursing mothers will bring their babies as long as they're not disruptive and they're usually not. So the students don't seem to mind so that's another way that we consider ourselves family but it's another way of supporting our students...that's all a part of life, this stuff happens but good grief you can't punish the students for that. (B, P18)

As well as providing immediate support for specific needs of students' families,

Donna described the common practice of how:

Our babies go up on the white board when they're born and then they're usually here within the next two or three days for the first few classes. They're usually

here for a while and then we will get the odd one after they're a little bit older. We don't invite as a common practice but if there's something happening it's fine, it usually works out. (D, P7)

As well, Donna described the process of establishing and maintaining emotional wellbeing and relationships with students by:

Having conversations which are different. You have students that I can have those relaxed sort of conversations with and some of them I feel they're not comfortable with it. I can tell that they feel awkward if I try to have those conversations. Sort of why is she asking me these questions, what does she want you know? So I just sort of let it evolve itself and then sooner or later they realize that it's not a big deal, I'm just helping. (D, PP4-5)

Donna also connected the evolution of relationships and establishing emotional support by describing this as being a part of her role in the workplace:

Sometimes I feel like the students are sort of practicing on me too...I sort of feel like the practice person sometimes but that's okay, I don't mind it, supporting them students. Just supporting people I guess, listening to people, trying to help people, not only physically here. Helping doing things for people but, but just being there when people need you just to talk to you or yea I find mostly just people need someone to talk to sometimes. And we do a lot of that here, a lot of that just supporting them. (D, PP5-6)

In terms of student relationships, the participants also described experiences with student and individual willingness to pursue self knowledge by accessing the emotional support system available to them in the Aboriginal TEP or not. Emotionally supportive student relationships appear to depend significantly on student recognition and initiation of help for personal issues even when staff members recognize an area of wellbeing that is negatively affecting individual student performance:

What's interesting to me is that we're really good at overall looking at our students in terms of the academics or the cognitive part of the program...but when it comes to the other domains, we have really no mechanism or no set means of addressing those areas if we see that it's greatly affecting how they're doing because it is only if they come to us...If somebody has an area that's very outwardly affecting their being first of all but also then affecting how they could

be as a teacher other than their cognitive, it's not our, I don't know, maybe it's because we don't really think it's our place or maybe it's never really been thought of in terms of teaching or teacher education programs. (Li, PP6-7)

Mike spoke extensively about the issue of supporting students' emotional development and their individual choice to do so in the context of the human journey to wellness that we are all a part of:

It's the human journey. How we support students is the same, it's about allowing people to discover who they are and become the best. It's a process of becoming, trying to become the best human being you can possibly become and what gets in our way are our blind spots...when you're not aware of it, you have that total blind spot. That's when you get into trouble whether you're a student or a faculty person. So I can't teach and nobody can teach me that, I can't teach anybody else that but hopefully they'll learn that though sometimes they will, sometimes they won't by what happens in life. (M, P6)

Blind spots, or lack of self-knowledge, can be frustrating when trying to establish supportive student relationships, especially when issues are pointed out to students and they cannot or will not acknowledge the problematic and deal with the issue. These students are most troublesome and Mike talked about how difficult it is to find ways to support them:

It's frustrating, what's so obvious on the outside...I think the people that we really have the most trouble with and the people that we are not equipped, I don't think anybody is equipped to deal with, are those that are stuck in the victim role, those who won't take ownership, everything is always somebody else's fault. And they're being picked on, persecuted and those are the ones typically that I have to throw out. They either have to go somewhere else and figure it out and come back because they're going to be, they're no good to the community, they're no good, they're not going to be any good to children, they'll just be a cancer on the staff and that's just the way it is. (M, PP6-8)

When dealing with students who are reluctant to mature emotionally by taking self responsibility and advantage of the support systems and staff available to them in the Aboriginal TEP, Bente described how, at times, the position a student takes may need to be challenged. Any or every student attitude is not necessarily accepted:

Students need to have a voice too so that's what it does, it gives them a voice. And sometimes we'll say okay come on, if it's coming from left field or one or two we'll say come on you got to just suck it up sometimes. (B, P6)

The participants also discussed the significance of emotional support in student relationships and how this pertains to student academic success. Emotional support was described within the context of systemic support mechanisms and without these initiatives in a learning environment, student success can be compromised:

What ends up happening for a lot of the Aboriginal people is that they don't graduate and those types of things, cause they don't feel supported. The system is set up in such a way that they feel alone, they don't feel supported when they do go through a difficult time...So here what we're trying to do is doing a little bit of the healing, we want to bring them in, make them feel part of a group, being part of the family, that you're loved, that you're cared for. (C, PP10-11)

As well as providing emotional support which enhances academic and professional success for students, emotional wellbeing in the Aboriginal TEP family includes responding to very difficult issues which happen in the lives of students. The need for strong emotional support is also recognized as valuable for students when they are forced to deal with deeply personal issues:

An extreme example of that and this is so sad, but one of our students' husband just committed suicide. I thought, my goodness, if that was me probably I wouldn't be back. But I think for her it's because she has the support here of the students and of us. This is kind of her safe haven, she's coming back next week and I'm thinking oh my goodness she's so brave. But part of it is I think because this is her, her sense of belonging and her safety net for her, she can go on as a student. (B, P5)

Establishing and maintaining emotional support networks and relationships does not just happen between staff and students. Liza explained that within the program, intentionally there are initiatives which promote ways for students to be emotionally supportive of each other by purposefully establishing different types of peer relationships:

As a group, we try to get some of the support happening between the students... We try to do that for the students and we also have them work in clan groups... Clan groups are just arbitrary, it's just somebody sits down at the computer and says okay we need so many people per group and we get all the students divided up. So you'll have so many fourth years per group, so many third years, so many second years, so many first years and it works quite well...students mingle with one another and have a cross kind of year, relationship with other students and to further their associations with other students for help, for assistance, for ideas, for support and things like that. (Li, PP10-11)

At the research site, emotional wellbeing in the Aboriginal TEP family was described with substantive data in terms of staff relationships, an open door ideology in action, and student relationships.

Physical Wellbeing in the Family

Physical wellbeing in the Aboriginal TEP family was described in terms of initiatives which promote physical activity, the overall importance of physical wellbeing, and how physical activity programming develops teacher skills.

Initiatives which promote physical activity. In our conversations, the participants identified several initiatives which promote physical activity and provide opportunities to develop different types of skills and abilities.

We have a few people here that are interested in sort of trying to up the physical activity around here which is nice. We have Cory who heads up the SUNTEP's biggest loser and then Bente is really active and everybody supports it. So when you have a lot of people that are really working on getting more physical activity happening. (Li, P5)

Leah expressed the same sentiment and added that the physical activity programming is a way to have fun and address certain issues within the Aboriginal TEP:

We do take a lot of action, we support and we try to have fun. Like Corey is doing the biggest loser competition cause we have a real obesity problem in our program ...So we're just trying together to have some fun, we have a problem, a collective weight problem here so let's have some fun and have a biggest loser competition

and make it fun and non-competitive but more personal growth and just fun and supportive. (Le, PP6-7)

Having fun and being supportive also invites humour into the Aboriginal TEP environment. Humour is described as having healing qualities:

There's so many things that we can do to help ourselves be well to...Like humour is just an amazing healing...there's humour around here all the time and I think as Aboriginal people that has sustained us over the centuries, that has kept us alive, kept us going because we do have a crazy staff too, I mean humour wise. And the students love the humour and the students are humorous, they know they can laugh and they're always laughing. And I think that's such a healing thing the laughter... We do have gigglers or people who you kind of just have to look at them and they'll start laughing and they get everybody going. So if anybody wants a laugh you just got to look at two or three people and they get things going. And yea, that's awesome. The sense of humour and it's such a healing thing. (B, PP8-9)

Humour and laughter allows for a lightness of spirit by knowing that "We don't have to take things so seriously. Like, its' just like, yea, it would be very, very sad if there was no laughter" (Li, P16).

The overall importance of physical wellbeing. One of the perspectives which Bente spoke about is the relationship between physical wellbeing and all other aspects of the self. Intertwined with different descriptions of varied program initiatives of a physical nature, she explains her understanding of the need for physical wellbeing and how it adds to strength in all other aspects of a person's self:

Leah does yoga classes...the SRC [student council] is really good too in terms of offering the opportunity for physical activities. So they will do things like bowling nights or things like offer students whatever they want to do and all they have to do is request it and they'll set it up...So you want to be strong physically and mentally and spiritually and emotionally as you can...Then there's one of our students too [name] who has a running group and stuff like that. So, the students are very good about realizing that the physical is so much a part of being healthy

overall and that helps their mental wellbeing and their emotional state and their spiritual state as well. So all of those things I think in terms of wellness it's some of the things we do around here. (B, PP2-3)

The importance of physical activity as it pertains to overall wellbeing was also described to be part of instructional aspects of certain course offerings:

The health class gets the students into looking at a more active kind of lifestyle, looking at what kinds of foods they eat and put into their bodies because that affects their wellbeing as well...They really take a look at that and then I guess in terms of wellness I do too. I just finished having here some of my mint tea and Labrador tea. So we look at some of the plants and their uses and I teach that in the science class but I mean anybody is welcome to have anytime to have any, I've got a whole container full of, a big pail full of stuff that I collect. (B, PP2-3)

Physical activity programming develops teacher skills. Physical activity programming at the research site was also stated to be important as it provides students with an opportunity to develop teacher skills. Bente spoke about how physical program initiatives developed certain skills in the students and they then offered and shared these skills in school settings:

The other thing is the singing and the dancing that are just so healing... We show them how to do dancing but they do workshops too and a class... And so we're going to be doing some dancing and some things that they can take to the schools and show the students from grade one to onwards... they're always going out to do workshops, requests are always coming from the schools... So, doing dancing workshops and bannock making food (laughs) and singing and Liza and Leah are awesome singers and they have some of the students involved in a women's singing group and drumming group. (B, PP8-9)

Another aspect of physical activity programming which develops teacher skills was described by promoting drama and storytelling types of activities which would then be offered as events and presentations in schools:

The other thing that we do here is our drama. An important part of it, storytelling, is a really important part of it. The drama doesn't only occur in the drama class, it occurs in also many other classes with the storytelling and the stories and the

improve. We do a lot of that...we then go out to the schools to do presentations. (B, PP17-18)

Physical activity programming and wellness initiatives were viewed as very beneficial to all but Corey expressed that such continued activity can be difficult at times when trying to balance other life commitments:

When the students get together and they have bowling night, do we go? Yea we go. They put on a steak night for some fundraising and stuff like that, you go, and sometimes do I feel like it? I got home and I was like okay, I'm done for the day, I could do this but no I feel that responsibility in working here. I'm not going to get paid any extra, maybe people are not even going to know, it doesn't matter but I feel, I feel that it's my responsibility to my students that I'm supporting them in what they're doing outside of just my three hours in the classroom. It's important for me to go and do those things. (C, P19)

At the research site, physical wellbeing in the Aboriginal TEP family was described by the participants as initiatives which promote physical activity, the overall importance of physical wellbeing, and how physical activity programming develops teacher skills.

Intellectual Wellbeing in the Family

Intellectual wellbeing in the Aboriginal TEP family was described in terms of teaching from an Aboriginal perspective and having high expectations of students within the context understanding individual situations.

Teaching from an Aboriginal perspective. As a way to develop intellectual wellbeing in the family, my participants described teaching from an Aboriginal perspective to be an extremely important aspect of knowledge development. This meant teaching Aboriginal content or knowledge and processes which they inherently adhered to in their everyday professional practice. Teaching from an Aboriginal perspective involves

the fundamental philosophical perspective that Western knowledge is incorporated into Aboriginal knowledge:

The one class, the science methods class, is the class that is really quite unique in terms of teaching from, how do I put this, teaching from an Aboriginal perspective. Not incorporating traditional knowledge into the Western knowledge, Western scientific knowledge, it's actually looking at how we can incorporate Western science into traditional knowledge. It's kind of the other way around. (B, P7)

Leah described teaching from an Aboriginal perspective to mean that she uses:

A holistic approach...I use whole brain learning techniques...theory on just how to engage the whole brain because we're so narrow in how we use our mind in only a few certain skill sets when it can offer us so much more. And I really love it because I just see the students benefiting and really growing from the holistic learning that I've incorporated...Whatever I can bring in to help the young students get that connection with self and deeper levels of self and then get into that zone where learning is open and balanced...I also am a big advocate of the healing arts. (Le, PP3-4)

Leah also identified an outcome of holistic teaching and learning practices:

I love the holistic approach cause we're developing an emotional vocabulary now that schools have never dealt with, emotional expression or having an emotional vocabulary and using it to help our students connect with their feelings and emotions. So it's really interesting to be in that time period where learning is starting to go holistic and it's becoming not so much the fringe anymore... Holistic learning is so connected to Indigenous ways of learning that it works for me. So I think the two worlds, the mainstream world under holistic learning is meeting the Aboriginal philosophy world view and thought and coming together in a nice way. (Le, PP3-4)

In his description of teaching and learning, Corey combined both the notion of storytelling and holistic learning when he talked about his own practice of teaching from an Aboriginal perspective:

Storytelling is where I'm starting and getting them to look at themselves as a human being and when they start to come to an understanding of who they are as a person, then they can start to see what type of teacher they're going to be. (C, PP3-4)

Sandy shared a similar point of view and talks about storytelling as giving an opportunity to have a voice and from that practice in the classroom, safety, trust and one's spirit has the chance to emerge and be witnessed by others:

I think that it is so important to give people a voice because we always have more dominant personalities or people that are really quiet but you always think they have something to say. So how are you going to provide them with that moment to say it (laughs) to have their voice and to tell their story? I think as a teacher it's my role to develop that safety in your classroom. You have to develop the trust so relationships become so important and until you have that, those relationships, then you can't have those conversations where that spirit can come forward. Cause it's a risk, can be risky business for students and I think it's really important that we practice that as professionals and with pre-service teachers. It's so they can be comfortable and they learn if I hate to call it a method but I mean we have to work at it to be able to practice good listening. I always think of people I know in my life who take your voice away you and sometimes people take your voice by just making an adamant statement. So if somebody, it's not an argument but because of the way they say it to give your feelings or opinions would be like you were arguing, like to disagree. So there's a way of bringing forth your perspectives that doesn't shut down other people's ideas. It's something you have to be conscious of so I think talking about those things as teachers are really important to have that awareness of how do we give everybody a voice and how do you bring their voice forward and their stories forward and what do we learn from stories? It's interesting when you said we're not wasting time with silence. We're not wasting time with storytelling. (S, P4)

From Sandy's words, trust is a foundational element which is needed in order to build safe and supportive relationships. As teachers and teachers in training, the practices of good listening skills and silence are both rewarding and valuable skills which are developed from allowing and inviting storytelling in the classroom.

Bente also described storytelling as a fundamental way to teach from an Aboriginal perspective and this includes incorporating Aboriginal Elders and their knowledge in the classroom:

I would have to say that I do teach from stories, especially my science methods class and I do teach from very much a traditional environmental knowledge perspective. Mine probably is more on the plants and the medicines and the teachings. We all do the teaching and we bring in a lot of Elders too, a lot of Elders which we feel is important. They're not only at our culture camps but they're here throughout as well. So we bring them in and we use examples and they're teachings but I, and a lot of us do use stories as well. so I always use stories and I start with stories and we do a lot of stories. (B, P7)

Teaching from an Aboriginal perspective was also identified as promoting learning experiences which utilize natural environments. The natural world was described as an important place to connect and be immersed in knowledge which is available from interactions which are real and tangible:

I use the environment and nature a lot...I take them outside for three days for a culture camp and I teach science from the environment. They're immersed in it and I think that's so important to connect and re-connect, you can talk about it all you want but unless you're actually doing it, I don't think it makes as much difference. And we're very fortunate and that comes in with the support. We're fortunate we have the opportunity that we can do that, that I can do that, that I have the support to do that...I think that's really important we can talk about it all we want but we have to do it. (B, P7)

Another matter of importance which was identified by the participants in keeping with the idea of teaching from an Aboriginal perspective with the intention to promote intellectual wellbeing was to seriously consider the nature of the learning environment for students. Corey spoke adamantly about needing to create an environment which is cooperative rather than competitive in nature. He viewed competitiveness as destructive to individuals and the family unit and he explained why he actively promotes a more cooperative learning environment:

That competitive environment, it's like society, the messages that you get from society is that you're number one and you look out for yourself, you're competing. In order for you to succeed, you have to be better than other people and I think that environment is destructive to support and caring for one another. That competitiveness...and trying to outdo one another, when that happens, there's a

breakdown...it takes away from that group cause in a family, even though you can be still competitive with one another, it's a friendly competitiveness, a brotherly or sisterly competitiveness. In the big picture of things what's really important, you're cheering for that person to do well. It's important that everyone is working together. A big part of it is I never felt like I was on my own here and when I had a weak day, it didn't matter because I was going to get dragged along with all the rest of my family. I wasn't going to be left behind you know. (C, PP16-17)

Corey also talked about removing competitiveness with the alternative idea of trying to be the best you can be as a person and as a student and further to recognize what this means in the process of becoming a teacher. He also spoke about his understanding of his role in terms of modeling as the teacher in a non-competitive environment:

I think in the classroom what I try to do in terms of supporting the group as a whole is to do away with the competitive environment and as much as possible try to get us to work together as a team. It's not me, myself as the instructor against the student. I'm there working with them to accomplish their goals...for some students, they almost see their value as a human being through a mark and it's something that we have to kind of deal with and get them to see a bigger picture of why they're here. It's not necessarily to get the best mark possible, it's to become the best human being possible and the best teacher that they possibly can be. (C, P3)

Another perspective which was valued by the participants was the idea that teaching and learning in a non-competitive environment recognizes:

Relationships, that's what was important. Me, the instructor and all of you the students, we are covering this content. It's not me, you're not just learning from me. No, I'm leaning just as much from you if not more and so we're doing this together. So I learn to become a facilitator and my role is to be there to help. (C, PP17-18)

Sandy also spoke about teaching and learning relationships in a non-competitive environment when she described providing feedback to students which helps to develop knowledge in ways that are constructive:

When it comes just down to the skills or things that they can change to develop as a teacher is to say, is to compare it to coaching. So if I was coaching you and you

were swimming I'd say well if you would stretch your arm just a little bit that way and bent it and pulled this way then you'd go a little faster...if I said those things and it doesn't hurt your feelings, it's just something that could be helpful...you're there as a supportive help to them. (S, PP5-6)

High expectations and individual situations. Developing intellectual wellbeing in the family is not simply a matter of teaching from an Aboriginal perspective and developing academic skills and prowess. When considering other factors which contribute to the development of and capacity for academic success, Mike talked about the need to balance support with the need for high expectations of students:

Well, it's a paradox because there is a balance between support and expectations. I believe that you have to have high expectations for people cause people will live up to your expectations or down to them. So when we bring in the students we say these are the expectations. We expect you to be here ninety percent of the time, we expect you to get your assignments in on time, and we expect your average to be above sixty. We expect you to go to the Friday lunches, we expect you to go to cultural camps, and we expect you to go teach in the North. We expect you to be kind, we expect you to be professional and all those things. When you're out in the field you cannot be late and we talk about why and a lot of its linked to racism, breaking stereotypes and those sorts of things. And the fact that they are funded to be here by their bands or we pay their tuition, so we're making a fairly large investment, our community is making a large investment. So, we have high expectations and if you choose not to live up to those expectations, you have to go somewhere else. Not in a mean way but it comes down to choices. (M, P3)

These expectations, however, do not exist in a vacuum and in order to assist in helping any need which is identified by a student, the student must be committed. With commitment, support for a multitude of needs can be provided in the Aboriginal TEP environment. Without a commitment, the student will most likely be unsuccessful and unable to complete the requirements of the program and they will be advised to go elsewhere:

There's the flip side. So we have expectations but there's the flip side and the flip side is, it sort of reminds me of the saying it's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog. So if this is what you want to do in your life and you are committed to do this, all the people here will bend over backwards to help you. We have an open door policy, you can talk to any of us at any time...so it starts with the individual, it starts with you have to be committed to this. You have to arrange your life in such a way that you are able to be here in body and in mind then you have to invest. You will get out of this process what you put into it and if you are committed to it, you will have all the support that we can possibly give you. But, at the same time, if you choose not to, if this is not where you want to be then you need to go somewhere...it comes down to are you committed to the process because you can't make anybody learn and you can't save anybody. So it comes back to the individual and it comes back to is this what you want to do with your life cause it takes a lot of, nothing comes easy, nothing worthwhile comes easy, it's all about sacrifice. It comes back to that idea of discipline and it comes back to this idea of support, not just academic support here. (M, PP3-4)

One example of having high expectations and support mechanisms in place for students to achieve goals is the opportunity in the Aboriginal TEP environment to upgrade academic English and Math skills. With a commitment, students can access these programs and this enhances their ability to succeed academically:

We offer the students other kinds of support out of their classroom time too like our labs for math at the beginning of the year or we do have the English ninety nine class which is a yearlong class. I think this is very important because in those classes they get a lot of support their first year for surviving as or succeeding as a SUNTEP or a University student. I think that's very key, we need these classes. (Li, PP10-11)

As well as providing specific academic skill types of development and support opportunities, there are other supports required which greatly affect a students' ability to be academically successful in an Aboriginal TEP. In this regard, Mike spoke about the influence of external personal relationships and particularly about relationships between men and women and how this can affect a students' ability to learn and be successful:

For women, the men in their lives, as the women begin their education they can see life changing and the men they get tremendously threatened and so many

times relationships will implode...and we have the men who come here, same thing...It's very complicated so most of our students that we lost it's not because there's not the support here, it's because life quite often will get them and we can't do anything about that I guess...So it's sort of like again the metaphor of the door. If they're willing to grapple with the door, we can stand on the side line and cheer them on and that sort of thing, provide things to help them, but it's all about self. (M, P4)

Another factor which has the potential to disrupt intellectual wellbeing was described by Sandy as stress in student lives and dealing with stressful situations requires understanding individual situations:

Students have a lot of stress in their lives. In terms of single parents and relationships and juggling everything they have going on in their life, I think being flexible means we have a really high standard, high expectations of our students and that is important. It's important to them and it's important to our program but I think you always still have to take it down to individual situations. So, it's like one size doesn't fit all and yes we have attendance reviews but we have to always be human. We give students the opportunity to make things right, it's never just hard and fast and if they need counselling or whatever kind of supportive services they might need, we work with that. (S, P7)

However, developing intellectually and achieving success for various reasons might not be possible for some students at certain times:

For some students, we come to realize that it just isn't the right time in terms of their own wellness. So why set them up for failure and how in a positive way do you move on from that? Sometimes students get stuck in the idea, I have to get through this in four years and I want to graduate with my group and it doesn't matter that I'm working and I'm pregnant and I'm this and that, my goodness. Hey, the turtle wins the race kind of thing (laughs). It's a choice you make when you choose to lengthen your program. Then you know you're making a good choice, it doesn't have anything to do with failure. You're always basing life on choices and what's the best path for you right now. Maybe you need to take a break from your schooling and get well again and come back when you're stronger. (S, P8)

At the research site, intellectual wellbeing in the Aboriginal TEP family was described in terms of teaching from an Aboriginal perspective and having high expectations of students within the context understanding individual situations.

Wellness and Support in Relationships with Community

The participants in the study at the research site also contributed to the research data by speaking about wellness and support in relationships with the community. This relational discussion was described as building the cultural community, building community in an institutional setting, and building a community of professional educators.

Building the Cultural Community

Wellness and support in relationships with community begin with a commitment at the Aboriginal TEP site to provide students with an opportunity to develop both as an Aboriginal person and as a teacher. From participants at my research site there was discussion about the idea that anyone can be taught the skills necessary to practice as an educator but the philosophy in their program is much deeper:

I think you could put somebody out in the classroom and they could learn the skills, take any apt intelligent person and they could eventually learn the skills to teach and there's lots of theory. But, I think the work we are doing and really working on is that whole wellness cause teaching comes from deep inside...that's our major role with them. (S, P11)

Bente supported this idea and described a similar philosophical perspective which recognizes the idea that in coming to know the self as a person, then one will come to know the self as a teacher:

We are, well nourishing the self, that's what we tell the students when they start, you have to start from who you are and who you are as a person is who you are as a teacher. And you need to figure out who you are and what you need and so we do a lot in terms of acknowledging their gifts. That's something that I think maybe that doesn't happen in mainstream education programs. Identity, valuing who they are and their important gifts and their experiences are important...I have to acknowledge that and I think a lot of it is our philosophy and what we believe in, that's what we believe. They are important and so if they felt important here for four years hopefully that's enough for them to go out and say okay I value each and every one of my students in the classroom for who they are and for their experiences. (B, PP12-13)

In the Aboriginal TEP environment, Sandy speaks further to this philosophy by describing the importance of having the opportunity an ability to know the self as a human being and what that means as a teacher:

As humans, we need a sense of hope and we need to belong. So if you aren't taking care of those things in the classroom, then to me, you would be doing a lot of damage. It's just so human to be asking the questions like what's my purpose, why am I here, those really important questions and as teachers we can't walk away from them. We have to let them explore those questions and those meanings and not that we have the answers but we let them tell the stories of their experiences and share their experiences and try to make their own meanings from that. (S, PP11-12)

In order to explore the self, Leah described encouraging and developing Aboriginal identity with the students in the program and the importance of providing this opportunity in the context of assimilative processes and expectations in society:

I love that culture is a priority with us. I think that's one of the gifts that we can give, some of these kids now don't even know what Métis is, what Métis culture is and we're their only link to their Métis culture. So many have been through generations of assimilation so here's where they finally get to belong and they get to express who they are and learn for the first time for some of them who they are and what it means to be a Métis person. And we offer them that gift and that's really nice. They see other Métis self identifying and it's just absolutely wonderful. So that helps with the concept of support and how we currently practice it. (Le, P12)

By offering the opportunity to develop an Aboriginal identity in connection with developing an identity as a teacher, Bente spoke about how this priority helps to heal deep hurts and woundedness in people and it teaches respect for self and others:

When students first come, because so many of them come in already so hurt through schooling, if we continue to do that it would not heal them. It also prevents that sort of bullying because if you have respect for who you are, you will respect all other people. (B, PP12-13)

For Sandy, developing an identity as an Aboriginal person not only stops cycles of wounding spirits, it provides fertile ground for modeling a positive change in mainstream schools:

In terms of violence, we all have wounded spirits. In our schools we're working with those children that they're missing that sense of belonging or having hope and knowing what their future might be. We're not going to get there by doing more math and doing more of what didn't work in the first place (laughs). What works is having high expectations and the support that you need to help them get there. So if we can model and be and work on those things in teacher preparation and take that to the classroom, we'll be okay...I won't hurt them, their spirits and that's, to me, it was like don't hurt them. (S, PP11-12)

Mike also spoke about providing opportunities for Aboriginal identity development as well as development of a teacher identity. He claimed that this dual kind of identity development is transformational in terms of personal development and it has ramifications for students long after they graduate and become a teacher. Mike also explained that even though participation in developing a cultural identity is provided in the Aboriginal TEP environment, it is also totally an individual choice to do so:

Many people, so many of our students especially Métis, are so disconnected from their community. So we have to do two things, we have to really, really focus on community cause we do a lot of things as a community and we also re-connect to culture... They'll catch the fever so to speak and they'll continue that long after

they graduate. It changes the way they view the world and it can be really transformative. But at the same time, the teachings, you can't and it's not meant to be indoctrinating. It's just an invitation and nobody is coerced or forced into any of that so again it comes back to freedom and it comes back to self. (M, P5)

Building a cultural community requires participation and involvement of

Aboriginal Elders. Leah described her desire to have a more permanent role for Elders in the program:

I just wish we could bring in more Elders. We used to have Elders hired and part of the center, they would come in, they would have an office and stuff. They could counsel and do stuff and since I've been here they haven't had Elders on staff. I really, that's one thing I think that I'd love to see reawakened. I don't know if it was budget or what not but I just think it would be really nice to see that aspect again to connect the community. (Le, PP8-9)

Liza reiterated the point made by Leah and added:

The thing that we've done in our program is then incorporate Elders for sure at our camps which happen twice a year but they're very short amount of times. They're only two to three days long and then we'll have Elders or people sort of like that nature of apprenticing Elders will come into the program to certain classes to do presentations. Then we also have the cultural committee here. So we try to at least have Elders or specific healthy resource people that come in to do certain things many times, but not on a day to day basis. (Li, P8)

Liza also suggested a solution to their situation when she commented that:

It would be really nice if we had it built in as a part of the mandate where you actually have a Métis Elder in resident or whatever it is but have somebody there that can be there in that capacity, and get paid for that job. I'm sure that there's a lot of these Elders too, you hear about they get so busy cause they're getting called to all kinds of different places. They're going here and there but I think some of those Elders would be happy to just stay stationary in one place as long as they're getting paid a decent wage cause they can't live off of a two days a month presentation, so they have to work different places. (Li, P8)

Aboriginal Elder participation was viewed as having fundamental value at the research site for staff and students as well as for the sharing of cultural and informational knowledge. Just being around Elders was important to Liza:

A lot of the times we're busy talking to the Elders cause we want to talk to them not necessarily about anything in particular or one on one. But, just talk to them and be around them because they are of that kind of nature of a person where you just want to be around them, you want to hear their stories and you want to hear whatever it is they have to share with you...And, the whole spiritual part of it too. (Li, P9)

Aboriginal Elder participation is also of significant value for students. From

Liza's point of view:

A lot of our students that go through the program they're just learning about smudging for example and quite often will hear students say what is that smell? Then the usual silly remarks, is somebody smoking pot and then they're just like (laughing) what is that? You just kind of laugh because you hear it all the time from somebody new that doesn't know what it is. So Elders offer to whoever wanted to learn about it and most of the people here on staff would more than likely know enough about it but some of the students they might not really necessarily want to ask a staff member. They might prefer to ask an Elder. (Li, PP9-10)

Aboriginal Elders are keepers of Aboriginal ways of knowing and ways of being that they can share with others.

Elders are gifted in a certain areas and they have been sort of openly recognized in some way for having that gift, whatever that gift might be...In terms of recognizing and remembering the whole area of Aboriginal content and how are you going to implement that, how are you going to put it into what you're teaching, how are you going to address that, I think with an Elder around sometimes Elders have a much more, I want to say perfunct and I don't even know if that's a word, it's like they'll just say it and it's straight out. The way it is it sounds really wonderful, there's no hoopla to it, it's just the truth and they have a way of relaying that information. (Li, PP9-10)

Leah added one more idea about ways to improve cultural opportunities and connections with Aboriginal Elders in the program specifically in terms of professional development opportunities and benefits which can accrue for the Aboriginal TEP:

I would like a little deeper level from the institution to commit to, I'd really like to see professional development where we could go on fasts and sundances...with professional development, I have more deeper levels of learning by attending extended ceremonies than when I go and take in a six month University class.

That helps me more here so I can be better here...I think we really have to change our notion of what professional development is here, not white professional development but our way of professional development. (Le, P5)

Building Community in an Institutional Setting

In terms of discussion about place in relationship to the larger institutional authority of the University of Saskatchewan, my participants did not comment on this relationship other than to recognize that the Aboriginal TEPs is a unique entity. “What makes SUNTEP special is the sense too that we are kind of a bit on an island and when things come down we’re able to adapt with things coming down from the University” (C, P5). The participants did, however, identify different types of support that they felt if further developed, these supports would help to build the Aboriginal TEP as a community within the larger institutional context. Leah identified one type of support as financial:

I wish we had more financial support. I really see that all the students work and they’re always trying to make ends meet and I understand that but I just wish we had a little bit more financial support for some of our students like even better scholarships or something. (Le, PP6-7)

In terms of financial issues, Leah also recognized that their Aboriginal TEP environment does provide assistance in terms of financial support by taking care of certain required administrative processes for student loans purposes:

It’s just mainly student loans, we sign student loan papers and stuff like that. They don’t have to go elsewhere, Mike and Bente and I think Corey sign for that. So we don’t have them running all over to strangers. They can deal with us so we’ve built in some things to make their University smooth administrative wise so they’re not having to call some stranger in Saskatoon. (Le, PP6-7)

Another support function which was identified as a possible institutional offering concerns developing childcare initiatives:

In order to connect the community and I think for growth and well being, I think that child daycare on site would be my dream because if you're going to heal you have to have wonderful early childhood daycare for these students so when they're in class their heads aren't elsewhere with their little kids...I see a lot of these young mothers, they're coming to school and they don't have the support and so in their heads they have a hard time focusing on their studies because they're worried about their kids. And I think if we really want to go holistic then we could have an early childhood program. (Le, PP8-9)

Another support function which is not necessarily connected to education institutional responsibilities, but more with political and community supports considers the issue of housing for students. Leah referred to:

A story I heard about NORTEP. They bought up a whole bunch of apartments because of their housing crisis for the students. I was like YES! And then I was like why can't we do that cause our students are always getting stressed out and booted out and moved around. It would be so nice to have a GDI, the Métis housing invest in a complex just for students...I'd like a student thing that you could go to for four years and even have a daycare center there where kids could go after school. That's my dream. I always feel housing is huge, really huge. (Le, PP9-10)

Respectfully, Leah offered her comments not as a criticism but rather as an articulation of considerations for positive change and directions for growth at their program site:

I see that SUNTEP really has a huge impact. The Métis students who are here though, wow, their commitment is unbelievable...We have high expectations and we'll do what we can but those are the four areas [Elders, finance, childcare and housing] that I think are really the areas I see where we could improve from what we're already doing well. And, that's all a person wants to see is things get better, if they don't change for the better, I just don't think it's a good thing. So it'd be neat to see where the program continues to grow or how it's going to change. (Le, P12)

Building a Community of Professional Educators

In terms of wellness and support in relationship with community, my participants also spoke about how, during the process of their teacher preparation program, students

came to realize the importance of balance and wellbeing as a teacher as they become representatives of the Aboriginal TEP and of Aboriginal people in general:

One thing I'm discovering with students is that they're starting to realize the importance of balancing those parts of our wellness, they're realizing how much a teacher actually has to do... They start to realize the career of teaching is wonderful yes but you need to be organized, planned about it and you need to have certain skills, balanced... so that it keeps their life flowing well. (Li, PP13-14)

Hence, the need to be stringent about high standards as graduates of Aboriginal TEPs reflect their place of study in professional and public life:

With SUNTEP and I'm sure ITEP, we're held up to higher standard than other places and organizations. It's like our students have a way they're supposed to behave out there that I don't think other students are held to the same. So we always have that, you can't or don't do that when you're in school because it always reflects so badly on us. So when they're down, when they're not doing well personally chances are they're not going to do well out there. And even though you care it, it's you care about them but they're still out there representing SUNTEP. So sometimes that makes it hard because you have to be a little harder and go maybe he shouldn't be out there, which probably seems unfair to them, but it's like wow we have to think of future students and the school divisions. We're always held accountable for everything our students do. Would they call the University and say that? I don't think so, but here, Mike has to deal with that. (D, PP12-13)

The participants also recognized that once students do graduate and become practicing professionals, they have developed uniquely into teachers who offer certain kinds of qualities. Leah defined one of these qualities as Aboriginal individuals and teachers with varying levels of Aboriginal knowledge which they share and integrate into teaching practice:

The Aboriginal infusion is just so strong, all the children are benefiting from it. I'm just amazed, I'm amazed to see our graduates go out there and then I have that firsthand experience through my own child's education of what the possibilities

are. What we do here is touching a lot of lives, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children. (Le, PP3-4)

Students who have struggled in life either personally or academically, or both, have something to offer which is unique in terms of qualities and understandings once they become teachers. Corey described this quality as:

Often our students who have not had success in school in the past and have had difficult experiences in life, I truly do believe that those type of people make for really good teachers and especially with the demographics of our society changing so much. Most children, or a lot of children these days would be labelled as at risk and I do think it's important for students that have come from those experiences and had difficulties within their lives and dealt with social issues...well they bring a unique background and they're a unique person for a lot of the future students that they'll be working with. It's those students that they will be able to connect with. (C, PP7-8)

Building a community of professional educators also was identified in terms of a response to addressing larger social inequity issues such as the issue of racism:

As teachers I think we can't say we're not political, you can't separate the two because you know as a teacher if you are that person that you want to create hope and wellness for your students, then you have to be political. It might be a small p political but you have to be an advocate for their rights so I mean you can't just close yourself in a classroom. What do you do as a school and community, what you do as a larger community matters cause it's a huge crisis and we have to get our voices out there. Racism is still a big thing out there. (S, P12)

Addressing issues of racism and respect are viewed as a responsibility of the Aboriginal TEP in terms of high standards and expectations combined with developing strong Aboriginal and teacher identity in students:

I think a positive thing about this community, SUNTEP, Prince Albert is over the past twenty years we've been a program in this community and we've gone a long way. The public school, we have so many of our graduates in the schools in this community who have been actively recruited by the school division. So we have been recognized as a program of excellence, cooperating teachers, they want an intern, they want a SUNTEP intern and I think it's because of the high standards and expectations that we have of them as human beings. The teachers would say there's so much they can learn, they learn so much from us. (S, P12)

Maintaining high standards and expectations over time has also addressed another social attitude which has been identified in discussions about Aboriginal TEPs. In the past, unique programs like Aboriginal TEPs, have been suspect and described as inferior in relationship to mainstream teacher education programs. Comments have been made that Aboriginal TEP students are prepared in inferior ways in comparison to mainstream teacher education students. Corey talked about his experience of this phenomenon:

We're TEP grads so I know that I did come across some of those derogatory types of attitudes about SUNTEP and calling it FUNTEP and that type of thing in the sense that you know somehow the education that you get here is you just walk through, that its' inferior to the education that the students on campus get. But, I can just go to an experience that I had when I was doing my internship. We were at the school and there were two SUNTEP students and we were with two on campus students from Saskatoon. And, based upon our experiences that we had, those four years of experiences, they were often coming to us to in terms of helping them plan and being prepared. So I don't think when I sit down with the Superintendent here for SaskRivers and talk to him, I don't think that that attitude exists much anymore in the sense that SUNTEP grads are inferior. I think it's looked at in high regard, that we produce solid teachers...I don't think we have to apologize in the sense of supporting our students or quote, babying them. They're not just a number here, these are people to us. (C, PP6-7)

Students are not the only representatives of Aboriginal TEPs in the profession or in the community. The faculty at my research site recognized the significant role that they play in developing a community of professional educators. Sandy described her understanding of her role as a faculty member to mean that she has a responsibility to be a respectful human being and role model in the community. Her perspective maintained that:

Respect is developed over time in terms of importance and community. So really also seeing yourselves as role models for your students. I mean you're always role modeling whether it's as a faculty member, as a person in the classroom, a person in the community, the person you present yourself when you're out in the schools.

I mean those relationships are really important and I think the respect, just always being respectful and I think with the students too, I mean you can't say you need to respect me and to me you give respect. It's about being caring, being respectful, and participating as a member of the faculty. (S, PP6-7)

Corey explained that his understanding and foundation as a teacher and a faculty member comes from his development as a human being and that opportunity was given to him when he was an Aboriginal TEP student:

As a person that graduated from the program, some people will say to me so how was your education at SUNTEP like? And I say they prepared me very, very well to become a teacher but more importantly they helped me to discover who I was as a person. In terms of identity, this place helped me discover who Corey was as a human being and that becomes the foundation on which I rely as I entered into the work force. Until you know who you are and where you come from and you feel good about who you are, it's pretty hard to become a good teacher. It starts there with becoming the best human being that you can possibly be because that's the foundation which we rely on. When we can heal ourselves, this is a very healing place. When I entered into this program I never experienced any educational place that I've ever been a part of or a group of people that were as supportive as at SUNTEP. (C, P9)

Bente also spoke about her sentiments of being an Aboriginal TEP graduate and faculty member to mean that she shares similar and connected philosophies with the program site and this has afforded a place for her to live and work in a connected way:

It's an experience I would never change, being a student here. I think that was the, I was so fortunate, I am so lucky...I think the reason that I loved coming here so much, it was a joy to get up in the morning and go to school. The reason I loved coming here is because people listened to you, you had the support but because they believed what I believe and they're philosophies were the same and they were just a joy to be around. So I loved being here...As a teacher, part of knowing self is finding and creating a connected life. We can't disconnect ourselves from life and that's what I see often happens in places too, no we can't live a disconnected life...people who live a disconnected life are not healthy people, they're not healthy at all and I couldn't do that, I just couldn't do that (laughs). This place gives me the best of all worlds I think, it allows me to grow and it

allows me to do the things I love and it allows me to be happy and that's important right, that's important to all aspects of self. (B, PP14-16)

Most of the faculty at the research site are graduates of an Aboriginal TEP. Bente commented on this fact and she spoke about how Aboriginal TEP graduates, no matter where they decide to work as professionals, continue to consider themselves part of the Aboriginal TEP family:

As faculty, that's why we're back, it's made a big difference in our lives and it is like a family. And I hear a lot of the students say I don't want to leave and they come back and visit often...so many students that you've taught and they're always a lot of them still around here. (B, P14)

As well as these types of philosophical and personal connections, as graduates of an Aboriginal TEP faculty view their roles as an opportunity to contribute or give back what has been given to them and it is but one way to find a place as an educator. Bente described this sentiment as:

Here I can do what I love to do and it's a way of giving back and I'm sure Liza and Corey feel the same. They've been through the program, they wouldn't be back here teaching if they didn't love it and didn't have that connection. So it says a lot and there's more of our SUNTEP grads to come back. That's kind of nice because we're all retiring so we need some more recruits. It's always very nice to be able to get your graduates come back and go through a Masters and teach here, it's nice to see. As well as to see graduates going into other areas and doing other things. (B, P17)

Being in the role of faculty members, my participants also spoke about making decisions regarding student participation and recognition of their impact in the community as a teacher in the future. As in any family, not all roles are the same and for some students in the Aboriginal TEP, they would not serve themselves or the community in a good way if they were to become a teacher. At times, faculty in Aboriginal TEPs need to make difficult decisions in this regard. But, those decisions are based on certain

ideas of future contributions to the community and decisions are made within the faculty as a group:

There are some students we know and we think about it and we think okay do we want this person teaching our children because it is all about going out there and making a difference and helping students. We don't want anybody going out there and hurting students so sometimes we do have those students who we know who will not make a good teacher. And so we have to make those kinds of decisions too and that's not easy but we do support each other a lot. But it comes down to let's all think about this and talk about this and look at it and the bottom line is would you feel comfortable with this person teaching your own child or in my case my grandchildren? (B, PP10-11)

Bente also recognized how student graduates become change agents in the community of professional educators:

Our students go forth into the communities and that's how they make a difference for those kids out there. I know that sometimes our students would like to say I don't want to be change agent, I don't want to make a difference, I just want to go out there and teach and survive. But most do go out and say well that's my job as a SUNTEP student, to do that and that is my role. That's what I wanted, I wanted to be there to make a difference in these kids' lives even if it's just one. I want to make that difference so they do carry that with them. And they carry it proudly and I think that shows because like I said they're well spoken of, they're sought after and it's those students who...promote that for the students in the schools who are getting more of a balance, we're not just teaching to the mental state. They are touching on the physical and the mental and the spiritual and the emotional part of each little body that they encounter. I can't speak more highly than that of our students cause they do go out and make a difference. And I think that's so important and that's why I think we exist is to create students who will make a difference not only for Aboriginal students but for all students. (B, PP10-11)

As change agents, student graduates contribute as teachers who make a difference in more ways than being cultural role models. As teachers, SUNTEP graduates are asked to become part of the teaching community as they promote and exemplify holistic educational practices.

At the research site, the theme of wellness and support in relationships with the community were described as building the cultural community, building community in an institutional setting, and building a community of professional educators.

Summary of Chapter Four

The findings in this chapter represent the spoken text and dialect of the seven participants in my study. Thematically, I view the findings as understandings of relationships with the self, family and community with each theme having sub-themes that further deepen the discussion of each area. Wellness and support in relationships with self was described by the participants as an ideal of holistic balance of the spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual aspect of self as one lives life. The abstract concept of wellness in self is learned significantly by influences from lived childhood experiences. In adulthood, these experiences are further understood in connection with abstract teachings about the medicine wheel from Elders in the Aboriginal community. The participants also talked about how they are not always well, or balanced, spiritually, emotionally, physically, or intellectually. They also acknowledged the necessity for individuals to take responsibility for their own wellbeing as it greatly affects the self and relationships with all others in the Aboriginal TEP environment.

Wellness and support in relationships with family begin with the concept that Aboriginal TEPs are much more than an employment setting or learning site. Aboriginal TEPs are considered to be a family. In the family, relationships of a spiritual nature promote wellbeing by providing opportunities for spiritual development individually, in group contexts, and in classroom practices. Emotional wellbeing in the family is

discussed as complex relationships between staff members and includes an open door ideology in action as well as the development of student relationships. The nature of physical wellbeing in the family is developed by initiatives which intend to promote physical activity, and advance the overall physical wellbeing of students and staff alike. Physical activity programming also develops teacher skills. Intellectual wellbeing in the family is accomplished by teaching from an Aboriginal perspective and having high expectations of students while taking individual situations into consideration. The participants described these efforts as their way of promoting wellness and support in relationships with family at the research site.

Wellness and support in relationships with community begin with building a cultural community in the Aboriginal TEP. The purpose for this effort is to provide students with the opportunity to develop a cultural identity along with their professional development as a teacher. In order to accomplish cultural identity development, many processes are in place one of which is relationships with Aboriginal Elders. In terms of building community in an institutional setting, my participants mostly spoke about how improvements to financial, childcare, housing and professional development opportunities would help to grow the program. Building a community of professional educators has many and complex implications and responsibilities for students and staff alike.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONNECTIONS AND MINO-PIMATISIWIN

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore a deeper understanding of wellness and support in a specific Aboriginal TEP located in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. After having conversations about the understandings of wellness and support and how they are practiced by the core group of professionals at my research site, the synthesis of their knowledge was presented in Chapter Four thematically as relationships with self, family, and community. Chapter Five provides a discussion of these research results as they connect to literature about Aboriginal peoples in terms of context, community, and culture. The chapter also contains my reflection on the research findings as they pertain to Aboriginal teacher education program developments. The chapter concludes with comments regarding future research possibilities which have the potential to influence Aboriginal TEPs and policy development.

Wellness and Support in Relationships with Self

Wellness Is an Ideal of Holistic Balance in Life

From a primary relationship with self, the participants spoke about their understanding and attempts to maintain balance in all aspects of their selves as they live their own lives. They identified all aspects of self to mean a person's spiritual, emotional,

physical, and intellectual nature. And, “balance occurs when a person is at peace and harmony within their physical, emotional, mental and spiritual humanness; with others in their family, community and the nation; and with all other living things, including the earth and natural world” (Longclaws, Malloch, & Zieba, as cited in Hart, 2002, p. 41). The participants also spoke about how the idea of wellness as a state of being is represented and connected to Elders and Aboriginal teachings about the medicine wheel. The medicine wheel is “a symbolic model that is frequently used by many Aboriginal peoples...individuals utilize the medicine wheel to reflect their understanding of themselves” (Hart, 2002, p. 39). As well, in the ongoing pursuit to know oneself, to learn how to balance life, to struggle and to move between states of being where one is well “balance is periodically and momentarily achieved, it is never achieved for an indefinitely extended period of time. The reality that life is ever-changing requires all beings to readjust in the constant pursuit to regain a sense of balance” (Hart, p. 41).

Life is lived in a continual journey of states of wellbeing, and whether or not a person chooses wellness is ultimately an individual choice. “Growth is dependent upon people using their volition to develop their physical, emotional, spiritual and mental aspects” (Bopp et al., as cited in Hart, 2002, p. 43). Volition, or willingness, is perceived as an individual attitude and pursuit. This idea of self direction also helps individuals to understand relationships with others and development of their own personal self knowledge. The participants spoke about this idea as not interfering with others and the concurrent responsibility that they must individually take in their own paths to wellness. They also spoke about the idea that wellness and healing are inextricably intertwined and subsequently have the power to influence not only the individual but the family and

community as well. Hart (2002) expresses a similar thought when he stated that “people must strive for their personal wellness in a manner which does not limit the wellness of others around them, including their family and community” (p. 41).

In previous literature specifically about Aboriginal TEPs, Hodson (2004) claimed that within Aboriginal TEPs there exists healing and wellness pedagogies which are based in culturally appropriate perspectives. He maintained that as Aboriginal individuals participate in Aboriginal TEPs, transformational needs for healing and wellness emerge organically. In his work, he described the nature of these needs and various responses within the Aboriginal TEP which respond to these demands. He claimed that wellness and healing is a change process which is individually pursued and influences all aspects of not only the self but families and communities as well. As a particular aspect of Aboriginal TEPs, Hodson further suggests that healing and wellness pedagogies need to be recognized as a path which leads to wellness for future generations of Aboriginal peoples.

Influences Which Develop the Ideal of Wellness

The participants spoke about two influences which developed the ideal of wellness in life. One influence was described as childhood experiences which developed a sense of wellness. Specifically, in conversation with my participants, they discussed how experiences and teachings which promoted learning how to care for the self were offered in childhood from within the family unit. These were considered positive childhood influences when learning how to live in healthy ways. There were also descriptions of experiences which did not promote a sense of wellness. Specifically, the issue of alcohol overuse and abuse was described as one experience which did not promote wellness.

The second primary influence which promoted the ideal of wellness was considered to be found in teachings given by Aboriginal Elders about the medicine wheel. Through the wisdom and teachings of the medicine wheel as an organizing concept, Elders connected all lived experiences to the abstract concept of the medicine wheel as a way to teach about how an individual can understand and learn about wellness in relationships with the self. The idea that childhood experiences can be understood by abstract concepts contained in the medicine wheel as taught by Aboriginal Elders provided an individual with the opportunity to make connections with familial and cultural experiences in order to best understand the self and these understandings were described as being larger than just the self.

Medicine wheel concepts as taught by Aboriginal Elders recognize collective memory and experiences.

Collective memory is the echo of old stories that links grandparents with their grandchildren. In the Cree tradition, collective memory is what puts our singular lives into a larger context. Old voices echo; the ancient poetic memory of our ancestors finds home in our individual lives and allows us to reshape our experience so that we can interpret the world we find ourselves in. (McLeod, 2007, p. 11)

The participants explained that abstract conceptualizations and understandings of the medicine wheel occur only in adulthood. Through Aboriginal Elders' teachings of medicine wheel concepts in an abstract and conceptual form helped my participants, as adults, to proactively understand wellness in the self.

We Are Not Always Balanced or Well

In terms of overall wellbeing, the participants spoke about the ways in which they are not always well, or balanced, spiritually, emotionally, physically, and intellectually.

This is the human journey and it includes ongoing attempts to find and maintain balance in life. Michell (2005) spoke to this idea in this way:

Walking in balance requires learning about Woodlands Cree values that are used to guide daily behaviour. Maintaining a healthy existence in the Woodlands Cree culture is based on a balance of the inner and outer landscapes. Balance at the inner level is about maintaining a multidimensional equilibrium of physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual development...Balance at the outer level is about maintaining respectful, interconnected, reciprocal and sustainable relationships beginning at the individual level embracing family, community, nation, and extending out toward the environment, plants, animals, and cosmos. (p. 40)

From the view of self responsibility, the participants remarked that individual persons are responsible to care for their own spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual wellbeing and taking this responsibility, or not, has a significant effect on others.

“Nabigon (no date) suggests, harmony includes respect for one’s relationship with others and within oneself, as well as the give and take between entities. It focuses on establishing peace with oneself and the life around” (Longclaws, Rosebush, & Barkwell as cited in Hart, 2002, p. 43).

In terms of spiritual wellbeing, the participants spoke about how individual spiritual practices and understandings affect modeling and being as a teacher. Self knowledge in terms of one’s spirit is interconnected with all aspects of life which includes the professional self. “On a spiritual level, we must learn and understand the values and beliefs of our people and freely decide those which we will internalize. We must validate these values and beliefs through our spiritual expression and daily practices” (Hart, 2002, p. 32).

The participants also spoke about the need to understand and care for one's spirit is more than a personal or professional responsibility. A person's spiritual wellness affects larger social contexts and cosmic orders.

Aboriginal people are on a valid search for subjective inner knowledge in order to arrive at insights into existence...This inner space is that universe of being within each person that is synonymous with the soul, the spirit, or the being...In the Aboriginal mind, therefore, an immanence is present that gives meaning to existence and forms the starting point for Aboriginal epistemology. (Ermine, 1999, pp. 102-103)

In this regard, wellness is connected to healing and the spiritual wellbeing of an individual affects both the understanding of the nature of Aboriginal communities and participation in them.

The participants spoke about how, if an individual intends to work in the Aboriginal community, it is important for them to understand the collective trauma and the nature of that trauma which has been experienced intergenerationally by Aboriginal peoples. Wellness and healing do dance with each other and the spiritual wellness of an individual does seriously impact their interconnected influence in the Aboriginal community. For this reason,

Healing is not only seen as the process of recovering from an illness or a problem. Indeed, those concerns are broadly re-conceptualized as disconnections, imbalances and disharmony. Healing is also viewed as a journey; it is something that people practice daily throughout their lives. It is the broad transitional process that restores the person, the community, and nation to wholeness, connectedness, and balance. (Regnier, as cited in Hart, 2002, p. 43)

If a person is not well spiritually, the participants claimed that they cannot contribute to wellness or healing in the Aboriginal community.

In order to care for emotional wellbeing, the participants spoke about the ways in which they try to balance their own emotions. One way is by seeking support of others when necessary. Having emotional support in their Aboriginal TEP provided them with a way to be well in their emotional realm which helps them personally and is a required form of support when working with students who deal with difficult life issues. In the Aboriginal TEP environment, as professionals, the participants spoke about their ability to give and receive emotional support with others and without this process, they would not be able to care for their emotional wellbeing and subsequently would not be available to care for others. Caring for their own emotional needs meant recognizing that the need exists and having opportunities to express them. This was described as the way to maintain individual emotional health and wellbeing. Hart (2002) expressed similarities with this idea by claiming that “on an emotional level, colonized individuals have to legitimize our feelings by validating them. Validating feelings requires us to internally experience them without inhibitions and to express them on our own terms” (p. 32). According to the participants, maintaining a personal sense of emotional wellbeing by engaging in practices which validate feelings was not only beneficial to them personally; it also was necessary and helped them to best be able to support others’ emotional needs.

Taking care of physical wellbeing was described as care for the self by participating in the various and numerous activities which are part of the participants’ Aboriginal TEP environment. Being physically active benefited the participants as it led to a general sense of wellbeing and being able to have more energy to deal with everyday life expectations. As well, “in terms of our physical selves, we must see and take pride in our image. This pride is demonstrated through means such as accepting our appearance,

eating properly, taking precautions to protect ourselves from physical harm, including diseases, and staying physically active” (Hart, 2002, p. 32). The participants spoke specifically about these ideas by referring to initiating or participating in healthy eating programs and many varied events and activities which promoted physical wellbeing. Taking care physically was also recognized as having an impact on participants when dealing with more personal, serious and chronic health issues. As well, the nature and quality of the physical environment was noted as having an effect on the physical health of students and staff alike. External social influences which are more societal in nature affect the physical wellbeing of individuals and the Aboriginal TEP as a community. From the participants’ point of view, taking care physically also meant recognizing how their physical state of wellness affected all aspects of both their personal and professional lives.

Caring for one’s intellectual wellbeing required taking control of mental processes and recognizing when trustworthy support is needed from colleagues in order to address thinking which can be negative or in a state of confusion. The connection of the mind and mental processes was described as very much in the control of the individual and that, from the participants’ point of view, it is an individual responsibility to seek an outlook which demonstrates a happiness in the self as this seriously affects others. The search for this outlook is described as living a good life or *mino-pimatisiwin*. “On a mental level...we have to recapture our peoples’ language, history and understanding of the world, take and live those teachings which will support us in this attempt to overcome oppression and reach *mino-pimatisiwin* – the good life” (Hart, 2002, p. 32). As cited in Hart (2002), Aiken (1990) expressed the same thoughts in his reflection that “in the

Indian world a really happy and full life is gained by living within each moment and taking it in your life's journey. And thus each moment does not have an end, but it may continue to live within us and to enrich us" (p. 47). The participants expressed a similar idea in that intellectual wellbeing meant taking control of thoughts that lead to a good life and resolving those thoughts that moved them individually away from living a good life. The power of thought was determined to be within individual choice and authority.

Wellness and Support in Relationships with Family

The Concept of Family in an Aboriginal TEP

At the research site, the Aboriginal TEP was described and understood as much more than a place of employment, the participants all referred to their work environment as a family. "The value of wholeness speaks to the totality of creation, the group as opposed to the individual...This value is reflected in the customs and organizations of Plains Indian tribes, where the locus of social organization is the extended family, not the immediate, biological family" (Little Bear, 2000, p. 79). The Aboriginal TEP is considered to be a family in form and in terms of kinship relationships and connections which are spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual in nature. And, "at one point, Aboriginal families were well defined by extended family relationships which crossed generations and bloodlines. These relationships established intricate balances between the genders, generations and assigned responsibilities, and were the weave of Aboriginal communities" (Hart, 2002, p. 26). In specific detail, the participants provided a substantive amount of data which connected to the ideas that the Aboriginal TEP

environment is a family and they expressed their understanding of the intricate nature of the family in terms of spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual wellbeing.

Spiritual Wellbeing in the Family

Opportunities for spiritual wellbeing at the research site were available and offered for both students and staff alike. A primary way to promote and make available these opportunities was through the practice of providing sweats. Sweats are ceremonial events which are led by Elders or other persons who are recognized in the community, and by the community, to conduct such activities. The purpose of a sweat is to “assist individuals in centering themselves and give them strength to participate in a lifelong learning process” (Longclaws, as cited in Hart, 2002, p. 58). At the research site, sweats could be requested by students or staff and in response to this request, a sweat would be arranged immediately.

Other purposeful opportunities for spiritual wellbeing in the Aboriginal TEP family were created by ongoing experiences in culture camps (Curwen Doige, 2003; Goulet, 1998; Goulet & McLeod, 2002). Culture camps are usually events which occur over a few to several days in an outdoor and off site location. Culture camps would include sweats and other opportunities for students’ spiritual nature to be explored and revealed to the group. At the research site, the staff was aware of observing and encouraging the spiritual essence of themselves individually as well as in the student body. This process of encouraging, recognizing and nurturing spirit involved a purposeful attention to get to know about giftedness in individuals. Aiken (as cited in Hart, 2002) stated it in this way:

In following their path, people are oriented to finding their true nature. They are also nurturing the experience of being alive since they are finding, seeing and accepting the goodness in all life around them. It is these processes that support the view that while people are mainly in the state of being – the experience of being alive and seeing the goodness in all life as it is experienced – they are also in a state of *being-in-becoming* – the active seeking of one's purpose. (p. 47)

As a result of being encouraged to recognize and express a spiritual self, the concept of family and individuals within the family unit are better understood. And one's place in the family is known as accepted as one's purpose. Spiritual wellbeing was also encouraged as a part of classroom practice. My participants spoke about the need for and ways to establish a clear sense of belonging and to incorporate silence and reflection, or introspection, into practice as a part of daily human experience. Students and staff “are prepared for periods of silence (Attneave 1982), especially since they recognize that ‘coming-to-know’ arises out of silence” (Peat, as cited in Hart, 2002, p. 55).

The opportunity to develop spirit, whether it be a student or a staff person, demands a type of vulnerability. “It is important that individuals utilizing an Aboriginal approach reflect upon their own life and be willing to share their life experience to support the healing of others” (Hart, 2002, p. 54). This type of spiritual development results in a level of vulnerability which leads to exposing the personal in a professional context, however, this is accomplished within professional limitations. The participants explained that by providing opportunities to develop spiritual wellbeing, they best understood and recognized the spiritual essence of all persons in their Aboriginal TEP and this is one aspect of relationship that underlies their contention that the Aboriginal TEP is a family.

Emotional Wellbeing in the Family

One aspect of emotional wellbeing in the Aboriginal TEP family is found in the relationships between core staff members. Staff relationships which promote and maintain emotional wellbeing take time to develop and function in a circular not hierarchical way. At the research site, the participants overwhelmingly attribute this type of collegial interaction to be a direct result of leadership in the unit. The leader, or Director, of the program was described by his core staff as a person who valued each and every person and he established practices and expectations which created emotional strength in the family. From the leader's point of view, he described leadership as not being about ego or power, it should not be, rather leadership is about service. Hart (2002) expressed similar views of leadership:

The varying distribution of power between individuals is accepted as long as the power is used to contribute to the creation and maintenance of balance, relationships and harmony. Indeed, the great power an individual holds, the greater is the responsibility for that person to contribute to the well-being of others.

Power is abused when an individual, for their own gain, hinders or attempts to hinder another person's or entities' learning, healing and/or growth. In other words, they stop individuals from following their own journey. Abuses of power result in imbalance, disconnections and disharmony. As demonstrated in many trickster stories, when an individual or entity continuously reaps the power of others for self gain, ultimately there will be a change in the processes...Until that time of significant change to the processes, the individual or entity may appear to be growing more powerful. The reality of the larger picture is that there is little growth; there may even be deterioration. (p. 53)

The opportunity for core staff members to experience leadership which was not about ego or power also defined as a capacity in the group which allowed for an understanding of where they fit into the team effort by having a really good understanding

of each others' strengths and limitations. Personal qualities of individuals in the group were not only understood individually and recognized in terms of how each individual person added to the group as a whole, qualities were perceived as gifts which are offered as a true purpose for the group. In this way, the participants felt that they could ask for help from colleagues and could, in turn, provide help to colleagues.

From the leaders' point of view, his role was to know the skills and spirit of his staff, to defer to them, and to care for and respect who they are as individual persons. From an Aboriginal perspective, "respect has been defined as showing honour and esteem or treating someone or something with deference and courtesy (Bopp et al., 1985). A respectful individual will not impose their views, particularly through judgement, onto another person" (Hart, 2002, p. 46). By knowing and encouraging individual strengths and limitations and understanding how the dynamics of the group work together, the leader and team are best able to serve rather than enact an ego or power based environment.

Emotional wellbeing in the family in terms of staff relationships was also purposefully developed by communication processes which were described as having certain characteristics. The core staff spoke about having the ability to talk things out. This type of communication was encouraged individually and in action occurred at staff meetings, in circle activities, and in professional development situations. "In the circle no one individual (two-legged, four-legged, mineral, plant, etc.) is deemed 'more than' or 'less than' another, so that treatment which elevates or denigrates one or the other is ruled out" (Calliou, as cited in Hart, 2002, p. 46). Being treated equally was also connected to the teaching of respect. "Respect is a central responsibility in all relationships, including

spiritual relationships. Indeed, one Cree Elder shared with me that respect is such an important concept for Cree peoples, it is considered one of the foundations to the peoples' cultures" (Briks, Hampton, & Zieba, as cited in Hart, 2002, p. 46).

According to the leader, communication based in respect is centrally important to his ability to lead the group as it was an avenue for him to be able to make informed decisions. For this reason, he purposefully established group consensus building expectations and practices in the family unit. "Collective decision making was and is such an important Aboriginal custom. It is important in all aspects of Aboriginal life, including decisions governing external relations, the utilization of resources, movements within the Aboriginal territory, and the education of the younger generation" (Little Bear, 2000, p. 80). As well, communication leads to empowering individuals and the community. In practice, the core staff remarked on how they were always encouraged to communicate, were always treated with respect, and felt that they were heard. By developing these types of communication process, all persons were encouraged to speak from the heart and this was perceived as central to sustaining feelings of wellness and support in the group. Hart (2002) stated it this way:

When Native people speak they are not talking from the head, relating some theory, mentioning that they have read in some book, or what someone else has told them. Rather, they are speaking from the heart, from the traditions of their people, and from knowledge of their land; they speak of what they have seen and heard and touched, and of what has been passed on to them by the traditions of their people. (Peat, 1994)...Speaking from the heart also includes the attempt to reach and touch the listener's heart. This process honours the listener because the speaker is sharing something that is truly meaningful and not merely informational. (p. 55)

In terms of communication, the leader also emphasized that not any kind of communication would do, in fact, the quality and nature of communication was essentially important to maintaining emotional wellbeing in the Aboriginal TEP family. He was adamant that honesty in conversations was critical. Little Bear (2000) agreed with this point. "Honesty is an important Aboriginal value...lies result in chaos and establishing false understanding. If people come to know another person as untruthful and a liar, they will eventually not use that person's actions and talk as a basis for their relationships and interactions" (p. 80). In honest discussions, issues are placed in the center of a conversation for information sharing and discussion purposes. In honest communication, confrontation is also important and it exists with the intent to lead to resolution of issues. Being honest allows for resolution and resolution contributes to emotional wellbeing.

From the core staff persons' perspective, having an environment where honest communication was promoted, they felt that their opinions counted, they felt supported, and they felt comfortable to bring even difficult issues up in conversations. They shared and were given information so they understood the nature of decisions which were made within the group. "Sharing speaks not just to interchanging material goods but also, more importantly, to the strength to create and sustain 'good feelings'...Sharing also brings about harmony, which sustains strength and balance" (Little Bear, 2000, p. 79). With this standard of quality in terms of honest and consensus building communication practices, emotional integrity in the staff was described as relationships which were open, honest, safe, and respectful. "The value of sharing and caring is fundamental to maintaining relationships. To become connected with others, one must share and care about them as if

they were your closest *wâkômâkânâk* (relatives)” (Michell, 2005, p. 41). It is for this reason that the leader expressed the idea that his role is to lead by example and he remarked that he cannot lie. To do so was described as a personal and professional affront. He also used the word love to describe his relationships with his staff and his responsibility to be truthful was directly related to maintaining their relationship. “Truth comes from searching within, communication, respect for diverse perspectives, and development of unconditional relationships based on love” (Michell, 2005, p. 41).

An emotionally supportive environment in terms of staff relationships in the family was also described as having consequences which resulted in opportunities to socialize and laugh. Socialization activities occurred outside of work hours and laughter was continuously mentioned as a common practice. In the Aboriginal community, laughter serves many purposes. Hart (2002) agreed:

Indeed Aiken suggests that ‘humour to our people is probably one of the greatest medicinal strengths’ (1990: 29). He considers it an indirect nurturing approach that is non-confrontational and non-interfering. Humour has been, and is, such a significant aspect of Aboriginal cultures that there are numerous stories based upon the antics of various clowns and tricksters (Peat 1994). Humorous stories are used for healing since they can ‘demonstrate the universal fallibility of contemporary existence’ (Bucko 1998: 167). Humour supports the release of tension and energy. It supports knowledge development since much can be learned from the laughter stemming from particular situations. Gaywish (2002) also suggests that humour affirms culturally prescribed roles and relationships. (p. 57)

In terms of staff relationships, the participants also described the importance of keeping track of each other emotionally in terms of recognizing when a colleague might need support such as a hug, a listening ear, or even by giving someone space. Keeping track was viewed as an act of kindness. As Little Bear (2000) stated:

Kindness is a value that revolves around notions of love, easy-goingness, praise and gratefulness. If love and good feelings pervade the group, then balance, harmony and beauty result. This is a positive rather than a negative approach to social control. If individuals are appropriately and immediately given recognition for upholding strength, honesty, and kindness, then a 'good' order will be maintained, and the good of the group will continue to be the goal of all the members. (p. 80)

“The value of kindness is the foundation for all relationships with oneself and others. In order to live a healthy balanced lifestyle, one must be kind” (Michell, 2005, p. 41). Staff members also supported each other in flexible ways when personal or family demands required attention during regular office hours. There was a respectful understanding that no one abused the privilege of being able to take care of immediate matters and time was made up in order to repay any short term absence. If longer periods of time off was needed to regain health, that was supported too. From the core staff point of view, these emotional supports were recognized and encouraged again by their leader. The purposeful pursuit of emotional wellbeing at the research site was described as an environment where genuine caring, trust and commitment existed in the staff relationships and one concern about this state of wellbeing was expressed by the participants when they recognized that change happens.

Change can affect the balance of emotional wellness and stability in the group. The participants spoke about having previous experiences of emotionally unhealthy work environments and how one individual person who is unhealthy can affect the whole group. In consideration of their group and upcoming changes, there was a concern about finding future staff persons who have similar beliefs and philosophies in terms of participating in emotionally supportive ways as a core staff person.

The concept of change, which is viewed in a particular manner by Aboriginal people is that it is tied to balance, relationships and harmony. Aboriginal peoples see the universe as being in a constant state of flux...Thus, change is an ongoing transitional process of balancing and connecting relationships within the individual, among individuals and between individuals and the world around them. (Longclaws, & Regnier, as cited in Hart, 2002, p. 52)

For these reasons, considerations about future staff members was claimed to be much more than credentials.

Another significant way of creating and maintaining emotional wellbeing in the family was described as having an open door ideology in action at the Aboriginal TEP. The open door ideology occurred by consistently being available to and participating in many and varied activities between students and staff. This meant that eating, praying, laughing and playing together was described as a part of everyday life experience and was viewed as a way of sharing in the Aboriginal TEP. Hart (2002) citing O'Meara and others noted that these types of sharing have a purpose:

As O'Meara (1996) notes, practical and sacred knowledge, life experiences and food reflect the wide variety of things shared between people. She further notes that sharing is the most natural way of developing human relationships...Sharing is tied to equality and democracy in that every person is considered as valuable as every other person and treated accordingly (Brant 1990). It also reduces conditions such as greed, envy and arrogance that may cause conflict within the group. Zieba (1990) suggests that sharing is viewed as so fundamentally important that any breach would result in sickness. (pp. 45-46)

An open door ideology also meant that literally the doors of offices were open unless a staff member was busy in another way and could not be open to invite students or others into their office. In practice, the open door ideology required being good listeners and one purpose of good listening skills was explained as helping others to regain balance in their life. Good listening skills also helped in developing deeper and holistic

understandings of complex individual students or situations. Good listening skills required an understanding of the role of the participants in supportive relationships and being able to have a certain skill set in terms of interactions with others.

People offering help recognize that they are not experts in the healing process since 'there is no inherent distinction between the helper and the helped' (Nelson et al. 1985: 241). Humility, not judgment, is paramount in this process (Ross 1996). The helper is prepared to 'sit patiently through long pauses and to listen rather than to be directive or to interrupt the speaker. (Broken Nose, as cited in Hart, 2002, p. 55)

After listening or connecting with students and others to gain a more complete understanding of a need, the participants expressed how this helped them to know how to support students or others in the Aboriginal TEP family. The relationships which developed by having an open door ideology in practice emerged organically as students choose to connect with specific staff persons based on their own reasons for doing so. This practice was respected among the staff members. The overall intent of the open door ideology in action was to create an environment which supported individuals as human beings and it provided an opportunity to be there for persons in the Aboriginal TEP environment in times of need. The relationships which resulted were described as emotionally safe and appreciated.

When establishing emotional wellbeing in the family specifically within the context of student relationships, the participants spoke about the need to learn about individual students. The students came from different communities, both rural and urban, and from different cultural backgrounds. Students also ranged in age from very young high school graduates to middle-aged persons who could be grandparents. At the research site, this demographic was encouraged and the staff recognized how with difference,

students learn from each other. They learned about different worldviews and life experiences and younger students learn from the maturity of older students. Mature students were supported and valued and very much encouraged to enter the program but overall the general age of the student body was getting younger.

This change has implications for the ways that emotional support and relationships are developed in the program. Younger students need a longer amount of time to establish a rapport with Aboriginal TEP staff as they are moving from an emotionally dependent place, or high school mentality, to an emotionally independent place, where as adults they can recognize that asking for help leads to learning and it is not viewed as deficiency rather it is viewed as maturity. More mature types of adult relationship do evolve in the Aboriginal TEP, but trust, time and support are needed for this to occur.

One of the ways that mature adult relationships developed is by inviting the real life of the students to be a part of the Aboriginal TEP environment. In practice, this meant that infants and children were welcome when need be. New and existing family members were also recognized visually by pictures which were placed on a public information board and how the family is doing was often asked about by staff members. These practices demonstrated to the students that their families are welcome, as they are. And if need be, in the Aboriginal TEP environment support for the caring of family members is viewed as part of life and not penalized by stringent rules which demanded a separation between home and school. The participants described how infants and children are a part of the Aboriginal TEP environment when circumstances demanded such a response. Getting to know students, the dynamics of their lives and building trust is an evolutionary

process and it takes time to develop this aspect of emotional support with students in the Aboriginal TEP. Emotional support also extends to the families of the students.

Regardless of the age or life experiences of students, it is respected that a willingness to be open to emotional support is an individual choice but it can also be frustrating when student issues arise. If a student is willing to pursue self knowledge, then emotional support systems are available to them in the Aboriginal TEP. However, there is not a set mechanism, other than an offer to help and different opportunities for support to address developmental needs. The participants spoke about recognizing how a student can be having difficulties and how those difficulties can be seriously be affecting their performance. The staff also realized that unless addressed, the same issues that a student may have as a student can affect them in their role as a teacher. Supporting the students in emotionally development ways does not mean that all students are willing to grow by recognizing their blind spots and how that is affecting them as students and as prospective teachers. These blind spots can get students, or staff, into troubled areas but there is recognition that being able to provide emotional support to students is ultimately an individual choice.

The participants described frustration when working with students who engage in denial and lack of motivation to gain self knowledge. What is obvious to staff members, even though identified and with an invitation to heal and grow from a particular difficulty, some students are not ready to face taking responsibility for their self. “It is through the taking of responsibility for their own personal healing and growth that individuals will be able to attain mino-pimatisiwin (Cree) – the good life” (Hart, 2002, p. 44). Taking

responsibility for oneself and purposefully attempting to engage in wellness with support is a way to healing.

The old Indian way of healing was first to know the illness and to know one's self. And because the individual participates in the healing process it is essential that a person needed to know themselves, their innermost core, their innermost spirit and soul, their innermost strength. As such, healing is also about people taking responsibility for their own learning and growth. (Ross, as cited in Hart, 2002, p. 44)

In our conversations, the participants named this as persons being stuck in a victim role, persons who won't take responsibility for self, and persons who continually present themselves as being persecuted or picked on. This emotional place represents a level of maturity in terms of self knowledge. The core staff at my research site indicated that these individuals are usually not successful in the program and are asked to leave as they continue to do harm to themselves and have the serious potential to harm others if they become teachers. The participants stated that some students will not mature emotionally regardless of the support systems available to them in the Aboriginal TEP.

For those students who do want to mature emotionally, support is available in the Aboriginal TEP by practices which include a response to difficulties when they arise during the school year. The participants talked about working towards establishing a rapport with students so that there are relationships in place for students if they experience difficulties. In these types of relationships, the staff felt that they were better equipped to recognize and respond to student needs for support when they arise. For many students, this type of emotional support has not been a common occurrence in their previous educational experiences. Through the modeling of support practices in the

Aboriginal TEP, the participants related with students so that they did not feel alone and so that they could access support in times of difficulty.

The participants talked about how they hoped that their practice as staff persons in the Aboriginal TEP would inform future practice in their students once they become teachers. The participants said that this is another way to incrementally affect school systems in a good way. As well in practice, the participants initiated many and varied healing opportunities by welcoming students and endearing a strong sense of belonging in the Aboriginal TEP family as a member. The staff also organized and established peer relationships by creating clan groups for the purpose of inter-year student interactions which was described as beneficial to all for the purposes of emotional support. In providing these emotionally supportive ways of being, the participants also linked student personal success to academic success.

Physical Wellbeing in the Family

The participants in the study identified several initiatives which promoted physical activity and provided opportunities to develop different types of skills. The participants explained that both students and staff were a part of these efforts. In individual classrooms, instructors and faculty designed and developed physical activity initiatives as a part of course offerings and expectations. Staff and students also contributed to specific group or program initiatives which were available to any person in the Aboriginal TEP family. As well, humour was viewed as a physical activity which was continually a part of the Aboriginal TEP setting. With the varied physical activities provided, students and

staff then supported the ongoing nature of different initiatives by participating and having fun in the process.

One of the other perspectives brought forward by the participants was the expression of the overall importance of physical activity in relationship to general wellbeing in the person. The need for physical activity programming initiatives was viewed as adding strength to an individuals' spiritual, emotional and intellectual wellbeing. Often the physical activity initiatives led to developing teacher skills. The participants spoke about how the schools in their area continually ask for student teachers from the Aboriginal TEP to come in and teach lessons or workshops on Aboriginal singing, dancing, food making or storytelling/drama in their school environments. The opportunity for physical wellbeing then extended from individual and group experiences or benefits to learning and practicing a variety of teacher skills in actual school classroom situations. The participants spoke about the significant value that they experience and recognize in regards to physical activity programming and initiatives, but they also commented on how these activities require extra effort and time commitments which can strain other demands that they have in their personal lives.

Intellectual Wellbeing in the Family

In order to care for, establish and develop intellectual wellbeing with students at the Aboriginal TEP site, the participants articulated several concepts underlying the practices which they initiated and considered to be an extremely important aspect of knowledge development. To begin, knowledge development is offered by teaching from an Aboriginal perspective (Kirkness, 1999). Teaching from an Aboriginal perspective

meant incorporating Western knowledge into traditional Aboriginal knowledge and not the other way around.

Aboriginal perspectives also meant teaching from a holistic perspective. Holistic teaching from an Aboriginal perspective was defined as the process of developing spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual knowledge in and of the self. One of the ways in which the participants enacted these fundamental concepts and practices specifically in terms of intellectual development was by inviting continual influences from Aboriginal Elders and the use of story and storytelling in the classroom (Goulet & McLeod, 2002).

One technique that is frequently used in this Aboriginal approach is storytelling. In many Aboriginal societies, stories are often used as the vehicle for true understanding and to describe the way of healing, health and wholeness (Bruchac 1992; Cajete 1999; Dion Buffalo 1990; O'Meara 1996; Peat 1994). They serve to establish and confirm traditional beliefs, values and practices, which then act as guides for present behaviours. (Bucko, as cited in Hart, 2002, p. 56)

The participants also explained that Aboriginal knowledge development included purposeful ways of connecting to living and being in the natural world which included the environment outside of the classroom. "Woodlands Cree cultural identity, ways of knowing and language are lined by a deep reverence and spiritual relationship with the land" (Michell, 2005, p. 37). In order to accomplish this form of knowledge development, the participants stated clearly that learning must occur outside of the traditional classroom. Learning must happen with the land and in the environment and subsequently many learning opportunities were provided which were off site and in the natural world. "Many traditional Aboriginal peoples' spirituality includes an intimate relationship with

the land...In recognizing a need to overcome an objectification of the land, an Aboriginal approach encourages people to re-establish a connection to the land” (Hart, 2002, p. 49).

Aboriginal knowledge development in classroom settings was also spoken about by the participants. They claimed that there is a need to provide classroom environments which are cooperative rather than competitive in nature. Competition was viewed as seriously debilitating to the process of establishing healthy relationships with the self and with others. “Competition within extended families and between families must be stopped and replaced with encouragement. Self-gratification, envy and jealousy must be replaced with support and a commitment to one another” (Hart, 2002, p. 33). Since competitive environments stop the development of many forms of knowledge in the self and the relationships that individuals have with others, as an alternative classroom practices and group processes were initiated to promote the value of cooperation. The totality of these fundamental concepts and practices promoted an opportunity for knowledge development for all persons in the Aboriginal TEP family.

Intellectual wellbeing the family was also described as more than developing academic prowess and practices which are based in Aboriginal and/or Western knowledge systems. One of the other factors when considering the capacity for academic success involved having high expectations of students (Archibald, 1986; Kirkness & More, 1981; Whyte, 1981). These high expectations demanded that students individually must choose to commit and discipline themselves to the process of preparing to be a teacher. If a student chose to not commit or be disciplined, he/she needed to go elsewhere. What this meant was that the participants expected commitment and discipline from students but they also would not interfere with the students’ independent individual choice to do so.

The Aboriginal conception of non-interference stresses that it is inappropriate to decide for others or to coerce them into a course of action (Good Tracks, 1989). This focus on personal autonomy and interdependence emphasizes that people have a personal responsibility for their own growth as well as for what they bring to the relationships they are involved in. (Ross, as cited in Hart, 2002, p. 56)

High expectations, however, did not exist in a vacuum at the research site. The participants spoke about non-interference and equally the value that if students had any type of need for support and wanted to pursue any form of development for their own selves, then the cores staff were available to provide whatever support is needed to respond to individual needs. So, commitment and discipline start in the individual student and the Aboriginal TEP provided the environment of support needed to promote and enhance student needs and this was viewed as a key factor for success. One example of this programmatic support for intellectual student needs and development was described by the existence of preparatory Math and English classes which are provided to first year students (Owston, 1978; Sharpe, 1992).

Another factor to consider regarding student intellectual development and academic success was the nature of support given, or not, from external circumstances or personal and familial relationships. If personal and family relationships were supportive, then students had a very good chance at being successful academically and specifically the participants spoke about the nature of relationships between women and men. The participants identified that influences from external personal relationships particularly between women and men can affect a student's ability to learn and at the research site eighty percent of the student body were women. For some women, the men in their lives felt threatened by changes in circles of friends and knowing that obtaining a degree would lead to gaining financial independence. For some women, these perceived threats led to

tumultuous relationships during their course of studies and at times personal relationships ended. For men who were students at the research site, negotiating personal relationships with the women in their lives could also be perceived as threatening as the male students became exposed to other women with similar professional interests.

These types of interpersonal relationship issues emerged for some students and this external influence was identified as one factor which affected academic progress and success. In terms of support, the core staff at my research site recognized the connection between these personal and familial relationship issues and their authority to control choices made by students. Support was offered to address these types of issues and move towards an understanding of equality in terms of interpersonal relationships. In Hart's (2002) words:

Another important relationship for people is the one between women and men. Traditionally, Aboriginal societies depended upon the contributions made by both women and men. While they often had different roles and commitments, women and men were equally important to the well-being of the people. To devalue one gender was to devalue your society and in turn yourself...The relationship between women and men has to be nurtured in a way that both are harmoniously supporting each other in their attempts to reach *mino-pimatisiwin*. (pp. 48-49)

Support was offered to address external relationship issues which could prevent student intellectual development and performance, but ultimately personal relationships are an individual choice and the participants recognized their limited authority and influence regarding the impact of relationships between women and men on student success.

Another factor to consider which had the potential to disrupt intellectual wellbeing for students in the Aboriginal TEP family was identified as the issue of attendance. The participants spoke about balancing attendance expectations and taking individual student

situations into account. It was identified that there is significant stress in student lives such as being single parents and juggling many competing demands with the rigor of being a university student. In terms of program functions, student attendance issues were dealt with on an individual basis and decisions were considered based on the life demands of the student. Attendance reviews happened but staff worked to provide opportunities for students to address whatever is causing their attendance issue. There were no hard and fast rules with definitive limits regarding attendance, however, high expectations were consistently enforced and considered to be the ultimate guideline. This led to another consideration in terms of intellectual wellbeing and academic success. It was recognized by the participants that for some students and for various reasons it was not the right time for them to be a student in the Aboriginal TEP. At times, difficulties and barriers are too overwhelming and students must maintain certain levels of wellness and academic progress and success in order to participate in the program. The participants spoke about helping students to make choices which recognized a path which was best for their own wellbeing. Taking a break from schooling was not perceived as failure. At times, students needed to make decisions to get well and then they could come back when they were stronger.

Wellness and Support in Relationships with Community

Building the Cultural Community

Wellness and support in relationships with community began with building a cultural community where a process of individual explorations leads to a deeper sense of self knowledge and identity. This meant that students were invited to understand who

they are as persons and then honour their individuality from a personal place of self understanding. This exploration came from deep inside an individual and demanded asking questions about identity. The participants contended that knowing who you are as a person is fundamental to who you are as a teacher. And, the participants said that they do not believe that this type of exploration happens in mainstream teacher education programs. The participants also claimed that knowing one's identity and valuing who you are as a person needs to evolve in the teacher preparation process (Bouvier, 1984; Whyte, 1981). It was further explained that through exploration of all aspects of self, recognizing an Aboriginal identity was important and a priority at the research site. Teacher preparation meant offering opportunities to develop both as an Aboriginal person and as a teacher. This process allowed for the healing of personal wounds. According to the participants, it was also an identified way to prevent bullying as knowledge of self identity teaches respect for the self which in turn is the only way that respect can be recognized genuinely with others.

The participants also spoke about how identity development is transformative by providing opportunities to be connected and develop identity and knowledge as an Aboriginal person. The participants spoke about how forces such as intergenerational assimilation have created an environment where people feel like they do not belong and they cannot express who they really are. The participants spoke about Aboriginal peoples being forced into denying Aboriginal roots and have not been given opportunities to learn about what it means to be an Aboriginal person.

The development of an identity as an Aboriginal person has significant implications for students long after they graduate as a teacher. The participants described

the purposes and ways of providing opportunities for identity development to occur and this included participating in many events and activities in the Aboriginal community as a way to re-connecting with cultural teachings and traditions. From these types of experiences, students have the chance to change the way they view the world and their place in it but the process is not indoctrinating. Identity development is offered as an invitation and students are not coerced or forced into a fixed Aboriginal identity. The students have freedom of choice to participate in identity development and to define what that means as individual persons.

From the participants, one other important factor which encourages and makes available the opportunity to develop an Aboriginal identity has to do with Elders in the program (Kompf & Hodson, 2000). The participants spoke about wanting to bring in more Elders and the value of having Elders in a more permanent capacity at the Aboriginal TEP site. The participants cited reasons for lack of Elder participation as: the reality of working with the Elderly; their personal choices for financial reasons; and health issues. Even though the participants wanted a more permanent situation with Aboriginal Elders in the program, they also recognize that in many ways they already incorporate Elders and apprenticeship Elders in many aspects and activities in the program.

Elders have significant value in that they are able to provide teachings and knowledge to young persons who are not aware of particular Aboriginal protocols; their nature and presence is soothing; and they are significant support persons for students and staff alike (Goulet, 1995, 1998; Goulet & McLeod, 2002). Elders are gifted people and

they have a way of speaking and relaying information and knowledge which is direct and truthful yet respectful at the same time. As Hart (2002) stated:

As suggested by Couture: Elders are superb embodiments of highly developed human potential...Their qualities of mind (intuition, intellect, memory, imagination) and emotion, their profound and refined moral sense manifest in an exquisite sense of humour, in a sense of caring and communication finesse in teaching and counselling, together with a high level of spiritual and psychic attainment, are perceived as clear behavioural indicators, deserving careful attention, if not compelling emulation (1996: 47). (pp. 57-58)

As well, Elders are storytellers who share cultural and historical knowledge through story (Goulet, 2002). The participants also spoke about improving cultural opportunities in the program by participating in personal professional development opportunities which benefit and accrue for the Aboriginal TEP. The nature of the professional development opportunities were, however, more than what is commonly known as professional educational types of professional development activities or events. The participants spoke about wanting a deeper level of commitment to professional development opportunities which provide and develop cultural skills and knowledge by learning through attending extended Aboriginal ceremonies and events which happened at various times throughout the year. This requires changing the notion of what is meant by professional development. The participants described it as not 'white' professional development but an Aboriginal way of professional development.

Building Community in an Institutional Setting

Wellness and support in relationships with community also required community building initiatives in institutional settings. The participants in the study recognized how SUNTEP, Prince Albert, is a unique entity which is connected directly to the University

of Saskatchewan and the program requirements of that degree granting institution. Being an off-campus site, university dictates are fulfilled but adaptations which are needed to respond to student and community demands are able to be realized. The participants did not really discuss any program issues in terms of degree requirements, but they did speak about different types of support which they felt would help to build their Aboriginal TEP.

One of the significant issues at my research site which could be developed and would be of great assistance would be the establishment of more financial support for the students namely by developing scholarships. As a service, students do have access to personnel at SUNTEP who deal administratively with student loans. Economically, students are financially supported through bursary programs and student loans if Métis and from band funding if they are supported by a First Nation. For Métis students, four years study and the need to acquire student loans can result in accruing a very huge debt. Having access to other types of funding support, such as established scholarships, would greatly benefit all students in the program.

The participants also spoke about developing childcare initiatives. As a support to students who are parents in the program, having childcare support would help them to focus on their studies without needlessly being concerned about the welfare of their child or children. With this initiative, the students would worry less and it was identified as a holistic way to care for students by providing support and care for their children.

As well, another area for improvement was identified as housing. The participants said that students were always 'stressed out' in terms of housing as they can be required to relocate and have to move around a lot which is very disruptive when engaging in an

academic program of studies. The participants suggested that a solution to the housing issue would be for political organizations to buy housing units and rent them to their students for the duration of their four year degree program. In these ways, the participants said that these initiatives would build community in the institutional setting and would be an improvement on what is already being done very well but would also help to grow the Aboriginal TEP.

Building a Community of Professional Educators

Wellness and support in relationships with community also involves the building of a community of professional educators. The participants talked about how, during the process of the teacher preparation program, the students came to realize the importance of balance and wellbeing as a teacher as they become representatives of the Aboriginal TEP and of Aboriginal people in general when they graduate. This is one of the reasons why the participants held to the need for stringent standards and high expectations of students. Graduates of their program reflect the Aboriginal TEP in every walk of their personal, professional, and public lives, and they are held accountable for all they do. With the personal and professional development of the Aboriginal TEP student as a graduate, one of the issues which is addressed in the larger social community involves racism. The participants spoke about how, as teachers, one way of being political is to address the issue of racism and this is accomplished by teaching and modeling respect and being a program of excellence.

The participants also spoke about the importance of their role as faculty members in this process.

Strong role models serve to inspire others and support them to see their own potential to reach *mino-pimatisiwin*. Role modelling is tied to the process, ‘teacher as healer’ which requires a person to live the life that is to be taught and wait for the student to come seeking knowledge. (Hart, 2002, p. 57)

Relationships are developed based in mutual respect which means that as role models, the participants did not demand respect from other, they are respectful as human beings. By being a program of excellence, the community of Prince Albert has responded by inviting student teachers and interns into their schools and they recruit and hire SUNTEP graduates as an active practice. As well, the participants attribute these developments to graduates who offer certain kinds of unique qualities. One quality is having a strong Aboriginal knowledge base and sound pedagogical practices which benefits all children. “Education systems must teach the peoples’ own histories, ways of knowing and learning, languages, literature, arts and sciences, as well as the global histories and teachings from other peoples” (Hart, 2002, p. 33). With this quality, graduates touch the lives of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students alike (Archibald, 1986; McAlpine, 2001).

The participants described another quality in their student graduates. For students who have struggled in any area of life and who have grown from adversity, these students who graduate have a special understanding when dealing with difficulties and are well prepared, from their own life experiences, to work with children labelled at risk. Graduates who have had difficult backgrounds and have resolved issues are able to connect with students who may be facing similar difficulties. In this way, these professionals have something unique to offer as a way of giving back the support which has been given to them from a very deep understanding of personal issues. And, no matter where graduates decide to work as a teacher, they continue to consider themselves part of the Aboriginal TEP family long after their graduation from the program. Maintaining high

standards and expectations over time has also addressed another issue facing Aboriginal TEP graduates.

It has been claimed that Aboriginal TEP students are prepared to be teachers in a more inferior way in comparison to mainstream teacher education program students. The participants claimed that the teacher preparation process is different, not inferior, as it includes the opportunity to develop as an identity as a human being and this is considered to be the foundation of being a teacher. As well, the participants spoke about how their own personal experiences of being an Aboriginal TEP student informed all aspects of their selves and their development as a teacher. The participants also claimed that they felt fortunate for the opportunity to be an Aboriginal TEP student as their philosophies were consistent with what was offered to them as they developed into a teacher (Kirkness, 1992, 1999; Hesch, 1999a). In this way, they did not have to live a disconnected life and become unhealthy as a person.

At the research site, the participants also recognized value in being able to work with other faculty who too had the experience of being an Aboriginal TEP student and graduate. There is a unique understanding and connection which exists between persons who are graduates of an Aboriginal TEP. As a graduate, to be a faculty member is one way to find a place as an educator and to give back what was given to them. Other graduates were recognized as finding a place as classroom teachers, vice principals, principals and in other professional capacities. And, Aboriginal TEP graduates will be considered as future faculty at their Aboriginal TEP site. This unique community of professional educators has evolved in just 30 years.

Reflections

At the beginning of the research project, I asserted the idea that Aboriginal TEPs are distinct entities within teacher preparation programs in general. I also claimed that they are unique as they offer ideological orientations and practices which respect and reflect Aboriginal worldviews. In the following discussion and summary, I would like to connect some of my own reflections and meanings of the participants' words which are presented as findings in Chapter Four and understandings that may be relevant to a deeper understanding of wellness and support as they exist as an integral function in an Aboriginal TEP.

Before reflection on specific aspects of the findings of the research project, I am mindful of and would like to articulate that I have a personal perspective to share which fundamentally underlies my understandings of the research findings. I believe that the participants in the study offered more than mere life experience when we explored the research questions for this project. I view their words as expressions of multi-layered and meaningful insights of Aboriginal worldview. I also believe that the participants in the study contributed their efforts as an offering and a gift. In action, they lived giving to me for the hopeful benefit to many peoples. This, by example, is one active expression of living in a good way. Hart (2002) reflects these thoughts:

This requires, at least, efforts by Aboriginal peoples in several areas, specifically our helping philosophies, research, education and practice. We need to turn to our traditional healers and Elders to relearn our helping philosophies. We need to relate these philosophies to the concerns and issues we face today as Aboriginal peoples. With the help of our healers and Elders, we need to build on these philosophies. In the area of research, we need to regenerate and use our own

methods of research, as well as those outside methods which our people believe will contribute to our well-being. (Hart, p. 35)

From this perspective, the following discussion and summary offers my reflections and understandings of the participant's words. In totality, the words of the participants provide a meaningful understanding of one aspect of an Aboriginal TEP environment and this understanding is offered for consideration regarding implications for program and policy development in Aboriginal TEPs.

Wellness and Support in Relationships with Self

Upon reflection, my understanding of the meaning of wellness and support in relationships with self were expressed in the research project as an understanding that ideally wellness is the living attempt to maintain balance in life in all aspects of the self as a person. This understanding recognizes the conscious attempt to care for our spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual wellbeing, this is what is meant by creating holistic balance in life. When in balance, we feel at peace and in harmony with the self and all others including the natural world. Understanding our states of being is influenced by Aboriginal Elders' teachings when we are adults. The conceptual framework of the medicine wheel teachings helps us to understand the components of the four aspects of ourselves and more importantly how those four entities and energies affect each other. Infused within the medicine wheel teachings, there is a further understanding that we are not always in balance and this is a human condition. Balance is an ideal that we strive for, but as human beings we move in and out of 'being' by moving between states of being well and not being well. In the ongoing pursuit to know and care for oneself, the human

journey involves taking care of the balance and imbalances which happen organically in life.

As well as the present caring relationship that we have with ourselves, there is a deep understanding of past influences which can affect our wellbeing. From childhood experiences, we can recognize those influences which are healthy and contribute to our knowing how to take good care of ourselves in all aspects of ourselves as adults. For many of us, however, there are also significant developmental injuries which happened in childhood and they continue to inform and manifest themselves in our adult lives until they are healed. Truly being well requires healing of these wounds and each one of us individually can purposefully engage in the healing process or not. Growth toward wellness is an individual choice which is motivated by personal desire and from internal influences which guide us to want something different or better in our lives. Pain, regardless of whether or not it is spiritual, emotional, physical or intellectual, is purposeful, it helps us to find direction and to seek changes. This is an individual journey and is ultimately an individual choice.

Volition is the energy within an individual which can promote searching for a deep-rooted consciousness of what is meant by wellness and this energy precedes development of self knowledge. For this reason, one person cannot interfere with the path of another literally in terms of ability or power to do so or in terms of authority, it is not respectful to do so. What can be accomplished in our relationships with ourselves and others as we pursue the ideal of wellness is found in personal self care as a first priority and from this center place of wellbeing, we do have an opportunity to influence others.

But, we cannot interfere and we have our own responsibility to strive for wellness in our self. Influence extends beyond the immediate relationships that we have with others.

Our influence of wellness in the self affects our families, communities, nations and cosmic energies. From this perspective, we are challenged as we are responsible for ourselves and we are equally responsible to all other energies as life unfolds. And, this perspective helps us to understand the collective nature of trauma in Aboriginal communities. If every person purposefully seeks wellness, then we are all well. When peoples do not seek wellness, we collectively are not well, we are not in harmony. So, our influence in the pursuit of wellness is individual but it means much more than personal balance, it implies balance in all other relationships or not. The collective understanding of the ideal of wellness then helps us to recognize our responsibilities to ourselves as that being much larger than what can be viewed from an individual perspective. Wellness and healing dance with each other, and we can understand our part if and when we are internally guided to do so.

As individuals, we are not always balanced or well spiritually, emotionally, physically or intellectually. In order to care for our spiritual essence, we can engage in individual spiritual practices and participate in community initiated ceremonies. Spiritual development leads to self knowledge which promotes an understanding of one's own spirit as a reflection of a very deep and personal understanding of one's place in the world by recognizing gifts and limitations. In this way, spiritual understandings are much more than mere teachings about appropriate behaviours, spiritual understandings bring us home into our own selves. With this knowledge, contributions in terms of behaviours can then

become a synonymous connection between the spirit self and our participation in families, communities and the world.

We are not meant to be the same, spiritual understandings help us to understand the true essence or nature within the self and with that understanding, we behave by aligning our self in the world. Development injuries, or spiritual wounds, prevent this self knowledge from happening and if need be, ways of being for an individual to learn about self may require healing practices. Within the Aboriginal community, there are many spiritual leaders and ceremonies which help with this journey. If a person is not spiritually grounded and healed, they cannot contribute to their full capacity in life. For these reasons and with these ways of being, spiritual wellness can be accomplished and maintained.

In order to care for emotional wellbeing in the self, balancing of the self is a journey which is influenced by internal and external forces. When needing emotional self care, we can seek the support of others behaviourally by talking with them. This means that the rules that govern our conversations can be expressions of much more than thoughts, our conversations with others can include expressions of our feelings with words and with other behavioural indicators like crying or laughing for that matter. The point is that emotional wellbeing comes from having an ability to express all emotions that emerge in the self as they occur and in this way emotional energy is processed.

Emotional expression needs to be recognized as appropriate in some situations and not in others. From these understandings, we can create or destroy emotional safety in relationships but ultimately emotional wellbeing is a significant factor in our overall

wellbeing. In practice, we can give and take emotional support and we need emotional support to be nourished as individuals. Without nourishment, we are not well and we cannot function and give back to others in a significant way. For this reason, emotional connections are viewed as a need in life and not merely the want of an individual.

Legitimizing, validating, processing and sharing emotions leads to emotional balance and this aspect of the self requires attention if wellness is to be actualized in this regard during life's journey.

Physical care is also a multidimensional understanding of self which leads to an overall sense of wellbeing and is accomplished by certain behaviours. In terms of behaviour, physical self care can be accomplished by taking part in physical activity and this requires venues to do so. Physical activity can be pursued individually and as a group and both forms of participation result in higher levels of energy and abilities to deal with life circumstances. Physical wellbeing also includes other understanding such as honouring the physical appearance of the self, diet and taking good care to protect oneself from harm which can be incidental, like a cold, or more chronic such as an inherited disease. Outside of the health of the individual, we also understand that taking care physically means that we recognize external influences such as environment impacts or social conditions. Taking care physically, like all other aspects of the self, is an individual responsibility and it affects all aspects of the self and therefore influences all personal and other types of relationships.

Taking care of the mind, or our intellectual self, recognizes a responsibility to understand a connection between how the mind affects the body. As individuals, part of maintaining wellness means that we recognize when our thinking is negative, confused or

distorted. When in this state of imbalance, we need to care for the self by self talk and we can seek support from trustworthy people. Another part of intellectual self care recognizes that external messages can be inaccurate and we can challenge their validity. What this can mean is that Aboriginal peoples can revitalize cultural history and understandings as a way to conceptually recognize intellectual balance and accuracy.

In the pursuit of this type of intellectual knowing, Aboriginal teachings become revealed and with that knowledge we are supported and clarity about understanding avenues to happiness, or living a good life, becomes part of our view of the world and our outlook in our lives personally. By taking control of personal thoughts and by understanding knowledge as a living energy in us as Aboriginal peoples, we can be happy. Happiness in the self, as the result of taking good care of intellectual processes which create knowledge, affects all other aspects of our lives. It allows us to live in the present moment with a clear understanding of the past and it allows goodness to flow in life and to reject thoughts and knowledge which remove us from living in a good way.

In understanding wellness and support in relationships with self from the research findings and my reflections on these findings, there are several important implications which can be offered for consideration regarding implications for program and policy directions and developments in Aboriginal TEPs. Wellness and support in relationships with the self is an ideal which recognizes that individual persons are constantly moving between states of 'being' well. Support initiatives in an Aboriginal TEP environment can mean providing opportunities for spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual self care. Wellness and support for the self also recognizes that past influences and developmental injuries can lead to individual promotion of growth and healing needs, but this is an

individual choice. Motivated by personal volition to participate, individuals in an Aboriginal TEP can be provided with opportunities for growth and healing to happen and this developmental process has collective consequences in terms of Aboriginal community wellbeing. Specifically, opportunities for spiritual growth can lead to a deeper knowledge of the self and in the world; emotional wellbeing opportunities can be provided by the ongoing and consistent establishment of emotionally supportive relationships; integrating physical activity programming and knowledge sharing regarding physical wellbeing can promote physical wellness; and opportunities for intellectual growth from Aboriginal teachings by Elders and scholarship can enhance an intellectual knowing of the self.

Wellness and Support in Relationships with Family

Upon reflection, my understanding of the meaning of wellness and support in relationships with family was expressed in the research project as an understanding that the concept of family is ultimately it is about relationships that we have with all others and other forms in life. From this broader conceptual understanding, individual and biological families are recognized, but they are viewed as one way to understand the concept of what is meant by a family. In keeping with these ideas, family connections in all aspects of our lives recognized the value and importance of our contribution to larger entities such as social groups and organizations. When viewed in a larger totality, the family is a conceptual understanding which embodies the idea that we are all relatives and that we are interconnected in ways that we have powerful influence on each other. For this reason, the relationships within and between families, whether or not they are biological, extended, community based or organizationally and socially governed, live out

intricate balances of responsibilities and consequences. The intricate nature of relationships within families then extends beyond the immediate biological social entity and it recognizes how family units move between states of wellness or not just as individuals do. For this reason, wellness and support in relationships with family can be understood in terms of spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual journeys which require care if they are to be balanced and whole.

In the larger context which is outside of the understanding of family only as a biological unit, opportunities for spiritual wellbeing are essential when promoting spiritual health for a group. Within Aboriginal groups, ceremonies are available which provide the context or individual spiritual development as it pertains to the wellbeing of the larger group. Having the opportunity to access spiritual development activities is essential to the wellbeing of the entire group and when spiritual need arises, being able to respond to that need allows for spiritual balance to be regained not only for the individual, but for the group as well. As well as ceremonies, other group activities which promote spiritual wellbeing, such as sweats and culture camps, orient the spiritual wellness of the group by allowing individuals an opportunity to explore an essence in self and to understand how that essence in self relates to others in the group. In this way, spiritual natures are given opportunity to be explored, nurtured, understood and shared in the group for purposes of spiritual wellbeing in the family.

In purposefully searching for knowledge about giftedness in the self and how this relates to the family, if a person knows his/her path, he/she are better able to understand their relationships with all other beings and entities and it gives direction towards a future. The active seeking of one's purpose is therefore viewed as much more than the individual

self seeking of self knowledge, what becomes paramount is knowing how one fits into a larger spiritual order in the family by knowing one's gifts and limitations. With spiritual wholeness, we can see, understand and accept the goodness in all others and all life around us. This is how we find purpose in life, it only exists in spiritual relationship with others. In order to attain these understandings, as well as larger communal ceremonies and events which provide a deep sense of belonging, silence is required for times of reflection and introspection. Hence, the human activity of prayer and meditation allows us to develop spiritually.

Spiritual understanding in the family from a personal place of knowing is also shared in the group by others by sensing our presence and hearing our stories. So, spiritual wellbeing in the family also includes the knowing of one's story and the sharing of one's story. This demands a certain type of vulnerability but it also releases spiritual energy which claims one's own spiritual journey in life but it is always connected to a larger spiritual journey which exists in the family. In this way, we can better understand how the stories of Aboriginal peoples are expressions of not only facts or events, Aboriginal peoples stories are expressions of personal spiritual journeys and collective, familial spiritual processes. Spiritual wellbeing in the family then is not simply an individual journey or pursuit. Spiritual wellbeing is accomplished by varied activities, events and opportunities in relationship with the self and the spiritual development of the family. In a family, spirit is the expression of individuals and the group as a whole.

In a family, emotional wellbeing can be understood within the context of certain types of relationships and the nature of how those relationships exist. In order to promote and maintain emotional wellbeing, in any family time is needed to develop emotional

bonds and understandings between people. One important understanding regarding the establishment of emotional wellbeing in the family is an extension of the idea that all peoples have gifts and limitations. When establishing emotional relationships in the family, if all persons are viewed as equal and not more or less than others, a circular understanding of the self in relationships with others in the family has the best opportunity to be developed. What this means that at a very primary level, emotional connections come directly from an understanding that each and every person has a spiritual essence which provides them with gifts and limitations.

No value of more or less is placed on spiritual essence rather its' value is viewed in how gifts and limitations contribute to functions in the entire group. From humility and being able to function in the family, or group, with a defined understanding of one's place and hence one's responsibilities which are circular in nature and not hierarchical in practice can be understood. With this understanding, healthy emotional relationships can evolve where independent individuals are able to and are nurtured towards sharing their essence as a contribution to the group. Independence is a step towards a larger energy within a group.

A larger energy is born in interdependent relationships where collective energy is realized. The Aboriginal teaching which supports such healthy group developments is based in the emotional strength which results from leadership that is not about power or ego but rather it is about service to the group. So, in a family there are different positions and difference is defined by different needs and roles in the group. Emotional wellbeing in the family is promoted when different positions recognize the gifts and limitations of individuals in the group and therefore make opportunities for individuals to make positive

contributions to the entire group as a whole. If the spiritual essence of individual persons in the group is hindered or not allowed, and abuses of position in a group occurs, then developmentally emotional wellbeing in the family cannot be realized. In this way, individuals can become imbalanced, disconnected and in disharmony if they are not allowed to contribute their giftedness to the group but there is a more serious consequence to abuses of position. That consequence is that the entire emotional balance and wellbeing in the family unit can be unwell or destroyed. Conversely, if humility and the interconnected nature of spiritual giftedness in a group can be realized in a circular, interdependent way, then there is a huge capacity for a group to be well emotionally.

The fruits of knowing, understanding and enacting the Aboriginal teaching that we are all related can result in a profound appreciation for where you fit into the family and as an individual, there will be a clear recognition of other family members, gifts and limitations. The result of all persons understanding each others' place removes the need for competition, cooperation results and spiritual essences' are allowed to be expressed. These fundamental ways of knowing are also considered to be respectful. Respect means that we treat others with deference. Deference is the way that we honour gifts, or spiritual energy, in others and we ask them to contribute to the group. This is how care and respect is honoured and in order for them to be realized, they must be enacted with certain behaviours. In the family, we all have a position and for the group to work together in a healthy and balance way, by knowing and encouraging the dynamics of how a group works together there is the most opportunity for balance and harmony to be created emotionally in the family.

Another Aboriginal teaching which pertains to emotional wellbeing in the family relates to the idea that in the circle we are all equal and therefore being treated with equality means that respect is fundamental in relationships. Acts of respect include behaviours where people are allowed to talk things out without sanction. This fundamental belief in respect forms the basis for group consensus making and collective decision processes. Respect and collective consensus are important Aboriginal customs which promote emotional wellbeing in a family.

There are certain characteristics in communication patterns which allow people to talk things out and which demonstrate respect to individuals in a group and it demonstrates a respect for group processes which include discussion and decision making. The underlying Aboriginal teaching needed for communication which is respectful and collective is that it is honest and truthful. Lies disrupt the soul, create chaos and establish false understandings. In order to establish emotional wellbeing in the family, the Aboriginal value of honest and truthful communication provides consequences which are essential to the wellbeing of the group. In honest communication, an issue is placed in the center of the group for information sharing and discussion purposes. In practice, if all comments are encouraged and people are treated with respect, then complete knowledge is shared which includes confrontation for the purpose of finding resolutions for issues.

The emotional consequences of these Aboriginal teachings is that people feel comfortable to communicate, are treated with respect and they feel heard. This type of an emotional environment also invites the Aboriginal teaching of speaking from the heart which means that conversations are not merely forms of information sharing. Speaking

from the heart means that as individuals, we are free to speak from all aspects of the self which includes the spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual parts of the self.

Communication patterns which embody Aboriginal teachings also provide other benefits one of which involves helping the leader in a group to make informed decisions with the best interests of the family in mind. With full and complete knowledge provided as a result of consensus building communication practices and collective decision making which is honest, truthful, and respectful, leaders are best able to lead the group in a good way. With standard practice of quality communication which is based in Aboriginal teachings, emotional integrity in the family can be protected and nurtured.

In families where emotional wellbeing is developed, opportunities for socialization and laughter occur. Humour is good medicine as it nurtures being able to laugh at oneself and our common human failings. There are many Aboriginal teachings, stories and characters, such as tricksters, which provide an opportunity to release tension and promote healing through laughter. Emotional wellbeing in the family is also recognized when there is a conscious effort to keep track of other persons' emotional states of being and to be responsive in a respectful way. In practice, this means that hugging, listening and giving space to an individual if need be is a way to show kindness. In an emotionally supportive family, the emotional needs of others is recognized and action is taken to care for the needs of others with the purpose of creating good feelings which then result in a balanced and easy going way of living.

Kindness is the foundation of relationships where others are given considerations which are based in immediate needs. With this in mind, needs can occur at any time and emotional support is based in responding to needs as they arise. Support of members in

the family is the result of acts of kindness and promotes another Aboriginal teaching which speaks to the need for give and take in all relationships. The emotional results of kindness and give and take are that persons can exist in an environment which is genuinely caring and trustworthy. And, individuals have a true commitment to the emotional wellbeing of all members of the family. Within any family unit, there can be the element of change. From an Aboriginal perspective, change is inevitable, it is part of life as we are continually involved with flux and movements between being balanced and imbalanced. With this in mind, one of the ways to continue to ensure emotional wellbeing in the family is to uphold the Aboriginal teachings which promote emotional wellbeing and enact everyday practices which exemplify the ideological understanding of Aboriginal ways of knowing how to be well.

Emotional wellbeing in the family is also created by living together without necessarily defined conditional roles which distance people from each other. Being open and available as a person, and seeking help when one needs emotional nurturing are part of recognizing that in a family, even though there are different roles, we are all human beings. An Aboriginal teaching which speaks to the practice of living everyday life together is found in an understanding of the purpose of sharing. Sharing is not just viewed as the sharing of material objects. Sharing includes the give and take of all aspects of the self, for the self and with others. What this means is that all persons have equal value and in that value, each person has an opportunity to be treated as an equal. Sharing intends to reduce greed as there is no need for addressing deprivation which can motivate people into survival ways of being and sharing humbles individuals into an understanding that envy of another and/or possessions represents a feeling of lack within the self.

Sharing of material possessions and all other aspects of self in relationships of give and take prevent these types of attitudes to develop in order to protect the emotional wellbeing in a family. Sharing requires having good listening skills which is viewed as an offering to another person to help them regain their balance. This does not mean that we give advice to others, we listen so others can figure out their own needs and solutions for the self. Listening in a good way means being open to witnessing expressions of another as they holistically describe what they are sharing with you. Conversely, in the keeping of emotional wellbeing in the individual, it is important to be able to share with others for the purpose of nurturing the self.

In acts of sharing, all expression can be expected from long pauses in speech patterns to emotional expressions of pain and hurt. As a witness in the sharing process, we can offer information or knowledge, but choices to act in any particular way is totally within the authority of the speaker. As well, in sharing it is common for certain energies between people to be preferred over others. This practice is respected as human beings respond to environments and people that they are intuitively attracted to. Emotional wellbeing in the family is also promoted by accepting difference. In difference, we have a chance to learn from each other. Acceptance is also practiced by welcoming and providing a sense of true belonging for all. Unconditional belonging challenges artificial rules about participation in a family which is outside of the biological family unit. It invites an environment where there is not a separation between an individual and the family to which they are invited to belong and the building of trust has an opportunity to grow.

Being invited into ideologies and practices of emotional wellbeing in a family is just that – an invitation. Like all aspects of the self, the pursuit and maintenance of emotional wellbeing is totally within the authority of an individual to do so or not. With this teaching of respect and non-interference, support and growth opportunities for emotional wellbeing and maturity can occur but it can also be frustrating to watch when witnessing destruction and imbalance in others. Inviting emotional wellbeing does not mean that all persons will recognize the importance of emotionally sound ways of knowing and ways of being and as a human response to witnessing hurt and pain, it is natural to feel ineffective and frustrated.

Taking responsibility for oneself and purposefully attempting to engage in wellness with support is a way to healing but if individuals are not prepared to do so, and if their being remains stuck in a victim role with attitudes of being persecuted, potentially they can seriously harm others. In order to protect the harmful emotional impact of these individuals on other peoples, opportunities for them may be sanctioned by the family as a whole. Being in an emotionally supportive family can, however, impact individuals in a positive way and with this knowledge, they can advance emotional wellbeing in future families that they participate in.

In terms of caring for physical wellbeing in the family, physical activity is a way to promote physical wellbeing in an individual and to develop different types of skills. Physical wellbeing is accomplished by participating in many and varied activities of a physical nature. The results of physical participation are viewed as adding strength to an individuals' spiritual, emotional and intellectual self. Physicality also promotes developing specific Aboriginal cultural skills such as dancing and singing which can be

shared with others. Physical wellbeing also recognizes the need for respect of one's personal appearance, taking care of health issues which are conditional or chronic and recognizing that environment and social health issues affect physical wellbeing in the family.

Caring for intellectual wellbeing from an Aboriginal perspective means recognizing that there are certain concepts which underlying the sharing of knowledge and that there are certain practices which support development of this knowledge sharing in the family. An extremely important aspect of caring for the intellectual wellbeing of the family pertains to the concept of knowledge acquisition which is from an Aboriginal perspective. Knowledge from different worldviews is promoted but Aboriginal knowledge opportunities promote growth and development in all aspects of the Aboriginal persons' spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual self. Aboriginal knowledge perspectives are hence considered to be holistic and Aboriginal Elders are keepers of traditional knowledge in the family. One common practice as a way to share knowledge is in story and storytelling practices. Elders and others use storytelling as a primary vehicle in knowledge sharing and it is viewed as more than just learning information. Stories confirm and embody traditional Aboriginal beliefs, values and familial practices which are examples of Aboriginal ways of knowing and ways of being.

As well as story, Aboriginal people's knowledge development comes from a direct relationship with the land. Another significant practice involves promoting co-operation in the family group rather than competition. Competition is viewed as seriously debilitating to the family as it divides individuals and prevents collective energy to be established in the group. Aboriginal teachings suggest that support and commitment are

what need to be taught as part of a co-operative environment which would be considered intellectually healthy. The alternative is an environment in the family where individualism, self-gratification, self-engrandizement, superiority and jealousy exist.

Intellectual wellbeing in the family is more than gaining knowledge from an Aboriginal perspective and with Aboriginal practices in place. The capacity for intellectual wellbeing involves having high expectations of others. Having high expectations for self demands an individual commitment to discipline and rigor. High expectations are contextually understood within the Aboriginal teaching of non-interference. In keeping with pursuing all other aspects of wellbeing, an individual must chose of their own volition to challenge themselves as a person but not against other family members. This is what is meant by personal autonomy and self responsibility in terms of wellbeing. As an individual, high expectations are a personal choice but they are best realized in a support familial environment. As such, intellectual wellbeing is possible in a family which provides all necessary support to an individual in order for intellectual growth and development to occur. If an individual does not receive support as needed, they can be prevented from realizing intellectual growth and wellbeing. Support in a family is needed from all members and between members of different genders. In the family relationship, women and men need to harmoniously support each other but this is not always the case.

Interpersonal relationship issues can emerge which can destroy the opportunity for growth and development in an individual. Aboriginal teachings honour both women and men by recognizing that even though there may be different roles in a family for women and men, as human beings we are equal. As well as interpersonal issues, intellectual

wellbeing can be disrupted by stressful life situations which create a diminished capacity for individuals' intellectual growth and development. In a family, certain wellness needs to be maintained before a person can grow intellectually and in some cases, individuals need to return to intellectual endeavours when the time is right in their lives. This protects the intellectual integrity and wellbeing in the family unit.

In understanding wellness and support in relationships with family from the research findings and my reflections on these findings, there are several important implications which can be offered for consideration regarding implications for program and policy directions and developments in Aboriginal TEPs. Wellness and support in relationships with the family is ultimately situated in a broader conceptual understanding that we are all related, we are all connected. In an Aboriginal TEP, implications of this understanding can form the foundation for understanding and valuing relationships which view family as more than a biological unit or entity. As a member of the human family, individual contributions to larger social groups and organizations are significantly important. Opportunities to contribute to personal, social, organizational, and professional entities can enhance this view of family in an Aboriginal TEP and beyond. Aboriginal TEP sites can also provide opportunities which develop wellness and support in the family by promoting spiritual wellness opportunities such as ceremonies and/or cultural events. These types of opportunities help individuals to understand their relationships with all other beings and entities and how one fits into a larger spiritual order. In Aboriginal TEPs, emotional wellbeing can be promoted by establishing certain types of relationships. Programming efforts which promote emotional bonds and understandings between individuals can include efforts to be personable, relational, and service oriented.

Emotional integrity in an Aboriginal TEP can also be provided when a standard practice of quality communication exists. In terms of physical wellbeing in the family, opportunities for physical activities and knowledge sharing promotes development of physical wellness. As program sites, Aboriginal TEPs can care for intellectual wellbeing in the family by providing Aboriginal knowledge sharing and development opportunities. These opportunities can be established in relationships with Elders, land based activities, and storytelling/scholarship sharing experiences. Intellectual wellbeing in the family can also be provided by having and maintaining high expectations within a context of support for addressing individual developmental needs.

Wellness and Support in Relationships with Community

Upon reflection, my understanding of the meaning of wellness and support in relationships with community was expressed in the research project as an understanding that relationships with community are, in one respect, about an individual process of exploration which leads a deeper sense of self knowledge and an Aboriginal identity. Community provides a context where this exploration can happen and in understanding identity, true respect for others is learned. Identity development is transformative as it allows new or deeper connections to an Aboriginal community as an Aboriginal person. In this process, forces which do not recognize the value of identity as an Aboriginal person or force denying Aboriginal roots can be challenged. Most important is the opportunity for an Aboriginal individual to express who they are and learn what it means to be an Aboriginal person.

The development of an identity as an Aboriginal person has significant implications in all aspects of a person's life. Community provides the venue for this identity development to occur by creating many events and activities. In the Aboriginal community, it is a way to re-connect with cultural teachings and traditions. From experience in the community, individuals are given the chance to change the way they view the world their place in it as an Aboriginal person. Identity development is an offering to all Aboriginal persons. It is an offering as an invitation, it is not coercion or defined by fixed notions of what it means to be an Aboriginal person. Identity development as an Aboriginal person is a free choice which is offered by the Aboriginal community.

Within a community, Aboriginal Elders are keepers of Aboriginal traditional ways of knowing and ways of being. Respected Elders and apprenticeship Elders provide teachings which express Aboriginal ways of knowing and ways of being in many different types of activities, events and ceremonies. In community, these happenings provide the opportunity for individuals to learn about Aboriginal protocols from Aboriginal Elders who are gifted persons who embody highly developed human qualities and understandings. Aboriginal Elders have keenly developed senses of wellbeing and are often connected directly to historical teachings in the community. Aboriginal Elders have different and specific gifts which can be accessed in the community. As well, Elders are often storytellers and they share cultural knowledge through story and humour. Regardless of position in a community, all persons benefit from association with Aboriginal Elders as their teachings are organic and community based.

Wellness and support in relationships with community also recognized that the Aboriginal community exists as an entity within different institutions and society as a whole. In order to build community in institutional settings, recognition of Aboriginal identity is imperative. If Aboriginal identity is not part of institutional frameworks, then Aboriginal ways of knowing and ways of being are also not a part of the institutional structure. In society, Aboriginal peoples build community by participating in a different but relational way in terms of institutional structure. Common mandates can exist with differences in ideology and approaches. The challenge is to create institutions which encourage diversity without disrespect to any community within the institution. This is certainly a challenge but recognizing the benefits of difference can promote building community in institutions in particular and in society in general.

Institutions, for the most part, are sites in society where individuals are given an educational opportunity to become a professional. In specific, wellness and support in building a community of professional educators requires institutional support and community guidelines. In education, institutions have provided the opportunity for the development of Aboriginal individuals to become teachers in Aboriginal TEPs. In order to maintain wellness and support in the building of professional educators, recognition of the importance of balance and wellbeing in the individual is paramount as graduates become representatives of not only their individual program sites, they become representatives of the degree granting institution and all Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal TEP students offer unique qualities to the teaching profession. They have a strong Aboriginal knowledge base and sound pedagogical practices which benefits all children, they are often best able to work with children and youth at risk, and they have the

potential to address the larger community and social issue of racism. By becoming a part of educational systems, Aboriginal TEP graduates have an opportunity to give back to community and society in general as practicing professionals.

In understanding wellness and support in relationships with community from the research findings and my reflections on these findings, there are several important implications which can be offered for consideration regarding implications for program and policy directions and developments in Aboriginal TEPs. In an Aboriginal TEP, wellness and support in relationships with the community can provide a context where individuals can explore a sense of personal Aboriginal identity and develop a deeper sense of personal self knowledge. As a way to develop wellness and support with the community, Aboriginal TEP offerings can provide connections with Aboriginal community events and opportunities where cultural teachings and traditions exist. As well, Aboriginal TEPs can establish ongoing relationships with Aboriginal Elders as they are keepers and providers of traditional ways of knowing and ways of being. The existence of Aboriginal TEPs in institutional environments can also contribute to recognizing diversity in institutional structures where common mandates can exist with differences in ideology and approaches. As well, Aboriginal TEP sites can contribute to building a community of professional educators as graduates become representatives of not only their individual program sites, they become representatives of their degree granting institution and all Aboriginal peoples.

Future Research

Considerations for future research are many. In terms of wellness and support in an Aboriginal TEP and considering the themes of wellness and support in relationships

with the self, the family and the community, future research could explore each one of these identified themes in more detail. As well, in my study, I only spoke with the practicing professionals in the Aboriginal TEP. No student voice was sought and it would be interesting to pursue the same research and ask students for their views about wellness and support in an Aboriginal TEP. Also, this research activity was situated in an off-campus site and considering that there are many on-campus Aboriginal TEPs, research at these sites would also potentially prove to be of value. As well, wellness and support functions in an Aboriginal TEPs are one of many different and diverse functions within an Aboriginal TEP. Other specifically defined functions could be the focus of future research activity. In terms of relationships with institutional and governing agencies which are connected to Aboriginal TEPs, research which considers implications for program development and policy planning could be examined.

Conclusion of the Work

From the words of my participants, I conclude that wellness and support at my research site, which was understood and described thematically as relationships with self, family, and community, is an integral function which is inextricably connected to a circle of Aboriginal teachings and learning which is historically grounded yet lived in a present context. What existed in the distant past is alive at SUNTEP, Prince Albert today. “For Aboriginal people, ‘life is experienced as a series of circles, in which change is not an irreversible line, but a curve bending backwards toward its beginning. Time extends from far in the past to far into the future’” (Nelson et al., as cited in Hart, 2002, p. 47). From this project, in yet another way I now understand more deeply the meaning of the words spoken to me by my Dad many years ago when he told me to always be aware of circles

in my life. For me personally, this work is important as I fully dedicate my efforts and understandings to my three children, Nathan, Lysanne, and Lucien. It is important to me that my beautiful and cherished children know the legacy of their heritage. This work is also important in terms of an abiding care that I have for all children. In this way, and by living in a good way, the circle continues.

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APPENDIX A:
LETTER OF INVITATION

LETTER OF INVITATION

Date:

Dear Participant:

My name is Louise Legare and I am a Ph. D. candidate with the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Saskatchewan. My study is titled **Wellness and Support in an Aboriginal Teacher Education Program.**

The purpose of this case study is to explore wellness and support in a unique Aboriginal teacher education program. Through storytelling and a narrative inquiry framework, the study will explore the understanding of wellness and support in an Aboriginal teacher education program from the perspective of the practicing professionals in this unique education environment.

This study will contribute to the literature on wellness and support specifically from one Aboriginal teacher education program environment. This case study will use a conversational and storytelling framework to explore the epistemological and practical professional practices of wellness and support at one Aboriginal teacher education site. The collective narrative research text has implications which can offer different possibilities and alternative meanings when understanding the concepts of wellness and support in an Aboriginal Teacher Education Program. With case study as technique, there is an opportunity to write about a particular site without having to make generalizations about my findings. This allows for the presentation of new knowledge, if that is what is presented in the conversational and storytelling process. In describing a unique life at an Aboriginal teacher education program site, a particular essence will be provided in the final written text which does not present a grand truth or generalizable results. Rather, transferability can exist only to the extent that one truth can be applied to another based on similarities which may or may not be found between the final text, other contexts and/or readers of the work.

I will utilize conversational information as data to write the final text. To gather this data, I have asked for your participation in one conversation based in a discussion about wellness and support in your unique teacher education program. I am requesting your participation as I view you, as a practicing professional, to be the best informant available to accomplish my research project. Your lived experience as a professional in your Aboriginal teacher education environment contains the knowledge that I seek for my study. Before this conversation, I will ask you to sign a consent form which identifies terms and conditions and indicates your agreement to participate in the study. Once we finish our conversation, I will have our taped conversation transcribed verbatim or written notes will be given to you if you do not want to be audio taped. Then, you will be asked to review the notes or transcript and make any changes or deletions that you would like. Then, you will be asked to sign a transcript release form which allows me to use your information in my study. I will then review all the conversational data that I have from all participants and write the research text. In the writing process, direct quotations may be used. Once finished, you will be given a copy of my dissertation.

As well, I anticipate that my research project may be used for presentations at conferences, professional venues, and scholarly and/or professional publications. Your cooperation in this study would be greatly appreciated. If you agree to participate, please read and sign the consent form.

At any time, if you have questions or concerns about this study, I can be contacted by e-mail at louise.legare@usask.ca or by phone at 306-384-7308. As well, you may contact my supervisors Dr Sheila Carr-Stewart at 306-966-7611 or Dr. Margaret Kovach at 306-966-7515. Thank you, in advance, for your consideration, cooperation and participation in this study.

Respectfully yours,

Louise Legare, Ph.D. Candidate
University of Saskatchewan

APPENDIX B:
CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

In our conversation, I will be asking the following questions:

What is your understanding of the concept of wellness?

How do you practice the concept of wellness in your Aboriginal teacher education program?

What is your understanding of the concept of support?

How do you practice support in your Aboriginal teacher education program?

**APPENDIX C:
CONSENT FORM**

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled *Wellness and Support in an Aboriginal Teacher Education Program*. Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have.

Researcher and Contact Information:

Louise Legare, PhD Candidate, Department of Educational Administration, College of Education

Contact Information: Email louise.legare@usask.ca Ph: 306-384-7308

Co-Supervisors and Contact Information:

Dr. Sheila Carr-Stewart, Co-supervisor, Department of Educational Administration, College of Education

Contact Information: Email sheila.carr-stewart@usask.ca Ph: 306-966-7611

Dr. Margaret Kovach, Co-supervisor, Department of Educational Administration, College of Education

Contact Information: Email margaret.kovach@usask.ca Ph: 306-966-7515

University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Office Information:

Contact Information: Ph: 306-966-2084 (Out of town participants may call collect.)

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this case study is to explore wellness and support in a unique Aboriginal teacher education program. Through conversation and storytelling, the study will explore an understanding of wellness and support in an Aboriginal teacher education program from the perspective of the practicing professionals in this particular education environment.

Procedure:

I will utilize conversational information as data to write the final text for my research project. To gather this data, I have asked for your participation in one conversation based in a discussion about wellness and support in your unique teacher education program. I am requesting your participation as I view you, as a practicing professional, to be the best informant available to accomplish my research project. Your lived experience as a professional in this Aboriginal teacher education environment contains the knowledge that I seek for my study. At this time, I am asking you to sign this consent form to conduct our conversation. Once we have finished our conversation, I will have my written notes or our taped conversation transcribed verbatim and you will be given a copy of the text for review. At this time, you will be asked to read the text and make any changes, additions or deletions that you would like or withdraw from the study without consequence. Then, you will be asked to sign a transcript release form which allows me to use your information in my study. I will then review all the conversational data that I have from all participants in the study and write the research text. In this writing process, direct quotations may be used. Once I have finished writing the entire and complete research document under the supervision of my Ph.D. committee, I will share the results of the

study by providing you with a personal copy of the research document. This copy will be given to you in person, or if need be, it will be mailed to you.

Potential Benefits:

The researcher cannot guarantee that there are any direct benefits to the participants. This study will contribute to literature on Aboriginal teacher education programs. The resulting work may be transferable only to the extent that one truth can be applied to another based on similarities which may or may not be found between the final text, other contexts and/or readers of the work.

Potential Risks:

There are no known risks for participating in this study. No deception is involved in the study. Participants will not be exposed to harm, discomforts, or perceived harm.

Storage of Data:

Upon completion of the study, all data (digital tapes, electronic, and paper) will be securely stored and retained by Dr. Sheila Carr-Stewart in a safe and secure place in accordance with the guidelines defined by the University of Saskatchewan. The data will be stored for five years after completion of the study. After this time, the data will be destroyed in an appropriate and secure manner.

Confidentiality:

As a participant, you have asked to be named in the study and I have been instructed to identify the research site. As a result of these requests, I understand as a researcher that confidentiality is not wanted by individual participants or the group collectively. You invite public recognition of your unique educational environment and your individual participation in that environment. If you prefer to not be named, pseudonyms will be used.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you can answer only those questions which you are comfortable with. There is no guarantee that you will personally benefit from your involvement. The information that is shared will be held in strict confidence and used in the research text only after the transcript release form has been approved by you. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason without penalty of any sort academically or professionally. If you withdraw from the research project, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed at your request.

Questions:

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 at the numbers provided if you have other questions. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) on February 23, 2010. 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.

Follow-Up:

Once the research project is completed, I will provide you with a copy of the final text.

Consent to Participate:

I have read and understood the description provided; I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any time. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

_____ I wish my name to be used.

_____ I wish a pseudonym to be used.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Signature of Researcher

APPENDIX D:
TRANSCRIPT RELEASE FORM

TRANSCRIPT RELEASE FORM

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

Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Signature of Researcher

APPENDIX E:
CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL



UNIVERSITY OF
SASKATCHEWAN

Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB)

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Sheila Carr-Stewart

DEPARTMENT
Educational Administration

BEH#
10-20

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CONDUCTED
University of Saskatchewan

SUB-INVESTIGATOR(S)
Margaret Kovach

STUDENT RESEARCHERS
Louise Marie Legare

SPONSOR
UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

TITLE
Wellness and Support in an Aboriginal Teacher Education Program

ORIGINAL REVIEW DATE
25-Jan-2010

APPROVAL ON
23-Feb-2010

APPROVAL OF:
Ethics Application
Consent Protocol

EXPIRY DATE
22-Feb-2011

Full Board Meeting

Date of Full Board Meeting:

Delegated Review

CERTIFICATION

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions: http://www.usask.ca/research/ethics_review/

University of Saskatchewan
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

Please send all correspondence to:

Research Ethics Office
University of Saskatchewan
Box 5000 RPO University, 1602-110 Gymnasium Place
Saskatoon SK S7N 4J8